

The wider benefits of learning:
What are they?
What evidence is there about
them?

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The Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning



www.learningbenefits.net



Aim of the day

- To explore how to measure wider benefits of learning in institutions

How?

- Not giving answers
- Findings and issues arising from research on the wider benefits of learning
- How these apply to institutions / practitioners to be discussed in the round tables



The wider benefits of learning

- What are they?
- What evidence is there about them?

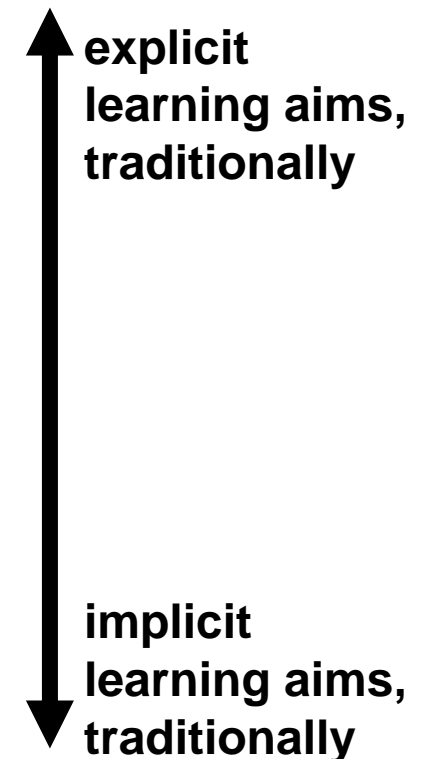


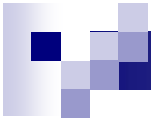
What do you want students to get out of learning?



Outcomes of learning

- Achievement / attainment
- Soft outcomes, e.g. confidence, communication skills, problem solving skills
- Wider benefits, e.g. well-being, health, active ageing, positive lifestyles, effective family relationships, social capital





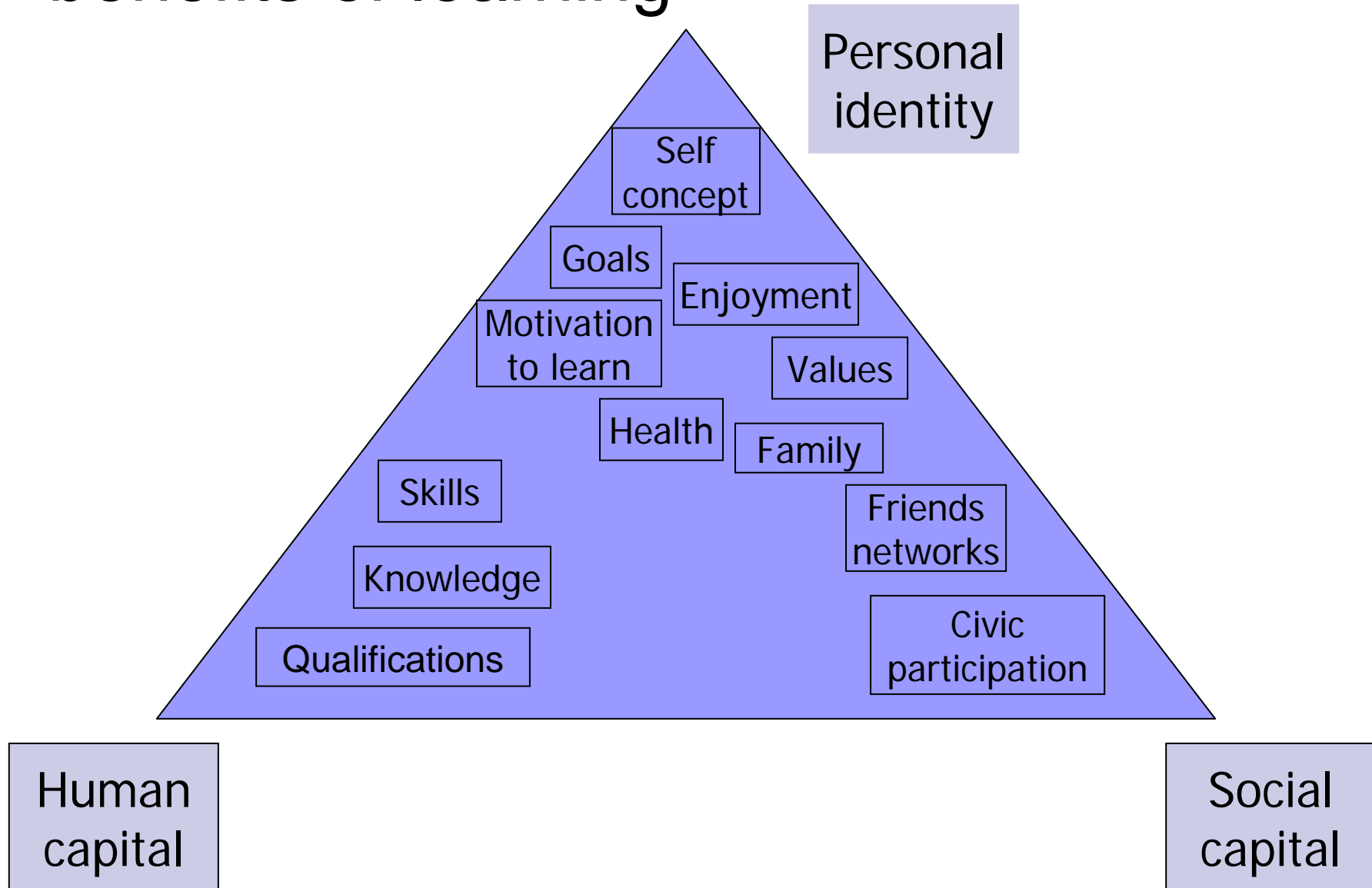
- Overview of our research
- Some overall findings
- Quantitative findings
- Comparative findings
- Case study findings
- Policy implications



