



WBL Update

Newsletter from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) at the Institute of Education

AUTUMN 2006

There's more to learning than earnings

● WBL MISSION

WBL investigates the benefits gained from learning across the life course and examines the impact of these benefits in the context of broader social policy. We undertake rigorous research as a basis for dialogue with a range of government departments, the research community and practitioners.

● WBL VALUES

Scope: We look to deepen understanding of the complex ways in which learning impacts upon individual health and well-being, family dynamics and community cohesion. To do this we take an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theory and methods in sociology, psychology, public health, economics and political sciences.

Our research examines the effects of formal educational participation and learning. We also look at experiences that occur in informal learning and other contexts such as out-of-school provision for young people, institutional care and interactions within families.

Validity: Our research combines quantitative and qualitative approaches, which support and test each other.

Collaboration: WBL looks to develop national and international collaborations to enrich our research and advance theoretical knowledge.

Integrity: We recognise our responsibility to ensure that our research is rigorous and trustworthy.

Objectivity: WBL is an objective research centre funded by government departments and other agencies.

Accountability: We seek to ensure academic accountability through submitting research to peer-reviewed journals and presenting at academic conferences and seminars.

Investment: We support the professional development of WBL members. To achieve this we encourage and fund staff to attend training to enhance their skills and give careful consideration to career implications when making decisions about roles on research projects, publications, conferences and networking.

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Welcome to the Autumn issue of WBL Update.

This has been a very busy year for WBL, full of suggestions of political change and debate about the direction of education and social policy. Amongst many other high profile activities, the Treasury is completing its review of services for Children and Young People and the new Minister for Social Exclusion is moving towards developing

and implementing the recent Social Exclusion Action Plan. There is the forthcoming Leitch Review of Skills, intense debates around the Education Bill, continued uncertainty about the funding and sustainability of adult learning in many places and a deepening focus on child poverty and social mobility.

These events and trends have formed the background of much of the work of WBL and this is apparent in the items included in this newsletter. I am delighted that Barbara Hearn has provided this issue's "Discussion" piece. Barbara advises the DfES on the provision of services for young people and families and is deeply involved in ongoing debates on this, both in the DfES and elsewhere. Here she provides a timely reminder about the importance of community engagement in policy reform.

As ever, in WBL we remain concerned about research and policy throughout the lifecourse and about the social as well as personal benefits that education brings.

If you have any comments on this issue, or would like to contribute the next discussion piece, please contact Vanessa Quiney at v.quiney@ioe.ac.uk.

Leon Feinstein, WBL Director

Making communities count

● Barbara Hearn discusses the vital importance of communities in achieving the goals of Every Child Matters

Development of the legal and policy framework 'Every Child Matters' has meant a number of changes in the way children's services are designed. While a great deal of the focus following the Children Act 2004 has been on structural change, Every Child Matters specifically envisions a world where the child is of central importance, rather than any one service or profession. The quality of community relationships can have a critical impact on the lives of vulnerable children - understanding and changing the nature of these relationships must be part of the next stage of development.

Communities are riddled with risks and untapped resources. Effective community engagement can tap into this rich vein of social capital. So what do we mean by 'community'? They are often stereotyped - the 'village idyll' or the 'rough estate'. Each image has elements of truth but they lack understanding of the complex social relationships that belie any single descriptor. Any geographical community is most typically a mix of multiple communities of interest, familial and social networks. Adults and children with different interests, of different social status and of different faiths can share the same space but they do not necessarily have relationships with each other. The challenge for services and workers is being able to understand the key dynamics of each social system within a locality or institution and draw out its positive social capital, rather than simply targeting its weaknesses. In Portsmouth it was the raising of a loud community voice against paedophiles in the area that was turned into a seed of community engagement that led to the development of new and inclusive provision through open debate and shared determination to define local priorities.

This means we need development professionals who can 'think out of the box'; who are capable of conceptualising and acting beyond a single professional boundary. They should not place themselves in a hierarchical relationship

with other professions or with members of the public. Where people are troubled or where there is pervasive poverty, living can be a struggle. Help may be needed to develop an effective system of familial, peer or other relationships. Belief or a common interest can be an effective mechanism for acquiring fulfilling relationships just as can be relationships within educational or leisure environments.

