

# SOCIOECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF ADULT LEARNING TO COMMUNITY: A SOCIAL CAPITAL PERSPECTIVE

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*As an explanatory concept that relates skills and knowledge to economic outcomes, “human capital” has dominated for decades. Skills and knowledge are certainly central attributes of a learning society. Given the limitations of economy as a proxy for social well-being, however, two outstanding questions about the impact of adult learning on community linger: What are the multiple impacts of adult learning on community? How do these occur? To address these questions adequately, the theoretical construct of social capital is proving useful. This article examines the impacts of such a nebulous entity as adult learning on diverse socioeconomic domains, and it looks at how these impacts occur. Outcomes of learning are discussed against the eight Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development indicators of social well-being. Social capital—its networks, trust, and shared values—emerges as the missing link in explaining the integrated role of knowledge and identity resources in generating adult learning benefits.*

**This article draws on empirical** research to build theory about the impact of adult learning on socioeconomic well-being. The argument is that the impact of learning on society is brought about by social capital. The skills and knowledge of “human capital” can be brought into socioeconomic circulation only through social means.

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We argue that the amount as well as particular qualities of social capital are primary factors in maximizing the impact of adult learning on socioeconomic well-being. The theory is that through the development of trust, networks, and shared values, people's and organizations' learning are of benefit both to them and to the wider society. The arena of the wider society is illustrated here as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1982) indicator bands. That is, only through social capital are the skills and knowledge of human capital made available for the benefit of individuals, the communities, and regions in which they live and ultimately the society at large.

We will advance this theoretical position in the following way. First, we will review the relevant literature associated with adult learning and social capital, especially as these two bodies of work intersect. The review includes a representation produced by the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia (CRLRA) of how social capital is used and built at the microlevel of interaction. This is followed by the description of one study conducted by CRLRA on the role of social capital in the production of socioeconomic benefits through adult learning. We conclude with a discussion of the study that draws out the ways in which social capital is implicated in adult learning and its outcomes. We begin with a brief overview of how human capital and social capital are defined, followed by possible explanations of how human capital, social capital, and learning are interrelated.

### WHAT ARE HUMAN CAPITAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Chronologically, human capital is a more mature concept than that of social capital. The notion of humans as capital was introduced in Adam Smith's (1776/1970) *The Wealth of Nations* but was not developed until the mid-20th century. Standard definitions describe human capital as the "ability, skill and knowledge of individuals which is used to produce goods and services" (Bullock, Stallybrass, & Trombley, 1988, p. 106). In recent times, human capital has been defined more broadly. The OECD (2001a), for example, defines human capital as "the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (p. 18). Attributes include the physical, emotional, and mental health of individuals. Coleman (1988) describes it as "the acquired knowledge, skills, and capabilities that enable persons to act in new ways" (p. 100).

The notion of social capital is a more recent phenomenon of the late 20th century, although the origins of the term have been traced back to Hanifan's (1916) communitarian work. Fundamental to social capital theory is the proposition that networks of relationships are a resource that can facilitate access to other resources of value to individuals or groups for a specific purpose. Portes (1998) stated, "whereas economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships." Although

social capital theory can be traced back to classical sociological theory (Portes, 1998; Wall, Ferrazzi, & Schryer, 1998), its usefulness in current times lies in highlighting those aspects of social structure, such as the qualities of networks, that lead to economic or social gain for groups or individuals.

In the past decade, the sociological term *social capital* has gained popularity in research and social policy literature across the fields of sociology, anthropology, economics, community development, and education. Concern with the apparent dissipation of social cohesion in some communities has arguably contributed to the interest in social capital (e.g., Putnam, 1995, 1999). Terminology such as “bonding ties” (interactions between members of a group that build and maintain cohesion and solidarity) and “bridging ties” (interactions external to the group) has entered the discourse around social capital in an attempt to define and understand it (Gittell & Vidal, 1998).

At this time, no single definition of the term *social capital* has won consensus. Social capital has been viewed as a private good, that is, an asset owned by individuals, and also as a public good that is owned by a group and beneficial to members of that group (Leana & Van Buren, 1999; Portes, 1998). On one hand, the term is used to describe the resources that are made available to individuals or groups by virtue of networks and their associated norms and trust. On the other, it has been used to describe the networks themselves. Sometimes the term is used simultaneously to describe both. For some (e.g., Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000), social capital implies goodness; that is, there is no such thing as bad social capital. Others (e.g., Portes, 1998) disagree and refer to negative social capital or social liability. These differences in the definitions and interpretations of social capital are due in part to the contextual factors taken into account and to the analytic purview adopted.

