Intergenerational work, social capital and wellbeing

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Introduction

We will report on two intergenerational projects. The first is a School based project, wherein older people work as volunteers in primary and secondary schools in three different localities of the outer city of Manchester. The second is a project with Families in the community, involving older and younger men within families of Somali and Yemeni communities in the inner city (Liverpool). For the Schools project we were asked to evaluate a project that had been going for some time. However, the Families project was a piece of action research which involved implementing intergenerational activities and researching their impact on the participants. We were interested in examining the projects with a view to exploring their impact on participants in terms of wellbeing, as well the contribution they made to social capital and community cohesion.

Intergenerational work

An international, comparative research programme about intergenerational initiatives adopted the following definition of intergenerational programmes:

> *Intergenerational programmes are vehicles for the purposeful and ongoing exchange of resources and learning among older and younger generations Bostrum, Hatton-Yeo, Ohsako, and Sawano, (2000:3)*

Drawing together experience across different countries, Bostrum et al. argue that intergenerational programmes can act as instruments for:

- Uniting separated generations

- Recapturing and reassessing the transmission of traditional culture

- Encouraging active cross-generational working and social life

- Sharing resources across generations

- Challenging social problems cross-generationally and contributing to lifelong learning.

Furthermore, Hatton-Yeo . Klerq, Oshako and Newman (2000) suggest that intergenerational programmes have an impact on: the economy and employment; society; on lifelong learning; and health. Extending these benefits, Rain (2005: 5) highlights the important role that intergenerational relations play in identity , with implications for community cohesion.

> *"Intergenerational relations are a part of our social identity. They have material effects on the experiences and quality of life of older and young people in particular settings, and important implications for community cohesion".*

Indeed, Patel (2007) suggests that intergenerational tensions created schisms at the heart of community cohesion, not just within families but more generally.

Community Cohesion

Community Cohesion in English social policy is closely linked to inter-racial disturbances in the

Northern towns in 2001, and the Government's strategy is to focus on addressing the cross-government (targets) aimed at reducing race inequality and building community cohesion (Home Office, 2005)

A broader understanding of community cohesion, though, is needed for consideration of both intergenerational projects. Duggan and Kagan (2007) have argued for a definition of a cohesive community as one, that is in a state of wellbeing, harmony and stability. (IdeA 2006, www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk)

The Local Government Association (LGA, 2004:7), offered guidance to Local Authorities for how to support the development of cohesive communities. They suggested that a cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;

- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and positively valued;

- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and

- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds and circumstances in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods………….

They went on to describe what is involved in creating community cohesion:

> *Promoting community cohesion involves addressing fractures, removing barriers and encouraging positive interaction between groups. Community cohesion is closely linked to integration as it aims to build communities where people feel confident that they belong and are comfortable mixing and interacting with others, particularly people from different racial backgrounds or people of a different faith.*

Diversity is, then at the heart of community cohesion, and schisms can occur in and between any areas of diversity, fracturing cohesion. The audit commission (2007) sees community cohesion as key to sustainable communities, beyond race and faith, and identified 10 areas of diversity in communities, of relevance to community cohesion. These include:

- Age equality: older people

- Age equality: young people

- Community engagement

- Customer focus

- Disability

- Gender

- Human rights

- Race

- Religion

- Sexual orientation

The Families project includes a number of dimensions relevant to cohesion, including faith, ethnic identity and the experience of migrancy, as well as age. The Schools project, however, focuses more on age as the salient dimension of cohesion. Both, however, are concerned with facilitating social capital across the generations and with enhancing the wellbeing of both older and younger people.

Social Capital

It is the work of Putnam (1993, 1995) that has underpinned most discussion of social capital in the UK. Putnam (1995: 67) describes social capital thus:

> *By analogy with physical capital and human capital - tools and training that enhance individual productivity - "social capital" refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.....Such networks facilitate coordination and communication, amplify reputations and thus allow dilemmas of collective action to be resolved...(Such) dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants' sense of self, developing the "I" into the "we"...*

The main elements of social capital, then, from Putnam's perspective are trust and co-operation and social networks based on norms of reciprocity.