This is complex territory and one that government has, until recently, shied away from, preferring instead to parachute in programmes offering temptingly luxurious environments or enthusiastic workers who have limited appreciation of the dynamics that underlie the problems that children and families face on a daily basis. The detail of surviving poverty as a lone mother with four children under eight years old, living in a fourth floor flat with no lift, can too easily pass by the reprimanding social worker or teacher when her six- and eight-year-olds are late for school or fail to attend classes. To go forward on the Every Child Matters agenda we have to now weave together a set of ways of working which allow adaptability and flexibility - where success is directly related to improving children's outcomes and not to employing the most highly qualified or well-paid professionals.

We need to give local people a stake in the solution

We need to develop a whole system analysis of local area needs using existing tools such as those learnt from the Communities that Care (CtC) Audit and Action Planning or the 'Turning the Curve' analysis of local priorities. We need to give local people a stake in the solutions that well-researched evidence makes professionals think would be beneficial. We need to take care not to waste precious resources that are sitting ill-defined or dormant in every community regardless of the struggles some may be facing. The CtC programme in Swansea surveyed 11- to 16-year-olds in local schools and local

adults. The design of provision, agreed with local people, to address the risks faced by young people cut right across typical boundaries. They addressed peer pressure, domestic violence and housing needs. The package made a real difference. There were significant reductions in smoking, drinking, drug use, youth crime and anti-social behaviour.

To engage communities we need professions which have skills in enabling the following:

- Social bonding: strengthening children's bonds with family members, friends, teachers and other socially responsible adults.
- Robust standards: having parents, teachers, community leaders and others who lead by example, holding clearly stated expectations for children's behaviour.
- Opportunities for involvement: affording children opportunities to be involved and valued in their families, schools and communities.
- Social and learning skills: equipping children with the social, reasoning and practical skills they need to take full advantage of the opportunities on offer.
- Recognition and praise: ensuring that children and young people's contributions and positive behaviour are recognised, thus giving them an incentive to continue.

It is an important moment in the development of public and social services for children and young people. As policy moves towards greater attempts to reduce child poverty and social exclusion we must continue to develop the Every Child Matters agenda and build in the role of community engagement.

Barbara Hearn is Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Policy and Research at the National Children's Bureau.

Current WBL projects

The social and economic benefits of part-time, mature study at Birkbeck College and the Open University

● WBL is currently in the third and final phase of this project examining the social and economic benefits of learning reported by part-time mature graduates. This project is not funded by the DfES.

In the first phase of the project we used data from a quantitative survey of over 3,000 graduates to explore why part-time mature learners participate in formal learning and the benefits that result from participation. We also explored whether the characteristics of graduates - such as their age, income or what they studied - are related to the benefits they report.

We found that the reasons for participation in learning can be coherently grouped into five categories:

1. Enjoyment
2. Progression and personal development
3. Finding a new job
4. Improvement of current job
5. Employment requirements

Graduates reported enjoyment and progression and personal development reasons more frequently than the other three categories.

The social and economic benefits of learning reported by the graduates fall into four broad categories:

1. Specific learning skills
2. Employment benefits
3. Identity capital (such as self-development and learning progression)
4. Social benefits

We found a strong relationship between graduates' reasons for studying and the social and economic benefits they reported. Those who reported a relatively large number of reasons for studying were particularly likely to report benefits.

We also found a relatively strong association between the characteristics of the graduates and the benefits reported. For example, employer-funded graduates were most likely to report employment benefits, while self-funded graduates were most likely to report learning progression benefits. Benefits reported by graduates were also related strongly to the subject studied.

When taken together, our findings suggest that the outcomes of learning are perhaps best understood within a life course context that includes graduates' social and economic backgrounds, current circumstances and motivations for learning.

For further information, please contact Tashweka Anderson at t.anderson@ioe.ac.uk.