More confusion sets in when the metaphorical aspect of the expression, evoked especially by the word *capital*, is further extended. We speak of building social capital, contributing to social capital, and of investing in social capital. We talk about accessing social capital, using social capital, and drawing on social capital. It seems that social capital can be replenished, accumulated, or stored, but it can also be depleted. Most important, social capital apparently can be measured, although agreement on how this should be done has not been reached.

Despite the inconsistencies of definition and debate on its merit as an explanatory tool (e.g., Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000; McClenaghan, 2000), the notion of social capital persists. In the area of education and training, this is due at least in part to the deficiencies of concepts such as human capital to adequately explain the processes and outcomes of learning.

#### *Relationships Among Learning, Human Capital, and Social Capital*

The connections among social capital, human capital, and learning have not gone unnoticed by scholars of education and learning (see Coleman, 1988; Falk &

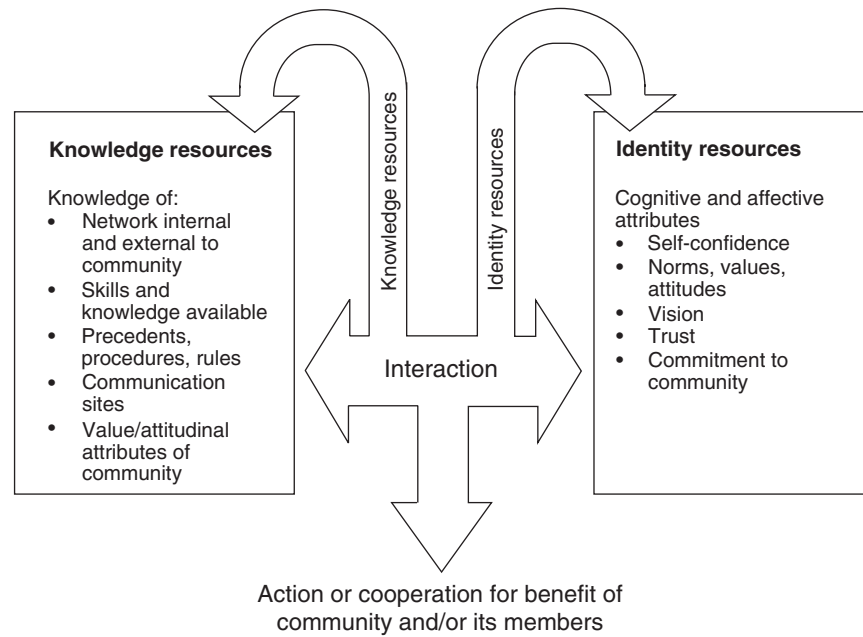
Kilpatrick, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Schuller & Field, 1998). More recently, OECD (2001b) reported on an empirical analysis of "the relationships between learning (in its various forms) and economic performance at the regional level" (p. 31). A core research question in the OECD study asks, "What is the importance of social capital in determining the processes of learning?" The answer to this question, in general terms, is that a "lack of social capital impedes learning and economic success" (p. 100).

The relationship between social capital and human capital has especially attracted the interest of researchers who theorize learning as a social activity. In a discussion of the kinds of social arrangements that best promote lifelong learning, Field and Schuller (1997) stated,

Social capital . . . treats learning not as a matter of individual acquisition of skills and knowledge, but as a function of identifiable social relationships. It also draws attention to the role of norms and values in the motivation to learn as well as in the acquisition of skills, and the deployment of new know-how. (p. 17)

The relationships among learning, social capital, and human or intellectual capital have been theorized in a number of ways (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Fevre, Rees, & Gorard, 1999; Field & Spence, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Schuller & Bamford, 2000). Here, a model representing these relationships is presented (see Figure 1). It was produced at the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia and first published in Falk and Kilpatrick (2000). In contrast to the theoretical explanations that focus on the broad social nature and impacts of social capital, the focus of this model is on the microprocesses involved in the production of social capital. It suggests that social and human capital coevolve.

