

Social inclusion policy:

Producing justice or retribution?

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Abstract

The notion of social inclusion has currently gained extraordinary credence in Australia. Policy incorporating social inclusion abounds across all discipline areas with the federal government for the first time instituting a government portfolio for this area, headed by the Deputy Prime Minister. Such a move indicates the importance of managing aspects of inclusion across all sectors, in a country where diversity abounds. However, this focus on inclusion can prove highly problematic, when it becomes such an integral part of policy formulation and of the assumptions, omissions and contradictions that policy produces. This paper examines how policy discourse produces ways of thinking about inclusion/exclusion. Using three vignettes, the author applies the theories of Michel Foucault to argue that the discursive production of such inclusive policy works to simultaneously exclude by categorising particular types of individuals and families as “proper” participants in society. The author contends that understandings of propriety relating to the inclusion/exclusion binary reinscribe each other, in ways that situate particular citizens outside of possibilities for “success” in social and systemic participation. Such understanding is highlighted by a conceptual examination of the ways in which discursively produced notions of propriety become normalised.

Keywords: bricolage, discourse, authorised knowledge, imperative discourse, regimes of truth

Since its election in 2007, the rhetoric of the Australian federal government has strongly focussed on the notion of social inclusion. In a statement to the Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), in November 2007, the [then] Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard reported that:

Too many individuals and communities [in Australia] remain caught in a spiral of low school attainment, high unemployment and underemployment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse. Too many Australians are socially excluded. (Gillard, 2007)

Gillard's statement suggests that to be included as an ethically responsible member of the Australian community, that is, as an ethical citizen, certain types of participation and/or behaviours are necessary. Gillard has used particular categories to determine how to define social exclusion. According to Foucault (1980) such categorisation as used here can be both enabling and constraining. The rhetoric used in Gillard's statements can be interpreted as enabling ethical participation in the Australian community and thus, can appear as a reasonable expectation of an Australian citizen. However, it is such reasonableness that also highlights the constraints of Gillard's rhetoric. In terms of the above statements, to be included as an ethical citizen in the Australian community, an individual must have successfully completed twelve years of schooling – the yardstick by which academic success is measured. An ethical citizen must also be employed and strive for good health, stay out of prison and not be an abuser. Such characteristics again appear quite reasonable in many respects. However, by using this type of categorisation, it is possible to consider those individuals who exist as incomplete schoolers, who do not engage in healthy practices such as eating nutritious food and refraining from smoking, who cannot keep themselves out of prison, whether they are incarcerated for murder or for addiction, and who abuse children whether they do so through their own inadequacy or through circumstances beyond their control, as engaging in unreasonable social and systemic practice. This definition of unreasonableness can occur whether or not the situation is outside of the control of the individual. Therefore, in the same way that such rhetoric works to produce reasonableness, it also simultaneously produces categories of inclusion and exclusion.

By inference then, it can be assumed that to engage in social and systemic practice in a successful way, that is, to be included, membership of certain categories is necessary. Again returning to Gillard's statement, it can be suggested that to be included as a successful or ethical Australian citizen, individuals should be educated, employed at a level that recognises their abilities and skills, be healthy, stay out of the criminal justice system and not be subject to abuse. The very fact that inclusion and exclusion can be defined by determining membership of specific categories raises questions about how such categories are determined and also how Australian citizens might gain membership to them. This fact also is of interest in terms of how such categories are then related to successful engagement in social and systemic practice and what might be the conditions of possibility that allow such categories to exist as determining such success.

To proceed in this way then, it is necessary to examine ways in which successful engagement in social and systemic practice is constituted and understood. To do so, this paper takes into account the work of Michel Foucault and his notions of "thinking otherwise" (1984) by using "pessimistic activism" (1984, pp. 231-232). Foucault's work from 1979 to 1984, focussed on asking his readers to think otherwise about how certain social and systemic practices could be seen as reasonable. To think otherwise, is to consider multiple perspectives, endeavouring to understand and problematise practices, which could be produced by particular meta-narratives or, as Foucault termed them, "regimes of truth" (1980). Such consideration is especially necessary where such practices might result in certain categorisations being determined as successful or proper.

In Foucault's (1991, p. 46) terms, it is not so much that adherence to truth or shared understandings is bad – it is dangerous – dangerous because it prevents holistic focus on an issue and limits and narrows perspective. While dangerous is not the same

as bad, such adherence does not allow multiple perspectives to inform understanding. Foucault (1980, p. 131) stated:

Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true: the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

Understood in this way unquestioned adherence to particular truths, practices or policies is more likely to constrain rather than enable social and systemic understandings and practices.

