

Australian adult education and its impact on *diversity, social inclusion and social capital*

La educación de adultos en Australia y su impacto en la diversidad, la inclusión social y el capital social

Educação de adultos australiana e seu impacto em diversidade, inclusão social e capital social

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Abstract

The linking of population and cultural diversity, processes of social inclusion, social capital development and adult education is a unique one and provides the opportunity to expand the social capital argument to ensure that it is more than rhetoric and policy terminology. Social capital has the potential to be a purposeful framework for the examination of complex, diverse twenty first century communities in Australia and around the world and the range of policies, organisations and practices that can contribute to social inclusion and exclusion in a community context.

Key words author

Australian adult education, cultural diversity, social inclusion, social capital development.

Key words plus

Educación de adultos - Australia, diversidad cultural, capital social.

Transference to practice

Adult education providers, programs and practice can actually contribute to social exclusion particularly for migrants more recently arrived in Australia and who reside in regional communities. People from culturally diverse backgrounds find it challenging to develop social capital within the context of Australian regional communities which means that adult education providers and practitioners need to be more actively engaged with all manner of social and economic networks within communities to locate and encourage diverse cultural groups who are often hidden from the mainstream.

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Palabras clave autor

Educación de adultos en Australia, diversidad cultural, inclusión social, desarrollo del capital social.

Palabras clave descriptores

Adult education – Australia, cultural diversity, social capital (Sociology).

Palavras-chave

Educação de adultos na Austrália, diversidade cultural, inclusão social, desenvolvimento do capital social.

Palavras-chave descritor

Educação de adultos – Austrália, Diversidade cultural, Capital social.

Resumen

El vínculo que hay entre la población y la diversidad cultural, los procesos de inclusión social, el desarrollo del capital social y la educación de adultos es único y proporciona la oportunidad de ampliar el debate del capital social para asegurar que sea más que simple terminología retórica y política. El capital social tiene el potencial de ser un marco determinante para examinar las comunidades diversas y complejas del siglo XXI en Australia y otros lugares del mundo, y las políticas, organizaciones y prácticas que contribuyen a la inclusión y la exclusión social en el contexto de las comunidades.

Transferencia a la práctica

Los encargados de administrar la educación de adultos, los programas y la práctica educativa pueden en realidad contribuir a la exclusión social, en particular a la de los trabajadores extranjeros que hace poco llegaron a Australia y que residen en comunidades regionales. Las personas que vienen de ambientes diversos culturalmente encuentran un desafío en desarrollar su capital social en el contexto de las comunidades regionales de Australia, lo cual significa que los encargados de administrar y los profesionales de la educación de adultos necesitan dedicar más atención a todas las redes sociales y económicas existentes en las comunidades para poder ubicar y animar a los diversos grupos culturales, que con frecuencia se encuentran alejados de la corriente dominante de la educación.

Resumo

O vínculo que há entre a população e a diversidade cultural, os processos de inclusão social, o desenvolvimento do capital social e a educação de adultos é único e proporciona a oportunidade de ampliar o debate do capital social para assegurar que seja mais que simples terminologia retórica e política. O capital social tem o potencial de ser um marco determinante para examinar as comunidades diversas e complexas do século XXI na Austrália e outros lugares do mundo, e as políticas, organizações e práticas que contribuem à inclusão e a exclusão social no contexto das comunidades.

Transferência à prática

Os encarregados de administrar a educação de adultos, os programas e a prática educativa podem na realidade contribuir à exclusão social, em particular a dos trabalhadores estrangeiros que faz pouco chegaram à Austrália e que moram em comunidades regionais. As pessoas que vem de ambientes diversos culturalmente encontram um desafio em desenvolver seu capital social no contexto das comunidades regionais da Austrália, o que significa que os encarregados de administrar e os profissionais da educação de adultos precisam dedicar mais atenção a todas as redes sociais e econômicas existentes nas comunidades para poder localizar e animar aos diversos grupos culturais, que com frequência encontram-se distanciados da corrente dominante da educação.

Introduction

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds want and need a range of activities and resources in communities they have just arrived; activities and resources which assist them to adapt to new social, cultural and economic systems. Adult education and training activities are an integral part of this process and social capital development is integral to adult education in Australia and many other countries. However, cultural activity and adult education as experiences and indicators have been absent from the social capital debate (Hero, 2007) and there is evidence that social capital development via adult education can be a form of social control and social reproduction in many mono-ethnic communities (Townsend, 2008).

