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Productivity of Social Inclusion
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Abstract

Developments in Australian social policy have led to the adoption of multileveled government social inclusion initiatives (Australian Government, 2011b). Many rural communities are strongly identified with significant indicators in socio-economic disadvantage and are therefore influenced by a growing number of inclusion programs (Australian Government, 2009b). Strategic approaches, which include the provision of adult education in rural communities, show promise of delivering social inclusion (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, 2011). Changes in civic activities for students occur within both the formal organisations, and importantly, the informal institutions of rural communities (A. Black, Duff, Saggers, & Baines, 2000 642; Kahne & Sporte, 2008 825). Whilst there is strong evidence for social outcomes through participation in adult education, the relative recency of social inclusion means the significance of post-course experiences are largely unexplored (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, 2011). Current analysis of practices is therefore open to better formation through incorporating knowledge from initiative and program participants (Wilson, 2006). The continued heavy emphasis on the prevention of social exclusion, leads to urgency for formation of community program assessment methods (Averis, 2008). Through a review of literature for a study involving adult rural students, suggestions are made, which discover the boundaries experienced by adult rural students in their communities and the utility of such findings.

Introduction

Australian social policies have adopted social inclusion with an emphasis on individual participation as a remedy for social exclusion (Australian Government, 2009b). The drive for participation highlights an inability by some individuals or groups to fully participate in societal processes (Australian Government, 2009c). Equally, social inclusion in this study is said to occur within the social networks of a community and is about people's capacity to control their lives or individual power and agency (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000; Ranson, 2000). The experience of social inclusion, or the exercise of individual agency in rural communities is yet to be fully understood, despite the continuation of social inclusion initiatives at Local, State and Commonwealth tiers (Australian Government, 2011b; Commins, 2004).

Study Overview

This paper focuses specifically upon the foundations of community involvement for adult literacy and numeracy students in an area of rural South Australia. The focus on this particular group and their pattern of engagement is undertaken for the following reasons:

1. South Australia is currently influenced by active social inclusion initiatives at Commonwealth, State and Local levels (Australian Government, 2011a, 2011b; Newman, Biedrzycki, Patterson, & Baum, 2007).
2. Rural individuals and communities are reported as vulnerable to social exclusion (Commins, 2004; Shucksmith, 2003).
3. Literacy and numeracy students undertaking a course of their own volition, exercise agency by undertaking a course which is traditionally associated with being at the foundation of democratic civic life (Kahne & Sporte, 2008; McLachlan & Arden, 2009).

A demonstration of individual agency and engagement with formal and informal institutions places students as ideal informants for this study.

Study Approach

This paper is concerned with the experiences of adult rural students as a means of understanding the concept of social inclusion. In particular, this study is undertaken in order to consider the ways in which individual involvement in differing civic activities may influence the research of social inclusion (Johnston, 2007; Shortall, 2004). The determinants of current social inclusion initiatives at Commonwealth, State and Local levels are outlined to understand the implications for rural individuals and their communities (Australian Government, 2011a, 2011b; Newman, et al., 2007). This review reflects upon two possible approaches to social inclusion; the current market led approach which is active in social inclusion and, a more multidimensional approach which arises from research and theories into the causal dimensions of social exclusion (Edwards, Armstrong, & Miller, 2001; Wilson, 2006).

Informing Social Inclusion Research

Criticisms of market led social inclusion are considered in order to identify the importance of divergence in inclusion initiatives to promote individual and community development (Mowbray, 2011). Research relating to formal and informal rural institutions is discussed within an inclusion and exclusion framework (Gray & Lawrence, 2001a). Literature that relates to adult education and literacy is also considered to inform how a local formal education facility potentially supplies access to both formal and informal community institutions (Dymock, 2007). It can be argued complexity in social inclusion may be documented through representation of individual experience of civic activities and community life (Johnston, 2007). This discussion leads to understanding the value of rural education participants informing social inclusion.

Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion

The applicability and theory of both social exclusion and inclusion are topical due to the rise of social inclusion as a solution for a variety of social ills (Australian Government, 2011a). The social inclusion approach originated in European research, but has been internationally adopted and is involved in the Australian political context (Australian Government, 2008b). The current review is primarily focussed on social inclusion; however, a discussion of social inclusion requires an understanding of the process of social exclusion (Alexander, 2005). Current works on social exclusion offer an explanatory mechanism with regard to deprived conditions for people and groups within particular communities or the societal whole (Australian Government, 2009c). In broad terms, social inclusion is considered the convex of social exclusion; however there is debate as to whether social inclusion is a direct polar opposite of social exclusion due to both processes being dynamic rather than static and therefore difficult to succinctly contrast (Jeannotte, 2008; Jeannotte et al., 2002; Laidlaw Foundation, 2002). The following section provides an overview of social exclusion theory and then a framework for social inclusion initiatives.

Social Exclusion Theory

To understand current government social inclusion programs it is necessary to have an understanding of the structure in which social exclusion is assumed to operate (Australian Government, 2009c; Pierson, 2001). Social exclusion is stated as a multidimensional process which restricts social networks; services; institutions and; development opportunities required for participation in social, political and economic activity (Australian Government, 2008b; Pierson, 2001). Social exclusion is primarily a consequence of low-income poverty but a variety of forces may underpin it, such as low educational attainment; discrimination and; depleted living environments (Pierson, 2001). Useful definitions of social exclusion describe a dynamic process of experiences for individuals or groups with significant changes, in differing elements over time (Laidlaw Foundation, 2002; Wilson, 2005). The importance of social exclusion theories is their

explanatory nature with regard to the deprived living conditions of people and groups within particular communities or society as a whole (Edwards, et al., 2001).

Types of Social Exclusion

Figueroa (2000) purports studies on social exclusion primarily deal with societies organised as a capitalist democracy. In a capitalist democracy, people participate in social networked oriented exchanges with each other. At any given point in time, these relationships and exchanges may result in economic inequality, which consequently produces social inequality (Figueroa, 2000). Figueroa's (2000) work provides three different categories of social exclusion. The first category of exclusion is exclusion from the political process or exclusion from citizenship rights (Figueroa, 2000). The second category is exclusion from the cultural process and relates to exclusion from participation in particular social networks (Figueroa, 2000). The last exclusion category is the economic process and entails the individual being excluded from market exchange (Figueroa, 2000) Social exclusion defined in this manner explains an exclusion based on societal resources which permeates the lives of individuals and groups in the areas of political, social and economic participation (Figueroa, 2000). This definition is useful for social inclusion as it leads to revelation of the remedial complexity of social exclusion (Australian Government, 2008b).

Social Inclusion Theory

Socially networked processes such as social capital arise through social interactions suggesting, trust, reciprocity and cooperation strongly rely on a foundation of social inclusion (Shortall, 2004; Wilson, 2006). Social inclusion can therefore be a social cohesion element involving a sense of community commitment for the provision of social groups to harmoniously co-exist (Jeannotte, et al., 2002; Jenson, 1998). Current social inclusion initiatives are the instigation of processes designed to remedy and prevent social exclusion of individuals and groups through promoting resource equity (Jeannotte, et al., 2002). Social inclusion therefore becomes a means to the actual or potential resources that an individual can access because of their membership within groups and networks (Jeannotte, et al., 2002). The phenomenon of social inclusion thus occurs within local community and is about people's capacity to control their lives within socially networked exchanges (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000; Ranson, 2000).

Social Inclusion Framework

In Figure 1, The Laidlaw Foundation (2002) clearly re-frames the debate around traditional notions of poverty and disadvantage by identifying multiple dimensions of social inclusion including relational, developmental and agential qualities, which translate to local community elements. As can be viewed in figure 1, continued inclusion whilst engaged in socially networked exchanges is

dimensionally complex with multiple elements. Apart from the recognition of the dynamics of social inclusion, The Laidlaw Foundation (2002) has succinctly captured the complexity of inclusion process, recognising the need for opportunity and the exercise of agency. The Laidlaw Foundation's (2002) dynamic social inclusion framework also extends itself to a variety of contexts, as it includes aspects of spatial and developmental elements salient to the exclusion of rural Australian individuals and communities.