Jack and Jordan, 1999, spell it out further:

> *Social capital consists of cultural practices, norms, networks, links, know-how and tradition, through which people conduct informal interactions of all kinds. For instance, social capital is the trust that enables people to make contracts, rather than the contracts themselves; the teamwork that makes groups function effectively, rather than the roles and structures of the groups; the culture through which citizens understand and participate in politics, rather then the processes of government or elections;*

and the expectations that people will be friendly and reciprocal towards their neighbours, rather than the physical buildings and spaces they inhabit. ...(Jack and Jordan, 1999 p. 243)

They go on to outline who might benefit from strong social capital, and to issue a warning that it may not necessarily work for the common good.

Social capital is produced through specific human interactions, and thus available only to members who share in certain ways of life (Jordan 1998a) and is freely available for the benefit of all members who take part in the community's interactions....the beneficial effects of norms, traditions and networks of trust and co-operation are as accessible to rogues and confidence tricksters, fraudsters and felons, as they are to the sociable, active or altruistic members of that society whose interactions sustain it. (Jack and Jordan, 1999 p.243)

A distinction is often made between bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 1995). Bonding refers to homogeneous horizontal ties with actors who share overlapping boundaries and similar moral values. Such networks enhance cohesion through a strong community-based environment and frequent face-to-face communication which enables social support to flourish. Bridging refers to open networks characterised by 'extra community' links across diverse social cleavages, facilitating inter-group understanding and relations. The more recent concept of linking social capital refers to those external resources that can be harnessed in support of strengthening bridging and bonding capital, and is central to health and wellbeing (Putnam, 2004).

The existence of social capital within a neighbourhood is one way in which families are regulated and sanctions applied to family members if they transgress local norms. Migrant families are particularly at risk of what Coleman (2000) describes as failing to achieve 'intergenerational closure', resulting in family conflict. Similarly in areas of rapidly increasing diversity i.e. both the localities of these projects), social capital and thereby social trust is threatened (Putnam, 2007) weakening community cohesion and threatening health.

Stores of social capital are said to enhance not only community cohesion but also health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing

Kilroy (2005:7) draws on Ryff and Singer's work (1998) to suggest that well-being is best described as the "presence of wellness, it is what it means to

flourish and is about having a sense of purpose and direction in life, good quality relationships with others and opportunities to realise ones potential" 'By wellbeing, then, we mean more than satisfaction with life. Shah and Peck (2005:2) remind us:

.. people also want to be leading rich and fulfilling lives - developing their capabilities and fulfilling their potential.

For Shah and Peck, then, eudemonic wellbeing (personal development and fulfilment) is as important as hedonic wellbeing (satisfaction and happiness). Indeed this two dimensional approach to personal wellbeing forms the core of an influential wellbeing manifesto for a flourishing society (Shah and Marks, 2004).

Hedonic and eudemonic well being of people who live in urban areas are inseparable from historical factors as well as people's economic positions, the environmental conditions in which they live and the political and ideological messages that define their life stages whilst enjoining them to break free and be active in their own lives. For both older people and young people, social responsibilities are closely linked to relevant social institutions (schools, pensions, public services etc). In other words, well-being in and of communities must be viewed in terms of human systems, not just as individual responses to circumstances.

Community wellbeing

The concept of well-being in the community, and of the community is multifaceted (Kagan and Kilroy 2007). It variously includes those environmental factors that contribute to good standards of living, such as clean water, clean air and so on; demographic issues such as population decline or changes in divorce rates; economic issues such as poverty, loss of employment or income, or rapid social change leading to the development of new jobs; the provision and/or retrenchment of public services; educational opportunities and achievements; levels of crime and fear of crime; alcohol and drug use; significant life events; diet, food poverty and levels of obesity; perceived happiness, depression, stress and sense of fun. It is also closely linked to stigma and discrimination - for our purposes this might be due to skin colour, faith, migrant status, senior citizen or child status (Modood, 1997; Modood et al., 1997).

