

Education and Social Capital

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Abstract

The relationship between education and social capital has been of great interest to the researchers over years, including, economists, sociologists, political scientists and educationists. The aim of this paper is to gain an understanding of the relationship between social capital and education. This paper starts with the theoretical perspectives on social capital and education, especially in the views of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert D. Putnam. The second section tries to explain the effect of social capital on education and the last section looks at the way education affects social capital. The paper suggests that the governments may fulfil the necessary condition of providing education but it will be less effective without sufficient social capital.

Keywords: Education and social capital.

Two of the main concerns about education that are high on the agenda of most of the countries around the world are: What is good for education? and what is education good for? The answers usually given by economists to the questions above are more economic in nature, that is, finance is good for education; and education is good for economic growth at micro and macro levels. However, empirical evidence suggests that social capital is an important factor that influences educational outcomes and gets influenced by investment in education. That is, education and social capital have a two way relationship, where social capital is not only a critical input for education, it is also one of its valuable by-products. As social capital is argued to have similar benefits and many of its characteristics are similar to other forms of capital, the term “capital” is used by scholars to draw analogy with other forms of economic capital. However, the analogy with capital is misleading to the extent that, unlike traditional forms of capital, social capital is not depleted by use, it in fact gets depleted by non-use. In this respect, it is similar to the now well-established economic concept of human capital. Social capital can also be distinguished in its casual and consequence from human capital. When we talk about cause, social capital is quality created between individuals and human capital is a quality of individuals. Therefore investment that creates social capital is different from the investment that creates human capital. With respect to consequences, social is the contextual complement to human capital and predicts that returns to intelligence, education and seniority depend in some part on the person’s location in the social structure

of a market or hierarchy. Thus, “While human capital refers to ability, social capital refers to opportunity and is a very important factor to understand that is helpful for other streams also” (Burt, 1997).

Social Capital: Conceptual Understanding

The concept of social capital has become popular in a wide range of social science disciplines. A growing number of sociologists, political scientists, and economists have invoked the concept of social capital in the search for answers to a broad range of questions being confronted in their own fields. More recently, social scientists in many countries have observed that social networks can also effects productivity. The central idea behind the concept of social capital is that ‘relationships matter’ and ‘social networks are a valuable asset’. When individuals interact they build communities and commit themselves to each other. When a sense of belongingness and the concrete experience of social networks are present it brings great benefits to people.

Societies with a good stock of such social capital are more likely to benefit from lower crime figures, better health, higher educational achievement, and better economic growth. But there is negative side to this also. Not all the externalities of social capital are positive. For example, groups and organizations with high social capital have the means to work to exclude and subordinate others. For example, some individuals use their networks to finance and conduct terrorism, just as physical and human capital. It is very normal for people to their social networks to escape their carelessness and negligence in day to day life. For example, when an individual do not follow the traffic rules and caught by police man, he may give references of his networks and escape from paying fine.

Social capital is one of sociology’s most popular theoretical exports (Field, 2001). The notion of social capital first appeared in Hanifan’s discussions of rural school community centres. Hanifan was particularly concerned with the cultivation of good will, fellowship, sympathy and social intercourse among those that “make up a social unit”. Pierre Bourdieu (1983) with regard to social theory, and then James S. Coleman (1988) in his discussions of the social context of education moved the idea into academic debates. However, it was the work of Robert D. Putnam (1993; 2000) that launched social capital as a popular focus for research and policy discussion.

There have been many attempts by various scholars to define social capital but let us restrict ourselves to three renowned scholars that are Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert D. Putnam. In ‘The Forms of Capital’, Pierre Bourdieu distinguishes between three forms of capital: economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. He defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or in other words, to membership in a group, which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (Pierre Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu says that these networks of relationship are not naturally given but are a product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing new relationships or reproducing social relationships. The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort by different individuals, an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed. Which implies that the expenditure of time and energy, and so,

directly or indirectly, of economic capital, is not profitable or even conceivable unless one invests in it a specific competence and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this competence, which are themselves integral parts of this capital.

According to Bourdieu, the volume of the social capital possessed depends on the size of the network of connections and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom an individual is connected.¹ This means that, although it is relatively irreducible to the economic and cultural capital possessed by a given individual, or even by the whole set of individuals to whom he is connected, social capital is never completely independent. He said that possession of social capital did not necessarily run alongside that of economic capital but it still is an attribute of elites, a means by particular networks held onto power and advantage.

