Community Service in Independent Schools: Social Capital, Engagement and Educational Outcomes
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Abbreviations

ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACER  Australian Council for Educational Research
AIFS  Australian Institute of Family Studies
AISV  Association of Independent Schools of Victoria
ARC  Australian Research Council
COAG  Council Of Australian Governments
CRLRA  Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia
DEST  Department of Education, Science and Training (Australia)
FaCS  Department of Family and Community Services (Australia)
FaCSIA  Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
IBO  International Baccalaureate Organization
LSAY  Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth
MIAESR  Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research
NELS  National Education Longitudinal Study (US)
NGO  Non-Government Organisation
NRI  National Reform Initiative (Australia)
NYLC  National Youth Leadership Council (US)
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OFSTED  Office for Standards in Education (UK)
PC  Productivity Commission (Australia)
SES  Socio-Economic Status
UK  United Kingdom
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
US  United States (of America)
Executive Summary

Social capital has recently received a great deal of attention in international government circles. Despite difficulties in its operationalisation due to differences in definition and methodology, studies are being used to assist policy-makers in decisions aimed at maintaining social resources and high levels of social trust. Schools are recognised as a source of social capital.

Outline

This paper provides an outline of social capital; its definitions and issues of methodology. It then considers the literature in areas where community service in schools has been studied, including volunteerism, service learning, extracurricular activities and civic engagement, based on fields of sociology, psychology and political science. The paper describes the nature of community service in schools.

Social capital

Social capital resides in social networks maintained by social and cultural norms and sanctions. Such social connections and attendant trust enable participants to pursue shared objectives and access a variety of resources that would not otherwise have been readily available. Analyses of social capital have been made at various levels, including the individual, groups, communities and nations. Studies of social capital consider notions of trust and reciprocity within groups and between different communities, and levels of capital and thus benefits available to individuals. There is some confusion and controversy over definitions and methodology, particularly as related to statistical measurement and its interpretation.

Community service research

Community service is primarily an activity in which time is freely given to benefit others. Research into schools and community service is concerned with factors that may improve student engagement and educational outcomes, leading to greater civic engagement and lifelong learning in adulthood. The literature makes a number of strong claims. Required service can be a positive motivating force, increasing rather than decreasing student engagement. Quality community service is beneficial in a variety of ways, including greater self-esteem, more positive adult role-models, more satisfaction with school and family life, higher levels of civic engagement, increased commitment to school and school values and higher educational aspirations and higher grades. Schools with an ethos or culture of participation are a strong influence on student engagement.
Generally, these results were controlled for markers such as parent service participation, education, and SES levels.

Although some studies find benefits in required community service, the importance of quality service and school ethos suggest that the way in which the service is presented and structured has a significant impact on student perspectives. Thus, the values underlying the service and presented by the school may be significant, and are under-considered in the literature. Required service, or service presented as a punitive measure may have a detrimental effect if perceived to be onerous by student and family.

Social capital and community service in schools

Four categories of community service are presented:

1. Event fundraising and issue awareness. Specific fundraising activities are commonly linked to and mediated by local, national or international charities.
2. School-nominated connections. Some schools have a specific link with a charity, organisation or facility that goes beyond an annual fundraising event and may be a unique connection forged by a single school. The main difference between this category and the next is that these connections are not based in the local community. Instead they are national or international.
3. Local community participation. Activities within the community which involve direct student participation.
4. Sharing and developing facilities. Schools may offer a variety of facilities to the local community, including buildings and equipment.

Social capital is generally measured by asking questions of individuals and aggregating results. In a school setting, it is not enough merely to poll students – teachers and leaders also play a significant but quite different role. In this sense, social capital can also be said to reside in a community. School culture, ethos and values have an effect on student engagement and community service can play a significant role in perceptions of community and self.

Community service in schools can be linked to recent government initiatives, including the COAG reform agenda and values education. Thus it should be possible to relate the outcomes discussed in the community service literature to issues of policy, and to highlight the influence of school culture and community participation on educational outcomes.
Social capital, education and community service

Social capital is defined in several ways and the experts disagree on the definitions. The major problem is that this is not a precise concept and that makes it difficult to use social capital as an analytical tool. As a social scientist I would rather throw it overboard. However, lately social capital has turned into a very important political tool… (Øyen, 2002: 11).

Social capital has become something of a phenomenon in many academic fields and in government circles, nationally and internationally. It is a buzzword of sorts, although its use is not widely recognised by the general public (Halpern, 2005: 1). The term has only come into vogue relatively recently and it appears to be both controversial and quite powerful, primarily due to its effect on government policy-making.

Although its use has been traced back to Hanifan, writing in 1916, and Marx in 1867 (Farr, 2004: 8), the current popularity of social capital began with Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), and obtained prominence following Putnam’s (1993) work on social capital and democratic institutions in Italy, and the work of both Fukuyama and Putnam, writing separately in 1995 (Halpern, 2005: 7; PC, 2003: 6). A wealth of recent material is now available from international institutions such as the World Bank (Grootaert, Narayan, Nyhan Jones, & Woolcock, 2004; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000), UNESCO (2002) and the OECD (2001), and literature reviews have been carried out by a variety of government bodies and other institutions including, in Australia, the ABS (2002), the AIFS (Stone, 2002; Stone & Hughes, 2002; Winter, 2000), the Productivity Commission (2003), FaCS (Black & Hughes, 2001; Johnson, Headey, & Jensen, 2005), and the CRLRA (Falk, 2001b; Kilpatrick, 2003).