According to Foucault (1980), the ways in which people understand what is "true" and "false", produce certain "truth effects" – particular modes of address, vocabularies, activities, behaviours and so on (Macfarlane, 2006). For poststructuralists like Foucault, our common sense "reality" is constituted in language, or more precisely in patterns of language use (Macfarlane, 2006). Discourse is the term used in poststructuralist work to name these systems of language use, which are, at the same time, systems of power relations. Discourses constitute the subjects - including human subjects – which they appear simply to describe. As Foucault argues, "...[d]iscourses are not about objects: they constitute them and in the practice of doing so, conceal their own invention..." (1980, p. 49). Importantly he goes on to say that discourses are "irreducible to language and to speech" (p. 49). They are systems for producing what is sayable rather than being the words used to say it. Thus it is the logic being applied to speak particular truths rather than particular words used that requires analysis (Macfarlane, 2006).

With such a view in mind it is necessary to critique how notions of truth produce certain categories of performance or participation as proper, in order to understand how alternative perspectives to such categorisations may be made visible and not marginalised. In Foucault's (1980) terms, truth is a production of discourse. To take Foucault's view is to examine how particular discourses work to produce understandings of social and systemic practice as proper and to categorise individuals as behaving or functioning properly. In particular this paper examines this issue in relation the notions of inclusion and exclusion and to policies relating to families, in an effort to highlight how some family practices and behaviours might be normalised and others demonised.

The author uses a series of vignettes which relate to family experiences to demonstrate how easily particular policies, statements, procedures, techniques and mechanisms can be made to function as truth at this particular time in history. The author also seeks to highlight the contingency of such truths in an effort to illuminate other possibilities for understanding. In short, this paper examines notions of propriety in relation to how such notions work to include or exclude particular families in social and systemic situations. That is, the paper explores how parents understand what counts as "the right thing to do" and what it means to conduct oneself as a "parent doing the right thing" (Macfarlane, 2006, p. 8). Thus the paper focuses on the notion of a normalising discourse that produces understanding and logic in terms of what might be deemed normal in relation to parenting (Macfarlane, 2006). The author argues that government policies as a function of discourse,

contribute to notions of propriety by determining the levels of performativity which parents must meet in order to be categorised as proper or ethically responsible.

Methodology

By using the work of Foucault, the author is seeking to highlight how particular truths are realised amongst a random group of participants all undertaking a similar experience. To enhance data analysis, the author uses the vignettes as artefacts in a bricolage, to be deconstructed using epistemologically coherent theory and literature which will enable alternative understandings to be considered.

Bricolage (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17) creates a patchwork using different tools, methods and techniques that are at hand. This approach deals with the complexity of research and allows the researcher to work within and against (Lather, 1996) competing or overlapping perspectives and philosophies (Stewart, 2001). What results is a method that does not offer “any single model or foolproof approach to discovering the “correct” explanation of problems and differences...” (Riches & Dawson, 2002, p. 210). The theoretical and interpretive bricolage reinforces the notion that truthful positions cannot be reached by the use of one perspective (Macfarlane, 2006). In this case, the vignettes are interpreted in ways that highlight alignments in understanding and in perspectives of truth. These alignments are then “sashed” together, using epistemologically coherent theory and literature to create a patchwork of information that highlights rather than dispels perspectives. In this paper the author uses theory and literature from disparate and diverse sources, interpreted in ways that bring normally unconsidered perspectives from a variety of disciplines to this examination of how discourses of performativity and propriety produce categories for inclusion and exclusion.

An interpretive bricolage is underpinned by the notion that “research is an interactive process” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 9), produced by many aspects of contexts relating to the researcher and to other actors in the process. An interpretive and theoretical bricolage will provide a series of lenses for examining the anecdotes that are both informative and effective (Macfarlane, 2006). In McLeod’s (2000, p. 7) terms, the bricoleur creates “...tension between creativity and conformity. The image of the bricoleur...is permissive...forcing [the researcher] to take higher level epistemological decisions....But in many ways this creativity is one of the core characteristics of good qualitative research.” Thus the use of bricolage will allow space for a higher level of analysis to occur.

This method is followed in order to highlight how disparate pieces of information can be brought together to produce categorizations in ways that are highly problematic. This bricolage method allows these sources of information that might otherwise be invisible on their own or siloed by disciplinary constraint, to be aligned in ways that produce understanding about how categories of performance might be constituted.

