4 Leveraging Social Capital

The University as Educator and Broker

Universities can significantly enrich the communities in which they are located. Through their educational role, they contribute to the overall well-being of the community by helping shape an enlightened citizenry and productive labor force. Through the musical, theatrical, and artistic activities they produce and sponsor, universities enhance the cultural life of the surrounding community, attracting residents and businesses in the process. As employers and purchasers of goods and services, they play a major role in local economies. Yet despite the myriad contributions of institutions of higher learning, their potential for community development has been and often still is overlooked by policy makers, even those within universities. Political scientist Carolyn Adams has demonstrated how policy makers continually underestimate the major role played by medical and higher education institutions in the larger economy. This failure to see universities (and nonprofits in general) as key components in the city's overall economic development schema results in lost financial opportunities of considerable magnitude,1 which, in a time of scarce and continually shrinking resources, is not a luxury a city can afford. Scarcity demands creativity, alternative visions, and innovative approaches to how we deploy our resources. One resource of universities that has been totally overlooked is social capital.

I use social capital in this chapter to refer to the connections individuals have that facilitate their ability to achieve desired ends, and I suggest that universities can be engines for the creation of social capital. Operating in ways that activate the economic and civic values associated with social capital, universities can contribute to the economic enrichment of less well-off constituents by brokering connections across racial, class, and cultural lines. Because of their educational mission; their vast networks within a city, region, and nation; their role in the political, social, economic and civic life of the city and beyond; and their legitimacy among broad constituent bases, universities can play a major role in the creation of social capital. This role becomes even more important for public institutions, especially urban ones, where there are likely to be many first-generation college students from working-class and lower middle-class families who typically do not possess resource-rich connections. For example, 41 percent of the students in the 2002 freshman class at Temple University in Philadelphia were from families whose income was low enough to qualify them for

federal grant aid. Because social capital, like financial capital, tends to be highly concentrated at the upper levels of the socioeconomic scale, public institutions can contribute at least somewhat to a leveling of the playing field.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how a university can contribute to developing the type of social capital that expands opportunities for those with few resources. The next section discusses the concept of social capital as used herein, followed by a discussion of how the educational and brokering roles of the university can be leveraged to create social capital for two primary constituent groups, college students and youth from the community. The general discussion is followed by a case study of Youth VOICES, a youth civic engagement program developed by the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia (UCCP) at Temple University. The chapter concludes with a list of the role of social capital in social learning and in contributing to the civil base of a pluralist society.

Unfortunately, much of the literature on social capital can be misconstrued as a justification for decreased government. I want to preempt any interpretation of this chapter in that vain. Although social capital is a vital resource, it will never replace or compensate for underresourced and failing schools, health care systems, physical infrastructures, and the like.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

I am of the mind that one should start simple because reality will always lend its complicating hand, hence my definition of social capital as the social connections that help individuals more efficiently and effectively pursue their ends. Drawn primarily from the works of Robert Putnam, James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu, and Ronald Burt, this relatively straightforward and simple definition raises many questions around connections, ability, and outcomes. First, what is the nature of the connections—are they many or few, strong or weak, resource rich or resource poor? Second, what is the individual's ability—based on knowledge or social and technical skills—to act on those connections? Combining one and two (nature of connections and ability to use them) determines to a large extent the value of the social capital (that is, the outcomes one can reasonably expect). Thus the simple definition has now morphed into a slightly more complex configuration as Table 4.1 demonstrates.

Table 4.1, particularly the last column, foreshadows a critical distinction within the social capital lexicon, namely, the potential for social/communitarian/psychological benefits versus the potential for material and economic gains. Although the two can be integrally related, the literature tends to emphasize one or the other. Authors such as Coleman and Putnam, who focus on the social/communitarian/psychological benefits of social capital, pay close attention to issues around norms, networks, and trust—the internally generated attributes of the group. These attributes are important for supporting individual transactions between members of the group and facilitating collective action among group members. When aggregated to the level of society as a whole, this type of social capital forms the basis of a well-functioning, robust, civil society, one that would substantiate Alexis de Tocqueville's observations in *Democracy in America*, particularly those that emphasize the rich associational life of American society.

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3 This concentration at the top refers to both quantity and quality. As will be discussed later in this chapter, not all social capital has the same value. The higher valued social capital is what tends to be concentrated among the wealthy.

4 Founded in 1997, the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia (UCCP) works in partnership with community-based and other nonprofit organizations on community-building initiatives. The underlying premise is that institutions of higher education can play a critical role in urban revitalization through a strategic application of their human capital resources. The UCCP operationalizes this principle through research, training and technical assistance, and direct services. Faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students are recruited to work on a diverse array of community-driven initiatives. The UCCP focuses its efforts in two primary areas: community economic development and youth civic engagement. See www.temple.edu/uccp.