The Projects

School project

This project deploys older volunteers into schools to undertake a variety of different activities. A school based co-ordinator works in close liaison with community based volunteer co-ordinators in the same locality who in turn recruits and supports volunteers. One community co-ordinator will work with a clutch of schools - primary and secondary- in the locality. Volunteers in the schools take part in academic activities (hearing children read, helping with maths) as well as extra curricular activities (such as teaching new skills, running clubs) and other things in school (such as taking a school assembly). The benefits are top the pupils, the schools, the volunteers, the teachers, the school culture and to the schools' public engagement targets.

Families Project

The families project arose out of previous work with families under stress and conflicts between African Muslim men and their sons was an emergent concern. Father and sons were brought together over a meal to take part in narrative workshops (Somali and Yemeni communities separately). Following this, the men and the boys identified further actions which included parenting workshops for fathers and the making of a magazine and a DVD for the sons. The benefits were anticipated to be for participating fathers and sons, as well as wider family and community members. In addition, community workers took part and it was expected that they too would benefit form participating.

Evaluation

Each project underwent a mixed method qualitative evaluations, and details of the methods are available on request from the first author. Illustrations from interviews and focus group discussions, as well as summaries of groupwork, undertaken as part of the evaluations form the basis of the extracts presented below.

Findings

Family Project

Bonding social capital:

> "I felt sad...it is hard for fathers" (S,flipchart content, concern narrative)

> "the cultural and psychological effects struck me – I felt sympathetic and frustrated listening to sons story and how difficult his life was. It is painful to hear, I felt touched not realising how much the children suffer." (F, Yemeni Narrative Workshop)

Bridging social capital

> "We could Visit the 'gap year' model – committing organisations to work with funding opportunities (maybe British Council) to send a group of young people to Yemen so they can contribute to Yemeni culture and learn from it" (Fathers, Yemeni Narrative Workshop).

> "the lesson for me was that its encouraging to see young people not having these problems, are enabled to pass on this information to other young people. Conferences like these are like a mentor. Those people might not be here but young people can affect them with this information, this awareness" (Son, Yemeni Workshop).

> "(Organising a) forum for fathers and sons ....if it does go well, we would like to follow up (around) the UK maybe even in the EU" (Sons, Somali Workshop)

> "We are actually thinking of going to visit other Somali boys and Somali communities in Sheffield, Cardiff, and London and tell them what we've done!" (Sons during Magazine Group meeting)

> "The idea of organising an awareness day for the social services is a good idea" (Son, Somali Workshop)

> "Sons prefer class sessions with mainstream to learn Arabic in local areas rather to be segregated in Arabic school" (Father, Yemeni Workshop).

Linking social capital:

> "Thank you for inviting me in this conference. I hope there will be many more including other cultures who are here (living in the UK)as well".

> "It is an advantage to live in Liverpool – culture, history, It is an important city." (Yemeni Workshop)

> in helping 'younger' generation to understand Somali culture, lots of work could be done." (Son, Narrative Workshop)

> "Just as adults refer to their friends, so can young people refer to their friends when they have problems". (Son, Yemeni Narrative Workshop)

Eudemonic well being

> "Sons educated in UK a valuable resource to Yemen" (Father, Yemeni Narrative Workshop)

".....what tools fathers use (are) important..but maybe there is not enough education: ....a father may be pushing his son using the wrong tools." (F, flipchart content, concern narrative)

"(It is) important to follow up those ideas.We (would) be disappointed if these ideas (are) not implement(ed)" (Sons, Somali Narrative Workshop)

"This story is for a man who has been in the uk for 20 years but even people who have been here longer say 50 years can identify with it. The stories are very important for us as they highlight the values/challenges that fathers face. We hope that this is not the first or the last meeting" (Father, Yemeni Narrative Workshop).