Normalising families by categorisation is a function of discourse. Such categories both allow and disallow participation simultaneously and are enabled by “responsibilising” individuals. To borrow from Nikolas Rose (2000, p. 1395), the term responsibilisation “asserts our belief in a common purpose.” This term has become the means by which governments promote particular values and ethics to the population espousing these as desirable qualities (Macfarlane, 2006). Based on the assumption that people need a “framework of belief” (Rose, 2000, p. 1396), this

“technique of government” (p. 1397) promotes mutual responsibility and reciprocal obligation as the cornerstones of civil societies (Macfarlane, 2006). Consequently the civic-minded citizen self-regulates and becomes responsabilised, that is, comes to understand this process as the proper way to function (Rose, 2000). Moreover the focus on a belief in a common purpose works to create “responsibilised communities” consisting of free and autonomised individuals who derive guidelines and techniques from these communities to enable them to “enact their freedom” (p. 1399). It is through this process that individuals are subjected to technologies of government (Rose, 1999), thereby becoming agents in particular and desirable ways (Macfarlane, 2006).

Viewed in this way, as was the case with the category of social exclusion, the category “working Australian” implies certain attributes. Both the ex Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the Prime Minister Julia Gillard have used this term, which works to both include and exclude members of the community. For example, Gillard states:

Australians are hard workers. They aren't asking anybody for a free ride. They know that for this nation to make its way in a competitive, indeed, cut-throat world, they need to work hard, work fast and work smart – then get up the next day and do it all again....And the best of our employers stand ready to share the benefits of the extra wealth created with those working Australians who have helped to generate it. (Australian Labor Party, 2007)

In Gillard's terms then, this category of working Australian includes individuals who do not look for a “free ride” but work hard, fast and smart every day, as responsabilised (Rose, 1999, 2000) community members who perform in Australia's best interests. The category excludes those who cannot perform in this way, for example, to use Gillard's (Australian Labor Party, 2007a) own words, the uneducated, the unemployed, the unhealthy, those in prison and those suffering abuse. Such categorisation allows it to appear reasonable that Australians must perform as hard workers and not expect government assistance in order to be considered ethical citizens. This type of understanding does not distinguish between those who have the necessary economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984) to participate in this way and those who do not. Rhetoric of this type insinuates a level playing field (Bourdieu, 1984).

In a similar way parents can be categorised as performing well or poorly if they cannot meet certain normalised understandings of practice. The category of the proper parent includes and excludes in a similar way to that of working Australian. Parents are “unfree” to invent versions of proper parenting, which are not already constituted as “speakable”, through the discursive rules that apply to all (Macfarlane, 2006). This does not mean that contestation would not happen, simply that no truth claim could be made outside discourse (Macfarlane, 2006). Moreover, such categories of propriety and performativity are constantly reinscribed, as speakable versions of proper parenting and are historically contingent. This means that parents can be categorised as improper and therefore become excluded, if their parenting practice comes to be situated problematically, as a result of constant and contingent re-inscription of notions of propriety and performativity.

Camping: a microcosm of life

To create the interpretive patchwork for which I aim, a series of vignettes is used. Each vignette highlighted in this paper takes place at a camping ground in Northern New South Wales, Australia. Camping at this particular venue is very reasonably priced as camping grounds go and therefore, it is a popular place for families with young children. In fact, observed at a distance, this venue can appear as a microcosm of Australian society to some extent. Those who camp here are largely white Australians and Europeans, with only a few African families. Indigenous families tend to prefer other surrounding regions and thus, are largely absent at this venue. However, the population holidaying at this venue would represent a group of families who could be categorised as “working Australians”, (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2010; Australian Workers Union, 2009; Department of Parliamentary Services, 2009; Williams, 2008) a term used in this country to normalise families as productive members of the community.

The three vignettes included relate to three themes for analysis – the notion of ethical responsibility as applied to the planet’s salvation, understanding the relationship between parent performance and moral panic and examining the reasonableness of our notions of success. These themes are applied to elements of categorisation, for example, performance, reason and propriety, in order to illustrate how social and systemic policy and practice can be both enabling and constraining and can thus simultaneously include and exclude.

Vignette one – Saving the planet

The first vignette occurs while observing children and families on the beach – adults sitting back relaxing and watching children playing. While playing in a mixed group one young child – a boy about four – was heard to say to his friends: “[B]e careful with your digging. It has taken millions of years to make this beach.”

The ingenuity of young children never ceases to amaze and it appears that children are developing an understanding of quite complex issues at younger and younger ages. After quiet reflection on this impressive statement, it is important to consider further how children are produced by what they hear and see and by what is discussed with them and around them.

In recent times there can be no doubt preserving the environment and thus, saving the planet, is high on the Australian government’s priority list. In fact, the recent summit in Copenhagen would indicate that it is of interest to the world. The Australian government in particular, has been driving policy in the direction of lowering carbon emissions and while these changes in policy are likely to cost families quite dearly, there is no doubt that most working Australians support the lowering of carbon emissions as the right thing to do (Macfarlane, 2006).