Overview of the Centre's work

- Began in autumn 1999
- Literature reviews
- In-depth qualitative research
- Quantitative analyses of nationally representative datasets
- Surveys
- International comparative research

A conceptualisation of the wider benefits of learning





Processes through which learning leads to wider benefits – e.g. health

Learning ➔ **Psychosocial mediators** ➔ **Intermediate factors**

Self-esteem, self-efficacy,
identity

Purpose and future, future-orientation

Social integration, interpersonal trust, non-discriminatory attitudes, engagement

Communication and competences

Economic
Access to services
Health practices
Coping with stress



Health outcomes

Well-being
Mental health
Physical health




Findings

- Psycho-social outcomes mediate effects of learning on wider outcomes
- Wider benefits operate at individual and community levels
- Learning doesn't always generate benefits, may lead to negative outcomes
- Learner-centred provision generates wider benefits
- Importance of context – social, political, life course
- Sustaining and transforming effects of learning
- Learning contributes to positive cycles of progression



Quantitative research

- National Child Development Study
 - All babies born during a week in 1958
 - Nationally representative in Britain for that cohort
 - Followed up at 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42 (in 2000)
 - Information from cohort members, parents, teachers, health visitors



Research questions

- If adults participate in learning, does their health improve and do they become more socially integrated?
- How confident can we be that adult learning has effects?
- How big are the effects?
- Do different types of adult learning have positive effects, for men and women, and for people with low qualification levels to start with?



