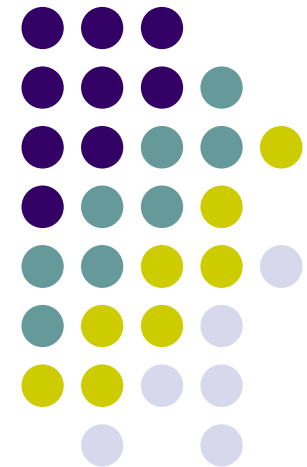


Social Capital and Lifewide Learning: current research, new opportunities

John Field, University of Stirling

**Second Nordic Conference on
Adult Learning**

Linköping University, April 2007



Traditions in adult education research



- Studies of participation
- Learning in and for active citizenship
- Community development and regeneration
- Innovation and business networks

A new consensus on the individualised society



“ . . . whereas individual achievement features as the top priority in all spheres of life, traditional social and financial buffers against life’s hardships are eroding. Reflexivity about life choices has become increasingly urgent”.

Glastra, Hake and Schedler, ‘Lifelong learning as transitional learning’, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 54, 4, 291-307

Individual-society relations in risk society



“In the individualised society the individual must therefore learn, on pain of permanent disadvantage, to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action Under these conditions of a reflexive biography ‘society’ must be individually manipulated as a ‘variable’ “

Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society*, 1992

Social capital



- Associations and civic engagement produce norms of reciprocity and trust – Putnam
- Closure between inter-related social circles, with the family at the centre – Coleman
- Interpersonal connections and mutual favours as the basis for middle class careers- Bourdieu

Significant empirical basis



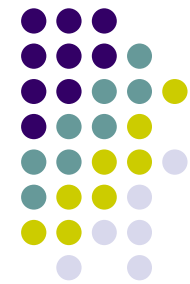
Significant empirical basis



Self-reported drinkers earn 10-14% more than abstainers; males who frequent bars earn an additional 7% premium

Bethany Peters and Edward Stringham (2006), 'No Booze? You May Lose: Why drinkers earn more money than nondrinkers', *Journal of Labor Research*, xxvii, 3, 411-22

Social capital – policy fad?



Researching social networks and adult learning



- Connected communities are more informed and better informed (eg about health)
- Active citizens have favourable attitudes towards lifelong learning
- Apathetic people have negative attitudes towards lifelong learning
- Connected citizens are better placed to lobby and change public service quality
- Personal connections promote the sharing of tacit skills and 'hot' information
- Personal connections support the acquisition of formal skills and codified knowledge
- High levels of trust often promote innovation and dynamism



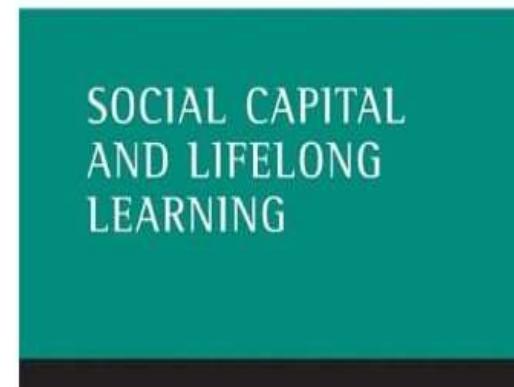
SOCIAL CAPITAL
AND LIFELONG
LEARNING

John Field

Researching social networks and adult learning

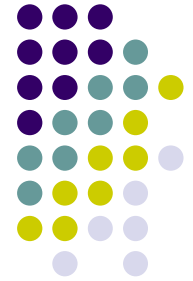


- Close connections often lead to a levelling downwards and inhibit innovation and dynamism, which might disrupt existing relationships
- Connected communities sometimes prefer 'insider knowledge' to more formal mechanisms and institutions
- Inequalities and rivalries inside communities affect flows of knowledge
- Community activists are often adept at learning about and networking within existing power structures
- Close communities can be very patriarchal



John Field

Researching social networks and adult learning



Some open issues and questions

- Heterogeneity vs homophily
- Change over time (short, medium, long term)
- Class, gender and ethnicity in social connections
- Enduring constraints arising from structural inequalities

And lifewide learning?



- What does education bring to people's social competences?
- What skills and knowledge do people develop through their social and civic engagement?
- Are these transferrable to, and valued in, other life spheres – especially working life?

Learning Lives

Learning, Identity and Agency in the Life Course

T·L·R·P
TEACHING
& LEARNING
RESEARCH
PROGRAMME

E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL



- Data collection over three years
- 120 adults – life history/life course
- Analysis of British Household Panel Survey
- Particular interest in transformations of learning dispositions triggered by changes in the life course

Social capital and learning transitions



Individual strategies

1. Maintain old networks, no new network
2. Maintain old networks, build new networks
3. Abandon old networks, no new network
4. Abandon old networks, build new networks

Social capital and learning transitions



Success strategies

Leaving old networks, while building new networks

Maintaining old networks (probably selectively), while building new networks

Learning lives – Fraser Smith



- School failure – exclusion
- Adult learner (young and continued)
- Qualified social worker
- Owner/manager of martial arts school
- Role model for younger men (and women)

Learning lives – Fraser Smith



- Discouraging family / mother
- Pattern of violence and minor crime
- Young Offenders' Institution (role of prison officers)
- Factory worker (learning by copying)
- Cousin and martial arts club
- Girlfriend and surrogate family

Learning lives – Fraser Smith



- Enough is enough
- Desire for degree in social work
- Fear of risk to (new) family

Learning lives – Willie Cotter



- Repeated participation in adult learning
- Childhood poverty and abuse
- Addictive behaviour
- Family troubles

Learning lives – Willie Cotter



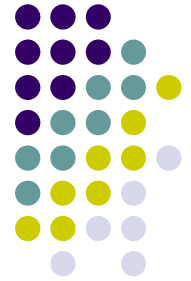
- Learning as repetition and observation (a spectator and outsider)
- Immobility – the comfort zone of local community and FE provision
- Yearning for grandchildren, desire to please wife
- Learning as surrogate for close ties

Learning lives – Willie Cotter



I'd like to find out who said that 'life begins at forty'. Who are they fuckin kiddin. Jesus.

Learning lives – Kathleen Donnelly



- Childhood poverty and family disruption
- Manual post office occupation
- Violent relationship
- Recreational drugs and parties (“my magazine lifestyle”)
- Successful return to learning in adult life

Learning lives – Kathleen Donnelly



- Birth of daughter a turning point
- Left partner, started course, new job
- Acquired a language and skills to describe and analyse her own life
- Embarked on but not finishing SVQ in community development
- Experience of SVQ misaligned to colleagues and experience
- Still desires a lifestyle free of commitments
- Anxiety and risk of depression

Social contexts for lifewide learning in reflexive modernity – some final questions



- Individualisation tendencies
- Decline of social movements
- Anti-political politics
- Identity and difference
- Importance of organisations
- Mediated communities
- Flexibility and mobility



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