The Australian government has spent some time in recent months, demonising the climate change sceptics in the Opposition parties, stating that scientists on the whole argue for the necessity of such climate change policy. This rhetoric by the federal government has resonated with most Australians with approximately 88% of surveyed Australians in late 2008, favouring a carbon reduction scheme and 66% saying that this scheme should go forward regardless of what other countries choose to do (The Australian, 2008). These figures indicate that the necessity to believe that

carbon emissions should be lowered is fast becoming a regime of truth in this country, one that is fuelled by the rhetoric of government policy.

However, respected science does exist on both sides of this argument. In April 2009, geologist, Professor Ian Plimer published 'Heaven and earth', a book comparing climate change theories to fundamentalist religion. Having tested eighty times the hypothesis that human emissions of carbon dioxide create global warming, Professor Plimer has disproved it each time. Plimer joins a range of scientists who state that climate change is a cyclical process and is not caused by human effects. More recently an article by McLean, de Freitas & Carter (2009) in the *Journal of Geophysical Research* has caused consternation. In this paper the authors argue that climate change in the southern hemisphere is more likely caused by El Nino changes than human effects. Following the publication of this paper in this peer reviewed journal, a rebuttal paper by Foster et al. (in press), is in the process of publication. This paper discredits the results in the McLean deFreitas and Carter paper. A further paper by McLean, deFreitas and Carter responding to the Foster et al. paper was submitted to the journal only to be refused publication.

While the profiles of Plimer and McLean, deFreitas and Carter are obviously considerable, prolific enough to be able to publish in peer-reviewed scientific journals, such individuals can come to be labelled sceptics by the media and government – a term which, when used in relation to climate change, has a distinctly derogatory tone. As the move to reduce carbon emissions gains momentum, the discussion about the human effects on climate change becomes more sensitive, particularly for those opposed to this idea. The discourse producing society's understanding of these human effects on climate change is very powerful and those who oppose such an idea are reluctant to speak up. If such individuals do speak up as seen above, then they are demonised by those who disagree as not having the "right to speak" (Ball, 1990) because they do not possess "authorised knowledge" (Simpson & Charlesworth, 1995, p. 126) and do not have, in Foucault's (1980, p. 131) terms, "the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true."

In the case of the above-mentioned differences it appears possible to argue that the opinions of Plimer and McLean, deFreitas and Carter represent a minority view and that most respected scientists agree with the argument that a reduction in carbon emissions causes climate change and that a carbon tax is the only reasonable way forward. In Foucault's terms (1980), such an argument is indicative of the fact the climate change discourse has become powerful enough to be understood as reason and thus, has effectively silenced alternative perspectives via processes of demonisation. Therefore, those who speak out against such policy are categorised as not having the necessary authorised knowledge and are, therefore, part of a fringe minority.

To take the above-mentioned view is not to argue for or against climate change or even to try and convince those who subscribe to the dominant view. Indeed, it is also not to argue for what is right or wrong/good or bad in this instance. What the argument is meant to represent is that unquestioned adherence to dominant discourses while appearing reasonable can also be highly problematic, as often less prominent views are marginalised and demonised in ways that situate them as improper. In such cases it is quite difficult for the "ordinary" "working Australian" to have an open mind on certain issues like climate change and it is more likely that these individuals will consciously embed within their habitus, the notion that human-made emissions are the most significant factor (Bourdieu, 1984). As the discourse about the human effects of climate change becomes more powerful, then there is a likelihood that ethically responsible Australians, will heed the "authorised knowledge" (Simpson &

Charlesworth, 1995, p. 126) and be less likely to listen to knowledge that does not adhere to the “imperative discourse” (Foucault, 1978a). Children, as individuals who are part of these families, will hear the imperative discourse through multiple means and thus be subject to the same regimes of truth.

Bourdieu (1984) also contributes to understanding such processes in terms of the way in which he conceptualises social practice. Bourdieu (1984) situates human beings as active agents who respond to the environment in terms of what it means to them. He attests that human beings engage in particular forms of practice by means of a set of practical dispositions that become an unconscious part of their repertoire. These dispositions are structured from past experiences, which act to shape perception, thought and action and that form strategies regarding how individuals act on their present circumstances. Bourdieu calls these habitual strategies and dispositions *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984, 2001; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In Bourdieu’s terms, an individual’s habitus consists of “dispositions, schemas, forms of know-how and competence, all of which function below the threshold of consciousness” (Macfarlane, 2006, p. 212). Consequently individuals develop particular beliefs and understandings that anchor and produce thinking and practice in particular ways.

This above-mentioned vignette is representative of how we can frame thinking by only considering one perspective and adopting that perspective as truth. What is demonstrated in the first vignette is that individuals, even children, understand and unconsciously adhere to imperative discourses. Such individuals also understand consciously or unconsciously that inclusion relies on the belief in imperative discourses and that to oppose imperative discourses is not only difficult but can bring ridicule and, at worst, exclusion. Thus this example of powerful climate change discourses producing regimes of truth demonstrates how such notions of truth contribute to a propriety palimpsest, which works to fabricate families (Ball, 2000, 2004) to think and behave in ways that enable their inclusion in categories such as “ethically responsible” or “working Australian”. Governments promote inclusion in such categories as desirable and representative of family success, through policy production and reform.