Social capital measurement to date has been mainly from Anglo-centric, capitalist, developed societies with traditional activities such as church going, volunteering and networking via clubs and associations being utilised as social capital indicators (Hero, 2007). People from lower socio-economic and/or a range of cultural backgrounds and other groups, tend to utilise public services, community services and sport as their main social networking environments and these connections are not being researched as completely as they could and should be (Hero, 2007). Nevertheless, adult education does have the potential to act as an agent of social networking and therefore facilitate social cohesion in many different contexts (Townsend, 2008; Balatti, Black & Falk, 2006).

Mixed methods research has evolved as an attempt to utilise the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research design to examine the social and behavioural aspects of individuals, communities and societies. Mixed methods research design acknowledges that values in the production and interpretation of texts, statistics and narratives are inescapable and need to be stated and discussed. The credibility of mixed methods research design stems from a search for the most plausible answer(s) to complex human interactions, issues and problems (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The subjective values and underpinnings of the Australian research project explored in this article are acknowledged, positing that policies and practices of adult education and training in Australia have a responsibility to incorporate, at all levels, notions and experiences of social inclusion for all people, given that Australian society is one of the most culturally diverse societies. The main data of the research, explored narratives of individual adult education experiences of people from varied cultural backgrounds living in one regional area in Australia.

The elements of public adult education in Australia are three distinct sectors: Adult Community Education (ACE), Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). The adult community education sector is characterised by the provision of general education courses, vocational programs and recreation/lifestyle courses. These adult education sites tend to be publicly owned, community-based and at a neighbourhood level. A recent development is the emergence of larger colleges of adult education which are increasingly delivering vocational programs to meet the human capital and skills gaps of so called 'hard to get to' communities and groups.

Adult education organisations are seen as sites of 'second chance' education for adults, empowering and transforming individuals through community embedded learning which acts as a social contribution by engaging adult learning with everyday and localised community life (Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001). Adult education programs of a general nature are

Article description | Descripción del artículo | Artigo Descrição

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aimed at the enrichment of individuals, families and communities where the "accumulation of social capital through broad participation... is seen as a source of regional regeneration, neighbourhood, town or community development" (Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001, p. 11).

Diversity(s) in Australian Adult education

Fifteen individuals from diverse backgrounds who were living in one regional community in Victoria, Australia were interviewed in 2006 about their adult education experiences. Diversity for the individuals interviewed embraced culture, languages, social and economic participation, geographic location, age and gender. The cultural and linguistic mix of the research sample was broad as were the interviewees' socio-economic backgrounds and experiences of migration to Australia which dated from the 1950s through to recent arrival. The age range was similarly broad; all were aged over 30 years of age, with nearly half being over 40 years of age. The gender mix for the study was limited, with two only males compared to thirteen females. Overall, diversity within this sample of individuals incorporated many issues other than linguistic background or country of birth or ancestry.

Specific individual narratives of life, migration, relationships, sexuality, education, employment and location were similarly diverse: Kon and George, for example, both males in their 50s who were never married and both had resided in urban environs for significant periods of their adult lives.

However, despite their social needs being alike, their adult education needs and experiences were not in any way similar. Kon had been participating in English language tuition as a means of keeping up social contacts whereas George participated in a range of adult education programs for personal, social and economic reasons. Liz, also in her 50s and with a similar migration background to Kon, had very different experiences again, with mental illness shaping her life experience and her use of adult education.

Ollie and Arosha, both women, who were relatively younger than the rest of the sample, being in their thirties, both married and recently arrived in Australia. Arosha was Sri Lankan, married to a Lankan-born man, has two young children, spoke English very well, had post-graduate qualifications and was active in pursuing employment and adult education programs and activities. Ollie was Russian, recently married to an Australian, spoke little English, wanted to have children, didn't work and was quite isolated by her circumstances and experiences of adult education and employment. Both women reported feeling them-

selves defined and judged by their gender and their family relationships and believed that their status both as a citizen and mature aged learner from a different cultural background was informed by the conflation of gender and migrant status.