Dimensions	Elements	
Spatial	Public spaces Private spaces Physical location	Geographic proximity/distance Economic proximity/distance
Relational	Social proximity/distance Emotional connectedness	Recognition Solidarity
Functional/Developmental	Capabilities Developmental Capacities	Assets/liabilities Talents/potential Human Capital
Participation/Empowerment/ Agency	Participation Agency/Freedom	Empowerment/power

Figure 1: Laidlaw Foundation Social Inclusion Framework
Note: Reprinted from *The Laidlaw Foundation's Perspective on Social Inclusion*, by The Laidlaw Foundation, 2002, Toronto, Canada: The Laidlaw Foundation.

Social Inclusion Initiatives

The opportunity for excluded individuals to attain power to influence the decisions that affect them is an important condition at the heart of social exclusion remedies (Australian Government, 2009c, 2009d). Social inclusion principles strongly prescribe participation as the primary exercise of agency by the individual to increase the experience of inclusion (Australian Government, 2008a). A participation-based initiative assumes individual agency will be supported by a system of formal structures, institutions and informal relations to engage with the local community (Marsh, 2005; Ostrom, 2009). Current social inclusion initiatives are therefore assumed to operate in an environment, which is conducive to participation of the individual (Australian Government, 2011b). It may be argued in contrast, that if a conducive participation and decision making equivalency system existed there would be little need for social exclusion remedies.

Commonwealth Based Initiatives

Social exclusion remedies continue to evolve, with social inclusion principles having wide appeal across the Australian and international political spectrum (Australian Government, 2009c, 2011b). The Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society includes conditions in which Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in societal life (Australian

Government, 2011a). According to the Australian Government (2011) achieving this vision means all Australians will have the resources, opportunities and capability to: learn by participating in education and training; work by participating in employment or in voluntary work and in family and caring; engage by connecting with people and using local community's resources and; have a voice so that they can influence decisions that affect them (Australian Government, 2011a). This initiative by the Commonwealth government is repeated at both state and local levels.

State Based Initiatives

In coherence with national objectives, the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative aims to assist in the creation of a society where all people feel valued, their differences are respected and their basic needs - both physical and emotional - are met (Commissioner for Social Inclusion, 2010; Newman, et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009). As with the aforementioned Commonwealth initiative, the South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative reports participation is a strong method for social justice (Commissioner for Social Inclusion, 2010; Newman, et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009). South Australia's social inclusion method delivers results through developing innovative solutions to pressing social problems (Commissioner for Social Inclusion, 2010; Newman, et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009). It is noted social exclusion is employed to steer away from more derogatory prior terms such as "poverty" or "disadvantage" and make people feel valued (Australian Government, 2008b). However, negative judgements often remain at the base of exploring state based social exclusion situations and initiating social inclusion programs (Newman, et al., 2007; Wilson, 2009).

Local Initiatives

In line with Commonwealth and State governments, the Riverland of SA is also subjected to local inclusion initiatives. Despite local social inclusion initiatives designed for individuals, an enduring rural exclusion predicament is the process of national and international bodies making influential decisions for communities, often without significant input from the communities most affected by the decisions (Eversole & Martin, 2006; Woods, 2007). Whilst the scope of this paper does not include a full account of the continuance of rural societal exclusion through lack of access to decision-making, it is worth noting a significant aspect of social exclusion is a lack of admission to societal decision-making structures, thus allowing the structures creating exclusion to continue unabated (Cavaye, 2001; Eversole & Martin, 2006). It can be argued that effective rural and localised social inclusion initiatives would provide opportunities for local communities to participate in national and international decision-making structures to break cycles of exclusion (Cavaye, 2001; Eversole & Martin, 2006). However, local social inclusion includes emphasis on youth literacy, better access to services and education for the disabled, with an accent on better inclusion for aboriginal people (Commissioner for Social Inclusion, 2010).