Ian Falk, then director of the CRLRA, noted that in Australia research has been conducted on social capital ‘in fields as diverse as vocational education and training, adult and community education, policy, literacy, community development, leadership and community capacity building’ (2001a: 1). The ABS discussion paper suggests that:

In Australia, social capital has emerged as an area of great interest to a large number of government agencies, community and welfare organisations, research institutions and community development practitioners. The potential for social capital to make a positive contribution to outcomes in diverse areas of social concern such as health, community safety and education has captured the interest of policy makers, social analysts and researchers (2002: v).

Given such a strong interest at government level, along with COAG’s current emphasis on human capital and the value of education for increasing the capacity of the Australian workforce, the causes and effects of social capital within a school setting would seem of particular relevance.
School community service has both social and educational ramifications, and the last decade has seen a considerable number of statistical studies undertaken in fields such as volunteering (Wilson, 2000), extracurricular activities (Marsh, 1992), civic engagement (Metz & Youniss, 2003) and service learning (NYLC, 2004). Much of this research uses measurements and indicators that parallel those used in social capital research, although few studies of community service have specifically considered social capital.

This discussion paper first presents the concept of social capital, outlining its primary components based largely on a review of the field by Halpern (2005). This is followed by a review of literature concerning community service in schools and a discussion of types of community service and links to social capital.

Social capital: conceptual definitions

“It’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” This common aphorism sums up much of the conventional wisdom regarding social capital. […] Intuitively, then, the basic idea of “social capital” is that one’s family, friends, and associates constitute an important asset, one that can be called upon in a crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and/or leveraged for material gain (Woolcock, 2002: 23).

David Halpern, in his comprehensive introduction to social capital, provides a useful conceptual overview of the different dimensions within the field (2005: 26), which may serve as a brief initial description of the theory and use of the term. Each area is then expanded to provide a picture of the concept as depicted in the current literature.

Social capital resides in social networks maintained by social and cultural norms and sanctions. An analysis of this social resource can be made at various levels, including the individual, groups, communities and nations. There are different types of relationship involved in forming and maintaining a network, and these are most commonly labelled bonding, bridging and linking. Interestingly, Halpern has little to say about trust, except in its use as a ‘rough and ready’ measure of social capital (2005: 32), despite its presence in Putnam’s definition, which, as Farr notes, ‘boils down to networks, norms and trust’ (2004: 8). The use of trust is also considered below. Where given, examples specifically relate to school communities.

Social networks, norms and sanctions

Features of social life – networks, norms, and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives… Social capital, in short, refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust (Putnam, 1995: 664-5).
The primary element of social capital appears to be the idea of networks or connections. Writing originally in French in 1980 (Portes, 1998: 3), Bourdieu’s definition echoes the language of economics:

Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 119, in; Halpern, 2005: 7).

Social networks, then, are generally agreed to be the source of social capital. As Farr puts it:

social capital is complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust, which are essential for civil society and productive of future collective action or goods, in the manner of other forms of capital (2004: 9).

Halpern suggests that the most commonly accepted, clearest examples of social capital are ‘non-family social networks in which people mostly know each other,’ as opposed to more controversial examples such as close family or a ‘network’ of strangers (Halpern, 2005: 13-14). On this basis, school communities are fertile ground for the development of social networks and social capital. The density of a network may also be considered. In schools, for example, a high proportion of the community will know each other, creating a dense network.

Halpern and Portes also discuss closure, which Halpern defines as ‘the preponderance of intra- versus inter-community links’ (2005: 10) and Portes defines as ‘the existence of sufficient ties between a certain number of people to guarantee the observance of norms’ (1998: 6). Both definitions are based on Coleman, who argues that closure is important for ‘the trustworthiness of social structures that allows the proliferation of obligations and expectations.’ He goes on to say that ‘Reputation cannot arise in an open structure, and collective sanctions that would ensure trustworthiness cannot be applied. Thus we may say that closure creates trustworthiness in a social structure’ (Coleman, 1988: S107-8). To an extent, the notion of closure parallels that of bonding, or networks with strong ties (Granovetter, 1973), which are further discussed below.

Social norms are ‘rules, values and expectancies that characterize the community (or network) members’ (Halpern, 2005: 10). Schools tend to codify certain areas of conduct; other rules are unwritten. They involve levels of behaviour such as respect, courtesy and consideration, looking after school and personal equipment, punctuality and quality of work. Other norms are affective and may involve positive and supportive feelings towards the school or certain groups within the school. Defined in such a way, norms may also be negative. Some schools develop a social hierarchy where it is common to prey on younger or weaker children, or where it is ‘cool to be street-wise’ and students’
interest in learning is demeaned by their peers. The Productivity Commission review of social capital adds that:

Underpinning many social norms is the concept of ‘reciprocity’, which is strongly reflected in the ethic of ‘do unto others as you would have them do unto you’. Reciprocity may be specific or generalised: that is, whether the favourable act will be reciprocated, and when, by and to whom, may or may not be known before the person commits to doing that act (PC, 2003: 9).

Sanctions are the means by which a community or network maintains the norms that allow it to function (Halpern, 2005: 11). The negative connotations associated with the word are perhaps unfortunate, as the intention can be positive and rewarding as well as punitive. Some sanctions in school are formal, such as school awards, or detention and loss of privileges. Others are more informal: peer pressure and teacher expectation may act in this way, either directly through face-to-face comments or indirectly through gossip.

Bonding, bridging and linking

Having established networks and their norms and sanctions as the source of social capital, the possibility of different kinds of networks created some confusion in the early literature, primarily due to the variety of terms initially used. The most common current sub-types of social capital are termed bonding and bridging. Bonding social capital includes strong ties with family and friends, or within homogenous ethnic and religious groups, where social ties are strengthened. Bridging capital includes relationships between different groups and communities, heterogeneous ties like those between ecumenical religious organisations. Bonding often creates close and lasting ties, whereas bridging often includes acquaintances and colleagues, and changes more often (Halpern, 2005: 22). Precisely because it encourages homogeneity in at least one area (ethnicity, sports team, etc.), bonding capital ‘by creating strong in-group loyalty, may also create strong out-group antagonism’ (Putnam, 2000: 23), thus producing negative effects.