Findings

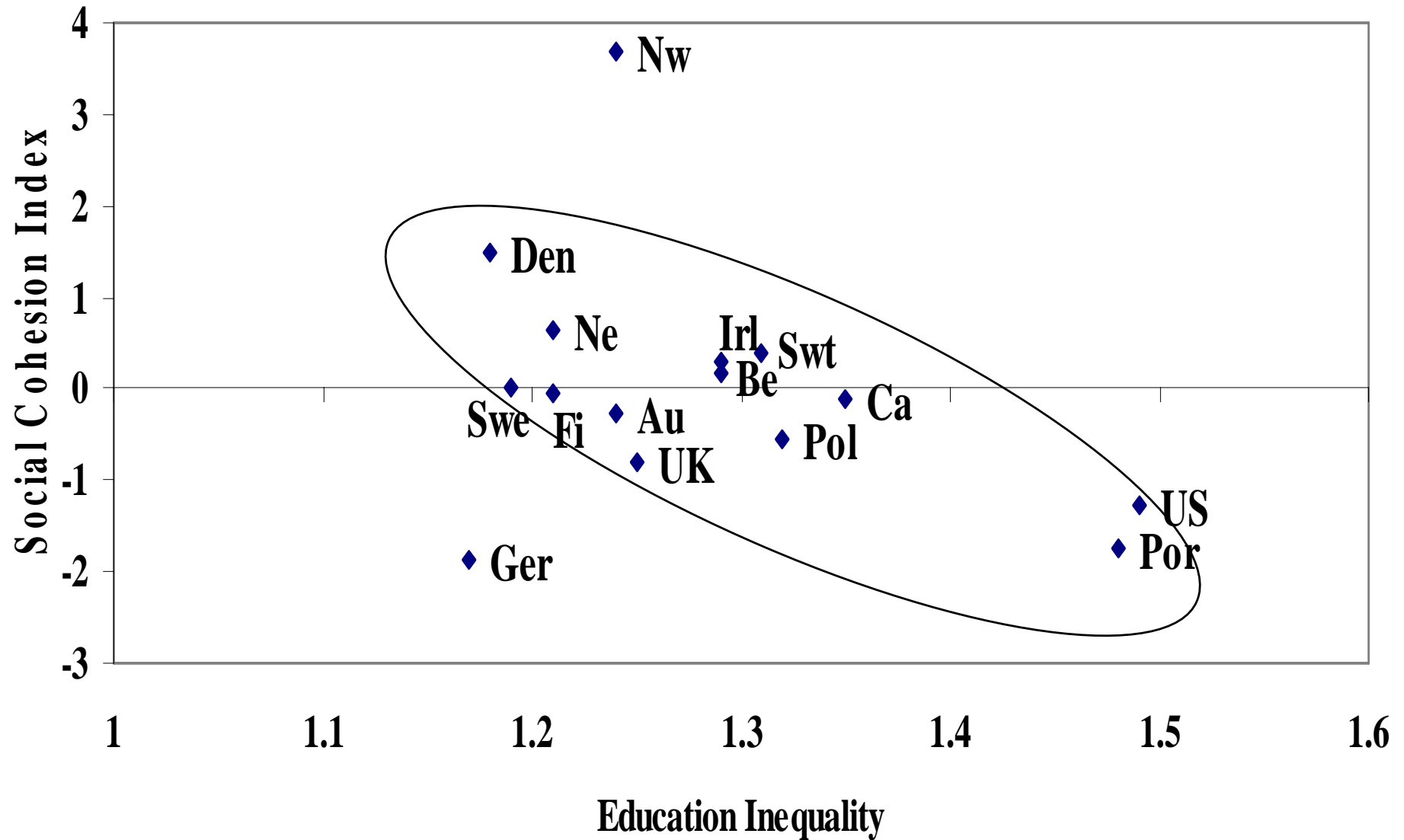
- If adults participate in learning, does their health improve and do they become more socially integrated?
 - **Yes**
- How confident can we be that adult learning has effects?
 - **Confident, AL contributes to positive cycles of progression**
- How big are the effects?
 - **Small, but important because emotional states, attitudes and behaviours are quite stable in adulthood**



Findings

- Do different types of adult learning have positive effects?
 - Non-accredited employer-provided and community-based, and academic accredited courses have positive effects. Vocational accredited have fewer effects.
- For men and women?
 - Yes
- For people with low qualification levels to start with?
 - Yes


Fig.1 Relationship between Social Cohesion - Education Inequality





Qualitative research

- Biographical interviews with 140 adult learners
- 1-3 hours in length
- Topic guide
- Sampling to represent diversity in terms of course and background
- Tendring (Essex), **Camden**, Nottinghamshire



Gareth (Health)

- 43 years old
- White British
- “...middle aged, white, heterosexual, cross-dressing male”
- Professional background



“Drug career”

Gareth: Well I did ‘O’ levels at [name of college], but that’s where I first got introduced to drugs, and acid was really big at that time. And acid and education don’t mix and I preferred acid to education, so that’s what...it became a drug experience more than an educational experience. So I left that and carried on my drug career.

Interviewer: OK. You talk about a drug career. Do you see it in terms of a career?

Gareth: Well, I see it as a sort of evolution in a progress path from mild drugs, through speed, through acid, through cocaine, to crack.



Maintaining a drug career

I was taking ecstasy to go shopping, you know, because it made it more excitable, more enjoyable. And I had a lifestyle that I could, you know...obviously it doesn't suit everybody's lifestyle, but I could work at 7 o'clock in the evening if I wanted to and work through the night if I'd been out clubbing the night before. I didn't have that 9 to 5 job. So...but I mean, that was the strongest community that I've ever been part of. You know, we used to go on holiday together, we used to go on clubbing trips around the world together



Esteem

Gareth: Giving up drugs and being liked by people. And getting good results, you know.”

Interviewer: So how does it feel when you get good results in...?”

