

Social inclusion in a 'risk society': Identifying the barriers and facilitators of inclusion across different communities and contexts

In this edition of JoSI we are pleased to present a collection of six papers that explore social inclusion issues as applied to children, young people and people with disabilities across different settings and geographic locations. In various ways this issue examines how meaningful progress in social inclusion can be achieved. Many of the suggested ways forward are discussed in the context of policies and practices reflective of risk averse tendencies that can, implicitly or explicitly, reproduce restrictive assumptions about not only the nature of 'children', 'young people' or 'disability,' but also about what is possible.

In a 'risk society' (Peterson and Lutpon 2000; Beck 1992) we often find the dual goals of increased social inclusion and the need to 'manage risk' in tension. As presented in this edition, these and other tensions are represented in the examination of spaces for children's play in suburban Australia, the 'management' of 'at risk' youth in educational settings and the deployment of ethical standards and guidelines in research with 'at risk' populations such as those with disabilities. Numerous implications are apparent from the discussion of these issues, however, the locus of power (and decision-making) is generally indicative of a structural bias whereby, despite any stated policy setting or emerging tensions, individual decision-makers who need to be accountable for their decisions will likely continue to be more risk averse.

In response to our call for papers on social inclusion and 'place', the themes reflected in the first two articles in this issue underscore how our local environment influences social participation and a multitude of outcomes, more broadly. This includes local environments which are responsive to children's needs and capacity to play, engage with the world around them and take risks, learn and develop. The first of these papers by Andrews, Stagnitti and Robertson explores differences in the social play of pre-school aged children as observed in an inner city and outer metropolitan suburb of Australia. The results of this study based on a survey of parents from both suburbs (n=98) and follow-up interviews with twenty parents (n=20), attributed the differences in child socialisation to neighbourhood, family and planning policy related matters. The results emphasise the importance of all children having access to places or spaces that facilitate play and socialisation, irrespective of suburban housing patterns or location.

The second article by Hall and Andrews presents the results of a review of the Australian literature exploring the features of urban environments that promote social health. In this context the notion of 'social health' refers to a sense of social connectedness, inclusion and community cohesion. Eleven articles were found to meet study criteria and reviewed for study quality. The results identified the importance of urban form, public facilities, 'third spaces' (i.e. spaces outside of the home and work which enable informal interactions), and green space. Despite international recognition of the social determinants of health, the influence of place and need for local environments that are conducive to social interaction, public health and wellbeing, it would appear there is still much to be done across Australia. Hall and Andrews therefore recommend the need to embed social health considerations in local policy and planning to promote more socially inclusive, high-density neighbourhoods in Australia and cite some existing frameworks as good practice examples.

In Australia and around the world, an increasing number of children are being excluded from school, including on the basis of being a 'risk' to others, with children with disabilities

significantly over-represented in these statistics (Adams, 2018; de Bruin, 2019; Sargent, 2016). What are the risks for society, however, if an increasing number of children are being excluded from school? How are approaches evolving in response? In this context, the third article in this issue, by Gatfield and Winter-Simat highlights the value of integrated, relational ways of working with secondary students who are described as being 'at-risk' or having complex challenges (e.g. learning difficulties, family dysfunction, risk of homelessness and/or substance misuse). A detailed description and rationale for their Integrated Systems Approach is presented, punctuated with a case illustration. Once again, the value of working with people in less hierarchical ways that disperse power and increase mutual responsibility are demonstrated, in this context in relation to secondary education settings and 'at-risk' students.