Vignette two – Proper parents are fearful

This second vignette occurs near the amenities block at the camp site. The observer noticed a man at the gate of the women’s toilets. This man was talking to someone inside encouraging this unseen person to do something. As soon as he saw the observer approach he said, “[O]h it is OK – here is a lady coming in.” The observer went into the toilets and found a young girl who was at least eight years old.

While there is a plethora of publicity currently available that would make parents fearful of letting their children walk alone into toilets, there is conflicting research relating to the importance of allowing children to exercise independence and become emotionally strong and resilient (Erikson, 1950; Rolfe, 2004). While no place is immune from danger, this camping ground is well populated at this time of year and it is hard to exit it without being seen. It is a place where all children play in large groups of mixed ages, sometimes well into the evening, whether they know each other

or not and where families talk to each other and invite each other to have drinks. Families feel safe here¹.

However, when viewing this vignette in Foucault's terms it can be seen how fear can lead to moral panic (Zgoba, 2004), allowing for the possibility that discourses producing notions of child safety overlap with those of responsabilisation and inclusion. Incidences such as the Azaria Chamberlain case are prime examples. In this case Lindy Chamberlain put baby Azaria to sleep in their tent with her sleeping brother only a few metres from where they ate dinner. It was 10 minutes later that Lindy was to cry "My God, my God a dingo's got my baby". Although evidence supported this claim, much of the evidence was met with scepticism, which was further fuelled by the fact that the parents did not demonstrate proper expressions of grief and were part of the Seventh Day Adventist Church - not of a faith that could be considered mainstream. The level of demonisation in this case eventually gained so much momentum that Lindy Chamberlain was convicted of her daughter's murder and her husband as an accessory after the fact, even though a previous coronial enquiry cleared them both. Mrs Chamberlain was sentenced to life in prison and spent several years there before the discovery of new evidence forced an inquiry that led to her release. The Chamberlains were eventually pardoned.

The Chamberlain case and the subsequent demonisation of the family, bears similarity to the more recent case of the disappearance of Madeleine McCann. The Madeleine McCann disappearance further demonstrated how common it is to judge parents in relation to their parenting style. In the McCann case, the parents initially lied to police because of their fear of being categorised as irresponsible parents or worse, as breaking the law (Collins, 2008). These lies led to the suspicion that the couple were involved in this disappearance and also to their demonisation by other parents. Their decision to leave the door of their room unlocked raised comment from many sectors and was speculated on in blogs around the world. The performance of these individuals as parents was judged by anyone who was able to access the story regardless of their understanding of the situation.

Similarities exist between the treatment of the parents in these two cases. Media treatment of these two women in each case was vicious. For example, the following quote from journalist Andrew Pierce states:

Yet have you ever felt a sense of unease at their [the McCann's] omnipresence in the papers and on television? No aspect of their grief seemed out of bounds. We have seen them deep in prayer at church. There was a photograph of them walking arm-in-arm on a deserted beach...And then there was the almost pitiful sight of Mrs (*not doctor*) McCann clutching Madeleine's favourite cuddly toy. Was I alone in wondering was this for comfort or was it what the PR advisors had suggested? (*Italics added*). (Skepticlawyer, 2007)

Additionally, both women were demonised for appearing too stoic and not crying enough over their missing children. Both were considered bad mothers for leaving their children while they slept. Both had their cars examined following the disappearance of their children, where it was claimed that blood was found in both cars. The claims relating to the blood evidence were eventually dismissed as frivolous.

¹ The author of this paper has holidayed at this camp ground with her own family for approximately twelve years and has observed the ways in which families allow children to play together in large groups without formal parental supervision.

Incidences such as these remind other parents to be wary and lead to them misrecognising what propriety is in such situations (Macfarlane, 2006) or if, in fact, such a notion is possible. The example in this vignette shows that the organising effects of discourses of performativity and propriety (Ball, 2004) on parents cannot be underestimated (Macfarlane, 2006). Parents are very aware of what they should be doing (Grieshaber, 2004) and often there is a strong desire in parents to conform to powerful discursive practices (Foucault, 1978b, 1979, 1991) such as those related to child safety. As seen in the examples above, failure to do so not only leads to community or society marginalisation of parents but they also tend to marginalise themselves (Grieshaber, 2004). As Jenks (1996) suggests, the family acts as a primary site of governmentality and the panoptic gaze can work as a principal disciplinary technique that encourages self-regulatory behaviour (Grieshaber, 2004) through hyper-surveillance techniques. Parents are subject to and engage in this hyper-surveillance and can become fearful of children's safety and outside judgement of their parenting style and abilities. They are aware that their performance as proper parents is always under the gaze (Foucault, 1980). Thus, discourses of performativity and propriety privileged as normal can be powerful regulators of parents' behaviour in many respects (Macfarlane, 2006). To be included as proper, certain protective behaviours become necessary as the possibility of judgement and demonisation as a bad parent is a powerful motivator.