Critical Approach

Given the pervasive existence of current participatory-based social inclusion initiatives and the societal and individual problems associated with an ill address of social exclusion, it is necessary to consider the current underpinnings of social inclusion initiatives from a more critical perspective. The following section considers the current market led approach and the rise of neo-liberalism as a guiding ideology for dispensing social inclusion. As an alternative, a more multidimensional examination of social inclusion is suggested to understand socially networked outcomes and civic activities. It is argued that an exercise of agency produces diverse and innovative outcomes with benefits for both the individual and their community (Eversole, 2010; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Newman & Dale, 2005).

Market Led Approach

The current approach to social inclusion promotes participation primarily centred on market exchange in a capitalist democracy (Figueroa, 2000; Newman, et al., 2007). Emphasis on market exchange, and particularly the area of employment or labour exchange, directly contradicts the usefulness of social exclusion theory as a multidimensional dynamic process which exclude individuals and groups from political, social and economic categories (Figueroa, 2000; Laidlaw Foundation, 2002). As the market led social inclusion approach is somewhat reductionist in nature, it produces policy associated with singular focus areas, such as income, to the detriment of addressing political and social outcomes which may change the system of exclusion (Australian Government, 2008a, 2008b). Given the complex nature of social exclusion, it is necessary to consider a more multidimensional perspective, which encourages the dimensions and elements of socially networked outcomes (Laidlaw Foundation, 2002). It is therefore useful to have a comprehensive understanding of the foundation of current social inclusion approaches and the section below discusses and analyses social inclusion initiatives in relation to current economic and political contexts.

Neo-liberal Ideology

Market forces, as the most appropriate guiding societal principle for allocation and coordination of resources has led to the rise of neo-liberal ideology (Alston, 2002b; Brooks, 2007; Gray & Lawrence, 2001a; Marsh, 2005). The use of market ideology is at the foundation of social inequity and therefore a deeply flawed solution to exclusion (Argent, 2005; Brooks, 2005). Neo-liberal solutions are problematic in social systems as they are at the foundation of social exclusion and have a distinctive absence of social justice, equity and compassion (Farrington & Farrington, 2005; Heron, 2008). Furthermore, the underlying assumption of neo-liberalism of an inherent equality in

individual agency directly contradicts the need for social inclusion principles (Heron, 2008). The issues raised by these criticisms are particularly relevant to the focus of this paper, in terms of the ways in which institutions are shaped by neo-liberal theory, and the implications of neo-liberal theory in prescribing social inclusion for rural communities (Beer, Clower, Haughtow, & Maude, 2005; Lockie, Lawrence, & Cheshire, 2006).

Participation

Social inclusion initiatives prescribe participation which is strongly associated with neoliberalism and is an act bound in a measured reward for the individual (Shortall, 2008). To this extent, participation within community is not inherently equal but an exercise of agency, which incorporates the use of citizen voice to achieve fulfilment of personal goals. As people often participate out of an extreme motivation, it suggests participation is an unnatural goal oriented act rather than natural act (Shortall, 2008). To this effect, participation is strongly associated with a market approach, labelling citizens as clients with differing consumer needs (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000). To prevent exclusion, it is argued citizen agency needs to be recalled within a socially inclusive agenda, requiring an ideological shift from participation as clients, to engagement as agents to prevent exclusion (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2000). This argument strongly suggests that the market led approach needs to be balanced with a sense of agency with opportunities for civic engagement or expressions of community loyalty.