This model was derived from an extensive empirical study of interactions in three towns in rural Australia between members of local networks, which were called "communities of common purpose" (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). The theoretical base of the project stems from Bourdieu's (1991) work on "habitus," Gee's (1996) on "discourse," Habermas's (1972, 1984), and some ethnomethodologically based concepts and techniques of conversation analysis (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984). In outline, broad social themes are captured by discourses (Gee, 1996). These discourses can be seen to have echoes in local interactions. Disjunctures between various discourses can be reconciled using the explanatory notion of "habitus" provided by Bourdieu (1991). Habermas (1972) allowed a theorization of the social construction of reality, knowledge, and ideology and of how sociohistorical discursive themes may be used to display the power of institutionally inscribed social practices, which serve to reproduce the social order. The resulting conceptual base ensures theoretical consistency across both the "what" and the "how" dimension of the model. The "what" is the relationship between social capital and learning, and the how is the ways in which it is produced.



**Figure 1. The Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) Model of Building and Using Social Capital**

Source: Falk, I., & Kilpatrick, S. (2000). What is social capital? A study of rural communities. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 40(1), 87-110. Reprinted with permission of Blackwells.

In the model, social capital is the knowledge and identity resources available to the community for a common purpose (see Figure 1). It is noted that the networks are considered a knowledge resource, and thus according to this model, social capital is both the networks and the resources generated through those networks. Furthermore, the resources normally defined as human capital constitute a subset of the knowledge resources and are identified in the diagram as "skills and knowledge." Learning occurs when social capital is built, that is, when the set of interactions calls on existing knowledge and identity resources and adds to them. In this model, learning occurs in the interactions. Changes to the knowledge and identity resources (which are collectively viewed as social capital in this model) that contribute to the common purpose are indicators that learning is taking place.

The model consists of three components: the interaction between participants, the resources potentially available to that interaction, and the desired outcome of the interaction. The desired outcome is the common purpose that unites and motivates the network or group (as small as two) to interact, and it is the purpose in hand that in fact defines the qualities of the social capital (knowledge and identity resources) drawn on in the interaction. That is, until the purpose is known and communally identified, the constitution of the contribution of the individuals'

knowledge and identity resources remains amorphous. It is important to note that the common purpose can be under continuous negotiation, a characteristic Wenger (1998) identified in communities of practice. The interaction can, but need not be, face to face (it can be a phone interaction or by electronic mail), and it can be formal (e.g., a meeting) or informal (e.g., a chance meeting in the street or corridor). The resources described as knowledge and identity resources can be located both within the immediate network or outside it.

Knowledge resources as identified in the diagram are described as the "common understandings related to knowledge of community, personal, individual and collective information" (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 99). Identity resources also identified in the diagram are described as the "common understandings related to personal, individual and collective identities" (p. 100). Trust is one element included here that features strongly in social capital theory generally (Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993, 1995) and that "inheres in the situated, observable and accountable reciprocity of every micro interaction" (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000, p. 104).

According to this model, the social capital available to the participants lies within the knowledge resources and the identity resources that are brought to the interaction by the participants individually and collectively. The subset of these resources used to achieve the desired objective of any specific interaction that contributes to the common purpose constitutes the social capital on and for that occasion. In all likelihood, a different set of interactions, for a different common purpose, will draw on a different subset and configuration of available knowledge and identity resources. Therefore, mapping or measuring individual knowledge or identity attributes is of limited use without knowledge of the purpose toward which the resources are aimed.

According to the Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) model, the value of the social capital available to the participants in an interaction is determined by two factors: first, the match between the desired outcome and the collective knowledge and identity resources available to the interaction and, second, the nature of the interaction itself. Central to the model is the interaction. The efficacy with which resources are drawn on is determined by the processes that occur within the interaction and the conditions under which the interaction takes place.