Such a position is demonstrated in the following. Recently, some authors are trying to challenge notions of children's safety in a variety of publications (Gill, 2007, Louv, 2008). One such author Tim Gill in his book, *No fear: growing up in a risk averse society*, argues that it is important for children to develop resilience and that parents need to allow them a balance between challenging experiences and protections. However, in a review of Gill's book, a Herald Sun columnist in 2007, stated the following:

Gill's off-hand description of school yard friction and his easy acceptance that we need to embrace the risks of childhood might be welcome in the happy homes that most of us inhabit...perhaps we do micromanage our children's lives a little too much. But there are kids in every classroom willing to torment the vulnerable. And just a few of them grow into Robert Arthur Selby Lowes, blokes who spend their days navigating the dead ends of their low lives looking for a Sheree Beasley or a Daniel Morcombe or a Madeleine McCann. Pass me the bubble wrap. (In Woolcock, 2010)

Such statements can fuel moral panic in ways that make the category of proper parent very fluid and contingent. While the arguments for the development of resilience and its human benefits are prolific (Daubney, 2010; Erikson, 1950; Rolfe, 2004), the discourse of child safety is very powerful. It would be a brave parent who challenged such discourses and the categories of performance that are consequently produced by allowing their child to experience riding trains or going to the park alone at certain ages, as situations can go so horribly wrong. Comments such as those above signify the impossibility of parents existing as proper outside of the discourse of child safety. And, because this discourse is so contingent, parents may unwittingly become categorised as improper and then be excluded as a result of the considered reasonableness/unreasonableness of what they might do.

Moreover, such situations are fuelled by policy knee jerk reactions that only complicate the situation further. For example Zgoba (2004) argues that situations such

as those of Madeleine McCann and others often lead to the hasty creation and implementation of policy. Zgoba (2004) cites Megan's Law in the US as an example, where policy was hastily signed and implemented as a result of the death of Megan Kanka who was murdered by a stranger while fundraising door-to-door. Zgoba (2004) states that statistics do not support the implementation of such policy as most children are murdered by someone they know. She also states that the actual implementation of policy like this is unworkable, as it is often passed in haste and therefore does not take into account the difficulties of implementation, and also minimises the possibility of more effective and relevant policy being implemented.

What such policy does however, is drive regimes of truth that produce categories of performance for parents that are fuelled by specific understandings of reason with the membership of such categories almost impossible to sustain. As more incidents occur and more moral panics are generated, then inclusion in the category of proper parent becomes subject to more and more restriction.

Vignette three – Being included in the game of “success”

This third example occurred while passing a large patch of grass which is often used at the camp site for groups to congregate for games. On this occasion a group of young men in their teens and early twenties were playing touch football. One young man was walking towards the group with his arm around a younger child. As he approached the group he said, “the little fella wants to play.” The young boy joined the game, which was interspersed with young boys and older men, the younger boys keen to compete with their older counterparts in a game of “footy.”

It is interesting to consider how often an activity such as this one, occurs at this particular time in history. The lack of such interaction and the isolation of young children from such experiences have some very real consequences for our culture. Author and journalist Steve Cannane (2009) comments on such a notion in his new publication, *First Tests*. Cannane provides a different perspective on the formalisation of sporting training in relation to cricket which followed the establishment of the Australian Cricket Academy in the 1990s. Cannane (2009, p. 1) states that:

The backyard has been the real academy of cricket in Australia. It's there in the streets and local parks that Australia's best cricketers honed their skills and their competitive instincts.

Cannane quotes authors such as Malcolm Gladwell (2008) who argue that champion sportsman are made rather than born, due to the fact that it takes about ten thousand hours to practise your craft and hone skills to elite levels. Taking on board Gladwell's perspective, many more hours of practice are required than can be found in one or two lessons per week.