The notion of bridging and bonding capital has become widely used (Halpern, 2005: 22), however as with many social concepts it would seem overly simplistic to assume, for example, that one necessarily precludes the other. Different ethnic groups, nationalities and religions are likely to be present in schools. As such, the school environment, by its very nature, provides an opportunity for students to network with others who are unlike them (bridging capital). At the same time, the school structure also leads to dense, close ties, as membership of the school itself becomes the common connection (bonding capital).

The same argument applies to networks of alumni. The common ground shared by those who went to the same school suggests homogeneity and therefore bonding capital. Yet a thirty-something job seeker contacting a fifty-something manager she has never met but
whose name was obtained from an alumni association would seem to be an exemplar of Granovetter’s weak ties, and closer to the notion of bridging capital. In this sense, bridging capital has to do more with the ability to make contacts outside close family, friendships or community; however there seems to be no clear delineation separating bonding from bridging capital.

Halpern notes a recent finding in the US that ‘there is a fairly high, positive correlation between bonding and bridging capital at the individual level’ (2005: 21). He suggests that this was perhaps contrary to expectations; however it could be argued that bridging capital often depends on some shared link between people in order to establish contact, however tenuous that link may be, and that, therefore, bonding capital often leads to bridging capital.

Linking social capital is similar to bridging but takes account of issues of power and inequality. Halpern defines it as ‘a vertical bridge across asymmetrical power and resources’ (2005: 25). The idea is that while two people may both be involved in networks of about the same size, with the same amount of bonding and bridging, the resources that each person has access to through their network may be of very different quality. Linking capital enables bridging between the resource poor and the rich and influential.

**Trust**

*Trust* is simply the level of confidence that people have that others will act as they say or are expected to act, or that what they say is reliable. *Social trust* (or ‘generalised trust’) refers to the general level of trust in a society — for example, how much one can trust strangers and previously unencountered institutions (PC, 2003: x).

Many literature reviews remark on trust as being an important element of social capital (ABS, 2002: 5; Harper, 2001: 8; PC, 2003: x). Schneider defines social capital as ‘the social relationships and patterns of reciprocal, enforceable trust that enable people and institutions to gain access to resources like social services, jobs, or government contracts’ (2004: 7). Schneider’s view of ‘enforceable trust’ seems rather similar to Halpern’s (2005: 10-11) definition of norms and sanctions, and highlights one of the difficulties in the use of the term. As the PC review points out, ‘while many authors treat trust as an element of social capital, others see it as an important source or outcome of social capital but caution against treating trust as social capital itself’ (PC, 2003: 11). It is, however, as Halpern notes, ‘reasonable to argue that widespread trust and trustworthiness are themselves an important part of the normative dimension of social capital’ (2005: 33). The issue becomes one of avoiding tautologies and ascertaining causal relationships; this is problematic, as trust would seem to be necessary for networks to form and, equally, the existence of networks and norms creates and reinforces trust.
One position is that ‘The net result of people being connected up in social networks with shared norms that facilitate cooperative action should be the emergence of trust’ (Halpern, 2005: 33). It is likely that trust would be required to facilitate networking in the first place, however this notion of trust has been used as a ‘rough and ready’ measurement of social capital at a national level, using a question asked in the World Values Survey: ‘Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be to careful in dealing with people?’ (in Halpern, 2005: 33). As such, levels of trust would seem to provide the basis for a comparison of different areas, using controls that would be expected to affect the outcome of such measurement, such as SES, education and unemployment levels. While this may work at macro-level analysis, at a very general level, its application at the individual level would seem fraught with complexity.

The use of trust is often not clarified in the literature and Halpern’s model of networks, norms and sanctions seems to better capture the concept of social capital. In this way, trust may remain an indicator of, an outcome of, and an agency for the development of, social capital, without necessarily obscuring or denying the potential of the concept.

Levels of analysis and measurement

More generally, research suggests that social capital — adherence to social norms, well-developed networks and associated levels of trust — can generate benefits in several ways (PC, 2003: xi).

Portes and Woolcock both highlight potential deficiencies in the methodologies used to study the concept of social capital. Portes argues that ‘it is important to distinguish the resources themselves from the ability to obtain them by virtue of membership in different social structures’ (1998: 5) and Woolcock contends that ‘definitions of social capital should focus primarily on its sources rather than its consequences’ as consequences ‘may be one indicator of the types and combinations of social capital that are present, but they are not to be confused with social capital itself’ (1998: 185). Winter, in his survey of the literature on family life and social capital for the AIFS, is particularly critical, arguing that many of the measurements used ‘confuse the potential outcomes of social capital with social capital per se’ and ‘assume that …forms of collective action are …associated with social capital with no a priori establishment of the fact’ (2000: 9-10).

Halpern uses the notions of *level* and *domain* to modify the notion of analysis, and in his conceptual diagram he prefers the terms micro-level, meso-level and macro-level (2005: 27). There is considerable debate over levels of analysis, with some researchers arguing that individual networks are the only method of gauging the effects of social networks and others claiming that cultural norms, national levels of trust and institutional structures can all be measured as a means of determining macro-level social capital.
Perhaps the most influential formation of macro-level analysis comes from the World Bank’s 1998 definition of social capital:

The social capital of a society includes the institutions, the relationships, the attitudes and values that govern interactions among people and contribute to economic and social development. Social capital, however, is not simply the sum of institutions which underpin society, it is also the glue that holds them together. It includes the shared values and rules for social conduct expressed in personal relationships, trust, and a common sense of ‘civic’ responsibility, that makes society more than just a collection of individuals (in PC, 2003: ix).

