LIFELONG LEARNING: EXPLORING THE ISSUES IN AN AREA OF SOCIAL DEPRIVATION IN SCOTLAND

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SYNOPSIS

This article explores ways in which the Scottish Executive's policy of lifelong learning is played out in an area of social deprivation in Scotland. It draws on data produced as part of research which investigated barriers and motivations to learning in Greater Govan, Glasgow. Our work took place at a time when notions of lifelong learning and widening access to educational opportunities to those traditionally excluded from post-compulsory education were high on the political agenda. We present lifelong learning as a contested concept, an idea which frames our work. The article provides an overview of barriers and motivations to accessing learning opportunities, from the perspective of local residents and stakeholders. In analysing the data, the concepts of human and social capital emerged as useful tools in understanding the relevance of lifelong learning for local people. We argue that the dominance of the development of human capital within current policy discourses is misplaced.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The empirical data which we draw on for this article was produced as part of a piece of research commissioned by the Greater Govan Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP). The SIP programme aims to bring together public, private and voluntary sectors to co-ordinate work in local areas to address the causes and symptoms of poverty. We were commissioned with the aim of providing a greater understanding of barriers and motivations to accessing learning and training opportunities for local residents, in order to improve provision in the area. The findings from this study and implications for learning providers are reported in greater depth elsewhere (Cloonan and Crossan, 2000, 2001). In working with the data, we became interested in the meanings and importance of lifelong learning as articulated by local residents. In this article we briefly overview policy developments in the field of lifelong learning and argue that the term is a contested one. Barriers to learning are then presented, and we show that some have particular local inflections. The reasons for participating in learning are then explored and the concepts of social and human capital used to provide a framework within which to present these findings. We discuss the findings in relation to the policy of lifelong learning.

LIFELONG LEARNING - A CONTESTED CONCEPT

Our work took place at a time when the concepts of lifelong learning, linked to widening access to educational opportunities and tackling social exclusion, were high on the political agenda across and beyond the UK. At an international level, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has expressed a concern that in many OECD countries there is 'a section of the community that faces extraordinary barriers to full participation in the labour market and society' (OECD, 1999a: 100). Recent years in the UK have witnessed a plethora of policy documents and official statements which have championed lifelong learning (DfEE, 1998; Department of Education (NI), 1999; Welsh Office, 1998). Within Scotland, lifelong learning has been presented in policy terms as key in improving economic competitiveness and social cohesion. The Scottish Green Paper on Lifelong Learning,

Opportunity Scotland (Scottish Office, 1998), was published in September 1998 and outlines the need to move Scotland towards becoming a Learning Society. In his introduction to this document the late Donald Dewar, then Secretary of State for Scotland, said that: 'Learning is vital element of a successful, healthy, vibrant and democratic society' (ibid 1998: 3).

Since then a range of policy documents have been issued, and lifelong learning and widening access initiatives started, many targeted at particular groups. The various initiatives and the progress made within them have recently usefully been summarised in *Lifelong Learning* (Scottish Executive 2001a). Meanwhile the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee of the new Scottish Parliament announced a wide-ranging Inquiry into Lifelong Learning in July 2001. In sum, lifelong learning remains high on the Scottish political agenda.

At a local level, Scottish local authorities have been developing Community Learning Strategies as a result of the Scottish Executive's response to the 1998 Report on Community Education, *Communities: Change Through Learning* (Working Group on the Future of Community Education, 1998). Glasgow City Council (2000) has taken part in this process and committed itself to tackling a number of issues including both poverty and the development of key skills within the workforce. Such issues have obvious relevance for an area of social deprivation such as Govan.

LIFELONG LEARNING, HUMAN CAPITAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

As has been noted elsewhere (Cloonan, 2000), UK and Scottish Government policy documents present lifelong learning as having two overlapping aims: to improve economic competitiveness and reduce social exclusion (primarily as a result of the former aim). There are criticisms, however, that the dominant discourse of lifelong learning is premised on notions of the development of human capital, to the detriment of the development of social capital or notions of active citizenship (Coffield 1999, Martin 1999, Gorard 2000, Murphy 2000). Such debates about policy have increased interest in the concepts of both human and social capital, especially as relate to the lifelong learning agenda.