The model represents the relationship between the social relations (interactions) and the resources brought to those interactions as being mutually embedded. The nature of the interaction potentially changes the resources that store the participants' social capital just as the resources themselves have an impact on the nature of the interaction. Neither the social capital nor the social relations through which it is accessed remain static. Social capital building is enhanced in those interactions that display two particular dimensions. One is a chronological dimension called historicity and futurity, and the other is a relational one described as externality. The role of historicity and futurity is fundamental in the processes that transmit social

and cultural norms. The research makes clear how past learning needs to be reconciled with the present, in the context of the knowledge and identity resource of a future gaze or "vision." Externality refers to the relationships that people have with the outside world, that is, the people, ideas, and issues that are outside the "space" in which they normally operate. Externality is not only about developing and using networks (bridging ties), although that is very important. It is also about the quality of the bridging tie afforded by the identity resource. It is about having the identity resource that allows one to see oneself as a member of the larger community of communities that comprise society.

The study that is reported in the next section illustrates the relevance of social capital in describing the wider benefits of adult learning and how they come about. It also reveals the interconnectedness of the two processes of drawing on and building social capital that are implicated in identifying learning outcomes.

### THE STUDY

The study was commissioned by the government of the State of Victoria in Australia and is documented in full elsewhere (Falk, Golding, & Balatti, 2000) as a series of narrative case studies. The research concerned the impact on communities of the learning experienced by participants in the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector. ACE is one of the three main education sectors involved in postschool education in Australia. The other two are Higher Education, which is principally the domain of universities, and Vocational Education and Training, which is mainly delivered by accredited training providers.

ACE providers deliver a range of education programs. They provide literacy, numeracy, and basic education courses; courses in English for people of non-English-speaking background; general courses focussing on basic skills or standards to prepare students for further education courses; courses that qualify students for entry to tertiary institutions; vocational education and training related to employment; and general adult education that includes hobby, recreational, and personal development courses. The ACE sector in Victoria is community owned and managed. This means that ACE providers are not-for-profit organizations with voluntary management committees drawn from the community. Training is funded through a number of sources, including commonwealth and state governments.

The ACE administration has divided the State of Victoria into nine regions managed by Regional Councils that develop regional and statewide policies and strategies to promote, support, resource, and evaluate adult education provision. There are more than 500 providers of ACE throughout Victoria.

The purpose of the research was to investigate the range of individual and community benefits that can be experienced as a result of participating in ACE programs delivered in Victoria. This included identifying how, if at all, ACE programs contribute to the social capital of the communities within which they operate. The



results of the research were to be reported as a collection of analytic, narrative case studies. In this project, the term *program* referred to a course, a series of courses, or an ongoing relationship between the ACE provider and the client group that produced planned learning experiences for that group.

For the research team, the project provided a context of formal education practice in which to test the usefulness of the theoretical proposition represented by the model in Figure 1, a proposition developed from research on communities. Notwithstanding the constraints associated with the project, such as the capacity to explore only a selection of 10 programs, the research provided an opportunity to investigate the relationship between social capital and learning outcomes in a diverse range of ACE programs. In particular, it allowed further exploration of the "flow" of resources that the model attempts to capture and the role of the elements of social capital pertaining to that flow, such as trust and networks.

## METHOD

The overall research approach for the study is best characterized as theory development using a multisite, multimethod case study design. The process of case selection began with the problem for the researchers of ensuring that in the data finally collected, sufficient quantity and diversity of instances of connections among adult learning outcomes, social capital, and communities would be captured. This necessity required the use of a research model that allowed a theory-building design as well as a theory-testing element (Falk, 1998).

Regional Councils nominated programs using preagreed criteria of effectiveness. Programs nominated had to show evidence of ACE practice or activity (a) strengthening existing community networks and creating new networks; (b) developing trust within the community; (c) fostering the development of common or community goals for the common good; (d) producing transformational experiences for learners, teachers or tutors, the community, or a group within the community; and (e) being responsive to local needs. These criteria were deemed sufficient by the researchers to ensure that should connections among adult learning, social capital, and communities be present, they would be available in the data.

The 10 programs selected for the study satisfied the criteria for effectiveness listed above and were representative of the diversity of programs offered in the ACE sector. Different providers delivered the programs, and all nine regions were represented. Each program targeted one of the following learner groups: unemployed people, youth at risk, migrants of non-English-speaking backgrounds, women refugees, rural Indigenous youth, Indigenous aged people, senior citizens, rural women, rural small business owners and employees, and last, rural community leaders.