"Parents have a duty in bring up their children& offer them different possibilities........as I listened, I thought: am I an ideal father/parent?"

(Father, Yemeni Narrative Workshop)

"there is a lot to do....to build on today (visibly very emotional)" (Father, Yemeni Narrative Workshop)

"It was very useful to learn and to take this forward." (Father, Narrative Yemeni Workshop)

Hedonic well being

"recognition from our sons for our hard work makes us feel appreciated"

(F, flipchart content, concern narrative)

"it......brings hope because children understand us and respects and value what we are trying to do"(F, flipchart contents, solution focused narrative)

Schools Project

Bonding Social capital

Time with the volunteers gives children the opportunity to get on with and talk with their friends as well as to get to know other children from other classes.

Just getting to know other people as well because sometimes different people come from different classes so it's nice to sit down and talk to them as well. Because it's a quiet activity so then it's good to talk to different people as well so you feel more friendly. JS C

Also you get on with your friends because you can't argue in front of her or argue who's done the best cross stitch, so you can get on with your friends without having a row about who won and who didn't win and stuff. JS C

Volunteers enjoyed being recognised outside school.

Seeing children out of school (is good). Very often you see them giving you a big beaming smile as they're going past. V

They benefited from the relationships more generally.

I think you gain an awful lot, you're contributing. You're making little friends you're making some big friends. V

I would say the social interaction with the children. They like the children, they like going, it gets them out of the house, they feel as they're useful and we've never heard anybody who's said 'don't like it I'm not doing it' (Volunteer Coordinator talking of benefits to volunteers)

Bridging capital - Breaking stereotypes -

Children were able to tell how they changed their minds about older people as a result of their time with Intergen volunteers.

I changed my mind [about older people] because I normally see old people very old so I didn't think of old people as Mrs X and Mrs Y. But when I saw them I changed my mind. ISc

I changed my mind because when I came to school and I saw them [the volunteers] I thought that if they're nice every old person could be nice and I changed my mind about [older people]. Isc

Children were also to see things from older people's perspectives.

I think they (volunteers) feel like they're on holiday and they just come here because everybody has to be very nice to them, not nice to the teachers, but sometimes they are. But every single time we are nice to them and I think they feel happy. ISc

(Volunteers) are very happy because they have a smile on their face…excited

because they like working with us…we're really kind to them ISc

Volunteers would continue, the children said, 'because they want to continue having fun with us' and 'we make them happy'.

Teachers gained from the links and connections.

It helps them (teachers) I think they feel they're not alone,. They're getting help from outside they're getting some support that encourages them., SC

They're so stressed. I think the teachers are so stressed with all the different things they've got to do, apart from teaching its the form filling and all this lot. Sometimes if they've got somebody to day 'come on you'll be alright'. We mother them! V.

Volunteers also brought in resources for schools to use (Linking capital).

The teacher's always so very busy that if you've time to spend with one child. I mean sometimes I've spent nearly half a day with one child. We had a little Ghanaian boy and he couldn't speak a word of English and so I spent the whole afternoon with pictures and telling him what they were. V

they haven't got the time to listen to the children read they've asked us to step in and do reading, like you do. V

Eudeamonic wellbeing

When asked what kept her going this volunteer talked of the challenge and being needed as well as the satisfaction gained.

I think now the kids need me and I don't want to let them down. It is a challenge you give something, it cost something but you get so much back and you just think its right to take part and contribute. The more you do, I do the week by week, you understand it more why you're there what you're doing and why its happening. V

Infant's school children, when asked about what they had learnt, generally referred directly to the activity such as 'how to make cakes and how to weigh'; how to weave and how to knit'.. However some children also understood the broader implications of what they were being taught. When asked why the volunteers

carried out their activities the following responses were obtained:

To help us make things.