6 This consideration, ability to use social capital, is absent from much of the literature, especially the literature that focuses on the social/civic value of social capital, such as Putnam and Coleman.

7 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Modern Library, 1943), pp. 95–101. Of course this conclusion assumes the kinds of associations that support the values embedded in democracy (liberty, equality, freedom, and the like). One could easily argue that Nazi Germany was rife with social capital. Though much of the literature fails to discuss the different variants of social capital, and this is indeed a huge flaw in that literature, it is nevertheless safe to assume that Putnam et al. were referring to the kind of social capital observed by de Tocqueville almost two centuries ago.
TABLE 4.2. Two Versions of Social Capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of Social Capital</th>
<th>Network Structure</th>
<th>Ties</th>
<th>Focus of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Economic/material</td>
<td>Fluid</td>
<td>Many/weak</td>
<td>Location of network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/communitarian/psychological</td>
<td>Dense</td>
<td>Few/strong</td>
<td>Within network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Authors such as Burt, Bourdieu, and Mark Granovetter, who have focused more on the economic and material benefits of social capital, pay close attention to the composition of the networks and their location in larger socioeconomic structures. By looking more at how networks and the individuals who comprise them are economically and socially situated, these scholars encourage us to examine the differential values of social capital. When such an examination is undertaken, the world of social capital closely mirrors that of financial capital; largely unequal distribution patterns reinforced by structural barriers that advantage those who already have significant amounts of capital (financial/social) and block those with low reserves. As Table 4.2 illustrates, those concerned with the social/communitarian/psychological values of social capital tend to emphasize close ties and dense networks, whereas those who focus on social capital as a means to economic or material gains emphasize the value of weaker ties and the fluidity of networks.

In his pioneering work on social capital, Coleman posited the notion of “functional communities” that were relatively closed and characterized by dense, cross-cutting ties that provided both access to information and norms of behavior that were informally enforced through the closed nature of the group. Coleman’s functional community is analogous to traditional societies, where the threat of social ostracism (and in some cases, even physical expulsion) was a powerful incentive for adhering to the norms of that society. These norms and the implied threat of sanctions yield the kind of trust necessary for engaging in transactions within the group (e.g., one diamond dealer allowing another dealer to take jewels home for closer inspection) and for collective action, which presumably yields a higher return than individual action.

Similarly, Putnam’s work on Italy focused primarily on how the social underpinnings of the northern and southern regions of the country either enabled or hindered certain types of economic transactions from occurring. Whereas Coleman was more interested in the micro view (the impact of the particular association on the individuals who comprised it), Putnam took a macro view, looking at how the overall organizational landscape in each region helped shape a larger civic culture. Putnam’s work in the United States, though in many ways potentially contradicting his findings in Italy, is also preoccupied with the social and civic consequences of social capital. His metaphor of bowling alone is designed to capture what he perceives as an ominous social trend: the decreased participation of Americans in organized clubs and activities such as the Lions, Rotary, Elks Clubs, PTAs, and, of course, the ubiquitous bowling league. This decline in participation reduces collective social capital, thus diminishing the quality and health of civil society.

When we turn our attention from the social and civic aspects of social capital to the economic and other material benefits potentially associated with it, we discover a very different emphasis, one concerned with the nature of the connections and their location in the larger social-economic structure. In contrast to the work just discussed, the attention here is external. Though employing slightly different language, Mark Granovetter’s work on networks is especially important. Turning earlier sociological intuitions with close-knit communities on their heads, Granovetter argued that such communities, because of the density of strong ties that characterized them, actually hinder one’s ability to access a diverse set of resources. They are communities of like-minded, like-resourced people and thus can only provide a narrow slice of the larger resource mosaic. Moreover, because dense ties are positively correlated with the amount of time that an individual spends on those connections, they limit the time available for making new connections that could yield a greater variety of resources. Granovetter’s most telling example of the consequences of strong ties is probably his work on labor markets, where he demonstrates that individuals with access to varied sources of information (that is, networks) are advantaged in their job search; the more ties and the greater the diversity of ties, the more likely a person is to get a job and a better one at that. Conversely, those job seekers with strong ties to one network are often cut off from vital information. I use this example because it directly relates social capital to economic capital, thus providing one answer to the ubiquitous question of “social capital for what?”

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11 In Making Democracy Work (pp. 83–120), Putnam suggested that northern Italy’s economic success vis-à-vis southern Italy’s was largely attributable to a type of civil society found in the former that supported the norms, networks, and trust that large-scale economic development and growth requires. However, in the United States, that very economic success appears to be at the root of our declining social capital. According to Putnam’s work in Italy, economic growth requires large amounts of a certain type of social capital. How, then, does he explain the continued economic growth in the United States in light of his alarms about declining social capital?