The development and importance of children's social capital

● WBL is conducting a three-year ethnographic research project, funded by the DfES, which explores the development and importance of children's social capital in an inner-city area in London.

In our research 'social capital' is defined as the specific relationships between children and the people around them (family members, school staff, friends, social workers) and as children's attachment to larger social groups (such as their neighbourhood, school and ethnic group).

In particular, this study will look at the following questions:

1. What kind of social capital do children develop within their specific social context?
2. How can we explain the development of children's social capital?
3. How does children's social capital impact on their educational achievement, well-being and social integration?

4. How does the Every Child Matters agenda, as it is put in practice by a specific Local Authority and schools, influence the kinds of capital that children develop?

This study is relevant for social policy as it explores the features of the school and wider education system that are potentially able to help create social and community capital, and in fact do (or do not) help create it. This research will address the question, how does the development of social capital relate to children's educational achievement and to the wider benefits of learning and children's well-being and social integration? We are also looking at how other providers, such as social welfare organisations, families and youth clubs, and the relationships between them, help develop social capital.

This study is being carried out in a diverse and multicultural London borough. Initially, the research will take place at two different (in terms of extended service provision) multicultural schools. Researchers will administer a school survey and conduct ethnographic observations and interviews with particular members of staff and pupils for a period of three to four months. After this period of time, the researchers will gradually move out of the schools to explore, through ethnographic observations and interviews, the importance of organisations and social activities outside the immediate school context (such as clubs, families, street corners and parks).

For further information, please contact Peter Stevens at p.stevens@ioe.ac.uk.

Recently published

● Since the last issue of WBL Update in the spring, WBL has published two more reports in the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report Series. Both reports are available to download from www.learningbenefits.net/publications/researchreports.htm

What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?

Annik Sorhaindo and Leon Feinstein

In recent times, the diet of children has risen to the top of the political agenda, not only for the potential health repercussions later in life, but also for its immediate effects on the physical and mental health of children and their consequent school experience and attainment.

In this report we provide a conceptual review of the literature on the relationship between aspects of nutrition and physical health, mental health, behavioural and social outcomes in children. Our research examines how nutrition impacts on healthy outcomes in children and how health outcomes that are a result of nutrition impact upon school life experiences and outcomes.

We find that the early development of preferences for foods of poor nutritional value can have long-term health implications. Ultimately, the aim must be to prevent nutritional deficiencies

from arising but the relationships between nutrition, health, education and social and cultural factors are complex and multi-directional. There is evidence that appropriately designed interventions can help to address early deficiencies and engage both children and parents in healthy eating.

Given that the diet of children depends not only on the availability of foods but, crucially, on their preferences, any effective interventions must address the multiple determinants of children's preferences for particular foods. In particular, the role of parents is important and there may be a need to adopt a collaborative approach between schools and parents to address children's nutritional choices. There is an opportunity to capitalise on existing initiatives such as the extended schools policy, which has created the chance for schools to engage with parents and local communities to improve diets and promote healthy

eating among children. Moreover, we need to recognise that the issues extend beyond educational policy to supply-side concerns such as marketing and mass media. As is so often the case, an integrated approach from government is required on this policy issue.

The challenges faced in changing the eating habits of children in the UK call for a collaborative approach. A concerted effort between schools, families, government departments and other agencies is necessary if children's nutritional intake, both in and out of school, is to be improved.

This report is No.18 in the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report Series, published in June 2006.

Related research is available in a review commissioned by the Foods Standards Agency (July 2006), available at <http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/2006/jul/childrenslearning>

Are there effects of mothers' post-16 education on the next generation? Effects on children's development and mothers' parenting

Leon Feinstein and Kathryn Duckworth

This report adds to a growing body of research from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning on the inter-generational transmission of educational success and issues of parenting skills, behaviours and attitudes. The report seeks to establish whether the strong correlation between mothers' participation in education and both her child's development and her parenting results from a primarily causal relationship, or from selection effects.