Despite their very different backgrounds, Arosha and Ollie reported social isolation and exclusion in describing their experiences as women in a regional area but the combination of being an outsider, being women and from a different cultural background compounded to produce a variety of alienating experiences, especially for the women who were recent migrants. Diversity thus encompasses many forms of social and economic isolation that adult education and training providers need to consider in any program aimed at targeting particular groups in any regional community. Linking adult education, cultural diversity and social exclusion requires an exploration of social capital as a framework for exploring these issues.

Why social capital?

Social capital is a relatively modern term that has become more common in academic and political discourse since the 1980s. Social capital was seen by James Coleman (1994) as the set of resources that are inherent in group relationships and community-based social organisations and these resources are then useful for the cognitive and/or social development of individuals. Michael Porter (1998) explored 'strong' versus 'weak' social ties as integral to social capital and Robert D. Putnam (1996) explored social capital indicators based on community networks, norms and trust.

Social capital then is the set of social and group relationships occurring in a community context that reinforce specific sets of networks and ties that result in community and social cohesion. In short, social capital opens up the way for different approaches to modelling social relations (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000). Tom Schuller, Stephen Baron and John Field (2000) describe social capital as an 'adolescent' notion, a term that is messy, immature and vulnerable to analytical and political abuse. Nevertheless, there is a belief that there are continuing merits in its use because it assists with an analysis of patterns of relations between agents, social units and institutions, rather than focusing on just individual behaviour (Schuller, Baron & Field, 2000).

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) explored the amount of social capital that any given individual can amass, regarding these as dependent on the network of connections s/he can mobilise in conjunction with the volume of other forms of capital possessed by the individual. Social capital, then, is dependent upon the size

of these networks and the quality of the connections. Networks and connections must be continually created and recreated otherwise they become devalued and have little less positive influence.

Ronald S. Burt (1997) explored social capital in terms of the information and control that networks achieve; they are the broker between individuals and the social structures which people have become disconnected from, for instance, employment, education and systems of social services. Michael Woolcock (2000) observed simultaneous benefits and disadvantages of social capital, creating a sense of belonging but any attempts to re-network within social structures can highlight the lack of network development of any individual. This focus on network in social capital theory is significant. In attempting to connect to existing networks, new migrants and residents can be repelled so that any rebuff by existing networks can exacerbate and prolong social exclusion and isolation. "It is widely suggested that contact with others is important in providing individuals with identity, social roles and social support mechanisms" (ABS, 2006, p. 86). Network structure (frequency, intensity and mode of contact) is a crucial indicator in social capital development that can be directly correlated to recent research in Australia. In very crude ways, the significance of such connections has been recognised in recent Australian modelling aimed at constructing measures for social cohesion and health (ABS, 2006; Vinson, 2007).

Measurements of social capital are problematic in that governments in Australia and internationally, do not have specific agencies to drive research around community life and social cohesion. Concepts, indicators and measurements are being derived from a variety of sources with tensions arising between researchers and government agencies because of cursory measurements. This means that it is still unclear whether social capital can be successfully measured in a way that satisfies policy development, evaluation and social research stakeholders.

If it can be agreed that social capital refers to the social relationships in a community context which result in collective networks, norms, values and understandings that facilitate cooperation and cohesion within groups and between different groups in communities, then the current challenge is about how to identify and measure social capital development in varied community contexts. Social capital as a concept can assist social research frameworks by acting as a link between the micro, meso and macro levels of inquiry. Social capital as a concept, and as a way of describing social relationships, can be utilised by governments at all levels as well as localised groups and agencies as a means of explor-

ing community ties. Integral to this link is a multidisciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach to new research on social capital that synthesises dialogue.

Increased use of the term social capital in recent years can be seen as heralding 'a return to social science', whereby issues such as 'community', 'trust', 'cohesion', 'connectedness' and so on, are being re-examined as a direct challenge to global capitalism and the neo-conservative obsession with the dollar value of everything. Social capital as a concept asks that researchers and analysts develop questions about values, morality and the way we debate issues in society. However, there is a need to move beyond the policy rhetoric and to begin to research the true value of the term by researching the relationships between individuals, social units and institutions in diverse communities.