12 Putnam, Bowling Alone, pp. 287–349.


14 Granovetter, Getting a Job.
Granovetter’s work, in shifting the emphasis from a concern with norms and behavior to economic or other material outcomes, points us in the direction of looking at the composition of the networks, and the quality of connections within those networks.\(^\text{15}\) Scholars Erin Horvat, Eliot Weininger, and Annette Lareau addressed the question of the composition and quality of networks in the form of a direct challenge to Coleman by comparing middle-class parental networks with parental networks in working-class and poor communities in Philadelphia in terms of their relative ability to interact with their children’s schools. Their analysis revealed a striking difference in both the composition and effectiveness of the parents’ networks vis-à-vis school issues. For parents in working-class networks, the ties were based primarily on kinship, whereas the middle-class networks involved other parents and professionals. Indeed, many of the parents were themselves professionals, a characteristic typically absent from the networks of poor and working-class parents. Although both networks yielded social capital, the middle-class parental networks were much more successful in advocating for their children on education-related matters.\(^\text{16}\) Thus, although Coleman’s functional community did generate social capital, the type and value of that social capital was determined by the composition of the community.

The findings of Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau lend support to prior theories of social capital that stress the importance of the sociostructural location of networks and their members.\(^\text{17}\) This locational aspect of networks has a decided influence on the value and use of the social capital that the network embodies. Putnam captured this characteristic well when he commented that “a well-connected individual in a poorly connected society is not as productive as a well-connected individual in a well-connected society.”\(^\text{18}\) Thus locational context determines the value of social capital.

Combining Granovetter’s work on weak ties with the study of parental networks yields a useful distinction between closed (dense) and open (more fluid) networks as generators of social capital. Closed networks are characterized by a density of strong ties, often based on kinship or ethnicity and highly correlated with geographic proximity of members, whereas open networks have weaker ties, but the members have more of them and thus can tap into a more diverse pool of resources.

Finally, those with weaker ties tend to be higher up on the larger sociostructural ladder. The social capital that is characteristic of dense networks and strong ties tends to have a lower exchange value than that which comprises more open networks and weaker ties.

This distinction between network closure and a more fluid constellation of connections is well articulated by Burt in his discussion of structural holes. Viewing social capital as a metaphor for advantage, Burt explores the network mechanisms that create social capital. As with Granovetter’s work on weak ties, Burt found the network closure model of Coleman and others to be both limiting to our understanding of social capital creation and less valuable as a generator of social capital than structural holes. Put simply, structural holes are the spaces that exist between different networks.\(^\text{19}\) These spaces create opportunities for enterprises to broker the flow of information across the networks, thereby generating social capital (that is, information or connections that facilitate the achievement of identified ends). Thus for Burt the brokerage mechanism is a greater generator of social capital than the closure mechanism; closure implies stasis, whereas brokerage implies change. Burt’s broker is clearly a person with many “weak ties.”\(^\text{20}\)

Burt’s broker is also a person who possesses the intellectual and social wherewithal to capitalize on those ties. This is not surprising because crossing different networks implies the ability to operate in different environments, each of which has its own set of rules, norms, and behavior and offers a distinct knowledge base. According to Bourdieu, social capital and cultural capital are highly correlated. Defined as situationally appropriate behavior and a collection of valuable social and technical skills, cultural capital is necessary for gaining access to and maintaining the social ties that make up the platform for social capital.\(^\text{21}\)

If weak ties are indeed more advantageous than strong ones for economic and material advancement, the key question becomes, how do we create weak ties? Combining the initial definition of social capital—connections among people that facilitate the pursuit of desired ends—with the new configuration (strength of the connections, quality and location of the networks, ability to capitalize on those connections) implies that social capital or, more accurately, the activation of social capital for larger ends (economic, material, social, political, and the like) is really a multistaged process consisting of (1) exposure to (new) networks, (2) instruction in the use of those networks, and (3) access to the networks. The first two stages (exposure and instruction) imply an educational process, whereas the third stage (access) suggests a brokering function. Viewed in this light, the institution of higher education becomes an ideal vehicle for the creation and activation of social capital.

\(^\text{15}\) The terms economic and material resources are used very broadly to include ends that enhance one’s ability to reap economic gain. For instance, if a parent group successfully lobbies a school to purchase more computers and hire a computer teacher, then presumably the children will benefit in the short term by having access to more skill training, which may enhance their chances of getting into college or getting a better job down the road.


\(^\text{18}\) Putnam, Bowling Alone, p. 20.


\(^\text{21}\) Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital.”
THE UNIVERSITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL CREATION

Using the conceptual lenses of Granovetter and Burt, I argue that the educational role of the university helps break down the constraints of highly insular and all too often resource-weak networks. The skill-building activities that are embedded in larger educational processes enable young people to activate these newly created ties. The university can then play the brokering role to provide young people access to its vast universe of networks and connections.