Contextual Considerations

It has been claimed that the tendency in some of the social inclusion literature to view participation in community and social activities in a neo-liberal fashion obscures important differences in the ways that citizen's activities are said to occur in a democratic civil society for the benefit of both the individual and the community (Eversole, 2010; Newton, 2001). Activities, which are undertaken by rural community members, which may promote the social cohesion of a community, do not necessarily involve a visible profit inherent in participation (Shortall, 2008). However, current measures, which investigate inclusion, are often surrounded by quantitative statistics rather that those measurements that lend themselves to the real value and real consequences of citizen's activities (Meer, Grotenhuis, & Scheepers, 2010). For example, civic engagement may or may not be about profit, but is essential for both social cohesion and social inclusion (Jeannotte, et al., 2002; Jenson, 1998). Nevertheless, participation appears to be used interchangeably, regrettably, with civic engagement (Shortall, 2008). The literature discussed above, which address a relative lack of attention to the multidimensional nature of citizen experience within community, is relevant because it aims to contribute towards redressing the relative lack of attention paid to activities,

which benefit the rural community. The section below highlights some of the ways in which democratic institutions require a variety of input beyond participation to promote inclusion.

Multidimensional Approach

For the purposes of this paper, it is therefore useful to have a comprehensive understanding of an approach, which includes different modes of community activity undertaken through the agency of individuals and is more than market led participation. The following section explains the different types of activities that citizens may democratically engaged in within the community context contained by a framework of civic action. Discussion ensues on the types of civic action relevant to a rural community, including civic engagement and abstention, as legitimate activities which arise from the exercise of agency and protect the sovereignty or self-determination of individuals and their communities (Gewirtz, 2001; Shortall, 2008).

Civic Engagement

The meaning of civic engagement is strongly debated, but is generally understood to be individual or collective action, not motivated by an objective of profit making for the individual (Shortall, 2008). Civic engagement is also the network of ties and groups through which people connect to one another and are drawn into community and/or political affairs (Shortall, 2008). Civic engagement may be socially, politically goal oriented, or it may appear without an objective (Shortall, 2008 255). Interestingly, civic engagement can increase at a time when social networks have decreased suggesting some small independence from social and political realms (Besser, 2009). The combination of civic engagement and social inclusion are both viewed as strong contributors to a stable order of social cohesion (Holdsworth & Hartman, 2009). To this effect social inclusion relies on opportunity structures to allow individuals to engage with community more so as an act of loyalty, rather than simply participate in exchange for benefits (Baum & Palmer, 2002; Stayner, 1997).

Abstention

Alongside participation and civic engagement is the contemplation of individuals who deliberately choose not to participate. Shortall (2008) discovered that some rural individuals and groups employ intentional non-participation out of ideological differences with government programs and initiatives. Non-participation is an important and legitimate choice of civic action, wielded from a position of power and agency and does not equate to social exclusion (Shortall, 2008). As non-participation may arise from a civic activity involving a difference of opinion, this paper employs the use of the term abstention. Abstention is traditionally used to denote a voluntary decision not to act, thereby differentiating it from the inability to participate or social exclusion (Egerton, 2002).

Abstention is therefore more the equivalent of citizen exit, denoting active withdrawal from a community process, often as a form of protest (Egerton, 2002). The arena for abstention as a form of protest is in local social and community institutions (Shortall, 2008). Abstention may signal a need for redesign of government initiatives; however, it is difficult to account for as an outsider to the local experience of initiatives and institutions (Shortall, 2008).

Institutions

During the previous two decades there has been an increase in studying institutional structures as a separate research variable, due to their significant influence on individuals and community (Ambrosio-Albalá & Bastiaensen, 2010; Amin, 1999; Rothstein & Stolle, 2007). An institution is defined as the theoretical structural mechanism of social order, which governs the behaviour of a community of individuals (Foa, 2008; Lowndes & Wilson, 2001). All institutional arrangements which encourage or inhibit behaviour and practice are significant, as the process of social exclusion and social inclusion are strongly influenced by informal and formal institutions within a community (Boonstra, 2006; Lowndes, Pratchett, & Stoker, 2006; McAdam, 1996; Ostrom, 2000).