Linking diversity, regionality & social cohesion

Regional communities in Australia have developed in a different manner and with a unique population profile compared to urban communities. Communities in regional Victoria, for example, have 16% of the population born overseas and are significantly less diverse than Melbourne, the capital city, where well over a third of the population is overseas born (DVC, 2006). Issues of cultural and social marginalization motivate many people and especially newly-arrived migrants, to choose to reside in the greater diversity of urban areas. In recent years however, a number of regional municipalities around Australia and other nations have been actively welcoming more diverse groups into their communities for a range of economic and social reasons.

Currently there are ranges of ways in which regional communities seek to source and attract more diverse populations. Immigration programs now target humanitarian entrants to resettle in regional and rural Australia. Skilled migrants are used to fill skill shortages, and there are opportunities for guest workers to come to Australia to fulfil specific employment contracts in regional and/or rural communities. The extent to which new internal and international migrants can expect support in their resettlement and in adjusting to life in their new communities is the subject of emerging research in Australia (Broadbent, Cacciattolo & Carpenter, 2006). It is recognised however, that Australian regional and rural communities have distinct localised cultures, often described as Anglo-saxon, protestant and rooted in the colonial history of a specific region, requiring newcomers to adjust to the mores and codes of local life rather than a culture that welcomes difference and 'newness' (Smyth,

2008). This concept can be applied to most communities which are ethno-centric and protective of localised culture and networks.

The more an individual conforms to the specific culture of a community, the more rapidly and easily they will develop new social and economic networks (Babacan, 2003). However, different cultural groups develop and utilise social and economic network development quite uniquely. Research is revealing that as an Anglo-centric society we cannot 'lump' all non-English speaking groups together under one label as 'migrants', expecting their experiences to be similar (Giorgas, 2000).

This raises the question of how international and internal migrants rebuild their social capital in a community context. What social capital do they 'carry' with them and what social capital already exists in regional communities for people from culturally diverse backgrounds to connect to? Is such social capital specific? Are individuals from culturally diverse backgrounds denied opportunities to amass social capital because they lack the critical mass that is evident in large cities? There are claims that social capital development for people from culturally diverse backgrounds is often dependent on the actions of previous generations as "social capital is increased when emphasis on linear ethnicity is greater and when social networks become dense" (Giorgas, 2000, p. 4).

Social capital development for new residents in any community occurs in the context of complex human, political and economic capital. The interaction of the ecological, economic, social and human provides for the specific production of identities through formal and informal networks, structures, shared experiences and a sense of history, purpose and being (Revill, 1993). These issues that shaped data and information collected as part of this research in one regional community and should be acknowledged as an overarching 'presence' in the research.

The context, the 'place' was a regional community, within which social capital formation occurred for residents from different backgrounds in a unique manner. The regional context, the community context was a place that has a wealth of distinct and diverse ecology which has influenced the development of economic capital via recreation and tourism and the emergence of new levels of human and social capital. The Murray River, with the world's largest red gum forests surrounded by broad open plains, has been a source of agricultural production for two centuries. However, recent decades of enduring drought and industry restructuring has seen the region rework its economic focus, expanding into a popular tourist destination attracting people traversing the continent from south to north and from east to west, all year round.

Agricultural production based on intensive irrigation is still the largest industry in terms of net worth and revenue but employment now occurs mostly in the service sectors of retail, finance, hospitality and tourism. These expanding industries are attracting many new residents to the region, influencing the development of new human capital. However, social capital development in this region is highlighted by existing, deep-rooted, separate, homogenous social and economic networks in the community that are either blind to or are purposefully excluding new residents and cultural diversity.

Social capital development for people from diverse backgrounds

Relationships between culture and community, racial or ethnic diversity and social capital are complex, interrelated and in tension in Australian society and in many other societies where cultural diversity is emerging as a demographic feature. They are intertwined and can be negatively interrelated (Hero, 2007). Examining the two perspectives of diversity and social capital requires the juxtaposition of a number of social and political dimensions: civic and social equality, patterns of participation and policy outputs in a range of community contexts (Hero, 2007). It should be asked, for example, if there is lower social capital development for people from different cultural backgrounds in communities where there are higher levels of social capital in the general community. Are social outcomes different when examined for specific cultural and ethnic groups, as per their arrival and longevity of residence in a country and the communities where they reside? Social capital is appealing because it emphasises community, consensus and connectedness, sociologically comforting in an era of economic rationalism and neo-conservative social values. It links social conditions and civic association with well-being, happiness and 'good' aspects of life in modern societies. There is a longing for a romanticised past of community and connectedness. However, social capital debates, measurements and analyses appear to be culturally and racially 'blind', with a lack of acknowledgement of the importance of racial or cultural inequality in society as compared to economic inequality. At this point in the global academic debate, social capital has limited application to analyses of cultural diversity because of a lack of evidence of the links between the two (Healy, 2007).