As an educational institution, the university introduces young people to varying perspectives that in theory break down old prejudices and parochialisms. When education is transformational, it enables students to transcend more parochial ideas and values and presumably embrace more tolerance and see broader possibilities for themselves and the people around them. Students who engage in community-based, experiential learning activities may develop a richer understanding of social issues and problems and, with proper guidance, often begin to grapple with possible ways for addressing these issues. For political scientists such as Putnam and others who equate social capital with civic behavior and association, the university should be a natural setting for seeding the kinds of values and fostering the types of activities that we associate with democratic life and practice.

In addition to new ideas, the university can also provide exposure to higher education for youth in the community. For inner-city youth, universities are mysterious places that are “for someone else.” Bringing young people on to a university campus in a supportive and nurturing fashion can help demystify the college experience and make it a real possibility in their future. Such excursions also help expand the narrow and confining boundaries of the neighborhood.

Complementing the exposure to new ideas, paradigms, possibilities, and so on is a skill-building component. Individuals may have access to social capital but lack the ability to use it. Navigating new worlds requires new skills and tools. Thus developing relevant interpersonal, communication, research, and technical skills is critical to capitalizing on this newly acquired access.

Awareness of other worlds (networks) and a rudimentary familiarity with some of the tools for operating in those worlds still do not ensure access. According to Burt, “You need a sponsor whenever you try to broker a connection into a group not likely to accept you as a legitimate member of the group.” Because of its vast array of networks and the legitimacy it wields, the university is particularly well suited to playing thebroker role that facilitates connections across networks, or “bridging capital.” As a sponsor, the university can span age, class, cultural, and racial divides that all too often operate as barriers. I am not assigning an order of importance to these four factors as barriers because there is considerable dispute as to which one is more critical; some would argue that race is the overriding factor, others would suggest class. For my purposes here, suffice it to say that all four conspire to block access. The university can thus play a critical role in providing youth and college students access to networks that they could probably not become part of on their own. Most of the time these networks contain far greater resources than the networks to which the youth and college students already belong. Given its cumulative nature, the earlier someone starts acquiring social capital, the more networked they will be in the future.

In addition to legitimacy, there is also an efficiency factor at work. Social capital tends to be concentrated within powerful institutions. It is thus much more expedient for a relative novice to the game (a youth or a college student) to align with an institutional broker than to develop these connections on his or her own. In short, the university can minimize the costs and increase the likelihood of developing critical connections for these two groups of individuals.

VOICES, a youth civic engagement program of the UCCP at Temple University, is an example of one way the university can contribute to the development and activation of weak ties for young people. The next section describes VOICES, its objectives and components, and then provides examples that illustrate how, through a university-based youth civic engagement program, the educational and brokering roles of the university can be leveraged to create the type of social capital that can expand opportunity structures, broaden perspectives, and ultimately translate into material resources for youth participants and college students alike.

THE YOUTH VOICES PROGRAM

The mission of the UCCP’s youth civic engagement initiative is to empower young people to use their voice for positive social change. Building the individual and collective power of youth through collaborative research, education, and relationship building with community partners, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations, the UCCP’s youth civic engagement activities are directly rooted in the emerging research on community youth development. Central to this relatively new paradigm, which takes an asset-based approach to youth development, proposing that young people be integrally involved in all aspects of community development, is the argument that youth need to be engaged in structured and meaningful activities that challenge their mental faculties and build their cognitive, social, and civic skills while also promoting their voice. They need opportunities for meaningful participation that connect them to community issues and institutions and that provide supportive and caring relationships with adults who can serve as role models and mentors.


The community youth development program focuses on building relationships with organizations to provide assistance in critical areas related to youth engagement and youth development. Through this program, Philadelphia is being managed by the YOUTH/Philadelphia Program (YPH). YPH initiatives to venture into these new and often untried educational experiences.

The educational and brokering roles that are necessary for connecting people to programs, which are increasingly being exposed to more programs, community, and other institutions. The strong core of programs that provide training and opportunities to stem this potential is the YOUTH/Philadelphia Program (YPH), which works with youth and community organizations, community-based and other institutions, and public presentation. These projects, written documents, community-based and other institutions, are being supported by the YOUTH/Philadelphia Program (YPH).

The YOUTH/Philadelphia Program (YPH) is a youth-driven project that involves young people in building communities and supporting youth-led projects (Mission Statement: YOUTH/Philadelphia). Community-based and other institutions, youth-led projects (Mission Statement: YOUTH/Philadelphia) and the Philadelphia Phillies (the Major League Baseball team). YOUTH/Philadelphia is a youth-driven project that involves young people in building communities and supporting youth-led projects (Mission Statement: YOUTH/Philadelphia). Community-based and other institutions, youth-led projects (Mission Statement: YOUTH/Philadelphia).
earmarked for children and youth programming, a small portion has been allocated to set up a youth philanthropy initiative. Comprised solely of youth and advised by a Philadelphia Foundation staff member, this Youth Advisory Committee will have access to $100,000 per year, which they will allocate to youth-led projects.