James Coleman, defines social capital as connections – “social capital inheres in the structure of relations between and among actors”. He defined social capital functionally as “a variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of actors...within the structure” (Coleman, 1988) that is, social capital is anything that facilitates individual or collective action, generated by networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and social norms. In his conception, social capital is a neutral resource that facilitates any manner of action, but whether society is better off as a result depends entirely on the individual uses to which it is put. He tried to theorize social capital in such a way that it will illuminate the processes and experiences of non-elite groups. In other words, he argued that those living in marginalized communities could also benefit from its possession.

Putnam says that “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.” (Putnam, 2000) According to him, social capital refers to the collective value of all ‘social networks’ and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other. He says that social capital facilitates co-operation and mutually supportive relations in communities and nations and therefore is a valuable instrument to handle many of the social disorders inherent in different societies. In contrast to those focussing on the individual benefit derived from the web of social relationships and ties individual actors find themselves in, he attribute’s social capital to increased personal access to information and skill sets and enhanced power.

He also talks about two different types of social capital, like the difference between “bonding” social capital and “bridging” social capital. “Bonding” social capital is links among people who are similar in ethnicity, age, social class. Whereas “bridging” social capital are links that cut across various lines of social cleavage. The main point that he tries to make is that social networks can be a powerful asset,

1 See Forms of Capital by Pierre Bourdieu (1986)

both for individuals and for communities. The distinction between the “bonding” social capital and “bridging” social capital is useful in understanding how social capital may not always be beneficial for society as a whole. A very good example of “bridging” social capital is the development of social capital on the internet via social networking websites such as Facebook or Orkut. Networks of individual and groups that enhance or improve community productivity are said to be positive social capital whereas self-serving exclusive gangs and hierarchical patronage systems that operate at cross purposes to societal interests can be treated as a negative social capital burdens on society.

Comparing Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam

It is interesting to compare Bourdieu’s, Coleman’s and Putnam’s contributions to thinking about social capital. Winter’s (2000) approach is quite useful in understanding the similarities and differences within the understanding of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam in relation to social capital. Winter tries to compare these three though definitions, the purpose of the authors in deploying social capital, and the scale or level of the analysis.

When we talk about definitional commonality, what is central to Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam’s attempts at definition is the clear location of social capital as residing, belonging and existing in the relational bonds of human society, i.e., socialness, the ‘durable network of relationships’ (Bourdieu), the ‘social structure’ (Coleman), or ‘social life networks’ (Putnam). Socialness is the medium in which social capital exists, operates, strengthens or diminishes. This relational context is a common defining feature of social capital. Second feature shared by these three scholars is that the relational behaviours have emotional and perceptual consequences and these emotional and perceptual consequences act as the oxygen of social capital, which provides either a potentially rich environment for growth and change. Thus by investment in different forms of behaviour and their products, social capital is sustained, preserved, kept alive and nourished (Allan et al., 2000). Another feature of social capital that is shared by them is expressed in following the symbolism of capital as an economic metaphor. For them, social capital is a form of power or a resource: it can be utilised, traded, exchanged, invested, or cashed. It is a form of energy or capacity that can be deployed towards achieving some desired goal. For them social capital is purposeful, a means toward other ends.

Table 1: Definition, Purpose and Scale of Analysis.

	Definition	Purpose	Analysis
Bourdieu	Resources that Provide access to group goods	To Secure Economic Capital	Individuals in Class Competition
Coleman	Aspects of Social structure that actors can use as resources to achieve their interests	To secure human capital	Individuals in family and community settings
Putnam	Trust, norms and networks that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit	To secure effective democrace and economy	Regions in national settings

Source: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2000.

Comparison can be made on the basis of interest and approaches used by these three scholars to use social capital. Bourdieu was basically interested in analyzing different type of capitals and how these capitals (i.e. economic, cultural and social capital) can be accumulated, exchanged and utilised. Bourdieu was more concerned about how the social relations in a society are reproduced and in particular the role of culture in this process. He uses social capital in theorising the nature of the reproduction and the maintenance of class position or advantage. On the other hand, Coleman was interested in explaining the relation between stratification and educational outcomes. Coleman in his earlier works has shown how school achievements being influenced by the nature of the relations and patterns of interaction between the home, the school and the local community. Coleman uses social capital to explain the differences in educational outcomes and more precisely in relating them to the development of human capital. Further talking about Putnam, he was more interested in the civic sphere and vitality of civil society as measured by aspects such as participation and voting behaviour. He used the concept of social capital when he was finding the answers to the decline of civic engagement in America. Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam can also be compared on the basis of scale or level of analysis.