The data used in the study here were primarily interview data. Brochures and other written material relating to the specific training program and/or training provider were also collected. Interviewees for the study were trainers, managers, and



participants in the programs who were either currently involved or had been involved within the previous 2 years. The timeline of 2 years allowed for the reporting of outcomes that had occurred after the completion of the programs but had been, in the interviewees' opinion, directly attributable to them. Only participants who had reported benefits from enrolling in the program were interviewed. This constituted a limitation to the study that prevented seeking any relationship between social capital and unsatisfactory outcomes. To help check the accuracy of reported outcomes, where possible, community members such as employers of participants and members of community organizations to which participants belonged were also interviewed. In all, approximately 100 interviews were recorded.

The semistructured interviews sought information on the nature of the program and of the benefits experienced. In the case of the participants, the questions were designed to elicit narratives of experience and thus invited participants to describe the events and circumstances that led to program enrolment and to tell of their experience in the program and of experiences resulting from the program. The questions for the trainers and managers sought information on the design, rationale, and implementation of the program as well as on the outcomes. In the case of all interviewees, questions that sought to establish cause-effect relationships were asked.

Data analysis of the interview transcripts began with categorizing benefits using the OECD (1982) eight areas of social concern, a framework taken up by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001) and noted for its comprehensiveness. The eight areas are health, education and learning, employment and the quality of working life, time and leisure, command over goods and services, physical environment, and social environment and personal safety (see Table 1). Evidence related to the presence of social capital in the form of references to the elements identified in the Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) model was also sought in the transcripts. Narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 1993) of the transcript data was then used to explore any relationship between the categories generated by the OECD list and the categories generated by the list of the components of social capital.

## FINDINGS

Table 1 is a selection of the outcomes that respondents identified from their learning experiences. The table lists only outcomes in which change in practice is evident in the reports of the respondents. In other words, reported outcomes of the kind "we learnt about good health" are not included in the list, whereas a response such as "I have changed my eating habits for the better" is included. This table is not meant to convey the impression that all learning produces benefits in all categories or that the same training program produces the same set of benefits for all its participants. The point of the table is to show that the 10 programs did produce a wide range of benefits for the participants and, directly or indirectly, for the communities of which they are members.

**TABLE 1**  
**Wider Benefits of Learning in Adult and Community Education**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving physical well-being, for example,</li> <li>Improving dietary practices</li> <li>Accessing government funded health checks (e.g., breast cancer)</li> <li>Decreasing usage of drugs and alcohol</li> <li>Improving physical fitness</li> <li>Improving psychological well-being, for example,</li> <li>Repairing psychological damage</li> <li>Reducing loneliness and isolation</li> <li>Increasing self-confidence</li> </ul>
Education and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acquiring credentials</li> <li>Progressing to other formal and informal learning opportunities</li> <li>Learning skills (e.g., information technology)</li> <li>Making more informed decisions and having more informed views</li> </ul>
Employment and quality of working life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment</li> <li>Finding paid employment</li> <li>Finding better employment (e.g., better pay, job satisfaction)</li> <li>Doing volunteer work (e.g., "giving back" to community)</li> <li>Quality of working life</li> <li>Improving work practices (e.g., safety, satisfaction, productivity)</li> </ul>
Time and leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Managing time more effectively</li> <li>Engaging in recreational activity (e.g., arts, crafts, sports, hobbies)</li> </ul>
Command over goods and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independently accessing public transport and other public services (e.g., banking, the law)</li> <li>Budgeting more effectively</li> <li>Exercising citizen and consumer rights</li> </ul>
Physical environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using the physical environment</li> <li>Interpreting and following road maps and signs</li> <li>Protecting the physical environment</li> <li>Recycling waste</li> <li>Using chemical substances correctly</li> </ul>
Social environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participating in environmental projects e.g., planting trees</li> <li>(Re)experiencing a sense of trust and identification with community and society</li> <li>Interacting more effectively with family members, coworkers, and other community members</li> <li>Reuniting with family</li> <li>Using language and communication skills to interact with people outside immediate networks</li> <li>Taking leadership roles in networks</li> <li>Accessing and/or creating opportunities for cultural exchanges</li> <li>Joining and/or establishing formal or informal professional, economic, educational social networks</li> </ul>