Because they might want to make us learn or making stuff.

They might want to be fun.

To make us get a bit more clever.

To make us know how you do things when you get older.

How?

When you get older you have to do stuff like that.

Like what?

Like to cook and you might you have different things that are broken like my teddy got broken.

Junior school children identified a number of things they had learnt from their time with volunteers, including: communication; how to cross stitch; help with maths; cooking;

In addition to general satisfaction, volunteers learn and sometimes this can be transformative.

You get satisfaction and so much change. I've come out even after an hour or half and hour and I've come out and I've been a different person than when I went it. Its almost sort of a bit of a challenge really. Because we get old and cynical, you do change. V

We forget the child that's inside us sometimes. You know the honesty and the innocence and the straightforwardness and that sort of point of view. V

Volunteers learn new skills and new insights into their own capabilities, As one volunteer said, in relation to helping with class work:

The children like having me, I love having them. I love being with them.

I've learnt an awful lot how to teach children numeracy. I did A'level maths but I couldn't ever remember how I first learnt any number work which changed anyway. So now I know lots of different ways of helping and teaching children. V

Hedonic wellbeing

Infants' school children enjoyed the activities with the Intergen volunteers, which included baking cakes,

making chocolate crispies, bookmarks and friendship bracelets, doing sewing and holding a tea party.

What do you like best about things she does with you?

A: The thing I like the best is when they made like fairy cakes and crispy cakes with you and we had tea parties. I like everything about them!

B: Fun stuff.

C: Every single things!

D: The crispy cakes and the butterfly cakes because I like cakes!

Furthermore the infant's school children said that they would feel 'sad', 'miserable', 'bored', 'lonely', 'unexcited', 'angry' if the volunteers were not in their classroom. When asked why they would feel like this, they said:

A: I would feel sad because you'd have to do work all day in stead of doing really fun things on Tuesdays and Mrs – has lots of nice things like baking and cakes.

B: Because they were really helpful and nice to us.

C: Because I like working with them.

D: Because you can't make interesting stuff [if they're not in our class].

Secondary age children also gained a sense of pride and satisfaction in their achievements with the older volunteers.

You can do it for you parents if their birthday or its mothers' day…because when you finish it you feel really proud and you want to tell everybody. JS C

Volunteers were thought to have gained in enjoyment and satisfaction according to a volunteer co-ordinator.

I imagine all I would say is probably now,[there are] seventeen or eighteen happier, more contented, sounds a bit corny really, older people. Who are now doing things they didn't think they could do and they really enjoy it. VC1

let's look at the volunteers. I mean definitely an impact on their wellbeing. … there was a volunteer who said, she wasn't in my area but she said to me because I met her socially, I said to her 'I hear that your working for [the p[roject] now as a volunteer' and she said 'yes, it's the best day of the week, I just love going in

and helping with these young children'… there's no doubt that … the impact … on volunteers is very, very positive. VC3

How do intergenerational projects enhance community cohesion with social capital and wellbeing

In both projects wellbeing and social capital was enhanced. It is clear though, that the particular intergenerational activities had a specific part to play in generating both social capital and wellbeing. The activities enabled participants to gain INSIGHT. Insight, that is, into self , the 'other' and self in relation to the other. We suggest a process through which wellbeing and social capital are both generated and linked together by insight into self and the other (see Figure 1). It is the intergenerational activities that have stimulated insight: without this insight there would be nothing to link wellbeing and social capital, and no clear indication that the intergenerational work had contributed to cohesion.
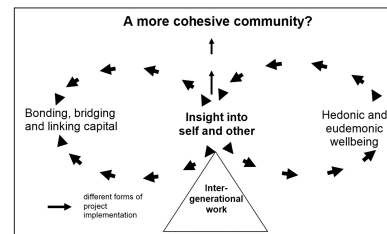

Figure 1: Intergenerational work and the stimulation of wellbeing, social capital and community cohesion

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