Broadly, the concept of social capital vary depending on whether their focus is primarily on the relations between people, the structure of relations among actors within a collectivity and or both types of linkages. The first group in the table under focuses on social capital as a resource that inheres in the social network tying a focal actor to other actors. Based on this, social capital can help explain the why there are differences in success of individuals and actions of individuals and groups can be greatly facilitated by their direct and indirect links to other actors in social networks. In contrast to this view of social capital, group two focuses on collective actor's internal characteristics. On these views, the social capital of a collectivity (organization, community, nation, and so forth) is in its internal structure in the linkages among individuals or groups within the collectivity. The third group of definitions is worded so as to be neutral on this internal/external dimension.

Effect of Social Capital on Education

There is no doubt about the importance of human capital for securing better economic and non-economic outcomes (Becker, 1964) but it is less effective without the social capital of opportunities in which to apply it, that is, human capital is a necessary condition but not a sufficient condition. The correlation between human capital and social capital is very close, not definitionally or tautologically, but empirically (Morgen and Sorensen, 1999; Dika and Singh, 2002; Putnam, 2004). Individuals and communities with high levels of human capital (education and training) are typically also characterized by high levels of social capital in its various forms. Correlation does not always prove causation, but there is reasonably good evidence in this case that causation flows in both directions, that is, social capital fosters the acquisition of human capital and that in turn education fosters the accumulation of social capital. For that reason, anyone interested in one side of this equation should also be interested in the other. This section is concerned with the effect of social capital on educational outcomes.

Coleman (1988) shows that the generation of human capital depends on a family's financial capital, the human capital of the parents, and the social capital – the relationship between parent and child –

that allows a child to access the human and financial capital of the parents. He shows that the amount of social capital that a child has access to does decrease the likelihood that the child will drop out of school. Social capital is also seen as a filter through which human and financial capital flow from the parents and the community to the child. Even if the parents of a child have large amounts of human and financial capital, if the family's store of social capital in the form of conducive family relationships and links to the community is low, the child will not be able to access the parents' other forms of capital. Social capital combines with human and financial capital to produce better educational outcomes, by making other forms of capital more productive.

A wide variety of studies suggest that social capital is an important input into the educational process. Putnam says that we can distinguish between social capital as the:

1. Social capital "Inside the walls"
2. Social capital "Outside the walls"

Here social capital "inside the walls" refers to social networks within schools, and social capital "outside the walls" refers to social networks linking schools to the broader community (Putnam, 2004). When we talk about "Inside the walls" it means that the networks among students have an effect on educational process and aspiration levels, for example, in very good universities, the relations between the students matter the most for their educational achievements or the improvements in educational levels and also help increase their aspiration levels. An average student having networks with intelligent student for sure will lead to increment in his educational and aspiration levels. Putnam says that this phenomenon is there in US universities, where some evidence suggests that college students learn more from one another than they do from formal instruction and I think it should be true for any university. Further the degree of trust, connectedness and cooperation among teachers and administrators is of great importance as it is one of the reasons for high-performance of the educational institutions (Bryk, 2002)

"Outside the walls" refers to social connections/ networks/ relations with families and communities are also very important for the educational achievements. It is an educational resource. In this context it is well said that "it takes a village to raise a child". When parents are involved at school, their children go further in school, and the schools they go to are better. Evidence from earlier studies shows that the attitudes and behaviour that parents and students have for education depends heavily on the strength of community and family bonds. In fact, the evidence suggests that test scores or dropout rates are better predicted by measures of community-based social capital than by measures of teacher quality or class size or spending per pupil.²

If we look at the students from minority and other backward class (i.e. SC, ST and OBC's), these students lack social capital, and thus, are educationally at disadvantageous position. Reason for their low performance in schools and universities is due to lack of social capital within and outside the

2 Robert D. Putnam, "Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance," in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, Diane Ravitch and Joseph Viteritti, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

schools/universities (i.e. they lack the social networks/relations/friends within the university and outside which can help them to improve their educational levels). However, the influence of social capital on educational outcomes may vary from country to country. So, it is of extreme importance for policymakers who are concerned with the raising of educational standards to be concerned with not only computers, textbooks, and teacher certification but also the social context attached to education.