TABLE 1 continued

<i>Category</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
Personal safety	Taking action to respond to or avoid threat to personal safety, for example, Living in safe accommodation Decreasing crime activity Driving more safely Applying conflict resolution skills in potentially volatile contexts

Not all learning programs produced benefits in all eight areas, but all produced benefits in at least three. The program for senior citizens, for example, produced benefits in five categories. The program offered a variety of courses, ranging from general interest courses such as creative writing and activities through the University of the Third Age to classes in cooking for one person and training in careful driving. In addition to the more obvious benefits of acquiring new skills and knowledge (education and learning), participation in the program by the elderly folk produced other benefits. Better dietary practices and a decreased sense of isolation and loneliness (health), better driving (personal safety), critical consumerism (command over goods and services), and engaging in productive or enjoyable activities to fill their days (time and leisure) were just some of the wider benefits of learning.

One of the 10 programs produced benefits in all eight areas for the participants or for the communities in which they worked. That program offered leadership development to community leaders over a large geographical area dotted with small towns. Participants reported that increased networking and increased self-confidence led to community action, which in turn led to community benefits. Evidence of some of the outcomes is found in the following excerpts from two transcripts: "There are youth development things occurring with the police now in the region that would never have occurred without the linkages that were created within the Program." And the other was as follows:

I'm opening a chapter of [a professional organization] in the region. Hopefully it will result in overall improvement in skills and knowledge amongst the professionals here, which will of course benefit the community. Without the confidence I got from the Program, I would never have gone and tapped on the door of the Branch Executive of the Australian. . . Society.

## DISCUSSION

The eight categories used to list the outcomes of learning in the previous section serve the purpose of illustrating how the benefits of adult learning can go beyond the usually cited ones of individual satisfaction, course completion, and

employment. Whereas the benefits listed are those that the participants personally experienced in their lives, it takes little effort to infer the benefits that the wider community gains as a result. The benefits go well beyond cost savings from reduced demand on health services, law enforcement, and social welfare services. Benefits also include economic and social contributions made by more learned citizens when engaging in family and social life, in paid labor, in volunteer work, and through civic participation more generally.

However, the list serves an even more important purpose for this article. It provides the platform for discussing how, through the use of the notion of social capital, the benefits of learning are more adequately identified and more comprehensively understood. Some benefits seem to be dependent predominantly on learners acquiring the capacity to draw on social capital in the community. Other benefits have more to do with building social capital in the community.

### *Drawing on Social Capital Is a Benefit of Learning*

If social capital refers to the set of useful resources available to individuals or groups of individuals by virtue of engaging in the appropriate social interactions, then engaging in those interactions is the key to drawing on social capital. In the study referred to here, many of the benefits from learning listed in Table 1 involved the participants having acquired the capacity to obtain resources held by groups that they had not been able to previously. Such capacity requires accessing the appropriate networks, building the necessary levels of trust, and sharing common norms and values among the group members. For example, for some learners, joining recreational clubs or other community groups instead of staying at home, watching television, and feeling isolated became possible only when they had developed the confidence that they could approach those groups, be accepted, and feel they could belong. The identity resources and knowledge resources developed through the ACE program provided the basis for developing the necessary bridging ties that led to active community participation. In cases of this kind, the benefits flowed not only to the individual but also to the group and to the community as a whole.

The African refugee women participating in a series of English as a Second Language courses in Melbourne provide a very strong example of learners acquiring the necessary wherewithal to draw on previously inaccessible social capital. In time, the women learned to promote their work in community groups and schools. They learned to shop independently, do their own banking, access government services such as health and law enforcement agencies, and manage public transport.

The African Women's Project—as it came to be called—involved learning English by writing and publishing stories of the women's experiences in their war-torn countries and refugee camps in book form and on the Internet. Learning the language was one resource of many they acquired from the process of preparing their

stories. Many of the women had been survivors of torture and had to relearn to trust people and systems in their new country. As important, they also had to learn a new identity.

Arriving at the common purpose of writing their stories took many weeks of negotiation among the women. One major impediment had been the lack of a common identity. Women saw themselves primarily as Ethiopians, Eritreans, Somalians, or from Djibouti. Historically, some had been at war with one another. Although now living in the same suburb or even in the same apartment block in an Australian city, there had been no communication between them. After many hours of interaction using interpreters, the women decided that to achieve their common purpose, they had to reidentify collectively as women from the Horn of Africa.