UCCP and the Philadelphia Foundation staff worked with youth from the VOICES program and other youth programs, including the Philadelphia Student Union, the Philadelphia Freedom School, the Philadelphia Youth Network, the Boys and Girls Club of Philadelphia, the Lighthouse, and the Enterprise Center, on setting up this new Youth Advisory Committee. Young people brainstormed about what an advisory committee should look like, how additional youth organizations should be recruited, how the initiative should be presented to these organizations, and how the core group of youth planners should be expanded to incorporate more youth from other parts of the city and other youth-serving organizations. This planning and development process involved a series of monthly Saturday meetings, retreats, and the Youth VOICES Summer Academy. 29

During summer 2004, nine members of the YOUTHadelphia Advisory Committee participated in the Youth VOICES Summer Academy on a project titled “Youth Perspectives.” The youth surveyed 407 young people from 10 neighborhoods in Philadelphia to learn more about their perspectives on what services and programs should be made available to youth. They developed, administered, and analyzed the results of this survey under the guidance of four VOICES instructors. Additionally, they conducted focus groups and interviews and documented both the process and their findings in a short film. 30 This film was shown and a presentation made by each of the nine youth at the Philadelphia Foundation’s annual Celebration of Philanthropy, which was attended by nearly five hundred people, the majority of whom were adults. The information gathered by the Youth Perspectives participants formed the basis of the request for proposals that was released in early fall 2004. YOUTHadelphia made their first funding decisions in December 2004. Contrary to the traditional approaches of many foundations, which embody a “deficit model” of youth, YOUTHadelphia is promoting an emphasis on the types of programs and activities that young people think should be available to that cohort.

The VOP is a leadership development program geared toward providing youth with the skills necessary to organize for community and social change. Under the direction of a Temple doctoral student in political science who was a youth organizer for the American Friends Service Committee in Seattle, a group of eight to ten high school students meets weekly at Temple to discuss readings that address issues of power, race, class, and privilege in American society. These critical readings are supplemented by training in community and youth organizing conducted by professional organizers. These students then conduct workshops for other young people around the city and for instructors of and youth in VOICES classes. The work with VOICES classes serves as a “train the trainers” model as VOICES participants join the VOP and take these lessons back to their communities and their school peers.

The VOP has four specific areas of concentration: (1) Know Your Rights workshops, (2) Testimonial Campaign, (3) educational workshops, and (4) service projects. Led by VOP high school students, the Know Your Rights workshops educate young people about how to assert and protect their constitutional rights, about institutional racism within the criminal justice system, and about how these issues can be addressed through community organizing. These workshops were developed in conjunction with similar efforts in other parts of the country and have benefited from input from lawyers and law school students. During the first year of the program (2003–2004), youth in VOP conducted nine such workshops. Held at public schools, community-based organizations, truancy prevention programs, job training programs, VOICES classes, and a national college student conference, these workshops served 175 participants between the ages of 9 and 24. 31 The Testimony Campaign is an effort to collect stories from young people whose rights have been violated by people in positions of authority. These stories will form the basis of a booklet that will be used to educate the public on issues of police brutality, racial profiling, and police accountability. Educational workshops are conducted to raise awareness about social justice issues. These workshops are typically led by experts in the respective fields and cover a range of topics, such as community organizing, nonviolence, undoing racism, political prisoners, and military recruitment of youth. As with the Know Your Rights workshops, VOP's objective is to ultimately train the young people to conduct similar workshops in an effort to build their leadership and community organizing skills to address racism and other systems of oppression. Finally, VOP participants engage in community-based service projects, such as neighborhood clean-ups and sending books to prisoners. In addition to workshops, the VOP youth helped organize a one-day Speak Out Against Racism event at the Rotunda, a venue for public events, in West Philadelphia. Featuring hip-hop artists, poetry readings, role playing and other forms of presentation, the event attracted about 150 persons between the ages of 14 and 30.

In our continuing efforts to develop tools for amplifying youth voice, the UCCP has been incorporating more and diverse types of media into the VOICES program. Beginning with photo essays in the first VOICES classes four years ago, we

29 As of this writing, there have been three retreats with a total youth attendance of 74. Youth have come from a variety of organizations above and beyond those listed above. These workshops were planned and carried out collaboratively by youth and adults and focused on the nuts-and-bolts of grant-making, how money could be used to support youth, the mission of YOUTHadelphia, its composition, and the like.