High levels of social capital seem to be linked to low rates of diversity, small populations, low urbanisation and slow population growth (Vinson, 2007; Healy, 2007) and this therefore brings into question the principles and validity of current research around

social capital development. "That social capital and political culture (especially the latter) have generally been inattentive to and have not fully incorporated racial diversity into their analyses is likewise notable. It is not clear what we should make of this, but it does not seem accidental" (Hero, 2007:168).

The research that has been briefly outlined in this article, has investigated social capital in a regional context where the literature suggests that social capital levels are comparatively high, but the experiences of the individuals from different cultural backgrounds reveals that social capital is more complex than previously documented. Individuals like George, Connie, Kon and Liz who had all resided in Australia for some decades were all experiencing difficulty developing social networks and sustaining social capital because of their status as 'outsiders'.

Connie revealed that it was important for her to socialise with other migrants and people from CALD backgrounds because *there are lots of Aussie rednecks*. George described this complexity as perplexing because it *looked like a modern and quite trendy town but it was all looks, the attitudes and behaviour of 'locals' about people from different cultural and other differences was rooted in an Anglo rural redneck culture*. Lena thought it was a joke, with people telling her to *watch the rednecks, I laughed, I thought that's strange, I see some people with red faces and wonder if it's them I should worry about*. She then described having to move her Buddhist shrine back inside her house because people were being abusive about it sitting out the front of her home. These quotes from the research reveal a 'known' aspect to this specific community, a closed and racist element that is intent on making people other than the norm, feel unwelcome.

Barriers to social network development

Migration to a country like Australia involves stages or periods of adjustment or settlement that allow for locating housing, an ongoing income and accessing goods and services required for daily living. This process of adjustment is dynamic, involving psychological, social and political dimensions, meaning that time taken for settlement and actual experiences are individual and manifold. Many variables influence the outcomes, including prior life experiences, migration experiences, social issues in specific societies, the welfare and support systems available, community and societal attitudes towards migrants and the economic status of the individual or family unit at their arrival.

Women tend to be more vulnerable during settlement with adjustment problems relating to English proficiency, being economic dependents with limited

means, and being more likely to be constrained by family dynamics. Social isolation and exclusion can also be exacerbated by unfavourable employment and housing and a lack of social support and kin-based systems.

A recent report (ICEPA, 2006) identified a plethora of Australian and international research all of which concluded that while there "is broad acceptance of the principle that social cohesion can promote economic growth, evidence suggests that immigrants often experience difficulty integrating into Australian society... this problem is particularly acute in rural and regional communities" (ICEPA, 2006, p. 26). Narayan Gopalkrishnan (2005) suggests that issues such as access, equity, racism and citizenship impact on how government support and intervention programs are developed to facilitate processes of settlement, integration and cohesion in a society where immigration and cultural plurality is a centrepiece of population and economic growth. Public policy in Australia has a history and practice of targeted or ethno-specific services directed towards specific groups in society.

Despite the use of 'cultural diversity' as a term to describe this targeting, incidental, structural and policy limitations occur at government and organisational levels. Barriers and limitations in public policy and program initiatives designed to target people from different backgrounds often arise because of a failure to 'reach out' to groups to locate them and their needs (Gopalkrishnan, 2005). The barriers experienced by people from different cultural backgrounds in Australia can include a distrust of government, the mono-lingualism of services and staff, inappropriate assessments of need, the location of services and a lack of knowledge about how Australian services operate. Governments in Australia are constantly making assertions about access and equity, lack of discrimination, the right to fully participate in society and so on. However, there is "ample evidence to show that racism impacts on life chances and social inclusion outcomes. Life chances can be impacted in the areas of occupational status and earning, educational achievement and social integration" (Gopalkrishnan, 2005, p. 14). Thus the responsibility of all public policies and programs targeting people from culturally diverse backgrounds is to consider the broader issues of the personal, social and economic experiences of migration, race, discrimination, social exclusion and isolation.