Human capital has been defined by the OECD (1998: 9) as 'the knowledge, skills and competencies and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity'. There are numerous examples of government publications which argue the case for the necessity of developing such attributes. For example, the (former) Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) described lifelong learning as 'the continuous development of the skills knowledge and understanding that are essential for employability and fulfillment' (DfEE, 1998: 11), while the Scottish Executive has committed itself to 'the securing of the human capital infrastructure at all levels through education and lifelong learning' (Scottish Executive, 2001b: xv). Such statements reflect the importance of notions of accumulating human capital in bringing lifelong learning to the forefront of education and training policy. Underpinning this is a concern about maintaining international competitiveness at a time when knowledge based economies and globalisation pose major challenges:

> 'We are in a new age - the age of information and global competition… The types of jobs we do have changed as have the industries in which we work and the skills they need… We have no choice but to prepare for this new age in which the key to success will be the continuous education and development of the human mind and imagination' (ibid: 9).

In official publications this is also closely linked to the need to promote greater equality in opportunities to participate in the labour market:

'The Government… believes that lifelong learning has a major contribution to make in promoting social inclusion. Opportunities to learn through vocational training or further education in general can improve the skills and employability of those seeking work, while less formal community education can provide the first steps into wider opportunities to participate in work and learning' (Scottish Office, 1999: 8).

While there has been a welcome attempt to broaden participation in post-compulsory education as part of this approach, such a focus can result in an emphasis on skills development for those already in, or preparing to participate in, the labour market. This can result in more marginal groups (such as single parents, the long-term unemployed, people with disabilities, and older people) receiving less attention. This is a problem which Coffield has also recognised in his review of issues emerging from the ESRC *Learning Society* Programme. He suggests that 'an unofficial hierarchy of types of learning is being created with *learning for earning* at its apex' (Coffield, 1999: 493, emphasis in original). In his article Coffield also suggests that one result of the influence of human capital theory is that education has increasingly been viewed as a form of investment or consumption. In this process, argues Coffield, the discourses of social justice and social cohesion have been sidelined. In sum, while official policy has been based on notions of human capital, that model has been criticised for being overly economistic and individualistic – in that it can fail to recognise important differences between individuals and thus the differing barriers which people can face in accessing lifelong learning.

There is also growing criticism of the way that lifelong learning is presented in official policy discourse as a voluntary activity, linked to the liberal adult education tradition. However, with Government initiatives such as Skillseekers, Training for Work, and New Deal, both young people and adults may now be entering formal learning through compulsion, rather that motivation. In this vein Field argues that "lifelong learning for all" requires some conscription:

'For enterprise, the lifelong learning discourse is widely taken to imply greater sharing of responsibility of individuals for their own employability, career building and demonstrability... At the most general level, then, the discourse implies continual reflexivity and learning, whether one wishes it or not' (Field, 2001: 142).

Importantly for us, the dominance of the economistic discourse within lifelong learning policy may neglect the residents of areas such as Govan, with high levels of unemployment—including long-term unemployment—as well as a low skills base for different types of employment other than heavy industry. In such circumstances the human capital model may be inappropriate and a different policy approach may pay more dividends.

Other commentators such as Schuller (1997, 2000) have suggested that the development of notions of social capital may be a more useful way to underpin the development of lifelong learning. With concern growing about the apparent demise and fragmentation of social cohesion within communities, the concept of social capital is receiving greater attention. Social capital can be used to describe the resources made available to individuals or groups through networks and their associated norms and trusts or to describe the networks themselves, and at other times both (Ballati and Faulk, 2001).