Analysis domains can also be cross-divided into groups delineated by age, gender, income or ethnicity (ABS, 2002: 1; OECD, 2001). According to the Productivity Commission (2003: 12), the World Bank and the OECD prefer to identify eight sources, or dimensions, of social capital: family, schools, local communities, firms, civil society, the public sector, gender and ethnicity. This bewildering variety of levels and domains from which social capital may be measured has been noted with concern by proponents and critics of the concept (Fine, 2003; Øyen, 2002; Woolcock, 1998). However, Halpern argues that ‘Both diffuse weak networks and norms at the national, macro-level and strong dense networks at the intimate, family or micro-level fit within broader definitions of social capital’ (2005: 18). He goes on to contend that there is ‘strong evidence for a conceptual envelope that can encompass these different levels’ and that ‘we should be attentive to these different levels of analysis and ready to distinguish between them’ (2005: 19).

Measuring social capital is particularly problematic as it is difficult to design a study that controls for the myriad complex situational and interaction variables affecting a given outcome. That said, a longitudinal study using a large enough cross-section of a population and controlling for a large number of variables, should be capable of a high level of statistically reliable information. The interpretation of statistical results may often be open to question, however.

One issue with statistical results (significant or not) is the question of causality and the logical inferences that could potentially be made as a result of causal assumptions. For example, if community service is shown to improve educational outcomes, does this mean that higher educational outcomes necessarily indicate the presence of community service? And if a higher education level is causally linked to higher levels of social capital, does it therefore follow that taking part in community service equals investing in social capital? Or is it that high levels of social capital result in higher education levels? In which case, is community service a cause or effect (or both) of higher levels of social capital?

A further issue is that both community service and the concept of social capital, while they may be beneficial, are likely to be so by inference, or indirectly. For example, taking part in community service may increase student engagement in school, and raise
levels of self-esteem, expectations and aspirations. These outcomes, in turn (and all else equal), may lead to improved academic performance. Arguably, student engagement is also closely linked to peer pressure and expectations, which is linked to whole-school ethos and values, in which community service also plays a part. School ethos and environment, in social capital terms, are synonymous with norms and sanctions, which create (or lack) the trust, respect and reciprocity required for a network to produce the social resources that form the character of social capital.

Community service research

...schools which are an integral part of community life, nurture high parental involvement, and actively expand the horizons of students, achieve higher test scores (Woolcock, 2002: 25).

Research into schools and community service can be found in several different areas, and is particularly concerned with factors that may improve educational outcomes, and with increasing student engagement in the school community and beyond, both in terms of lifelong learning and adult civic engagement. There are a number of differing concepts and definitions that relate to community service, which makes a review of relevant literature somewhat problematic.

This section begins by providing an initial, fairly narrow definition of community service, based on the concept of volunteering. A review of a decade of literature on volunteering by Wilson (2000) is the source for an initial overview of relevant research considering schools, education, values and social capital. Literature that encompasses aspects of community service in extracurricular activities, community service learning and civic engagement is considered.

Volunteering

Volunteering is any activity in which time is given freely to benefit another person, group or cause. Volunteering is part of a cluster of helping behaviors, entailing more commitment than spontaneous assistance but narrower in scope than the care provided to family and friends (Wilson, 2000: 215).

Community service and volunteering appear to be synonymous based on the definition of volunteering provided for the Annual Review of Sociology by Wilson (2000). The basic definition is in the quotation above, and involves time given freely for the benefit of others. Wilson notes that there is some argument over whether intentions should be included in a definition, or whether activity is enough, as in the behavioural view that sees volunteering ‘as an activity that produces goods and services at below market rate’ (2000: 216).
Volunteering is perhaps a more relevant term, as community service covers a wider spectrum of activity than is intended here, such as service provided in lieu of a prison sentence. The use of community service as a punitive measure may be problematic in a school environment and is discussed further below. On the other hand, volunteering is a narrower concept that may exclude some activities. For example, while organising a fundraising event could be considered volunteering, participation in that event might not. Wilson indicates that ‘volunteering is typically proactive rather than reactive and entails some commitment of time and effort’ (2000: 216).

Based on his survey of a decade of literature, Wilson states that ‘Level of education is the most consistent predictor of volunteering …because it heightens awareness of problems, increases empathy and builds self-confidence’ (2000: 219). Research has found that ‘Children who volunteer during their high school years develop more pro-social attitudes and are more likely to volunteer in college and later in their adult life’ and also that ‘Learning to think of citizenship as carrying responsibilities as well as rights encourages teenagers to volunteer when they become adults regardless of whether they volunteered when young’ (Wilson, 2000: 218-219).

Interestingly, Wilson later notes that statistical research pre-2000 found that, ‘overall, the relation between values and volunteering is weak and inconsistent (religious and civic values do little to encourage volunteering)’ and that, generally, ‘values are less important in helping decide who volunteers than in helping decide what volunteering means to the people who do’ (2000: 219).

Wilson initially avoids social capital as a direct term, preferring instead to use social resources and social networks. He notes that ‘Extensive social networks, multiple organizational memberships, and prior volunteer experience all increase the chances of volunteering’ (2000: 223). Social resources help explain a number of reasons for volunteering, including face-to-face invitations (more common than impersonal, mass media appeals), higher SES levels, extroversion and the religious (these categories of people join more organisations, increasing the chance of volunteering). Again, without mentioning social capital or referencing the primary social capital literature, Wilson notes that ‘Social ties generate trust, and trust makes it easier for us to step forward and donate our time’ (2000: 224), as well as a number of other benefits that fit the notions of norms and sanctions.

