

Social Capital: a framework for innovative learning and teaching? (0304)

Barry Avery, Deborah Anderson, Mark Passera
Kingston University, UK

Introduction

This paper will propose that social capital theory can provide a valuable framework for guiding the development of learning and teaching innovations in higher education.

Social Capital

Social Capital theory has become a popular way to label and evaluate the value that comes from the relationships between people or organisations. The fact that value can be assigned to the relationships and bonds that hold these entities together is not a new concept; as early as 1832, Tocqueville was in America seeking ways to evaluate how pioneers were forming social associations (Farr 2004). Later in the works of Hanifan and Dewey, social capital became a term used in a consistent, recognisable way (p. 14), whilst in the last twenty years Bourdieu (1977), Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000) have furthered its use and promoted its contemporary significance.

Most commentators agree that the nature of the relationship falls into different types, although the terminology varies. *Primary, Strong* or *Bonding* social capital typically exists between entities that know each other well, are "friends" and is used to "get by" (Putnam 2000, p.22). Often, *Closure* is used to describe a close knit group exhibiting strong bonding social capital (Coleman 1990). *Secondary, weak* or *bridging* social capital exists between entities that know of each other (not necessarily well) but can be used to "get ahead" (Woolcock 2001, p.10). Successful entrepreneurs are said to have bridging social capital which is used to circumvent structural holes, where there may be missing close connections or links. Both bonding and bridging relationships are horizontal connections to the same economic or cultural demographic. Vertical connections to 'other' or 'outside' communities have been identified as *linking* social capital, which appears to be a key requirement for social mobility (Woolcock 2001, p. 11). In the last twenty years the measures used to assess social capital in education have moved beyond achievement and attainment to include aspiration, engagement and motivation (Pribesh & Downey, 1999; Muller & Ellison, 2001).

Attendance, behaviour and commitment to education have also been used as successful indicators (McNeal, 1999; Wright et al., 2001), which suggest that educational innovations that promote these factors will see an increase in the equality of opportunity, particularly amongst groups where there has traditionally been low social capital such as black and minority ethnic (BME) students.

Using social capital as a framework for teaching innovations

We propose that although more often associated with politics and sociology, social capital has the potential as a construct in helping to create dynamic, interested and 'lean forward' thinkers in higher education. For optimum development of social capital, it is proposed that a blend of bonding, bridging and linking connectivity is aspired to; this could be achieved through learning and teaching innovations in the classroom, online and outside the academic curriculum using engagement activities.

For example, innovations which encourage students to develop trust within the groups will support bonding social capital amongst small groups. At the research site for example, learning and teaching innovations such as 'Experts and Novices' (Anderson, 2011) require students to support each other by reading extensively and sharing their new knowledge with each other. During the first year of study, another innovation 'Marketing Downloads' provides an opportunity for students to bond and develop trust through collaborative research. As pockets of expertise in both innovations develop, we arguably also see the emergence of bridging capital across the group. Linking activities, which arguably provide the most potential for social mobility (Woolcock, 2001) can be supported by initiatives which require students to make contacts outside the classroom. For example, 'Employer Insights' involves groups of five students arranging a visit to a marketing communications practitioner in the workplace, to film a short interview which can then be shown to the rest of the class to stimulate discussion and debate. Although this was originally designed to link theory from the classroom with the practical realities of the workplace, (a challenge identified by Peterson and Dover, 2014) the vertical connections created provide the basis for long term relationships. Students are encouraged to follow up their visit by email or connecting with the practitioner through a social media channel such as LinkedIn.

Discussion

In this paper we have demonstrated how teaching innovations and initiatives such as 'Experts and Novices', 'Marketing Downloads' and 'Employer Insights' are not only effective pedagogical devices but are also useful in creating bonding, bridging and linking social capital for the student body. By creating dynamic collaborative experiences we are not only encouraging the students to take control over their education; we are also creating deep horizontal and vertical ties; in short developing social capital. We propose that these ties will strengthen through time and will also reinforce alumni links. Through imaginative assessment and practical exercises which require students to work with new groups, we are not solely teaching business students; we are creating a community of learners engaged with colleagues, peers and employers.

References

- Anderson, D. (2011) "Experts and Novices": can participative approaches to learning help the lonely academic writer? In: Patterson, A. and Oakes, S. (eds) *Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing Conference 2011: Marketing Fields Forever*, Academy of Marketing, Liverpool. (Winner of Best Paper in Track)
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Cultural reproduction and social reproduction: power and ideology in education*. J.H. Karabel, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Coleman, J.S. (1990) *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.
- Farr, J. (2004) "Social Capital: A Conceptual History" *Political Theory* 32(1): 6-33.
- McNeal, R. (1999) Parental involvement as social capital: Differential effectiveness on science achievement, truancy, and dropping out. *Social Forces*, 78(1), 117–144.
- Putnam, R.D. (2000) *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Peterson, Robert M. and Dover, Howard F. (2014) Building student networks with LinkedIn: the potential for connections, internships and jobs. *Marketing Education Review*. Vol. 24, no.1, pp15-20.
- Pribesh, S. and Downey, D. B. (1999) Why are residential and school moves associated with poor school performance? *Demography*, 36(4), 521–534
- Woolcock, M. (2001) The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2(1).
- Wright, J. P., Cullen, F. T. and Miller, J. T. (2001) Family social capital and delinquent involvement. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 29, 1–9