30 The youth produced a report on their research which can be obtained online at www.phialfund.org/fundforchildren-youthadelphia.html.

31 The conference was the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) conference.
now use film (documentary and fictional), music videos, Web sites, teen zines, and existing news media outlets as part of our regular programming. Youth have worked with a combination of graduate students (film and visual anthropology), professional filmmakers, screenwriters and editors, professional writers and reporters, and Web designers getting exposure to and instruction in various media as tools for youth voice. Working with these professionals, youth have produced films on violence and safety in the community, peer pressure, affordable housing issues (in conjunction with a nonprofit housing organization), stereotypes around homelessness, and a fictional piece on the family. These films have been screened in several venues, including Temple University, the National Liberty Museum, the Prince Theatre, and the Institute for Cultural Affairs. With the exception of Temple University, these are all downtown, city-wide cultural institutions. On the writing side, a high school class developed a teen zine under the guidance of a writer from AWOL Magazine, and several other youth co-wrote a story for the Philadelphia Public School Notebook, a city-wide progressive newspaper dedicated to school reform issues.

EDUCATOR AND BROKER: ANALYZING THE UNIVERSITY’S ROLE IN SOCIAL CAPITAL CREATION

The three projects just discussed each contain strong educational and brokering functions. Educationally, each project opens up new ways of seeing the world, indeed even new worlds, to youth and college students. Most of these young people, for example, had not used video or sound equipment and certainly did not consider them as tools for articulating youth voice or community building. Similarly, none of the youth had heard of youth philanthropy, itself a relatively new (though growing) area. Finally, youth organizing has been an eye opener for many of our participants who think that no one listens to young people. Indeed, each of these three initiatives counters that view of youth as marginal to the larger society, a view that many youth, especially low-income and minority youth, have internalized.

Accompanying their exposure to new ways of getting their messages across, youth have also been exposed to individuals and organizations in a variety of professional fields. Filmmakers who use the medium as a tool for social justice have met with the young people to discuss their work and how they entered that field. Writers and newspaper editors have conducted workshops on getting a message across to a wider audience. Community organizers have talked about the strategies and politics of this tool. Funders have talked about how money is raised and distributed, and how one sets up an advisory committee to make such decisions.

This exposure to new avenues for youth voice serves several ends. First, it reinforces the efficacy of the particular tool (media, organizing, philanthropy) as a mechanism for change. Second, it provides a resource that youth can leverage as they advocate for issues of importance to them, such as safe schools, better community services for youth, and so on. In fact, a deliberate aspect of the UCCP’s youth civic engagement work is to link up youth with other individuals and organizations who are doing similar work. Third, it provides exposure to alternative career and educational paths, thus expanding the informational base of the youths’ opportunity structures. Young people (and adults) typically make decisions about their future based on the knowledge they have at hand. The more expansive that knowledge is, the broader the decisions one can make.

Each of the three initiatives also involved considerable skill building. In the media initiative, youth were trained in technical skills such as screenwriting, scripting, using a camera, editing, Web design, and writing to get a message across. In the VOP, oral presentations and leading workshops are given very high attention, both of which help build communication, leadership, and facilitation skills. And, in all three initiatives, youth were given instruction and training in how to research an issue. Specific research techniques included interviewing, surveying, Internet searches, focus groups, and library research. The VOP also puts a particular emphasis on critical reading and analysis around issues of power, race, and class. With the exception of VOP, where the high school interns have stronger educational skills than the typical VOICES participant, we have had to spend more time on skill building than initially anticipated. Many program participants have weak communication and research skills, thus forcing us to pay more attention to foundational skill building. Although this clearly limits how much can be accomplished within a given program cycle, it is nevertheless an issue that needs to be addressed if the youth are to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the program and its connection to the university.

The Temple students who serve as VOICES instructors have also experienced educational benefits from their involvement in the program. Serving as mentors and instructors has helped them develop greater confidence and self-esteem, and they have been exposed to community and institutional settings with which they were previously unfamiliar. And, like the youth they mentor and instruct, the college students have become versed in the various tools (media, philanthropy, organizing, and the like) for amplifying youth voices. Finally, all instructors receive training from the UCCP in group facilitation, conflict management, decision making, and project management and in various substantive areas, including democratic practice and government operations. By supervising the youth-driven projects, the instructors also learn about a variety of topics, such as homelessness, affordable housing, education, and community health.

Equally important in the creation and activation of social capital is the brokering function. The media projects illustrate how this role is often embedded in the educational component of VOICES. Educationally, we introduced young people to the idea of using media, most of which they had not used before, to express their perspectives on a variety of issues. This exposure was followed by the requisite skill-building activities that using media involve. Skill building was provided in house, by graduate students in film and visual anthropology, and through our partnerships with other organizations, Big Picture Alliance (BPA), Youth Empowerment Services (YES), and the Philadelphia Public School Notebook. Having youth work with these organizations gave them exposure to professional filmmakers, screenwriters, editors, writers, and reporters. Given how
closely they worked on some of these projects, this initial exposure ultimately turned into contacts for the youth. On several occasions, YES has leveraged their connections to get paid internships for youth in media positions and get students into technical training institutes. These examples illustrate the importance of weak ties, especially from a material benefits perspective.

