

The Applications of Social Capital Theory in Education

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Abstract

A newly proposed theoretical framework, social capital has successfully extended its influence over multiple disciplines. Although controversies exist in perspectives to define the theory, the common ground of these perspectives refers to extend that social networks are assets. This paper reviews studies of social capital and discuss the two perspectives and their use in education. For the normative perspective, learning and teaching strategies to promote a learning atmosphere in schools or student groups are encouraged. The strategies help to shape a shared value that learning becomes possible among students. For the resource-oriented perspective, building instrumental relationships with school personnel is particularly useful for students' schooling from disadvantaged background. Moreover, the paper calls attentions on two issues. One is that educational programs could be significant means to empower students from low-status families. The other is that more studies are needed to understand the roles of school personnel. The significant role of school children plays an important role in bridging resources for students.

Keywords: social capital, sociology of education, teacher student relationship, low-status group.

社會資本理論在教育上的應用

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摘要

社會資本理論近年來已在不同領域中展現其適用性，雖然不同的理論取向仍有爭議，但學者們都同意該理論核心即是人際網絡的資產性。依據 Dika & Singh, 2002 的分類，相信團體規範及信任為理論核心的學者，提倡形塑學校或團體內的學習氛圍是對學習的有效方法。另一派的學者則強調人際網絡的資源是否被有效的引介給學生使用，尤其對於來自弱勢背景的學生，學校內的教職員的角色就顯得重要，他們往往能協助弱勢學生開啓重要資源，取得所需的學習資訊。本研究更進一步提倡重視教育專案對於弱勢學生的重要性，同時也指出教職員角色對於學生學習關鍵角色，並引述近代學者對該角色的定義與建議。

關鍵詞：社會資本、教育社會學、師生關係、弱勢族群。

Introduction

Social capital theory has become a promising framework of analysis over past decades (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Dika & Singh, 2002; Lin, 2001; Maeroff, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Portes (2000) noted “the concept of social capital is arguably one of the most successful exports from sociology to other social sciences and to public discourse” (p.1). Indeed, the concept of social capital has been extended to education, economics, anthropology, business, and political science. It provides an exclusive framework for analyzing and understanding how and why multiple kinds of capital accumulate through the process of network development.

The World Bank has applied the theoretical concept to help economic-challenging countries. The international organization has created an implemental framework by using the social capital theory in promoting economic growth for the countries under stress. Its framework focused mainly on constructing networks and the use of network resources (Baker, 2000). The framework of the World Bank encouraged implementations from group formation to projects operation. An India’s case exemplified successful implication of the framework. A humanitarian banker showed how the low-income people create social capital by strategically use of small amount of loans. With the helps of the small loans, the people in poverty were able to create profit and became self-supporting.

Politics was a field that social capital theory shows its influence over (Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). More social scientists became interested in human networking behaviors. Political scientists sought answer how a government could be more stable, efficient, innovative and well-managed than others. Traditionally, those scholars would focus on such factors as electoral competitiveness, government design, and bureaucratic capacity. Theorists of social capital have provided a powerful additional explanatory variable. Recently, Putnam (2000) argued that American society had shown a decline over time. With stocks of nation-wide data, Putnam warned that Americans had withdrawn from civil participation, which caused less interactions and trust of the society. The new theoretical framework provided a new perspective for the development of political science.

More importantly, educational scholars began to explore the implementation of the social capital theory in the field of school and learning (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; Dika & Singh, 2001).

Their aims were to understand the difficulties faced by the minority. Most studies presented the social inequity in status, race, and gender. For example, Coleman's longitude studies (Field, 2000) drew on his earlier work which looked at the performance of black children in American secondary schools. His findings attracted considerable attentions with his expected and unexpected findings. Conventionally, social scientists believed that parents' economic and social status play determining roles in children' academic performance. Not surprisingly, school children from families with economic and social status well-placed tended to outperform those who from families with disadvantage background. However, one of Coleman's findings surprised those social scientists. When comparing minority's schooling in public and private schools, Catholic schools demonstrated lower dropout rates among students with similar background and ability levels. Race did not show its influence over Coleman's case. With the findings, Coleman and his colleagues' studies provided solid base for his latter masterpiece, in which he adopted substantial data to define the social capital theory.

This paper promoted understanding of social capital theory by reviewing previous studies. Most of all, this study attempted to draw attentions on the applications of social capital theory in education. Particularly, we believe that the best way to empower the students from disadvantaged families is through education.