The fourth article in this issue by Amsters introduces a second theme that has emerged in this edition relating to the need to better recognise and include the perspectives of people with disabilities and the research implications of this. Amsters examines themes of exploitation and meaningful engagement for those conducting research in the area of disability and rehabilitation, proposing a '6-C approach to meaningful engagement' framework as a way of addressing the potential for exploitation in the area of disability research. This recognises that even where research has meaningful involvement of those with lived experience of disability this does not necessarily protect against exploitation. Amsters suggests that even with the best of intentions, elements of the institutional spaces that most researchers work within combined with unconscious bias and the continuing dominance of the medical model within disability research can often result in exploitative practices. The '6-C approach is posited as a framework for reducing such exploitation within research with the 6 elements of 'communication', 'comfort and convenience', 'cash', 'credit' and 'capacity building'. The article asks us to pause and think critically about research participant involvement and the relative benefits that accrue to parties, dependent on power dynamics. The findings also provide further support for the emergence of co-design principles and practices in the field currently.

Hills, Clapton and Dorsett pick-up related themes in their reflective commentary on conducting research with people with nonverbal autism. The authors highlight tensions where the desire to ensure authentic representations of the lived experience of those with non-verbal autism in research comes up against ethical concerns regarding facilitated communication methods, often utilised by people with nonverbal autism to assist their participation in such research. Reflecting upon their own research exploring the spirituality of people with nonverbal autism, the authors detail how assumptions about communication, language and expression for those with non-verbal autism, the desire to protect this group and the need to observe ethical guidelines and standards at the same time as seeking to ensure inclusion, respect and empowerment produce various points of tension for those working in the field. The authors conclude by drawing our attention to the need to consciously engage with this tension in our efforts to produce further opportunities for inclusive research in the future.

In our final paper, Naami presents the findings of a research project undertaken in Accra-Ghana utilising photovoice methodology (n=10) to explore the experiences of people with mobility disabilities in navigating the physical and transport barriers existing in the region. The photovoice method is an example of moving toward research approaches that facilitate diverse communication and can allow for more participant directed narratives and priorities to be identified in the data collection and analysis process. Images taken by the ten research participants are presented alongside their first-hand narratives highlighting a range of access issues confronted in their daily lives as they interact and engage with eleven different types of environments including the home, workspace, schools, hospitals and other settings. Two main access barriers are identified; transportation and physical barriers. Naami argues for the necessary resourcing and enforcement to back up the recent political will expressed by the Ghanaian government in enacting various disability rights oriented measures to improve accessibility and remove barriers to social participation

The respective approaches highlighted in this issue of the journal, in many ways reflect a confluence of key principles or pre-requisites for social inclusion, particularly from a systems theory or ecological perspective. Indeed, the implications for local policy and planning schemes, relational ways of working and approaches to more actively engage people with disabilities as research participants (or even partners) are clear. A decade on, JoSI looks forward to continuing to explore these and other social inclusion related issues in the future. We thank you for your continued support of JoSI, in particular all the researchers who have contributed or agreed to review articles submitted to the journal.

Angella Duvnjak, PhD

Co-Editor

Paul Harris, PhD

Co-Editor

*School of Human Services and Social Work
Griffith University
Australia*

References

- Adams, R. (2018). Sharp rise in pupil exclusions in English state schools. *The Guardian* (Australia Edition), 19 July 2018. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2018/jul/19/sharp-rise-in-pupil-exclusions-from-english-state-schools>
- Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications: London
- Benoit, C., Belle-Isle, L., Smith, M., Phillips, R., Shumka, L., Atchison, C., Jansson, M., Loppie, C. and Flagg, J. (2017). "Sex workers as peer health advocates: community empowerment and transformative learning through a Canadian pilot program", *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 16, (1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-017-0655-2>
- de Bruin, K. (2019). The impact of inclusive education reforms on students with disability: an international comparison, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 27, (7-8), pp. 811-826. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1623327>
- Peterson, A and Lupton, D (2000). *The New Public Health: Health and Self in the Age of Risk*, Sage Publications: London
- Sargeant, J. (2016). *Are we expelling too many children from Australian schools?* The Conversation. Retrieved from: <http://theconversation.com/are-we-expelling-too-many-children-from-australian-schools-65162>