Brokering was also critical to securing venues for the youths’ projects. Prior relationships with the National Liberty Museum, the Prince Theatre, and the Philadelphia Public School Notebook helped us secure those venues. The National Liberty Museum and the Prince Theatre have screened youth films, and the Philadelphia Public School Notebook has published youth articles. It is doubtful that the young people on their own would have known which venues to pursue and, even if they did, to get a positive response to their request. Coming in as Temple University, however, we bring the legitimacy of a major educational institution. In the process of securing these venues, we also demonstrate to youth participants the nature and power of connections and how to use them to achieve objectives. Thus the educational component now becomes enmeshed in the brokering role.

Brokering was also critical to developing both the YOUTHadelphia and the VOP projects. Although the Philadelphian Foundation funds many youth programs, they do not have youth in their staff, nor do they work with youth directly. It is highly unlikely that they would have responded positively to a group of young people coming to them with a request to set up a youth-run board. When those same youth came in under the guise of Temple’s Youth VOICES program, however, they received a very warm welcome and continue to be quite welcome at the foundation. Several have received paid internships to work on aspects of the YOUTHadelphia project.

Similarly, the ability of the VOP to conduct workshops at nonprofit organizations and several schools in Philadelphia was a function of brokering activities by UCCP staff. The head of the VOP has ties to the American Friends Service Committee and to several nonprofit organizations in the area. Additionally, her prior work in youth organizing has given her contacts and legitimacy that youth who are new to this field do not possess. The program has now developed a good enough track record for conducting Know Your Rights workshops that requests come to the program rather than the program having to seek them out. This may be the best illustration of exposure, education, and brokering leading to the creation of weak ties for program participants.

Although not phrased in the language of social capital, networks, or weak ties, various assessments that we have conducted confirm that college students and participants alike have indeed benefited from their involvement in the VOICES programs, particularly from the exposure and skill-building components. Program impact data, acquired through interviews and focus groups with participants, instructors, and partner organization staff, as well as surveys, observation, and participant projects and portfolios, indicate that program participants develop skills in a number of areas, including leadership development, collaboration and teamwork, communication (written and oral), and technology. Participants also learned how to conduct research on the Internet, how to use different media (e.g., film, Web, newspapers, zines) to promote their issues and how to work across communities on similar issues. Through community-based research activities and collaborations with advocacy organizations, youth also developed an awareness of community issues and how they relate to city-wide policy. Several youth sought community-based internships after completing the program, others expressed a strong interest in pursuing higher education opportunities, and others expressed desires to continue the projects they had worked on in their VOICES classes. In addition, a significant percent of youth participants (35 to 40 percent) re-enroll in VOICES classes, which is suggestive of a high level of satisfaction with the program overall. It is also suggestive of the development of relationships, no doubt a result of the strong mentoring component and nurturing environment. The role of trust is critical in getting youth participants to go the extra mile. In the area of media production, for example, there is often a tension between youth who just want to “shoot the camera” and the larger program objectives of teaching youth how to use media as a tool for social change or community-building objectives. These latter objectives require a more critical, thoughtful, and deliberate approach to media usage than youth participants are often willing to assume. The role of trust between instructors and youth is often the key factor in persuading young people to take this more time-consuming approach to their work.

Similarly, many college students demonstrate an increase in leadership, facilitation, and conflict management skills, a better understanding of diversity and different cultures, an increased awareness of community and policy issues, and a stronger orientation toward careers or further education related to youth development or community oriented work. Several graduates have secured work in youth and education-related fields, and others have pursued graduate education.

The effectiveness of the brokering component can also be documented. In addition to the interim benefits already noted (e.g., public screenings of projects), college students and youth participants have secured internships and employment as a result of the UCCP’s relationships. These placement sites include the Philadelphia Foundation, the National Liberty Museum, the Constitution Center, two charter schools, a Catholic school, Youth Empowerment Services, the American Street Youth Opportunity Center, Morris Square Civic Association, and the Experiment in International Living, among others.