The reasons for Wilson’s reluctance to use the term social capital become evident as he notes a variety of problems associated with integrating the idea of social resources into a theory of volunteering.

First, whether social ties are positive or negative for volunteering depends on the nature of the volunteer work. […] Second, social ties can be relatively insignificant, depending on the nature of the volunteer work. […] Third, it is frequently difficult to decide in advance what will constitute a social resource, and the determination can be made only after the volunteering occurs. Not only does this mean that the term social capital varies in meaning from one study to
another, but it also makes the theory difficult to disprove—something that must have functioned as social capital can always be found (2000: 224).

Wilson’s third point is particularly relevant. Choosing to volunteer with an organisation does not guarantee a networking opportunity. School students volunteering in a home for the elderly are already part of the primary organisation responsible for the activity (the school) and may gain no direct social resource (in terms of networking). What they do gain, socially and psychologically, may well assist them in maintaining current social capital and developing new opportunities. Such considerations once again indicate difficulties concerning what is social capital, its sources and its consequences.

The notion of context is a little understood aspect of volunteering. Context here refers to ‘ecological factors ranging from units as small as households, residential blocks, workplaces, and schools to those as large as cities, regions, and countries’ (Wilson, 2000: 229). Of the two relevant studies Wilson located from the nineties, one finds that ‘net of individual differences, the chances a student will volunteer increase if he or she attends a school that requires or encourages community service’ and the other finds ‘that students attending private colleges with a strong religious orientation participate in community service more frequently than students at private colleges with less emphasis on religion or at public universities.’ Wilson then notes that ‘Other than these studies of schools, the impact of organizational context on volunteering has hardly been explored’ (2000: 229). Issues of whole-school environment are further considered below.

**Community service learning**

Butcher et al. (2003) provide the following definitions of community service learning from the literature:

…community service learning can be distinguished from community service by ‘the integration of study with hands-on activity outside the classroom, typically through a collaborative effort to address a community problem.’ In community service learning programmes, both the service provider and recipient are beneficiaries. There is then a dual focus on the service being provided and the learning that occurs (2003: 111-112).

In considering service-learning, Anderson (1998) recognises that it has similarities to other forms of what he calls ‘experiential education’ including internships and community service. He thus offers a definition of community service that has evident similarities to that of Wilson on volunteering:

Community service involves students providing assistance to individuals, organizations, or the community. The assistance can be direct (preparing meals in a shelter for the homeless or picking up trash in a park) or indirect (organizing a food drive or doing clerical work for a social service agency). In
in all cases, the primary focus is on providing a service and the primary beneficiary is the service recipient (Anderson, 1998).

Billig remarks that ‘practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers simply do not define service-learning in consistent ways’ (2004: 14). She suggests that service-learning might include at least one of areas such as ‘clearly identified learning objectives, student involvement in selecting or designing the service activity, a theoretical base, integration of service with academic curriculum, and student reflection’ (2004: 13). Given this kind of focus, it is likely that schools for which community service is part of their culture (as opposed to an add-on, optional extra), provide learning opportunities for their students without any explicit recognition of the service-learning concept. Billig cites a private school study where only 9 percent of respondents considered their programs to include service-learning. However, those who said they were engaged in community service said that the service ‘included curricular integration (62 percent); connection to an academic class (26 percent); student reflection (61 percent); and students designing service projects (61 percent). As such, it is likely that research pertaining to service-learning may also apply to much community service undertaken in independent schools in Australia.

A considerable body of research on community service learning has been undertaken in the US under the auspices of the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC, 2004, 2005, 2006; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2004). Much of this research considers the relationship between community service (of any kind, not just service learning, as it is commonly termed in the literature) in schools and a range of contexts and benefits, including SES levels, academic outcomes and increased community engagement (Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal, Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006). For example, a study by Scales and Roehlkepartain found that ‘Involvement in service appears to contribute to lessening the achievement gap, with low income students who serve doing better academically than students who do not serve’ (2005: 10).

Martin et al. (2006) surveyed a nationally representative sample of 3,123 US residents aged 18-28. They found that ‘Students attending private or parochial schools seem to have the greatest access to service opportunities, with Service-Learning and Service Only participation each reported at 45 percent, and No Service reported at only 10 percent’ (2006: 6). While service-learning scored consistently higher than service only, those who experienced some form of service scored higher than those who did not in reporting having more positive adult role models, being more engaged within their local communities, being more satisfied with work, school, family life and friendships, having higher educational aspirations, and showing higher levels of civic engagement (e.g. voting, community leadership, treating others with respect and keeping informed of current events).

The highly beneficial results of service learning would be of particular relevance to schools with Round Square membership or IBO accreditation. The Round Square organisation includes service as part of their curriculum. Students are ‘encouraged to
perform a substantial number of service hours, either in school-sponsored, regional or international projects’ (Round Square, 2005). The IBO curriculum also includes ‘a community service component requiring action and reflection’ (IBO, 2005). Both organisations see service as an educational commitment promoting personal, social and emotional growth as well as intellectual attainment.

**Extracurricular activities and student engagement**

...participation in extracurricular activities—even those not obviously associated with academic achievement—apparently leads to increased commitment to school and school values, which leads indirectly to increased academic success (Marsh, 1992: 560).

One area of statistically measured research which is only partially focussed on the outcomes of community service is student engagement in extracurricular activities. Community service is only one aspect of such activities, which include participation in sports, music, art and drama, school governance, academic and vocational clubs. Finn argued that participation in extracurricular activities develops a sense of belonging, and that participation can be a measure of student engagement in school (Finn, 1989, 1993). Participation in extracurricular activities has been correlated with decreasing dropout rates (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), higher levels of self-esteem, higher educational aspirations and higher grades (Fullarton, 2002: 2; Holland & Andre, 1987; Marsh, 1992).