The work of Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1996) is much cited in relation to lifelong learning and social capital. While the emphasis varies, the notion of social capital as articulated in their works has three component parts – "networks, norms and trust" and the ways in which these allow agents and to be 'more effective in

achieving common objectives' (Schuller, 2000: 8). We sympathise with Schuller and Field's view that at a minimum these theorists 'challenge the individualism and the assumed rationality of orthodox human capital approaches' (Schuller and Field, 1998: 230) and thus lay the grounds for alternative visions of a learning society. We will argue that there is evidence to support such claims within our own data.

We acknowledge that there are differing theoretical constructions of the notions of social capital (Baron *et al,* 2000), and that there are criticisms of the idea. Some feminists, for example, argue that it does not adequately take into account the micro-relations of power, such as gendered power relationships within families (Blaxter and Hughes, 2000). Nevertheless, the notion of social capital offers the potential to re-orientate policy away from individualistic to more collective approaches which promote and build on local networks and communities.

So far we have argued that lifelong learning is a highly contested concept, despite its presentation within official documents as a form of commonsense which is a panacea for the problems caused by the reconfiguration of international capital which is usually referred to as "globalisation". We have also suggested that an approach based more on social, rather than human, capital may pay dividends. In such a context, areas such as Govan offer a litmus test for current policy. Thus as part of our research, we were keen to explore how the policy discourses were being played out in this area of urban social deprivation.

GREATER GOVAN

The Greater Govan area of Glasgow has a population of approximately 27,000 people. Govan has been a victim of the decline of traditional heavy industry – especially that of shipbuilding. It has suffered from all the problems associated with industrial decline and still displays the need for continued regeneration, despite welcome new developments such as the Braehead Shopping Centre and the Science Centre (which opened after our research was completed). The area has high levels of poverty, poor health and unemployment. For example, unemployment rates for the area are continually higher in for the area than the rest of Glasgow (Govan Initiative 2001: 60). The incidence of death from heart disease in Govan is 40% higher than the Scottish average. The figure for lung cancer is 96% (ibid: 58).

With regard to participation in post-compulsory education, one survey found that while 63% of the UK population saw learning as "very important to them", the figure for Glasgow was 52% (Speed and Hartfree, 1998: 13). Across Scotland as a whole it is expected that around 45% of 18-21 year olds will participate in some form of higher education. For Glasgow this falls to around 15%, while for Govan and other former Priority Treatment Areas (areas which had in the past been designated as in need of regeneration) the figure is 5% (Steele, 1999: 1; UACE, 1999). Thus Govan can be characterised as having comparatively high levels of unemployment and comparatively low levels of participation in higher education. As one respondent noted about the area: 'It was just the way it was done. Nobody ever really... like families in Govan they don't do education. They get jobs' (female interviewee)

However, whilst this may paint a rather negative picture of the area, in undertaking the research there was evidence of a number of agencies and individuals trying to overcome a range of social problems, including educational ones. Often they were fostering and building on social relationship between learning providers and local people, and the strengthening of community networks (Cloonan and Crossan, 2000).

We also recognise that Govan is not a closed area which exists in isolation from the rest of the world. Rather its residents can potentially travel outwith the area for education and the area can attract people in. However, the reality we found was that unless educational provision was local it was highly unlikely to be accessed by local residents (ibid) and we return to the importance of locality below.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

The data from on which we draw on in this paper was produced as part of a wider study which explored barriers and motivations to accessing lifelong learning opportunities amongst Greater Govan residents. The rationale behind the study was that the local Social Inclusion Partnership (SIP) commissioned the work to explore barriers and motivations to accessing learning opportunities within the local area, from the perspective of local residents and representative from a small number of learning organizations. The report (Cloonan and Crossan, 2000) from this work was sent to the SIP and circulated widely in the local area.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was qualitative and data were produced through group and individual interviews. Six focus group interviews were held with local adults most, but not all, of whom were involved in learning in the local area. Three of the six were single sex groups, and three were mixed. The group interviews explored barriers and motivations to learning as well as local employment issues. In total we elicited the views of 40 residents. From the focus groups, we invited five residents to participate in individual one-to-one interviews. These explored learning within the context of their own life history. Finally we interviewed representatives of five local learning organisations about their perceptions of barriers and motivations to learning and the responsiveness of local learning agencies to the needs of the local community. Further details of the methodology and results of this study are reported elsewhere (Cloonan and Crossan, 2000).