**STRONG TIES VERSUS WEAK TIES**

Clearly, the discussion thus far has come down on the side of weak ties that are diverse in nature and large in number. Viewing social capital as a means to potential economic advancement undeniably gives the edge to weak ties. Their capacity to significantly expand opportunity structures for individuals who lack

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32 The Prince Theatre connection was actually brokered through the Big Picture Alliance, illustrating yet again the importance and power of weak ties.
access to what many middle- and upper middle-class people take for granted makes them a commodity to be desired. But what about the noneconomic benefits of social capital—the support structures that dense networks and strong ties provide? There is indeed an inherent tension between tight support systems that characterize dense networks on one hand and strong ties and broader networks that may not provide as much emotional support but contain greater economic resources. This tension is particularly acute and continuously played out in immigrant communities where the younger generation seeks to “fit in” and thus abandons the culture, language, and customs of their families for the broader but weaker ties of the larger society. The prevalence of this theme is evidenced by its appearance in popular culture; movies like Crossing Delancey Street and Avalon depict the dilemmas of those who attempt to straddle both worlds. As much of the academic literature, this tension is always depicted in dichotomous fashion. But do strong and weak ties necessarily have to be at odds?

The discussion of VOICES suggests an alternative to this dichotomy. The high re-enrollment rate experienced by the program combined with the strong identification that many youth feel with VOICES suggests that strong ties are being developed as well. This identification often extends to other family members. Many youth participants recruit siblings and cousins as well as their friends to be in VOICES classes. Parents, aunts, and grandparents have participated in larger VOICES events and activities. This participation has ranged from simple attendance at an event to participation on the advisory board, to cooking dinner for fifty people. During one of the filming projects, a participant’s family opened their house up to the entire class and crew, allowing them to film scenes in the house and store their equipment there while making sure that no one ever went hungry. Though the filming example may be an exceptional case, there is no question that for many young people, VOICES offers a safe and comfortable haven where they develop new ties beyond the confines of their existing worlds. They are not the ties that one finds in the immediate and extended family, but they are strong enough to provide the nurturing and support that all individuals need. And they are strong enough to bolster the youth as they venture into the unexplored territory of their newly developing weak ties.

Xavier de Souza Briggs, Ross Gittell, and Avis Vidal draw distinctions between bonding capital (the relationships that are good for getting by) and bridging capital (the connections that are good for getting ahead). These distinctions are, of course, analogous to strong and weak ties. Using their terminology, the VOICES experience suggests there may be a third type of social capital—supporting capital. This has

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many of the characteristics of bonding capital without the constraints that Granovetter and others have found it to contain. To the extent that it exists outside of the dense network, it is also akin to bridging capital, perhaps a prerequisite to the full-blown world of more distant, less emotionally supportive, more instrumental connections.

**Social Capital, Social Learning: A Two-Way Street**

The discussion thus far has focused on the university creating opportunities for college students and low-income youth to acquire the kind of social capital that can expand their opportunity structures. As highly marginalized groups, these two constituencies can gain a lot when the university provides the wherewithal for opportunity expansion. As part of their larger educational and public missions, universities, especially public ones, should be engaged in these activities. But youth and college students are not the only beneficiaries. The institutions from which the UCMP sought access also experienced gains. The Philadelphia Foundation, for example, is seeking genuine input from youth to inform their grant-making. They cannot go and ask youth directly because they do not have the kind of legitimacy among that group that will yield candid responses. Thus they need youth to broker that connection for them. Similarly, the Philadelphia Public School Notebook, to their credit, wanted to have more young voices in their publications. They also needed young people, and they used VOICES to broker that connection for them. If social capital refers to the connections that individuals have that facilitate their ability to achieve desired ends, then these cases demonstrate how social capital can indeed be a two-way street.

More important than the Philadelphia Foundation or other mainstream institutions increasing their social capital is the potential for these institutions to increase their social learning. According to political scientist Clarence Stone, this happens when tightly knit groups expand their membership to include more diversity. With diversity comes new perspectives that force us to look at the world in new and different ways and challenge our long-standing assumptions. I explained earlier how the narrow confines of neighborhoods create dense, strong ties. In some sense, every context creates narrow confines, bound by the limits of its members. The narrow context of the neighborhood has potentially negative economic consequences for its members. The narrowness of other environments, which house decision makers, has consequences for the overall health of civil society. In their narrowness, they remain disconnected from large portions of society. As Stone discovered with the tight-knit governing regime in Atlanta, their

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34 Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” Getting a Job, and “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited.”

exclusionary nature prevented them from “understand[ing] and act[ing] on behalf of the community in its entirety.” In an increasingly pluralistic world, this is not a healthy dynamic. The university, because of its legitimacy, its many ties, its stake in the larger society, and its commitment to education as a tool for improving democratic life, can provide the exposure, skill building, and brokering that brings these disparate members of society together. If the university can combine these functions with the creation and activation of social capital for groups with little access to that resource and open up resource-rich institutions to input from populations not typically on their radar screen, it will succeed in uniting, in practice, the civic and economic values of social capital. In short, the university will become a civic actor in the best sense of the term.

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36 Ibid., p. 242.