Gareth: [interrupts] “It’s wonderful, of course it is. I mean, you know, I’m as competitive as the next person. I try not to be because I don’t think that’s a particularly good attribute. But, you know, when the teacher hands you an essay that you’ve done and you’ve got a level three, it’s a real sense of achievement. And that – that can only boost your self esteem. Which is where I’ve been lacking in the past.”



Attitudes

When I came here, I was very dogmatic about my beliefs. I didn't approve of single mothers because of my own life experiences. I didn't think they could give a proper – raise a child properly, that is. Having been surrounded by a lot of single mothers, I realized [that] isn't the case. Learning sociology and looking at issues more intently, I found really difficult at first. But obviously, when you look into these things deeper, you know, yeah, you do have to take other things into perspective..[...]..I kind of believed a lot of propaganda about asylum seekers, in that I bought the trip about it, you know, about them [being] economic migrants rather than genuine asylum seekers. And being here, and there's quite a lot of asylum seekers here, and just – you know, they've become people, you know as opposed to this tag 'asylum seekers' and they're lovely. They're really nice.



Gareth : conclusions

- Interplay of other factors (professional background – economic capital, therapy)
- BUT education has a role to play in terms of continuity
- Attitude change as well as personal
- Various ‘careers’ / transitions



Francis (Civic participation)

- Mid 30s
- “Black British, Black Carrib., Black European..”
- Working class background



Called up

I don't work. I haven't been able to work for over ten years because of disability – spine disability. Over the years I've just been doing writing courses and things, just finding my way and in 1994 I did a photography course and it was for those with learning difficulties. About three years I think after that I did an exam but I dropped out because it was *just too expensive. I didn't have the finance for it* so I just went back to doing writing courses. In 1998 I was *called up* for a Back to Work scheme but that hasn't worked out and now I've gone back to my...I've had a chance to go back to my photography and I do that once a week on a Thursday evening.”



Friendships

Francis: Everyone bar one, everyone was new. I think there was one lady who had been there before, a year before. I was sitting with some other – I think his name was Tom and we would just sit down and we'd talk about what we have done, what we haven't done and we talked about the kind of cameras we had. He had like a semi-automatic when it was...and we talked about the manual and just talking about how you can't get things through using the automatic. I told him they've got some manual ones there, to ask the teachers to borrow one of them, things like that. I made friendships like that in that sense.

Interviewer: Have you continued the friendships?"

Francis: No I haven't, like I said, I had to drop out."

Interviewer : Oh yes."

Francis: So I haven't seen anyone for three years."

Interviewer : Oh

Francis: "Three, four years."



What not to wear

Interviewer: OK, what does the Back to Work course involve?”

Francis: Oh, finding work. It's about writing CVs, preparation of CVs and *how not to over-delve in your past*. Just write out the *basics* and it's also about *how you dress* when going for an interview and then what they do is they give you some advertising things and you look up for some companies and you're given the phone which is at the far end of the room and you phone up for work and that's basically it.”



Frustration

...you very rarely get an answer back. If you haven't got the job I think they should have the decency to tell you but you don't know. I mean like, I sent off for one about five months ago and it was about a month ago he [the employer] phoned me out of the blue to say that it wasn't the kind of job that I thought it would be. I didn't recognize him at first. That was months ago. If I had taken that time in sending off the application form, you would be annoyed – your reply to me is wrong, it's too long and there's no apology, no nothing and that's wrong. I feel that's wrong.



Cracks in the pavement

...maybe on the Open University late at night you might see something and it comes from there” or through bookshops “I’ve read a small book on – I think it’s Tolstoy and I’ve read Thomas Hardy. Up at Waterstones – I just sit there and read.



Francis : conclusions

- Informal learning
- Barriers to study / participation (material / access)
- Social capital as appropriable / exclusionary
- Importance of structural considerations



Conclusions

- Linear, redemptive pathway uncommon
- Structural considerations important
- But role for learning in agency, challenge, open up new trajectories



Policy

- Messy biographies
- Contingent on other social structures
- Provision – diverse but inclusive
- Cultural interests of respondents
- Conflicts with other types of learning intervention



Conclusion : Policy potential?

- Social benefits
- Adult education – role in health promotion / socialisation
- Academic / vocational divide? Still differential effects
- Effects of unaccredited courses



Conclusion : Policy problematics

- Certain areas where no effects / negative effects
- Importance of distributions
- Importance of context (Bernstein - can education compensate for society?)
- Non-participants and widening participation agenda