The content of the paper included the definitions of social capital theory in types of perspectives. With the approaches, the influences of social capital showed on when the theory has been widely used in different professional fields. Followed by the argument of different perspectives of the theory, we presented pioneering research that attempt to explore the pathways for the development of the theory in education.

Two Perspectives of Social Capital

The concept of social capital entered the public consciousness in the 1990s with the publication of two masterpieces. Bourdieu (1986) first proposed the term of social capital with his attempt to distinct from the economic capital, cultural capital and social capital. In his work, "the forms of capital", the French sociologist put his efforts to address the social inequity caused by the levels of people's ownership of cultural capital. Groups with advantage cultural background mirror in their resources of economic capital. The privileged groups own more

access to social resources like information or knowledge than others do (Field, 2003). The American sociologist, Coleman (1988) defined social capital as a resource because it involves the expectation of reciprocity, and goes beyond any given individual to involve wider networks whose relationships are governed by a high degree of trust and share values. Coleman's definition of social capital had considerable influence on the study of education.

Since Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) have proposed different approaches to define the concept of social capital, scholars have critiqued and analyzed these concepts and potential applications. Two major perspectives can be identified relative to social capital. Dika and Singh (2002) demonstrate distinctions among the varying concepts of social capital. Their article categorizes scholars across two camps: a) in terms of norms and, b) in terms of resources. One perspective views that social capital as group assets can be shared when group norms are enforced (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Zhou & Bankston, 1996; Goddard, 2003). The other perspective perceives social capital as resources embedded in individual relationships. The benefit of resourceful relationships can favor individuals' actions (Lin, 2001; Stanton-Salazar, 2003; Van Der Gaag, Snijders, & Flap, 2004). The following section entails two perspectives of scholars on social capital and their applications in education.

Normative Perspective

The normative perspective emphasizes that using social capital as the lens of analysis has to concentrate on those characteristics, such as social norms, rules, and social trust (Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Portes, 1998; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Coleman (1988) defines social capital by its function. The characteristics of a dense group show are norms enforcement, shared beliefs, and trust, which make social capital productive. These produce group assets, which members can then share (Dika & Singh, 2002).

This perspective is rooted in Durkheim who focuses on social integration. Durkheim proposed that the importance of an individual depends on his/her identity within the group. Through network development and activity participation, the individual and the group reassure their mutual identity by repeated interactions with group members. The individual feels connected with other individuals and group. Coleman (1988) borrows Durkheim's social integration theory to identify the characteristics of groups. Social norms, rules, and social trust

produce group assets for group members. In Coleman's (1988) example of a Jewish community, a bag of precious diamonds can be exchanged among wholesale merchants without any form of insurance. If one merchant is found stealing one diamond out of the bag, he/she will lose all the privileges of the group. When norms and rules are effectively enforced within a group, trust will be engendered among all the members.

Putnam (2000) describes a declining American society wherein the citizens' networks have become disconnected. The work of this political scientist presents statistical evidence of documenting less political participation, church attendance, less interests in clubs and unions, and less time spent with friends and family. The author asserted that the social fabric of American society has declined because citizens have joined less, trusted less, and voted less. Indeed, he believes participation in formal and informal organizations help individuals construct dense networks. Participation in organizations makes individuals more apt to benefit from networks and contacts.

In a revealing publication, Putnam and Feldstein (2003) extend their focus from civil participation to that of the concept of reciprocity. The authors present several cases to illustrate their notion of reciprocity at the community level. The political scientists argue that networks of community engagement foster intangible but strong norms of reciprocity. According to the authors, reciprocity is specific. They contend that while the return may not be substantial, return is nevertheless guaranteed by mutual expectations and obligations among the alliances.

Portes (1998) also illustrated the enforcement of norms at a community level. He states that in a safe community, senior citizens can take walks on the street without fear of being exposed or being victimized by other dangers. It is a norm that gangs and crime do not present in the community. Residents are active about vigilant about crime. Similar beliefs of effective norm enforcement at the community level were reported in a community with a large population of Vietnamese. Zhou and Bankston (1996) examined the shared belief existing in the Vietnamese community living in the US. They point out that "if a child flunks out or drops out of a school, or if a boy falls into a gang or a girl becomes pregnant without getting married, he or she brings shame not only to himself or herself but also to the family" (p. 207). Therefore, norms are viewed as collective beliefs either for individuals or for a community. Given the implied constraints of norms, expected behaviors are performed and collective goals will be achieved.