Using longitudinal data spanning three generations, we find that while mothers' participation in post-compulsory education has some small positive causal effects, much of the apparent relationship between a mother's post-16 educational participation and measures of her

children's cognitive ability and her parenting skills is driven by the selection bias - it is largely other factors, such as her aspirations, motivation and prior achievement, which determine her child's attainment and affect her decision to stay on in education.

Much of the developmental literature tends towards a causal interpretation of the relationship between parents' education and the development and ability of their children. However, the results of this report suggest that such assumptions should be made with considerable caution.

Our findings suggest that simply extending the length of time that women spend in education may do little to directly affect the educational

attainment of their children. Rather, it is the ability and aspirations of women which inform their participation in post-16 education, their parenting ability and the attainment of their children. It may be through inter-generational continuities in factors such as these that inequalities in educational success are transmitted through the generations. This suggests that supporting children in learning through early and continued investment in quality education and developmental opportunities is more important in addressing social immobility than simply extending the average length of participation, important though that may be.

This report is No.19 in the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report Series, published in June 2006.

Development in the early years

Its importance for school performance and adult outcomes

By Leon Feinstein and Kathryn Duckworth

Early development of intellectual, social and physical abilities has the potential to affect children's achievement, beyond the initial introduction to the classroom, through their school lives and into adulthood. A greater understanding of the processes at work in these early years and their role in later success is therefore important to ensure that resources are appropriately targeted.

This report uses data from the 1970 British Cohort Study to explore development in the pre-school years and considers the relative importance of a range of different childhood developmental features at the time of school entry and for later achievement. We assess the benefit that children gain from arriving at school with particular personal characteristics and the impact of age 5 abilities in predicting educational attainment in mid-childhood (age 10) and human capital in adulthood (age 30).

Our findings will add to the debate on the appropriate balance between cognitive and non-cognitive skills at different ages and for different groups of children.

This report will be No.20 in the WBL Research Report Series. It will be available to download from the WBL website at www.learningbenefits.net/publications/researchreports.htm at the end of November 2006.

The wider benefits of learning

A synthesis of findings from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (1999-2006)

In 1999, the Department for Education and Employment (now the Department for Education and Skills) established the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL). In recognition that the benefits of learning go beyond the enhancement of individual and national economic productivity, the Centre's role was to define the nature of these benefits and explore how they might be realised. Recent WBL work has synthesised the findings of the Centre in its first seven years, not only in the form of important specific findings but also conceptual maps and frameworks of relationships, and implications for policy and practice.

WBL's research to date finds that the importance of education is wide-ranging, extending well beyond qualifications and economic success - it has the power to exert a causal influence on a number of factors including health and well-being, attitudes and behaviour. But it is not simply the quantity of education and the qualifications achieved that have an impact, both the quality and the nature of the experience are important, i.e. appropriateness to the individual and their engagement with learning.

An overview has been published as a DfES Research Brief (RCB05-06) at <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RCB05-06.pdf>. A more extensive report/paper will be published by WBL in 2007.

WBL PhD study

Foundations for success

The developing multi-dimensional abilities of the child

PhD student: Kathryn Duckworth (WBL Research Officer) | Supervisor: Leon Feinstein (WBL Director)

Within the contexts of increases in education spending, education reform, policy initiatives such as a pre-school national curriculum, and a renewed focus on national literacy and numeracy standards, how do children's abilities develop before school and through their primary years, and what are the most important early skills for their subsequent academic success?

Kathryn's PhD thesis presents four studies which combine developmental, ecological and economic considerations to explore the development of children's learning throughout the early years and identify important influences in predicting educational success. Using data from three different longitudinal samples surveyed from birth, initially she explores the intergenerational transmission of educational success, investigating whether the relationship between mothers' education and children's development results from a primarily causal relationship or from selection effects. Later chapters examine the particular contributions of children's cognitive and non-cognitive capabilities at school entry to predicting their subsequent achievement (both in childhood and adulthood), progression from Key Stage 1 to 2, exploring the relative contributions of earlier academic abilities, and the importance of different contexts and the interactions between them in influencing educational success.