Fullarton’s brief literature review also highlights research using *High School and Beyond* longitudinal data. Camp’s (1990) study found that students’ extracurricular participation ‘produced a significant positive effect on achievement’ and Marsh (1992) ‘found that significant effects of total extracurricular activity participation were small but consistently positive… facilitated academic outcomes rather than detracted from them, and that these positive effects were generalisable across a variety of student backgrounds’ (Fullarton, 2002: 2-3).

In her own Australian study using LSAY data, Fullarton (2002) finds school-level engagement to be the strongest influence on student engagement. Whole-school engagement, for Fullarton, is ‘a school ‘ethos’ of participation,’ and is an attempt to take into account the influence of the school environment on participation as opposed to individual levels. Fullarton recognises the limitations of her data in providing this construct and does not clearly define what is meant, though she appears to be referring to the variety of activities provided within a school and the levels of student participation in these activities. Given the data constraints, Fullarton found that ‘The level of engagement within a school was found to vary significantly between schools, and was found to be higher in single-sex schools, small schools, and in schools with higher levels of socioeconomic status’ (2002: 32). Levels of engagement in school life, measured by participation in extracurricular activities (also from LSAY data), have also
been shown to have an impact on student retention (year 12 participation) (Marks, Fleming, Long, & McMillan, 2000).

Other recent research has found that separating extracurricular activities into different streams led to different findings. McNeal (1995) separated activities into four categories: sports clubs, fine arts, academic clubs and vocational clubs. Of these, only participation in sports clubs and fine arts activities were significantly related to a reduction in dropout levels. Broh (2002) went further, separating interscholastic and intramural sports. His data (which is based on US schools) showed that of the two, only interscholastic sports participation benefited students’ self-esteem, educational outcomes and relationships. Broh also found that participation in music had significant positive benefits, as, to a lesser extent did cheerleading, school drama, student council and school magazines (2002: 84).

Thus, research into student participation and engagement in schools generally agrees on the benefits of extracurricular activities, while debate continues as to levels of benefit and the benefits of different activity types. Interestingly, while McNeal and Broh do not identify community service as part of extracurricular activity, Marsh (1992: 556) does include community service activities (as one of 16 activity types, aggregated) and Lindsay (1984) found that extracurricular participation was significantly correlated with high participation rates among young adults in voluntary social activities (Fullarton, 2002: 3). These results appear to agree with similar studies undertaken as part of the service-learning research agenda.

**Civic engagement, required volunteerism and school ethos**

In recent years, theorists have focused on another aspect of youths’ lives as a potential facilitator of civic engagement— their participation in school-based community service (Metz & Youniss, 2003: 281).

The Liberal Party recently released its education policy ahead of the 2006 State Election. In the section titled ‘A Partnership with Parents and the Community,’ this policy document stated that ‘A Liberal Government will allow schools to enter into binding parent-school contracts to define and enforce the obligations of parents and schools in relation to the behaviour of students.’ It goes on to say that ‘Consequences for a breach of parent-school contracts may include fines, community service within the school by the student and parent, restrictions on inclusion in school activities or any other action the school considers appropriate and fair and agreed to under the contract’ (2006: 15).

In comparison, the prospectus of Geelong Grammar School presents a quite different view of community service, in a section titled Generosity: ‘Community service enriches the experience of our girls and boys, helping them to learn more about the larger community and their potential in it. More importantly, it teaches them to give because
they can, to be compassionate and active in public life, and to respect the environment’ (2003: 18).

The values implicit in the Liberal Party’s policy, and in many common approaches to community service, have at their base punitive measures, or conditions and prerequisites. While it could be argued that doing community service has the potential to raise awareness about community issues and ethical values, that argument would seem to be undermined when the notion of service is conflated with that of punishment, or with a graduation requirement.

In 1999 it was estimated that for 19% of public high schools in America, community service was a requirement and a given number of hours must be completed for a student to graduate (Chapman & Kleiner, 1999, in; Metz & Youniss, 2003: 281). While this is not a form of punishment, at first sight it does remove choice (required volunteering is an obvious oxymoron) and could potentially lead to resentment. Metz and Youniss note that, on the one hand, ‘Studies show that service and activism during youth are associated with life-long civic engagement involving voting, trust in government, and involvement in voluntary organizations’ while on the other hand, ‘required service can take away youths’ intrinsic motivation, provoking the question as to whether such policies lessen the quality of the service experiences or even turn youth off to future volunteerism altogether’ (2003: 281).

Metz and Youniss studied a single school where 40 hours required service was introduced, and found that:

Students who where [sic] more inclined to volunteer completed their requirement quickly and then went on to do volunteer service at high rates in their remaining years in school without the added motivation of a service requisite. At the same time, the less inclined students who waited until grade 12 to finish the requirement responded to that experience with increased intentions to volunteer after their high school graduation. There is no evidence that the requirement turned students off to service, but quite a bit of support for the notion that required service was a positive motivating force (2003: 285).

Their research considered a number of variables, however the absence of greater contextual variables, such as other schools in other SES areas, and the small dataset, suggest that further research would be required to generalise these results.

Arguably, there is potentially a considerable difference between a school that expects its students to give to their community and a school that requires it. A school that tells its students to complete 40 hours of community service as a mandatory requirement for graduation is surely building a value culture that is quite different from a school that expects its students to take part in community service because they have the ability and the responsibility to do so. This is not to say that a mandatory requirement is negative in
itself, but that reactions to that requirement may depend on the values placed on it; the reasons given to the student and the manner in which they are presented.