Formal Institutions: Established Organisations

Formal institutions in communities refer to establish organisations that guide practices with clear boundary rules (McAdam, 1996). These established organisations may include monitoring and regulatory bodies at local, state, Commonwealth or international levels (Gray & Lawrence, 2001b; Worthington & Dollery, 2008). Formal institutions may also be in the guise of local government, education facilities, or private sector and third sector services in the community. For the purpose of this paper, it is important to note formal institutions which have previously delivered government services are now often replaced by services from the private or third sectors (Argent, 2005). It is suggested formal organisations have thus undergone fusion in neo-liberal ideology, suggesting formal institutions are fused in a form which is primarily market led (Good Gingrich, 2008; Lowndes, et al., 2006).

Informal Institutions: Rules-In-Use

Institutions may also be located in the mindsets and values, which underpin a community of practice (Macadam, Drinan, Inall, & McKenzie, 2004). Rules-in-use refers to local institutional structures, which consist of informal social customs (Lowndes, et al., 2006). Local practices such as rules-in-use enable or restrict community members by defining who is included or excluded, and the timing, entitlement and allocation of resources and benefits (Lowndes, et al., 2006; Ostrom, 2009). In light of new initiatives, informal institutions such as rules-in-use are thus relied upon for continuity and developmental directions within community (Averis, 2008; Gray & Lawrence, 2001a).

Informal rules-in-use may therefore produce actions, which are difficult to account for, but are none-the-less effective structures for enabling or prohibiting specific interactions and social exchanges between community members (Ostrom & Ahn, 2003). Local informal institutions in rural communities therefore, strongly dictate the lived included or excluded experience of individuals (Herbert Cheshire, 2003).

Rural Institutions

Informal institutions in rural communities often present as closed social structures with power and control in the hands of those most privileged (Averis, 2008; Gray & Lawrence, 2001a). Informal and effective power structures in the Australian small town landscape can marginalise the aspirations of those less powerful, restricting opportunities for community involvement of individuals or groups (Averis, 2008; Gray & Lawrence, 2001a). The process of little opportunity for those excluded to access decision-making structures occurs despite the recognition that the maximum practical engagement of disadvantaged community members in decisions of all kinds is a key to strengthening community institutions (Australian Government, 2011b). The focus on the experiences of rural citizens is therefore important, as informal rural community institutions are a complex and final interpretation of formal initiatives only revealed to community members in context.

Rural Contexts

Rural areas are currently dealing with major socio-economic restructuring, usually without the support of strong institutions of their own (Gray & Lawrence, 2001b). Rural researchers have argued decline in rural space is a direct result of a movement from socio-spatial equality to socio-economic rationalism and the social dislocation arising from this neo-liberal principles (Alston, 2002b; Bellamy & Brown, 2009). As illustrated by exploring the limits of neo-liberal ideology and pervasive informal institutions, community participation does not adequately solve generation, reinforcement and perpetuation of exclusion (Cheshire & Lawrence, 2005; Lockie, et al., 2006; MacLeavy, 2008). Government initiatives, which filter through a market approach and informal local institutions in the community, may lose the intention of inclusion (Cheshire & Lawrence, 2005; Lockie, et al., 2006; MacLeavy, 2008). The neo-liberal perspective is thus criticised for viewing social inclusion and participation as occurring in a uniform fashion for all citizens in Australia, and as having potential benefits that operate in similar ways for diverse groups of people across differing social contexts (Cheshire & Lawrence, 2005; Lockie, et al., 2006; MacLeavy, 2008). It is therefore argued that current social inclusion programs do not adequately consider the diverse context in which socially excluded groups participate in community activities and research in context may enlighten social inclusion (Newman, et al., 2007).

Rural Community

Research suggests patterns of community involvement vary greatly in rural areas (Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Stone & Hughes, 2001). Indeed, research has identified that patterns of community involvement activities in Australia have significant variance across different landscapes (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Locality and spatial matters can be an important and enduring locus of social exclusion, especially in rural and remote areas and, are often cited as a significant reason for rural areas being a group of interest in social exclusion literature (Australian Government, 2009b; Pruitt, 2009). This is despite strong evidence for high rural civic engagement, conceptualised as the exercise of agency to engage with community with or without expected benefit (Onyx & Bullen, 2000; Shortall, 2008). This finding is related to observations that rural citizens do not always have access to a large population to inform decisions and initiate actions, thus spurring civic engagement by citizens (Gray & Lawrence, 2001a). It is therefore pertinent when considering social inclusion to examine establishments in rural communities, which can supply access to both formal and informal institutions.