For further information, please contact Kathryn Duckworth at k.duckworth@ioe.ac.uk

WBL new arrivals

KAREN ROBSON

Research Officer

Research interests: Effects of young motherhood on socio-economic outcomes; the contribution of human, social and cultural capital to social stratification; youth time use and later-life socio-economic outcomes.

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NATALIE HEATH

Post Doctoral Research Fellow

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VANESSA QUINEY

Acting WBL Administrator

Work includes controlling administrative systems; maintaining records; acting as a central contact point; organising events; supporting the Marketing and Communications Manager; co-ordinating and minuting meetings.

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OTHER NEWS

Smith Institute seminar on nutrition and education

On 5 July 2006, Leon Feinstein presented WBL research on the links between education and nutrition at a Smith Institute seminar in Whitehall. The event was chaired by Jon Snow from the Channel 4 News and guests included Alan Johnson, Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

Leon presented results from two pieces of research that WBL has undertaken independently and in collaboration with researchers at the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) at the University of Bristol. He discussed how the literature paints a complex picture of the relationship between childhood nutrition and school outcomes. Conceptually, he explained, poor nutrition in childhood has the potential to impact negatively on participation, achievement and social inclusion in the school environment. It appears that age 4 nutritional intake is more important on later test results (Key Stage 1 and 2) than age 7 nutritional intake. Thus important dietary patterns are established early in life.

A lively debate followed the presentation, with questions coming from guests working in the policy, education, health, advertising and retail sectors. The guests were most interested in what policy could do to improve healthy eating among children and young people through collaborative

efforts across government and private agencies.

The findings of both reports are currently being written up for publication in academic journals. For further information, please contact Annik Sorhaindo at a.sorhaindo@ioe.ac.uk.

Predicting adult life outcomes from earlier risk signals: identifying those at risk

In August 2006, Leon Feinstein and Ricardo Sabates of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning submitted a report to the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit identifying children at risk of high cost/harm adult outcomes. The report summarises findings from UK birth cohort data about the extent to which information about children and their family environments is predictive of later outcomes. The outcomes are those which tend to be associated with personal harm for them as young people and adults and social cost for those in their environment and wider society.

It is important to emphasise that the relationship between childhood risk and high cost or high harm outcomes in adolescence or adulthood is not deterministic, mechanistic or inevitable. There are many steps on the pathway

from risk to outcome. There are children at risk who do not experience harmful outcomes and there are children with low apparent or observable risk who do. Moreover, predictions may be true on average for a particular risk group - nothing is certain about outcomes for individual children.

Using early childhood information about family context and child development, Feinstein and Sabates find a potentially very high level of predictability in the extent to which those at risk can be identified. In their view these findings are a challenge to which current central and local government should respond with appropriate and measured policy in the interests of social inclusion, personal welfare and the wider economic and social development of the UK.

Policy responses must allow for flexibility and change. Administrative data should always be augmented by local level, practitioner knowledge and the appropriate interventions should also be selected by local level practitioners who should work closely alongside local communities and agencies to avoid rigid tracking or excessive and unnecessary stigmatisation of vulnerable young people and their families.

For further information, please contact Leon Feinstein at l.feinstein@ioe.ac.uk.

Research findings in 'Other News' are not necessarily endorsed by the DfES.

WBL spring seminar 2007

THE STORY SO FAR AND THE STORY TO COME

Findings from the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL)

Presented by Leon Feinstein (WBL)

12.30pm to 2pm, Wednesday 31 January 2007, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London, WC1H 0AL

To register your attendance, please email info@learningbenefits.net.

This presentation will summarise the findings from the first six years of research at the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL). The seminar will give an overview

of the conceptual work WBL has undertaken, describe some of the empirical findings to date and set out the implications of this research for policy development and practice. Further information is available at www.learningbenefits.net/events/seminars.htm.

Leon Feinstein is Director of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning and Reader in the Economics of Education at the Institute of Education.

This seminar is free of charge.

To receive emails about forthcoming events, please register to join the WBL mailing list at www.learningbenefits.net/contactWBL/register.htm.