Community service research: Some conclusions

A growing body of literature is connecting community service with a variety of beneficial effects including higher levels of engagement in school, higher academic success, greater self-esteem and ongoing civic engagement. Research also indicates that whole-school ‘ethos’ affects student engagement, participation and educational aspirations, as does parental expectation and volunteerism. Levels of education achieved and service during youth also correlate with adult community engagement.

Research into volunteering, service-learning and extracurricular activities provides a broad academic base from which to argue that community service has a significantly positive effect on youth at school. Schools with a strong ethos of service to the community have a highly positive impact, which should rightly be celebrated. Their students are more likely to have high self-esteem and social aptitude, and to be more aware of their responsibilities towards others in their community.

Billig usefully separates service research into four areas of impact: academic or cognitive domains, civic domains, personal and social domains, and career exploration skills (2004: 14). In all these domains, community service appears to be beneficial, although research has also found that student perceptions of the quality of a service experience are a highly significant indicator of its benefit levels. This would also seem to apply, to an extent, to other factors such as the amount of time spent in service and the values placed on it by those involved. Such contextual concerns have not been explored in-depth in the literature, however the generally positive outcomes of most of the research does suggest that experiences are seldom negative.

Schools, community service and social capital: Making connections

Following the review of literature on social capital and community service, this section looks at the kinds of service actually undertaken in schools, and how they may be considered within the social capital concept.

Types of community service in schools

There are many different activities that can be placed under the community service umbrella, from fundraising to picking up litter, collecting blankets for the homeless to providing company at a home for the elderly. Quantitative research in the literature is
usually based on questionnaires and the notion of community service is generalised. Given that the quality of the service experience plays a role in student perception of its worth (Billig, 2004), a useful exercise may be to identify the type of service activities that take place in schools. This was achieved by collating 25 stories from the AISV website, part of the Making Active Connections project (AISV, 2006). Four general categories were ascertained: event fundraising and issue awareness, school-nominated connections, local community participation and sharing facilities.

1. Event fundraising and issue awareness. Specific fundraising activities are commonly linked to and mediated by local, national or international charities. They usually take place annually, are observed by many schools and other groups, and are also a means of raising awareness about issues such as health and welfare. Examples would include the Salvation Army’s Red Shield Appeal, World Vision Australia’s 40 hour famine, Children’s Medical Research Institute’s Jeans for Genes day, The Cancer Council of Australia’s Relay for Life, and SIDS and kids’ Red Nose Day. This category also includes student participation in movements like Make Poverty History and the ONE campaign, which may involve students raising awareness within their school about significant global issues such as poverty, and actions such as writing to local MPs.

2. School-nominated connections. Some schools have a specific link with a charity, organisation or facility that goes beyond an annual fundraising event and may be a unique connection forged by a single school. The main difference between this category and the next is that these connections are not based in the local community. Instead they are national or international. Activities are varied and may include (but are not limited to) fundraising. Examples would be schools with connections to indigenous communities in Australia, orphanages in poor areas of various countries, or to schools destroyed by the tsunami in Indonesia. These connections are usually ongoing and may involve sending material such as clothes or school books, communications between students such as pen pals or reciprocal visits, or visiting another country to take part in building or other forms of aid.

3. Local community participation. Activities within the community involve direct student participation and would include visits to homes for disabled or elderly, assisting with a meals on wheels service, picking up litter or planting trees in a park, collecting blankets for charity, painting a community building, cooking and cleaning in someone’s home, and assisting with teaching or homework in a community centre or another school.

4. Sharing and developing facilities. Schools may offer a variety of facilities to the local community, including buildings such as halls and classrooms, sports grounds and swimming pools, and equipment such as language labs and recording studios. They may also develop other infrastructure items that impact a community, as part of school development, including building roads and placing traffic lights and pedestrian crossings.
These broad areas are not intended to be definitive, however they are meant to capture most forms of school-based community service. Arguably, fundraising directly for a school, while not included in the above, could be considered an aspect of local community participation (perhaps depending upon how the school is perceived in the local area).

There is a marked difference between the first three, all of which require student participation, and the last, which is at the discretion of school authorities and involves infrastructure. The sharing and building of facilities is still a form of community service within a school’s local neighbourhood and is worth including here, as the notion of social capital arguably affects individuals and groups at many levels.

There are also differences within the first three, based on the definitions of community service in the literature, which involve giving time and effort, as opposed to giving money. The specific fundraising activities of category one, usually mediated by organisations external to the school, often require very little time or effort from the student participants, and the beneficiaries are not generally present or part of the local community. As an annual event, such fundraising is not a regular, ongoing activity. Such events do seem to belong in the repertoire of schools’ community service activities, however, and different schools and events will have a different impact, as category one covers everything from raising money by selling chocolate to raising money by sleeping outside in a cardboard box for a night.

Students raising awareness of poverty under the auspices of a campaign like ONE (2006), which is also part of the first category, raise questions concerning the relationship between volunteers and activists. Wilson states that ‘Conventional wisdom holds that social activists are oriented to social change while volunteers focus more on the amelioration of individual problems.’ He goes on to argue that ‘Social circumstances …help determine the meaning of these two roles and their relation to each other. There is no good sociological reason to study them separately’ (2000: 216-217).

**Individual and school social capital**

Schools are an obvious source of social capital, potentially providing the greatest opportunity for children as individuals to network. From an individual level of analysis, children’s networks might include their family and close family friends, a variety of groups and individuals at their school, and any clubs or groups they attend that are not directly tied to family and school, such as a church youth group, a swimming or dance club, or an association like the Scouts. The activities of school life, and school ethos, may also have a bearing on what children learn about developing social capital, particularly of the bridging and linking varieties. Such learning is likely to be tacit; a product of environment and experience rather than explicit teaching.
The contribution of community service activities to individual-level social capital resources would seem difficult to measure, at least as far as networking is concerned. The impact of school-level ethos – social norms and sanctions, teacher and peer expectations, and trust – is likely to have significance for attainment and other individual benefits, and it should be possible to establish a causal argument between them (see e.g. Fullarton, 2002).