Rural Community Involvement

Variation in rural community involvement may also fluctuate according to background indicators, with those who are more privileged more likely to be involved in participation in community decision making processes (Alexander, 2005; Gray & Lawrence, 2001a). Qualitative studies have also reported that community involvement is often perceived as a duty of the old guard, who have a reluctance to allow new ideas into the community (Onyx, Edwards, & Bullen, 2007; Onyx & Leonard, 2010). However, this concept should not be understood as a fixed characteristic of rural communities, but as a socially constructed necessity which has built rural resilience, and furthermore, is traditionally shaped by inequitable distributions of power (Gray & Lawrence, 2001a, 2001b). Therefore, rural resilience and rural power shape one another, however this cycle discourages socially inclusive practices, which harness the innovative potential of diversity and therefore inhibits community prosperity (Hegney et al., 2007; McIntosh et al., 2008).

Education

There is a consistent association between combined aspects of 'cohesion' due to education and the containment of the ill effects from disadvantageous community conditions (Australian Government, 2009a; Babacan, 2007). Education develops skills and knowledge for the entire community and is both a source of information and important for the quality of life of individuals (A. Black, et al., 2000). To this effect, adult education is purported to supply social inclusive

mechanisms, signalling social inclusion as a research priority in adult education (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, 2011). Interestingly, education has a demonstrated positive relationship to civic activities, which is considered one of the most reliable results in social science (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). This is particularly salient for this study, as social inclusion is purported to be access to decision-making structures through agency in civic actions. As education has the impetus to create positive outcomes for both social inclusion and civic activities, it can be considered the responsibility of research to examine the processes of this effective institution (Ostrom, 2009).

Rural Education

Education facilities provide access to a formally established organisation alongside the informal institutions of the rural community (A. Black, et al., 2000). Education and learning provides rural community members with the capability to positively influence resilience, heightening community capacity to respond to changing economic and social conditions thus facilitating a community shift to prosperity (A. Black, et al., 2000). In the longer term, education influences the skills developed in rural areas, the ability of these areas to attract and keep a skilled workforce through lifelong learning, and constructively affects the distribution of social disadvantage between rural and urban areas in Australia (A. Black, et al., 2000).   Thus, rural prosperity is secured through a combination of human and social capital in rural communities (Booth & Richard, 1998; Brooks, 2008; Liu, 2003). Therefore, in rural communities, education has emerged as central to issues affecting healthy engagement with community life (McIntosh, et al., 2008).

Adult Rural Students

High rates of Australian adults have a very basic education and rural Australia has a history of significant educational disadvantage (Alston, 2002a; Johnson, Thompson, & Naugle, 2009). Engaging in education allows students to create new social networks, reporting an increase in social capital, and have opportunities to combine different types of capital (Balatti, Black, & Falk, 2006; Priest, 2008). The production of capital in the education context encourages acts of agency including citizen engagement and civic action (La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). It is unknown how education would influence abstention in this context; presumably as social capital networks are primarily responsible for the transmittal of political information and expertise among and between individuals there may be impetus by students to willingly withdraw from some activities (Egerton, 2002; Newton, 2001). Engagement with adult rural students involved within a local formal education facility is a way of examining experiences of community life and variations in social inclusion (Ostrom, 2009). Information supplied by those who have engaged in courses at a local rural institution, would relay the sense of inclusion provided by rural adult education.

Literacy Courses

Education, which provides literacy development, is a current priority in the Riverland region (Commissioner for Social Inclusion, 2010). In general, terms literacy provides the core capability, which empowers people to express their voice as citizens in the community (S. Black & Yasukawa, 2010; Ranson, 2000). Courses in literacy therefore provide an ideal background to the study of actions of citizens alongside their social inclusion experiences (Morse, 2004; Ranson, 2000). The Riverland currently supplies combined courses to enhance literacy and numeracy, skills considered to be at the foundation of democratic civic life (TAFE SA, 2011).