At this particular time in history, the value of playing in the park or the backyard as a means of honing skills has lost its allure (Gill, 2007, Hall, 2007, Woolcock, 2010). Apart from the aforementioned comments relating to safety which cause parents to be wary of parks and the like, in our performative and competitive culture parents often look to give children the competitive edge by taking them to formal classes rather than allowing time for backyard play. In Cannane's view such a focus is to our detriment as a sporting nation, rather than to its benefit. Cannane (2009, p. 4) states that:

The backyards and streets they played in had a huge influence on the way they played their cricket. Don Bradman's unique grip, stance and backlift all evolved from the pace at which the golf ball rebounded off the tank stand. Greg Chappell's trademark flick off the hip came about because the leg side of his backyard wicket offered the best scoring opportunities. Alan Davidson bowled accurately because he had to. If he missed the stumps on his home made pitch he had to chase the ball down the hill into the scrub. Doug Walters played spin with ease because his ant-bed backyard pitch spun viciously. Neil Harvey's immaculate footwork came from playing balls darting off cobblestones.

Cannane (2009, p. 5) also argues that few of Australia's great cricketers came from privileged families and so in their case "the backyard, the typical environment for unstructured play in Australia provided an efficient and competitive environment for cricket."

What is interesting in Cannane's observations is his focus on this backyard, unstructured play. Cannane's comments in this respect are shared by rugby coach Eddie Jones, who stated in interview that the skills that were present in young Australian footballers and cricketers in past years had decreased in more contemporary times. Jones argued that one of the main reasons this had occurred was that there were decreased opportunities for young children to play football and cricket in their own back yards. Jones stated that this was where such skills were normally developed – as siblings and friends of different ages played together teaching each other these skills (Macfarlane, 2008).

In current times when children's after school times are more formally organised, some children attend activities every afternoon. Parents who are raising their children today often believe this is a necessary part of their lives. In fact many parents begin this process with their infants and toddlers (Woolcock, 2010) and it becomes a very established part of how parents see that the lives of young children should be organised. The report *Crisis in the Kindergarten* (Miller & Allman, 2009) funded by the *Alliance for Childhood* highlights issues relating to the lack of regard for play. The report states that recent focus on standardised testing, homework and after school activities are having a very real impact on children's time for play. Despite research that states that play is essential for children's learning and development (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Training, 2009), parents are choosing to support large amounts of homework and organised after school sport or music rather than free play.

This notion of propriety, which produces parents' understanding of how to organise their children's time, is having very real effects on families in this country. In an interview (June 13, 2009) with Anna Patty, the Herald's Education editor, parent Patricia Bennett stated that she "juggles her job with Thursday soccer training, Friday netball and Monday afternoon acrobatics and dancing." Tuesday is her only day at home and the children become stressed when she encourages them to complete homework in short spaces of time. Bennett stated that she admired a friend who did not push her young child to complete homework but that she feared that her children would "fall behind" if she tried this.

This interview demonstrates that parents will go to extremes to organise their lives in ways that include multiple activities for their children because they see this as the right thing to do (Macfarlane, 2006). Such organisation can lead to "parent fatigue" (Macfarlane, 2006, p. 26) and other health effects. These health effects have

been highlighted in research by Hall, 2007, who has studied the relationship between the diminishing backyard, the lack of time spent in the backyard and the health risks associated with these factors. Such effects are not only impacting on groups of parents but our nation as a whole and yet the drive to be included as responsabilised parents who give their children the best opportunities to compete is still strong.

Creating the patchwork

In the Australian culture, the strong focus on performativity is having very real organising effects for children and families and also on deciding how categories impact on the notion of social inclusion. These organising effects are produced by what we believe to be true about success and propriety. While the vignettes used in this paper have led to discussion about diverse topics, the analysis of these vignettes has sashed together information and literature which has highlighted certain effects that are possible as a result of the logic that can be applied to speak about such organisation of thinking and behaviour. This analysis demonstrates that adherence to imperative discourses, even at a micro level, can produce multiple effects that can be highly problematic. As Rose (1990) states, childhood is the most governed of all categories and thus as children and, by association, their families, engage in and become objects of hyper-surveillance and techniques of governmentality, then the importance of being included as proper becomes inextricably linked to their performance and to inclusion in the category of ethically responsabilised citizens. Viewed in this way, the desire to perform according to notions of propriety causes parents and children to adhere to imperative discourses and thus move from “domination to domination” (Foucault, 1984, p. 85) in order to be included. This means that access to the category of inclusion becomes more restricted as the inclusion palimpsest is constantly reinscribed by multiple discourses.

Here, the notion of success is also problematic. Success in any Australian context is tied to formality and performance (Claxton, 2004; Dweck, 2006; Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2008). To understand the process of being a successful parent then, it is necessary to also examine how lack of success in this category is understood and constituted. Thus it is necessary to determine how parents come to be categorised as unsuccessful, bad or improper (Macfarlane, 2006). Stephen Ball (1990) refers to such a notion in relation to how parents’ engagement in schooling leads to particular categorisations. Ball states that discursive themes of excellence, competitiveness and performance standards work to produce “the concerned parent” (p. 33). Ball (1990, p. 35) states:

...the concerned parent aims to do the best for his or her child, given the harsh realities of the competitive world. The child needs a decent education and good qualifications, which will enable him or her to get on. The emphasis is on individual betterment and competition. The parent’s duty is to ensure that they choose the best education for their child...if the parent makes a poor choice...then that is his or her problem.