Adult education and social capital development

"Settlement is a dynamic process and involves the interface of the social, psychological and political dimensions of the person/group entering Australia

and the prevailing attitudes and social institutions in the society that receives them. Success or otherwise of settlement cannot be uni-dimensional and solely dependent upon the person/group immigrating" (Babacan, 2007, p. 7). Research revealed that adult education staff tended to underestimate the numbers of people from diverse cultural backgrounds residing in their local region and communities. This raises two pertinent questions requiring broader discussion and analysis. Are individuals who work in adult education in regional communities 'blind' to this new diversity in their local population and the needs of these new residents because they themselves are mostly established residents and from English-speaking backgrounds? Does there need to be a critical mass of people from specific cultural backgrounds in a community or region before dominant social and cultural groups begin to 'see' them, and act to engage them and provide the resources they require?

All of the individual learners interviewed for this research experienced social exclusion and isolation in the first years of their life in this region. These experiences confirmed for them their status as outsiders. Some had developed social capital via employment-based networks and experiences, while some believed themselves to still be 'outsiders', many years after moving to this new community. They were searching for social connections either as a primary or secondary motivation when accessing adult education.

The research revealed that individuals experience the complex and multi-layered nature of various forms of social capital development in regional communities. Adult education is one example of a community-based service and resource which can be shown to impact on the development of human and social capital, and which is accessed for that purpose. Other avenues such as employment or owning a small business can lead to new residents and migrants building new social networks, but most of the interviewees experienced difficulty in gaining access to employment or business development and so were unable to locate and 'join' any social networks based on these identities and roles.

Other recent research measuring social inclusion and exclusion in Australia and internationally concluded that networks developed benefits including new work and education opportunities and ageing well and that these benefits affected individuals, groups and organisations in a regional context. Regions are complex geographic and demographic 'places' with socio-economic sub-groups influencing social capital development. Emerging research is locating ethnicity, gender and age as issues that have yet to be measured and analysed as part of the social capital 'project' (Stone & Hughes, 2001; Giorgas, 2000; Bullen & Onyx, 1998).

The development of social capital for residents of diverse backgrounds is occurring within the context of communities deeply rooted in the colonial history of Australia. There can be an absence of any events that celebrate the cultural identities in the region with all mass events centring on Anglo-type sports which have dominated the region for centuries, events like fishing competitions, speed-boat racing and paddle-steamer parades. Diversity in population and culture is only a very recent phenomenon for some communities in Australia, with local populations growing and diversifying mostly in the past couple of decades.

All Australian adult education and training sectors, including higher education (universities), vocational training and adult education, reflect public policy being constructed and driven as a vehicle for individual and collective economic development. However, there is a lack of attention given to the personal and social experiences which can act as enablers and barriers to participation in adult education. This article contends that there appears to be confusion at Australian public policy, adult education provider and program facilitation levels about the philosophies, purpose and delivery of the economic, social and personal goals of adult education programs. Access to adult education programs is now seen mostly as a pathway to vocational training or higher education courses and not as access to a community resource that has broader social capacity building potential. However, this research has revealed that neighbourhood-based adult education providers are clearly delivering valuable social, cultural and civic services that need to be further recognised and expanded.

There is emerging research in Australia exploring adult education and training programs as potential partnership processes in regional and local community contexts, partnerships that have the potential of reviving what now appears to be flagging participation within all forms of adult education and training across Australian communities (Balatti, Black & Falk, 2006; Clemans, Hartley & Macrae, 2003; Golding, Davies & Volkoff, 2001). Partnership processes are one example of an attempt by governments and education agencies to forge links with individuals, groups and organisations in specific communities, with partnership projects 'reaching out' to rather than waiting for 'customers' to initiate interaction with adult education and training providers (Billet, 2004).