The leadership program already cited provided participants with a web of networks that allowed them to draw on resources not previously available to them. One leader from the business sector explained,

The people I have met and the contacts I can make now compared to before are amazing. There are lots of chief executive officers' doors I can go and tap on, senior management people in all business sectors. Even if I don't know them, I know someone who can give me an introduction or contact. . . . We're thinking of expanding our business, so I called up some alumni in that area who straight away gave me five to six names of people I needed to meet.

Clearly, learners' capacity to draw on social capital is not entirely determined by their own skills, knowledge resources, identity resources, and connections. Being able and willing to engage in interactions that draw on social capital is also determined by the norms of the group or network in which the desired social capital circulates. The program concerning the refugee women is a case in point. Fifty years ago, the norms and values of Australian mainstream society would have prevented women from non-English-speaking backgrounds from making the kinds of contacts that the refugee women in this case successfully achieved.

### *Building Social Capital Is a Benefit of Learning*

The phrase "building social capital" suggests that through particular processes and conditions, the "quantum" and/or "quality" of the social capital available to community members improves. Increases in trust levels, in the number and/or effectiveness of networks operating in a community, and in the size of network memberships are ways of identifying whether an intervention, in this case, adult learning through ACE programs, makes a positive difference to the social capital of a community.

The model of building and using social capital described earlier would suggest that changes in the level and kind of interaction or activity between actors within and between networks are also indicators of change in social capital. The nature and

frequency of interactions have an impact on social capital by influencing the kinds of knowledge and identity resources made available or generated for achieving the actors' common purpose. Social capital is built when the nature and frequency of the interactions contribute positively toward the actors' common purpose.

The experiences reported in this study provide strong evidence that outcomes from ACE learning build social capital. All the outcomes listed in the social environment category in Table 1, for instance, are explicit examples of learner activity—during the program or as a result of the program—that generated social capital through the creation of new social relations in the community that produced positive outcomes.

A common feature across all 10 cases in the ACE study was the initial site of social capital building for the learners. In all cases, social capital production began within the small community comprising the participants and staff involved in the program. The programs aimed at creating the conditions that encouraged individuals to develop the building blocks required for social capital to grow. These building blocks are trust and the appropriate norms and relationships.

As well as helping learners build social capital, the study also showed that the ACE sector builds social capital in the community at another level. ACE contributes to the development of social capital through the design and implementation of its programs. It does this first by calling on existing networks in the community and, second, by generating new networks or connections. As community-owned and community-based providers, the success of the programs is very dependent on sharing resources and on a shared ownership of the programs by the communities they service.

When the ACE provider calls on its existing networks of community groups, professional bodies, employer groups, and other training providers, it is strengthening those networks by activating them. Relationships are reaffirmed, and common values are reinforced. With the African Women's Project, for example, existing networks with community groups and agencies were called in both for the implementation and ongoing running of the program. This included recruiting the learners, arranging transport, and seeking the assistance of other training providers in information technology.

Sometimes, however, the ACE provider is the catalyst, agent, trigger, or facilitator for the development of new networks or connections. Often, the subsequent outcomes can go beyond those resulting from the initial intent of the people involved. Examples are numerous. The learning pathways made possible through the African Women's Project is just one example. In this case, the ACE provider initiated discussions with the local university of technology on the need to create learning pathways. As a result, bridging courses were set up, and many of the women began to follow pathways leading to university studies or jobs. A second outcome of meeting with the university was the eventual establishment by the university of an advisory committee to identify education, training, and employment needs in the African community and, where necessary, to develop appropriate courses. In another

program, ACE activity linked elderly Indigenous people with the younger generation. In another, leadership networks across a relatively uncohesive region of the state were expanded and used, whereas yet in another, industry training networks were developed and drawn on.

*Building Social Capital and Drawing on  
Social Capital Are Related Processes*

In the discussion so far, we have referred to the two processes of building and drawing on social capital as if they were independent of each other and even, one could infer, opposing actions. This has been done only as a means of focusing on different dimensions of the role of social capital in learning and in its benefits. Doing so has been useful also because the learner groups in the 10 cases were, in the main, marginalized relative to other groups in the same geographic community or relative to their counterparts in the more populated parts of the state. Given their marginalized status, they did not have access to many of the resources—financial, physical, intellectual, and social—that members of the mainstream groups have by virtue of being members of those groups. Making a distinction between drawing on and building social capital helped identify those participant benefits that involved developing the capability to draw on social capital that had not been previously available to them but had been available to others.