BARRIERS TO LEARNING

As we noted above, current lifelong learning policy seeks to widen access to educational opportunities to increase economic competitiveness and improve social justice. Yet it is being championed at a time where research shows that certain sections of society continue to face complex and inter-linking barriers to participation (Gallacher *et al,* 2000). Within the context of an emphasis on individuals finding their own way into post-compulsory education and the continued existence of structural barriers, it is apparent that residents in areas of social deprivation such as Govan are the most likely to continue to suffer from comparative educational disadvantage. In short, it is areas with high levels of poverty and social disadvantage which present the most serious obstacles to creating the aimed for learning society.

In relation to our research at a local level barriers to learning in Glasgow have been documented in the *Glasgow Learning City* report (Steele, 1999). Many of these were again raised by the respondents in our study. These include*: economic barriers* including lack of employment opportunities in stable, skilled, occupations with an educational infrastructure*; regional and local factors* such as public transport issues, poor housing with lack of appropriate space for study, lack of well established educational systems of all types in the locality; *social and cultural factors* such as lack of peer or reference groups participating in post-compulsory education; *personal factors* such as finance or restricted aspirations; *institutional factors* such as lack of crèche facilities, lack of guidance and support form non-traditional students.

This echoes previous findings from Cross (1981) who categorised barriers in the following way: *situational barriers* associated with a learner's, or potential learner's, position in life; *institutional barriers* associated with institutional provision; and *dispositional* barriers associated with learners', or potential learners', attitudes (Cross, 1981). However, recent research, focused on Scottish Further Education, has shown that such typologies may over-simplify what is in reality a complex picture by separating out processes which inter-link in myriad ways (Gallacher *et al,* 2000).

Many of our respondents had had negative experiences of school, and often lacked a cultural milieu which was supportive - such as families or peers who participated in post-compulsory education. In addition we found barriers which had a particular local inflection. For example, the area is one marked by internal territorial boundaries. For young people, particularly young men, territorialism was an issue which emerged from the focus group and stakeholder interviews. A local school representative cited territorial violence as a reason given by a small number of pupils for non-attendance at school and fear of violence, particularly for young men, often prevented young people leaving their own "patch". This impacted on where learning opportunities were organised and delivered for young adults. Another stakeholder noted that:

> 'When we do work we have to be careful where we do it. We do things in the centre of Govan – it's seen as neutral, but then we have to bus people in and then bus them out' (stakeholder interview).

Respondents also told us about another barrier which we termed the "Govan stigma". We were struck during the research by how many times people told us of encountering negative feelings simply because they came from Govan. Some participants were concerned that those running courses (for example college tutors) would stereotype all Govan people as anti-social. Although participants knew that this was a stereotyped view of Govan residents, it still presented a powerful disincentive to go to established learning centres, particularly those outwith the local area. For local residents and stakeholders this is obviously a highly sensitive issue. Overall our findings reflect McGivney's earlier acknowledgment that reasons for non-participation 'vary according to different geographical and cultural situations' (McGivney, 1993: 16).

MOTIVATIONS TO LEARNING

The focus groups and interviews explored what had motivated respondents to take up a range of learning opportunities and a range of factors emerged. Despite various barriers to participation, many respondents were accessing a range of learning opportunities - from an informal men's group which discussed issues such as unemployment and health, to courses linked directly to local employment opportunities. Overall a range of motivations emerged which reflected both the development of human *and* social capital.

In an area of high unemployment and social deprivation, employment and employability issues were important to local men and women. Overall men tended to express learning in a way that directly linked this to work, with the hope that this would lead to decently paid employment. However we found that despite these hopes of learning leading to employment, there was a degree of pessimism that this would lead to the level of skills and qualifications to secure them work, particularly well paid work. This replicates finding from a previous study (Gallacher *et al,* 2000) and we return to this point later.

