



WBL Update

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

SPRING 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.

CONTENTS

- **Discussion: Stimulating the next generation**

- **WBL spring seminar 2006** ● **WBL vacancy**

- **Does education have an impact on mothers' educational attitudes and behaviours?**

- **Are those who flourished at school healthier adults? What role for adult education?**

- **Forthcoming WBL research**

- **Links from education to health** ● **National Learning at Work Day**



Welcome to the Spring 2006 issue of WBL Update. There are a number of events and publications that we would like to bring to your attention - in January and February we published two more reports in the Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report Series, further details on page 4. There are many more reports in the pipeline, two of which will be based on the research featured on page 5.

As you will see, we've looked to international expertise for this issue's discussion piece. Pamela Davis-Kean of the University of Michigan, USA has contributed an article on the reasons for continuity in educational achievement across the generations. Jacque Eccles, one of Pam's colleagues, is coming to visit us later this summer, and will lead a session on "young people and the wider benefits of learning" at our summer 2006 seminar. Strongly recommended! Details will be posted on our website as they become available. In the meantime, the Spring 2006 seminar is almost upon us, so please register soon if you wish to attend (further details on page 3).

The WBL team continues to grow - we are currently looking to recruit another research officer, see page 3 for a brief job description.

As ever, if you have any comments on this issue, or would like to contribute the next discussion piece, please contact Jessica Henniker-Major at j.henniker-major@ioe.ac.uk.

Leon Feinstein, WBL Director

Stimulating the next generation

● Pamela Davis-Kean looks at the intergenerational transfer of educational attainment

Research has found parental educational attainment predicts the academic ability of children. However, there is often little explanation for this relationship. There are various theories regarding the mechanisms that may contribute to the transfer of educational attainment from one generation to the next. One of the simplest possibilities is that there is a genetic transfer from parents to children. These “achievement” genes would transfer not only raw ability, but also motivation and other important cognitive processing abilities. However, work with Asian immigrant families in the United States suggests that attainment can be increased substantially from one generation to the next. Work in behavioural genetics has also shown that environmental factors play a role in attainment transfer, especially for those from lower income environments. So, given that genetics may play a role, albeit potentially small in different social classes, what other factors may be important in the intergenerational transfer of educational attainment?

Do more educated parents do things in the home or in schools that assist their children in their achievement? Do parental educational values and beliefs influence their own behaviour as well as their children’s? These are very complicated questions and only recently has research begun to examine the pathways through which socio-economic indicators may influence parenting and child outcomes.

There are different theories on how family background or demographic variables influence child development. Some examine how negative socio-economic factors might cause stress on good parenting behaviours with subsequent detrimental effects on child outcomes. Others believe that family background influences how parents create the environment in which children develop and thus how they socialise their children regarding values like achievement and a work ethic. All these models believe that parents’

beliefs, either regarding expectations or mental health components, influence parenting behaviours with subsequent positive or detrimental influences on child development.

Perhaps the best examples of the importance of parental beliefs and behaviours can be found in the literature on the influence of income on child outcomes. Here the research finds that the influence of income on intellectual development was predicted not directly from income but from the influence income had on the home environment (e.g. number of books in the home), physical environment (e.g. organised home) and parenting style (e.g. parental affection). Having a substantially lower income influenced both what the parents provided in the home environment, and how they interacted with their children.

Income and education may provide very different kinds of resources in the home

Even though great strides have been made in linking income to achievement and behavioural outcomes, almost no research has examined the influence of parents’ educational attainment. Studies that have examined this have shown that parents’ education has a strong influence (stronger than income) on both parents’ beliefs and behaviours, and this influence exists across development. Thus, income and education may provide very different kinds of resources in the home. Income provides the actual monetary means of providing resources but education provides the knowledge and problem-solving ability of the best way to use it for a successful family. So those who are educated, even with little monetary means, can probably provide an enriching environment for their children. Providing income alone to a family with a low education may provide needed money for resources but without the knowledge of how to use the money appropriately to enhance the

achievement environment in the home, this new resource may not lead to a successful family environment.