Building and drawing on social capital, however, are not two discrete processes. The model presented earlier illustrates the theoretical parameters of how building and using social capital can be simultaneously occurring processes in the one set of interactions. It is the nature of the interaction that determines whether by drawing on social capital, the pool of social capital available to the actors is being replenished or depleted.

The interconnectedness of the two processes—drawing on and building social capital—is well illustrated in the African Women's Project. The dimensions of externality and historicity/futurity are also well illustrated in the learning interactions experienced by the women. For example, at the time of the interviews, the project was in its 3rd year and on the eve of a new phase. Funding had been won to have the African Women's Project Road Show visit community centers and libraries in the region. The women would be doing readings of their stories and showing and talking about their book, photos, and video. Although the logistics sounded complicated and time consuming, the ACE provider explained the importance of continuing with the project:

It follows on from the original desires of the women. They want to have that information shared, to get the information out there. Particularly in schools. And in other places where the women themselves or their children use the services and facilities. They want people to know what it means to have come from the Horn of Africa. That's part of being united.



The processes of drawing on and building social capital are engaged at a number of different points in the series of interactions referred to in the quote, and only two are identified explicitly here. The women's increased confidence and self-efficacy, improved language skills, and their developing sense of a common identity as Horn of African women and of being valued members of their new country allow them to envisage reaching out to mainstream communities that are important to them. This, in turn, leads them to use the ACE provider's capacity to arrange for these meetings to occur (drawing on social capital). In so doing, the women can access the previously inaccessible domains of the mainstream as legitimate and valued participants with resources to offer. Through the ensuing cultural exchanges between the women and the non-African people they meet, both parties may leave the interaction with richer knowledge resources about the other's life worlds and increased identity resources by virtue of successfully holding a conversation with someone so different from oneself (building social capital).

### CONCLUSION

This article has explained and illustrated the importance of the notion of social capital in helping identify and understand the socioeconomic contributions that adult learning can make to the community. Social capital is implicated in effective adult learning in three most important ways:

1. The processes of drawing on and building social capital are intrinsic to the learning process.
2. The processes of drawing on and building social capital are directly or indirectly implicated in realizing socioeconomic outcomes from adult learning.
3. The realization of socioeconomic benefits through learning is brought about as much through the learners' identity formation and reformation as through knowledge and skills.

The OECD (2001a) has called for more research "clarifying the links between human and social capital to explore how social networks can promote the education of individuals and how education can promote social capital" (p. 70). Although the research reported in this article has shown the usefulness of the Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) model in understanding the links among social capital, human capital, and learning, it is important that the developing theory outlined here investigates the relationship between social capital and learning experiences and outcomes of varying quality—the bad and the indifferent as well as the good.

Despite the still-emerging understanding of the notion of social capital, it has begun transforming the way we understand and value human interaction, productivity, and especially learning. At the very least, it draws our attention to the social dimensions of human endeavor. The notion of social capital forwarded in this article has at its core the social interaction as the site for the combination and exchange of knowledge and identity resources. The significance of this point for a theory on

how adult learning contributes to the socioeconomic well-being of community lies in highlighting the significance of social capital in the learning processes that produce those benefits.

Last year, the OECD (2001a) published a report titled *The Well-Being of Nations: The Role of Human and Social Capital*. It followed this with a research analysis (OECD, 2001b) showing the centrality of the role of social capital in learning processes that contribute to economic outcomes. In the 18th century, Adam Smith (1776/1970), the great Scottish philosopher, social theorist, and economist, published his most influential book *The Wealth of Nations*. Although that book was a total philosophy of society, its theory on the purely economic aspects of human life has been taken up at the expense of its social commentary. One cannot help but speculate that in the beginning of the 21st century, there are telling signs that this major oversight in the understanding of human endeavor is being addressed, at least in part, through social capital theory. By explaining the role of social capital in the production of socioeconomic outcomes through adult learning, this article foreshadows much-needed policy and pedagogical work to make the theory rather more practical.

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