Issues relating to the development of human capital which emerged from the data included the need to upgrade skills; enhancing career prospects, and the need to have suitable qualifications for particular jobs. In a sense this represents Coffield's "learning for earning" analysis of the development of lifelong learning, and the importance to some respondents of the developing their own human capital. The data showed that men and woman wanted learning to lead to *better* employment opportunities: 'That's what its all about, getting yourself trained to get a better job' (female interviewee).

Courses which were directly linked to employment were popular. This included one where on completion participants were guaranteed a job interview at the then soon-to-open Science Centre. This was work which would pay well above the

minimum wage and was obviously a motivation: 'This way we'll get the pick of the jobs' (female interviewee).

Getting decent work was clearly important to the respondents and the issue of a skills gap within the area was raised many times. While the woman quoted above is optimistic (and did get a job, although she commented that she was surprised how few other local people did), others feared that many better paid jobs would not go to local people. The reasons for this were complex, including issues related to the "Govan stigma" raised previously, and also that participation in learning may not increase skills to the degree wanted by employers.

The focus groups and interviews also showed that other elements of lifelong learning were important especially issues of pleasure and self-development. To an extent this represents the other side of the instrumentalist coin. Rather than vocational learning, this was "learning for its own sake" - a notion which is currently greatly underplayed in official thinking. Despite being on a vocationally orientated course, one woman, described how important it was for her to complete her Skillseekers programme, which she framed more in social rather than human capital terms:

> 'At that point my son was six months old. I had lost all confidence. I just couldn't be bothered doing anything. I was stuck in a rut and then I got the chance to go for six months and putting my son in a nursery. So that was giving me time for myself because I am a single parent - I was getting a break from him, plus learning and building my confidence back up. It helped me a lot' (female interviewee).

In addition the respondents in Govan highlighted social and family aspects to learning. Three of the focus groups noted that learning has the potential to broaden participants' social horizons and spoke of meeting new people and getting involved in new networks. With regard to family issues, women in particular wanted their own learning to influence their children's attitudes to education and the concept of bettering oneself was an important motivation.

A recurring theme which emerged from the data was the positive inter-generational impacts that one family member engaging with learning can have. Adults (parents and grandparents) may be motivated to return to learning because they want to keep up with what their children are learning at school. Similarly, if parents become engaged in learning it can provide a positive role model for young people in a household. This is of some importance both in policy terms and in theorising human and social capital. As Tom Schuller has rightly noted: 'Intra and intergenerational relations are less likely to be neglected in a social capital framework than in a policy framework which focuses only on the skills and qualifications of a population at a given point in time' (Schuller, 2000: 8). This has particular relevance in Govan where rates of absenteeism from school have consistently been above Scottish and Glasgow averages (Govan Initiative, 2001: 56).

A few of the respondents had been motivated to take part in learning opportunities to help with mental health difficulties. Data from a life history interview illustrates this point: 'I needed something to do to keep my brain active, but I didn't feel I could hold down a job for fear the stress would make me ill' (male interviewee).

The interviewee also wanted to become more effective in community/voluntary work. While he could not take up paid work because of mental health difficulties, he was engaging with learning in order to become more effective in his community/ voluntary work: 'I want to put something back into the community so the things I am learning I can use in my work in the tenants group' (ibid).

The fact that models of human capital have little to say about those with long term mental health problems and/or learning difficulties has been noted elsewhere (Baron *et al,* 1997; 2000). In addition, the absence of notions of citizenship - including

serving the community - from official lifelong discourses has also been subject to criticism (Martin, 1999). Yet it is precisely such issues which came to the fore during our research.

The importance of where learning took place also emerged as an important factor from the data and has also been highlighted in previous research as important in overcoming barriers to participation in learning (Gallacher *et al,* 2000). The residents of Govan agreed that location of learning was important, but also argued strongly places of informal learning such as drop-in centres serve as a focus for the community and serve to develop and strengthen social networks in the area. One interviewee said of one such place:

> 'The community flat is a good place. I know the folk that live there get a lot from it, and it's not just the computing. You hear the women, and the men for that matter, having a natter, a blether, and maybe talking about things that are on their mind' (male interviewee).