All of these pathways are important, but even more important for future research is to understand why additional years of education may be important for child achievement. For this type of research not only do basic social class and parenting contexts need to be examined but this work now needs to be integrated with research on brain development. Our initial clues that parents’ education may be important for children’s cognitive development are from the work on early language where more educated mothers talk more and with more complicated sentence structure to their children. This difference in “conversation” predicts early discrepancies in reading ability, and is related directly to the education of the mother. We also now know that the brain does not cease to develop after a certain critical point in early childhood, but synaptic pathways continue to be built across all phases of development. Indeed, older adults are now being encouraged to continue their education as a way to fend off diseases like Alzheimer’s and senile dementia. Perhaps then, continued education may be providing potential parents with continued development of the brain, which in turn encourages problem solving and so leads to better and more stimulating parenting of the next generation. Again, we are on the cusp of testing these ideas and connecting how education is related to continued brain development. However, it is likely that this research will begin to answer some of the questions of “why” parental education is so important to child development and indeed show us the wider and important benefits of learning across generations.

Pamela Davis-Kean is Assistant Research Professor and Director of the Center for the Analyses of Pathways from Childhood to Adulthood at the University of Michigan, USA

WBL spring seminar 2006

● THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON YOUTH ASPIRATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN SRI LANKA

Presented by Professor Angela Little, Institute of Education and Dr Ricardo Sabates, WBL.

2pm to 4pm, Wednesday 8 March 2006 in room 639, Institute of Education, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL (www.learningbenefits.net/aboutwbl/howtofindus.htm)

Professor Alison Wolf, King's College London, will be the discussant.

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

● Abstract

This research explores the proposition that globalisation leads to a widening of inequalities between rich and poor. Specifically it addresses changes in the aspirations of youth from different socio-economic groups for education and occupation over time in Sri Lanka.

Individual interviews were conducted in Sinhala and Tamil among youth educated before economic globalisation, operationalised as the period prior to the policies of economic liberalisation (i.e. before 1977) and youth educated after (post 1977). The parents of contemporary youth form the sample of youth from the pre-liberalisation period, through reflections on their aspiration 'when a youth'.

The research is part of a larger study of shifts in aspirations among young people in Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and China. The field evidence in Sri Lanka was collected by a team at the University of Colombo, led by Professor Siri Hettige and Nishara Fernando. Dr Ricardo Sabates has offered statistical support for the analysis.

● Biographies

Angela W. Little is Professor of Education (with reference to developing countries) at the Institute of Education, University of London. She has conducted research on aspects of education in Sri Lanka over the past 30 years.

Dr Ricardo Sabates is a Senior Research Officer at WBL. Whilst working for the Centre, he has been involved in projects looking at the effects of education on health, family and social outcomes. Particular investigations have focused on the effects of education on the uptake of preventative health care using cervical cancer as an example of preventative health care activity; evaluating externalities of the Educational Maintenance Allowance Programme on crime reduction at an area level; and estimating the causality of education on parenting style. He was also involved in research on the effects of adult learning on social cohesion from a cross country perspective.

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

WBL vacancy

Quantitative Research Officer

Salary up to £32,325 (Grade IA) or up to £39,282 (Grade II) inclusive.

Appointment for one year in the first instance - May start preferred.

Job share or secondment considered.

The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning (WBL) is looking for a Research Officer to work on our quantitative projects. You will be interested in the development of education and social policy in the UK and keen to develop your understanding of social science methodology and theory. You will have an MSc or higher degree in a social science discipline, including substantive training in research methods. You will also have a high level of competence in the application of statistical techniques, with experience

and training in statistical research using STATA, MPlus or similar. For Grade II you will need a record of publications in academic journals and either a PhD (completed or submitted for examination) or at least five years' post-Masters research experience.