Effect of Education on Social Capital

Social capital is not only a critical input for education but also one of its valuable by-products (Heyneman 1998) and the best predictor of high social capital is simply years of formal education. Education is the basic component of social cohesion, national identity and democratization. The foundations for a conscious and active citizenship are often laid in school. Fukuyama (1999) contends that the “area where governments probably have the greatest direct ability to generate social capital is education. Educational institutions do not simply transmit human capital but they also pass on social capital in the form of social rules and norms. Educational institutions foster social capital-rich networks. This is true not just in primary and secondary education, but in higher and professional education as well.” Since social capital is mainly a means of access, through social connections and networks, to the collectively owned capital of a whole group or community, the effort that schools make to establish and maintain social networks for pupils ‘by proxy’ with their local community, through work experience, links with social services, local media and sports facilities, etc., becomes one vital indicator of potential for growth in social capital.

Helliwell and Putnam have shown that the effects of education on trust and social engagement are positive (using trust and social engagement as measures of social capital). In comparison to less educated people, more educated people have much stronger social networks. Social capital is produced through education in three fundamental ways: Firstly, students practice social capital skills, such as participation and reciprocity; Secondly, schools provide forums for community activity; Thirdly, through civil education students learn how to participate responsibly in their society. Some of the features of educational process play very important role in fostering social capital. Some of which have been discussed below:

Appropriate Pedagogy and Curricula:

The way students are taught and the course content, strongly influences the student’s later life engagements and participation in society. It is quite visible that these two things have durable and consistent effects on students’ social and community engagement in later life. Appropriate course content is very important in the sense that it can be both very good for the society as whole and can be dangerous also. Course content can be based on the ideology that is on a whole very beneficial for the society and may promote social cohesion but course content can also be such that not allowing for “bridging”, i.e., hatred against India in the course contents of Pakistani schools may create problems in “bridging”. Putnam says that “civic education” or “citizenship education” can inculcate not only factual information about public life but also norms and skills, such as tolerance, public speaking, and habits of collaboration. Pedagogy

that encourages active teamwork seems likely to be more effective in inculcating social skills than pedagogy that promotes purely individual achievement, though of course a balance must be struck here.

Extracurricular Activities:

Swimming, athletics, music, cultural engagements, etc. strongly predicts adult civic involvement. Sports and arts represent especially congenial contexts within which to build “bridging social capital,” because they are less immediately dependent upon verbal skills, that is, it is not the verbal skills but the different talents that individual have helps in “bridging social capital”, for example, exceptional talent of Sachin Tendulkar in the field of cricket has helped the bridging social capital over the years. Recently, Abdul Quadir, Pakistani fast bowler said that Sachin Tendulkar has as many friends’ fans in Pakistan as in rest of the world, which means Sachin has helped in creating “bridging social capital”. Further, Cricket itself has helped in bridging social capital between India and Pakistan.

Service Learning:

This includes programs that combine activity in the community with academic reflections. For example, students in a course on environmental studies might become involved in some local environmental clean-up project or planting saplings. Students who have participated in such programs are more likely to be civic in later years of their life.

Social Integration of Schools:

In many countries, some of the most controversial issue about educational policy have involved issues of the ethnic and social mix of students within a given school. Social and ethnic mixed schools are very important in “bridging social capital”. For example, schools tends to encourage students from different race and class to interact with each other and understand each other in a much better way and thus in the process trusting each other and maintaining social cohesion, thus, “bridging social capital” Segregation either by race or by class is so distressing from the point of view of social cohesion is that it radically impairs the ability of schools to foster “bridging social capital”.

Conclusion

Social Capital can be thought of as an intermediate level of theory. It is not an overarching theory that claims to explain the macro order and at the same time it is not focused on the micro level, its place is in the mid range. There is high correlation between human capital and social capital. Individuals and communities with high levels of human capital are typically also characterized by high levels of social capital in its various forms. Correlation does not always prove causation, but there is reasonably good evidence in this case that causation flows in both directions, that is, that social capital fosters the acquisition of human capital and that in turn education fosters the accumulation of social capital. Thus, governments in addition to investments in education should also invest in social capital for the optimal outcomes at micro and macro levels.

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