Australian public policy authorities have a tendency to consult with specific interest groups who have already made their voices heard, with most people in local communities not participating in government consultation and planning processes because they either get missed in the process, exclude themselves or are apathetic about these kind of processes, deeming

them too political or bureaucratic (Marsh, Buckle & Smale, 2003). Engaging with individuals, groups and communities on any policy or problem solving process requires acknowledgement that community networks and issues of trust are paramount. Partnership projects or programs must be nurtured in a way that builds awareness around local issues, locates key support for the issue, allows the community to take responsibility for the issue and the problem solving, and resources the community connections that will build on the program implementation process (Billet, 2004).

There are several categories of people who engage with government in the processes of building resources and services. These include groups of people with shared interests, groups with a shared identity who have contacts and networks across communities, community organisations and professionals, and some individuals who are newly arrived in a community and become acutely aware of the gaps in resource and service provision. In relation to newly-arrived migrants and people from a range of cultural backgrounds, this engagement with government tends to occur through peak bodies like ethnic communities councils because, as mentioned previously, people new to a country, region or community, experience individual and social barriers to full participation in a range of community resources.

Steve Garlick and Anne Langworthy (2004) view engagement processes between Australian education providers and regional communities as currently being project specific, small in scale and still dominated by the university sector. They argue that improvement in community engagement processes in education can occur through evaluation frameworks that connect to communities rather than just engaging them in the collection and reporting of quantified indicators of education participation and outcomes.

The cultural 'target' group can be one of the most difficult groups to engage in public and policy discourse about their needs because of a mistrust of government or because the processes seem overly bureaucratic. An analysis of community engagement relevant to adult education is provided by Yaso Nadarajah (2004) who links engagement to notions of culture, where culture is seen as a dominant variable which influences the way we organise ourselves, the ways we think, problem solve, develop beliefs and value systems and relate to others as insiders or outsiders.

Nadarajah (2004) explains community engagement in terms of connectivity, of creating new spaces within marginal positions that explore how individuals and groups engage with government and organizational policies, strategies and systems. He believes that diverse regions provide nations with a quality of life and that the organisations who service these regions must diversify to encompass regional needs and pat-

terns of life. Community engagement must be about genuine partnerships and not just about outreach service provision.

This means examining how social and cultural structures and processes contribute to a discourse on identity, history and local sustainability and an exploration of local power relations, the processes of exclusion and marginalization. This linking of the local to the global and the individual to the organisational provides a reminder that adult education as policy and practice needs to re-engage with the margins of society to create a space for the acknowledgement of multiple identities and multi-dimensional problems, and must be careful not to engage only with those who appear before us or who can speak the loudest.

Conclusions

It is apparent that research around social capital development for migrants in Australia and in other culturally diverse countries around the globe has concentrated on how ethnic groups in urban and regional communities draw on generational, social and economic network development (Babacan, 2007; Giorgas, 2000). However, all people from culturally diverse backgrounds cannot rely on such generational social development because of the lack of a historical and generational presence of cultural diversity in many regions.

There is then a need to explore social capital development for people from different cultural backgrounds living in one area or region, in comparable ways which reflect the realities of individual experience, that is, by considering their participation in social and civic life and in mainstream social and economic structures like education and employment. Participation in adult education was the central theme of the research project described in this article and so provides one example of how education, training, employment and local government agencies foster social inclusion *and* social exclusion in localised communities. There are questions that need further analysis in relation to the development of social capital for people from culturally diverse backgrounds in regional communities in a range of contexts throughout Australian and around the world.

For example, why isn't the measurement of social capital being correlated with demographic variables such as age, gender and ethnicity? Are current elements, measures and questions of social capital development culturally significant? Where are the studies that evaluate the contribution of social capital to specific public policy issues such as adult education? What role does adult education play in a range of community contexts in the fostering of social inclusion and the development of social capital?

The linking of population and cultural diversity, processes of social inclusion, social capital development and adult education is a unique one and provides the opportunity to expand the social capital argument to ensure that it is more than rhetoric and policy terminology. Social capital has the potential to be a purposeful framework for the examination of complex, diverse twenty first century communities in Australia and around the world and the range of policies, organisations and practices that can contribute to social inclusion and exclusion in a community context. Adult education is but one example of a social policy framework and social purpose community service that has the potential to act as an agency that facilitates and manages social diversity and inclusion in localised settings.

About the author

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