Once again our respondents articulated notions associated with social capital—networks, norms and trust—as key factors which facilitated their continued participation in lifelong learning.

DISCUSSION

In this article we have explored the meanings and importance of the contested concept of lifelong learning in an area of social deprivation. Despite facing complex barriers to participation, some with a particular local inflection, our work shows that respondents were motivated to take part in local learning for a range of purposes.

Govan is an area of high unemployment and the economic discourse of lifelong learning, linked to employment and employability, was important to local men and women. Men, apart from those who perceived themselves outwith the labour market, tended to articulate participation in learning as hopefully leading to employment. Women, too, linked learning to employment, often with the hope that it would improve not only their own but their children's situation. In this sense, the policy emphasis on the development of human capital clearly has meaning for the residents of Govan.

What emerged from our work was the importance for local people in gaining "decent" employment. Policy discourse tends to concentrate on issues of employment and employability, but has less to say about notions of underemployment. Participants in the study showed concern that, despite the positive developments in the area such as the Science Centre, the better paid jobs would not go to local people. This is an area of concern as a focus on employability may be one which involves the cycling form unemployment to poorly paid, flexible work, either in the regular or irregular economy, and back again (see Byrne, 1999: 127).

Issues of employment are clearly important to the residents of Govan and we in no way wish to deny the importance of employment, particularly "*decent"* employment in the socioeconomic regeneration of areas such as Govan. Some respondents in our study has this as their prime focus for participation in learning. However, the issue of the lack of good jobs was raised and this is an issue which has to be addressed. As Jackson argues:

> '...people do not study for… qualifications when they perceive, accurately or otherwise, that their place in the labour market will not be improved thereby - either due to high unemployment or the low quality of the work available' (Jackson, 1997: 54).

Many others, however, articulated more complex motivations to participation in learning. For some, employment was not an option for them at that time in their

lives. Issues such as mental and physical health problems or lack of confidence meant that respondents themselves did not see themselves as "fitting" the employability discourse. We therefore looked to the notion of social capital and the importance that respondents themselves placed on this.

As noted above, the notion of social capital as articulated in the works of Putnam and Coleman has three component parts: 'networks, norms and trust'. It thus moves from individuals to collectives. As Field and Schuller note:

> 'Social capital… treats learning not as a matter of individual acquisition of skills and knowledge, but as a function of identifiable social relationships. It also draws attention to the role of norms and values in the motivation to learn as well as in the acquisition of skills, and the development of know-how' (Field and Schuller, 1997: 17).

From the data we clearly see that lifelong learning linked to the development of social capital in the forms of networks, norms and trust are of importance to the residents of Govan. This took many forms such as wanting to become more effective in community or voluntary work, or learning in a local community flat, playing an important role in developing social networks, encouraging active citizenship, or simply being with their pals. If we consider one of the quotations above which shows the importance of the community flat as a social space in which relationships were formed and developed, and trust fostered, we can see this in operation. It is not '*just the computing*' but the social interactions and sharing (for men and women) talking about '*things that are on their mind'*. Such spaces have to be fostered with the development of a learning society.

We are keenly aware that the social capital model itself is not a panacea for the ills which afflict current lifelong learning policy, any more than lifelong learning is a panacea for the ills of international capitalism. Indeed, the social capital model itself also assumes continuing inequality, exploitation and injustice (Blaxter and Hughes, 2000). However, we reiterate the view that in the present lifelong learning policies which were more orientated towards social capital have the potential to alleviate some of the problems which our respondents faced.

Within Scotland both Paterson (1998) and Schuller (1997, 2000) have suggested that an orientation of lifelong learning towards social capital would pay dividends. Our work echoes this. Certainly the existing networks within Govan will need building on if the learning society is to mean anything to residents of this inner city area. We have noted that current Government policies on lifelong learning and social inclusion are often framed in notions of the development of human capital. For the residents of Govan at least, a change of emphasis is necessary if lifelong learning is not to remain only a partial discourse.

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