The issue of performativity then is an important one, in terms of developing an understanding that to be viewed as good or excellent, parents must perform well in relation to any social or systemic practice that involves caring for their children. Parents, particularly mothers, are produced to view parenting as a rewarding and highly responsible undertaking (Jenks, 1996). To exist as ‘improper’ infers a

particularly deviant category and failure at one of the most important responsibilities in life (Macfarlane, 2006). As Jenks (1996) states, the present postmodern conceptualisation of childhood as “nostalgia” (1996, p. 15) heightens emotions that exist in relation to the care of children acting to position them as vulnerable and at risk (McWilliam, 2003). Thus, parents who exploit this vulnerability by not performing properly are definitely situated problematically.

Most parents will always seek inclusion in successful categories (Grieshaber, 2004). However in order to decide inclusion in the discursive category of the successful family in contemporary times, notions of performance and propriety allow the practices of certain families to be opened up for scrutiny. And, as these families are objectified, then they can also be demonised for as little as a lack of understanding of nutrition or a lack of awareness of how to parent in certain circumstances. Therefore, they must be trained and educated so they can perform successfully and fit normalised understandings of the Australian family.

In order to seek justice and not retribution for children and families, it is vital to understand the fact that targeting individuals and families for inclusion means that they are simultaneously excluded. Popkewitz (2008) speaks to this point stating that such processes represent particular modes of organising difference. According to Popkewitz (2008, p. 4) such organisation of difference:

...entails comparative installations that differentiate and divide those who are enlightened and civilized from those who do not have those qualities – the backward, the savage and the barbarian of the 19th century and the at risk and delinquent child of the present. The universal and inclusive practices of...reforms that speak about inclusion locate difference and incomplete elements, points and directions in the process of inclusion and exclusion...[R]eforms...are to provide an inclusive society where “all children learn” and there is “no child left behind”. The gesture is to make all children the same and on equal footing...[where]...hope overlaps with fears of the child whose characteristics are a threat to moral unity.

In Popkewitz’s (2008) terms such a situation produces the notion of dangerous populations that threaten the happiness of individuals and the productivity of the nation. Thus disadvantaged populations, for example the uneducated, the unemployed, the unhealthy, the prisoner and the abused (Gillard, 2007) cited for inclusion are objectified in ways that signify exclusion and situate them outside of what is normalised. This means that these dangerous populations are targeted for intervention. These interventions are often multiple, thereby working to highlight the danger and position such children and families as deviant, making inclusion and success less and less likely.

To return to Foucault then, it is important to take an attitude of pessimistic activism recognising that policy reforms and interventions are not bad but dangerous – more dangerous unless the consequences, intended and unintended, of social and systemic practices and policies with and for children and their families can be recognised. If such consequences can be recognised, then it is possible to resist approaches that affirm such deficit-based practices. To resist normalised notions of performance and propriety, it is essential to open the mind to thinking otherwise about the competence of children, the expertise of families and the pursuit of success. This resistance will be difficult as propriety and success palimpsests are constantly reinscribed by social and systemic policies and practices in ways that ensure that

certain normalised notions of performance and propriety are necessary for inclusion and thus appear entirely reasonable.

However as Foucault (1985, pp. 95-96) states:

There is no single locus of all rebellions, no pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case; resistances that are possible, necessary and improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested or sacrificial....But more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, producing cleavages in a society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting re-groupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting up and remoulding them.

Thus, resistance is not futile but it is also unlikely to be systemic. It begins and is promoted at a local level and often it begins and ends with the practitioner or the professional who resists what is understood to be true in an effort to include what is possible.

Conclusion

In this paper there has been an examination of how policies producing particular social and systemic practices contribute to discourses of inclusion/exclusion. The author uses the work of Michel Foucault as part of a bricolage of theory and literature, to argue that discursive production of such inclusive policy, works to simultaneously exclude by producing a propriety palimpsest that categorises particular types of individuals and families as proper participants in society. This constant reinscription of propriety produces an inclusion/exclusion binary, which situates particular citizens outside of possibilities for success, in social and systemic participation.

There is a contention in the paper that unless the consequences, intended or unintended, of such normalised understandings are made visible, then it will always be possible for families to be judged in terms of deficit-based notions of success. Such judgement will highlight families for exclusion and will categorise them as unsuccessful or deviant in ways that ensure success is further from their reach. Excluded families will then be the subject of further policy reform that ensures further intervention and opportunities for governance rather than opening up possibilities for diversity and difference to be encouraged and supported.

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Biographical Note

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