Social capital can also be said to reside at the group level. The social capital of a school may include links to the parents of its children, various government departments in areas of health and welfare as well as education, local community groups such as churches or sports clubs, and its alumni. At this level of analysis, the social capital of a school, particularly the bridging and linking forms, are a huge potential resource. With specific reference to community service, the networking a school can achieve within its local community provides opportunity for such service to take place, breaking down various barriers of ignorance and prejudice. Children attending the school may be exposed to a variety of environments: working with indigenous and other ethnic groups, with the elderly, adults with disabilities, families with children in hospital, and so on. Such community activity has reciprocal benefits, enhancing the positive image of the school as an active part of the community, and building trust.

Some commentators argue that social capital cannot reside in a community because a community cannot itself own anything (as opposed to a limited/incorporated company or institution). ‘Communities are outcomes, not actors …complicated sets of social, political, cultural and economic relationships’ (DeFilippis, 2001: 789). A school is more complex, as it is a community with set participative boundaries, however this view does draw attention to the fact that teachers and school leaders, as individuals representing the school, can have a marked impact on the levels of social capital available to the school-as-community as much as to the school-as-institution. For example, the availability of community service experiences for students would depend on relationships between school personnel and the leaders of various service providers in the local area; on the willingness of the school to approach these providers, and on the providers to incorporate students into their services. Such relationships may well be complicated by issues of risk management and insurance – an area where policy-makers could potentially have a profound impact on local community partnerships and collaboration.

Community service as facilitated bridging?

In terms of bonding and bridging capital, community service has the potential to break down some of the negative or prejudicial aspects of bonding at the individual or micro level of social capital analysis. Some examples of community service provide school students with what may be termed a facilitated bridging experience.

Melbourne Grammar School has an ongoing relationship with a Ronald McDonald house (for families living away from home, usually with a seriously ill child in hospital).
Students visit twice per term and activities include spending time with the residents and cooking a meal. St. Johns Lutheran School students assist with a meals-on-wheels service, allowing them to meet elderly people in the community (AISV, 2006).

In both cases, only a few students take part each time and it is unlikely any networking actually takes place between the students and the people they meet, in the sense that the students gain connections they can re-use. Indeed, it is possible in this kind of context that school policy would actively discourage any further relationship not mediated by the school itself (due to risk management and insurance issues). Hence the experience is facilitated – it allows schools to provide students with an opportunity to meet people outside their usual network and in an alien context, while supporting them through the experience.

Community service, human capital, and critical social learning

As a social process, learning is ultimately restricted by social rules and values that result, more or less, in the common good. …we seem to have missed on recognising the significance of the social capital required for effective social interaction and participation. …people need to have the resources to engage in critical social learning. Critical social learning impacts directly on the development of trust, social cohesion, economic outcomes and the common good (Falk, 2001c: 2).

Ian Falk made the above comments in a CRLRA paper discussing literacy policies, vocational training and the long-term unemployed. He notes that human capital makes much of a relationship between education, productivity and earnings, and quotes Dawkins (1987: 1), whose work influenced Australian educational policy at the time:

A better educated and more highly skilled population will be able to deal more effectively with change… At the same time, education facilitates adaptability, making it easier for individuals to learn skills related to their intended profession and improve their ability to learn while pursuing that profession (in Falk, 2001c: 3).

The Council of Australian Governments’ (2006a; 2006b) National Reform Initiative is particularly concerned with human capital.

COAG agreed that human capital reform will be focussed first and foremost on a limited number of outcomes. [These could] include: …an increase in the proportion of young people meeting basic literacy and numeracy standards, and improved overall levels of achievement; an increase in the proportion of young people making a smooth transition from school to work or further study; [and] an increase in the proportion of adult workers who have the skills and
qualifications needed to enjoy active and productive working lives… (2006a: 2).

COAG does not mention social capital, which is interesting given that ‘The social context within which individual maturation occurs strongly conditions what otherwise equally competent individuals can achieve’ (Loury 1977: 176, in DeFilippis, 2001). More pointedly, Falk quotes Marginson’s (1993:53) argument that:

…human capital has failed to find empirical grounding for its key assumptions: education determines productivity, productivity determines earnings, and therefore education determines earnings… (in Falk, 2001c: 3).

Social context and resources have a significant effect on levels of educational attainment and transitions to adult environments. At the same time, ‘A lack of human capital is a barrier for civic engagement’ (Bekkers, 2005: 446). Human and social capital are ‘interdependent and mutually reinforcing’ even though ‘there is a clear distinction between them’ (Cuthill, 2003: 375; Falk, 2002). Falk goes on to conclude:

By bringing human and social capital together, we increase the capacity of people to learn and respond to change. The networks, shared values and trust they acquire through their interactions serve to bring the appropriate knowledge together in the process of shaping and shifting people's perceptions of themselves – that is, their identities – in ways that manage learning and change rather than simply being carried along on the tide (2001c: 13).

Falk argues that knowledge in itself is not enough – it’s often not what you know, it’s who you know. Aspects of identity, particularly self-esteem and self-confidence, are necessary to translate knowledge into a social environment. While only one strand of school activity and social interaction, quality community service has clear benefits for the establishment of individual social capital skills – the ability to interact meaningfully with a diverse array of people and circumstances. Both literacy and numeracy standards and the transition from school to work depend, at least to an extent, on social skills and student engagement. Participation in the wider community through service initiatives is one means of focussing on those outcomes, a means which, according to the literature, is of significant benefit.
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