Conclusion: Issues

It is argued the multiplicity of social exclusion theory can be extended to consider the multitude of considerations for effective social inclusion initiatives. A comprehensive social inclusion framework for rural community considers possible outcomes from the exercise of agency by individuals beyond participation. The reliance on market led participatory approaches, as a foundation for social inclusion is troubling, as according to Figueroa (2000) a capitalist society is at the foundation of social exclusion. Individuals who exercise agency within community processes access legitimate processes of value such as civic engagement and abstention, which have subtle but valid effects at individual and community levels.

Institutions as Context

Whilst formal institutions may reflect government ideals, the informal rural institutions are a local interpretation of formal government policy and initiatives. Community institutions remain the regulators of input by rural citizens, including timing of involvement, and the allocation of resources for community members (Lowndes, et al., 2006). An attempt to increase participation in a singular area such as economic engagement to create effective social inclusion in rural communities effectively ignores the role of established informal institutions. The importance of informal institutions in rural communities cannot be understated, as they illustrate powerful local interpretations of policy with pronounced implications for lived experience.

Rural as a Social Inclusion Group of Interest

It is well documented that community participation and civic engagement is particularly strong in rural areas; however due to community development outcomes of resilience rather than prosperity, rural communities remain a social exclusion group of interest. Current social inclusion attempts have been criticised for not reflecting upon the entirety of rural social exclusion, which includes rural power and decisions remaining in the hands of those most privileged in the community. It can

be argued that the very survival of rural communities is reliant on the development of social inclusion mechanisms, which can supply innovative input into community and societal processes through formal and informal institutions (Gray & Lawrence, 2001a).

Conclusion: Implications

In a review of market led social inclusion initiatives, there has been identification of some overall themes that are relevant to social inclusion research. Firstly, studies have detailed the ways in which the nature of social exclusion and social exclusion varies dynamically, between individuals and groups in different categories at different times (Figueroa, 2000; Jeannotte, et al., 2002; Laidlaw Foundation, 2002). Although it is explicitly recognised that systematic poverty in societal resources is at the foundation of social exclusion of individuals, this argument is problematically and contradictorily used to speculate about the role of the individual in changing their circumstances through a restricted participation approach. This approach ignores comprehension of how social inclusion and social exclusion continues through the systematic differential distribution of resources within the local area and between socio-economic groups according to complex informal institutions.

Social Inclusion Context

The majority of literature reviewed concludes that a market approach to social inclusion through participatory methods does not adequately address the halt of social exclusion reproduction. As social inclusion occurs within a local community, research requires acknowledgement of the social, political and economic issues of citizens within that community. Furthermore, local institutions have considerable effects on inclusion and exclusion experiences. Whilst research suggests that some aspects of social inclusion initiatives can have a modest improvement role, the damaging impact of social exclusion upon the liveability and sustainability, or capacity for community prosperity has been identified as the more powerful concept, threatening the existence of rural individuals (Brook Lyndhurst Ltd, 2004; Gray & Lawrence, 2001b; Newman, 2007).

Summary

This paper initially builds upon the current contributions of research, by developing a greater understanding of components, which instigate the boundaries of social exclusion and inclusion. This work also adds to current research by incorporating the significance of civic engagement and abstention activities for individuals and community in interrupting the reproduction of social exclusion. To further inform social inclusion research through the measurement of community activities, active agents such as, adult rural students, are situated within formal and informal

institutions and have opportunity for a variety of civic activities. It is therefore argued that individuals accessing broad opportunities, such as engaging with local literacy education may have access to power and agency, which influences social inclusion boundaries. Adult rural students are therefore ideally placed to enlighten social inclusion research through imparting experiences of social inclusion and thereby extending our knowledge before more practical interventions are prescribed.

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