For an application form and further details please ring +44 (0)20 7612 6159 (24-hour answerphone) quoting reference R/BG/45 or email jobs@ioe.ac.uk. Textphone calls accepted via Tynetalk (Tynetalk users please call 18001 020 7612 6715 during normal working hours). Please do not send CVs at this stage. Completed applications to be returned to the Human Resources Department, Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL by **17 March 2006**.

Committed to equality.

THE ROLE AND ITS RESPONSIBILITIES

- To undertake quantitative research in line with the requirements of WBL.
- To work with other WBL researchers to publish papers in peer-reviewed journals.
- To undertake your own research leading to academic publications.
- To write research reports describing findings for policy-makers and funders.
- To present research findings at internal seminars and to the wider academic community, and practitioner and policy stakeholders.
- To attend WBL research meetings and participate in related discussions.

For an application form and further details please contact the Institute of Education's Human Resources Department (jobs@ioe.ac.uk).

Does education have an impact on mothers' educational attitudes and behaviours?

● Previous research showing that education has a direct impact on parents' educational attitudes and behaviours may not be as robust as it appears, writes Leon Feinstein.

The different elements of parents' educational attitudes and behaviours have been well documented and are identified as having a significant effect on their children's levels of educational achievement.

It therefore seems likely that some of the intergenerational effects of education may be transmitted through parents' educational attitudes and behaviours. However, empirical research to date has not been set up in such a way as to test whether there is a causal effect of education on these attitudes and behaviours. This research fills the gap by providing a rigorous estimate of the causal educational effect.

Whilst initial analysis shows an association between the age at which a mother leaves full-time education and her subsequent educational attitudes

and behaviours, through using instrumental variable (IV) methodology we find that this link is not the result of causal effects of post-compulsory education, but rather it is due to underlying related differences between mothers who stayed on in education and mothers who did not.

An interesting implication of these results is the emphasis they place on the positional importance of education - as educational levels for those with lower educational aspirations increase, individuals with positional ambition increase their education further in order to maintain their relative advantage.

The results of this research strongly indicate the possibility that the apparent relationships shown by ordinary least squares (OLS) methodology may be spurious as

indicators of a causal relationship. This should be taken into account when drawing inferences from OLS studies, particularly those with few control variables. If policy reform causes individuals to self-select within the system, then educational interventions based on observed links between education and outcomes may not generate the expected results.

We also conclude that we cannot glibly assume that quantity of education will bring wide-ranging benefits. To achieve these benefits, the quality of learning may be the key.

The report **Does education have an impact on mothers' educational attitudes and behaviours?** is available online at www.learningbenefits.net/publications/researchreports.htm

Leon Feinstein is the WBL Director

Are those who flourished at school healthier adults? What role for adult education?

● Engagement at school, as well as academic achievement, is an important contributor to adult health and well-being. Furthermore, patterns formed during the school years have a profound effect and are not easily remedied by changes that may be adopted in later life as a result of adult learning. Cathie Hammond explains.

This is a two-part project about the importance for adult health and well-being of (1) broadly defined school success and (2) participation in adult learning.

In the first part of the project we examine which aspects of schooling are markers for health and well-being in adulthood, using not only measures of attainment such as qualifications, but also measures of engagement. Our interest is in testing the strength of broad-ranging childhood indicators for adult health in order to help practitioners target appropriate resources.

In the second part of the research we consider the potential role for adult learning in improving health and well-being amongst adults generally, and in

offsetting the disadvantage associated with not flourishing at school, thereby reducing health inequalities. We use longitudinal data to examine relationships between participation in adult learning and trajectories in health and well-being for adults who did and did not flourish at school.

The differences in adult health and well-being between those who flourished at secondary school and those who did not are substantial and pervasive and go far beyond the effect of qualifications attained, indicating the importance of engagement at school as well as academic attainment.

We also find that patterns established in early life have a very profound effect and are not easily changed. The difference in scale and pervasiveness

of the results for school and for adult education tend to support this.

Our findings underline the importance of understanding why flourishing at secondary school is such an important signal for adult health and well-being. However, they also highlight the value of adult education, which seems to provide real opportunities for transformation of poor health and well-being amongst adults, whether or not they flourished at school.

The report **Are those who flourished at school healthier adults? What role for adult education?** is available online at www.learningbenefits.net/publications/researchreports.htm

Cathie Hammond is a WBL Research Officer

Forthcoming WBL research

● What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes?

Annik Sorhaindo and Leon Feinstein

Given the current situation with regard to children's nutrition and the efforts of the Department for Health and the Department for Education and Skills to improve nutrition in childhood, a question arises regarding the relationship of nutrition, not only to short-and long-term health outcomes, but also to the potential for attainment and experience in school. This research attempts to address the following questions:

- How does nutrition impact upon health outcomes in children?
- How can the health outcomes that manifest as a result of nutrition impact upon school life experiences and outcomes?

This study reviews key papers, seeking to draw together research across the disciplines of biology, public health, psychology and sociology to construct a model of the complex relationships between nutrition and school outcomes.

The research will be published in a Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report at the end of April 2006.

● Ready for school? The components of school readiness and their importance for school performance and adult outcomes

Leon Feinstein and Kathryn Duckworth

The DfES's Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners asserts that 'children learn better when they are excited and engaged' and recognises the importance of child development beyond cognitive skill enhancement. This project explores the contributions of early measures of children's cognitive ability and behavioural development to their subsequent academic attainment in mid-childhood, and economic success in adulthood.

As the DfES seeks to build family learning programmes and engage parents more in their children's learning, it is helpful to know more about the importance of children's state of development at school entry, and how this may impact on their educational success. It is hoped that this research will provide meaningful insights into the aspects of development that are important as signals of successful academic development.

It is intended that the research will be published in a Wider Benefits of Learning Research Report later this year.

Links from education to health

In December 2005, WBL and the MRC National Survey of Health and Development held a round table made up of academics, policy makers and other interested parties to discuss the relationship between education and health across a variety of disciplines, in particular economics, public health and sociology. From the WBL perspective, one objective of the round table was to facilitate the completion of the first draft of a report to the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). This report reviews theory and evidence on the complex effects of education on health. A further objective was to support links between the different research groups represented at the meeting.

The round table included presentations from Richard Wilkinson (Division of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Nottingham); Marcus Richards and Stephani Hatch (MRC National Survey of Health and Development, UCL); and Arnaud Chevalier (University of Kent). The WBL Director, Leon Feinstein, gave the final presentation, highlighting the main features of the conceptual model developed by WBL to structure the review of the evidence on the OECD-funded project. The event ended with a discussion of cross-cutting issues, including policy concerns.

National Learning at Work Day

Relaxation techniques, time management practice, presentation skills or an hour of reflexology. These are just some of the many ways your staff could be learning at work. And, thanks to the learning charity, the Campaign for Learning, Thursday 25 May 2006 is the ideal day to encourage them to try. It's National Learning at Work Day and your organisation could join thousands of others in showing its commitment to employee learning and development by running your own internal learning activities. From this one action-packed day of workplace learning, the Campaign for Learning, co-ordinators of Learning at Work Day nationally, hope employers and

employees alike will be able to see and experience the benefits of learning all through the year. Allowing employees to learn how to bring out the best in themselves leads to a vibrant, motivated and self-confident workforce that can only lead to success.

The Campaign for Learning will be on hand to help you make the most of your Learning at Work Day experience. Visit www.learningatworkday.com for access to a whole range of activity ideas, planning tips, media advice and helpful resources to aid the smooth running of your event, or call 0870 350 2345 to find out more.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Jacque Eccles will be visiting WBL this summer and has kindly offered to present at our Summer 2006 seminar, which will look at young people and the wider benefits of learning. Further details will be posted at www.learningbenefits.net/events/seminars.htm as they become available.

Professor Jacque Eccles is based at the University of Michigan, USA. She chaired the MacArthur Foundation Network on Successful Pathways through Middle Childhood and was a member of the MacArthur Research Network on Successful Pathways through Adolescence.