Normative Perspectives in Education

One of the strengths of social capital theory lies in its ability to analyze the processes of educational attainment and academic achievement. The norm, rules and trust conform to individuals' performance of group expectations. Horvat and Lewis (2003) were interested in the socialization of African American students with regards to academic success. In particular, the researchers looked at how African American students who achieved academic success navigated between social interactions with their African American peers, and the types of positive or negative attitudes they experienced regarding their academic performance. The African American students were accused of "acting White" because of their academic successes, which overshadowed the less successful academic performances of their critical African American peers. The research found that those students with high academic performance developed strategies to manage these negative social interactions with their critics. The students used camouflaging strategies to avoid the barrage of "acting White" accusations. By doing so, the students were able to maintain connections but avert potential sanctions from their unsupportive peer group. Conversely, when the same high achievers interacted with supportive African American peers, the students readily engaged in productive discourse regarding their academic activities and aspirations. Therefore, camouflaging strategies helped these students counter negative interactions with one peer group, while seeking affirmation for their academic success from a different peer group. In short, they strategically embraced the norms, but avoided sanctions.

Balatti and Falk (2002) reviewed 10 adult programs, which aimed to promote the well-being of individuals and the community. Their findings reported that individuals in the group under observation acted to change their behaviors in order to conform to shared values after an initial consensus endorsement. The individuals were required by their initial commitment and, sort of, compete with other participants. In the work by Balatti and Falk (2002), participants in the programs accumulated social capital and built up their social networks.

Resource-oriented Perspective

Dika and Singh (2002) proposed that the resource-oriented perspective of social capital

refers to access to the social resources. The constellation of resource group access scholars is consistent with Bourdieu's (1986) concept of social capital which proposed that social capital depends on two elements: a) access to the resources possessed by the contacts, and b) the volume of social networks and the amount of crucial contacts that are possessed by institutional resources. In addition, Lin (2001) defined social capital as "resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (p. 29). According to Lin (2001), social capital is defined in terms of economic and institutional resources. Bourdieu and Lin's social capital concentrates on two elements. First, social capital is a social asset embedded in relationships. Second, resources exist in a socially hierarchical structure.

It is important to recognize that our society is hierarchical and inequities exist in many ways. Lin (2001) has suggested that most societies are hierarchical in term of the distribution of valued resources and occupants. A hierarchical society can be categorized by its distribution of valued resources and occupants across hierarchical levels. Since valued resources and the positions embedded within these resources are appreciated, individuals who possess the resources tend to protect their advantageous positions and to exclude others from sharing with them. Eventually, society assumes a pyramidal structure.

Burt's (2000) concept of social capital is defined as the "structural holes" which are capable of bridging resources between groups. The author has proposed that within dense networks, there are relative absences of ties. He has labeled these absences as "structure holes" and noted that these structural holes can advance individual mobility. However, Burt's concept of bridging groups together overlooks the structure of a society. In fact, most societies are hierarchical and pyramid shaped by class and resource holders. The upper class tends to closely connect with individuals of that class. Doing so protects the collective valuable resources they possess. Often, bridging happens only between groups in the same class.

Strong ties and weak ties refer to the quality of relationships (Granovetter, 1983). The quality of relationships with strong ties is shown as a densely knit structural clump or network. Strong ties, such as close friends and family members, are usually the sources of emotional and social supports. Weak ties refer to individuals who are acquaintances. Granovetter (1983) has suggested that the strength of weak ties is in bridging information across groups. Employment and educational opportunities, as well as certain important information are more likely to

spread through the ego's weak ties. Weak ties are different from strong ties in that dormant ties often play a part in extending the individuals' densely knit clump of social structures. On the other hand, active ties tend to maintain the closure of social relationships.

The concept of dormant ties has been applied to the process of minority students' socialization. Stanton-Salazar (2004) has argued that by building dormant ties, minority students could benefit from a wider and more resourceful middle-class network. He states that some working-class parents executed connections with upper-class friends by becoming affiliated with organizations, such as church and Catholic schools. The parents' dormant ties may not provide immediate support emotionally or socially. Yet, friends in various organizations could offer academic information and career opportunities for working-class students.

Resource-oriented Perspectives in Education

Indeed, social capital theory from a resource-oriented perspective is powerful in understanding why students perform differently in different schools. Gaps in achievement and school behavior are significantly associated with an individual's contacts whether they possess resources or not.

Horvat (2003) found that parents of different classes used different approaches to manage school situations. She concluded that middle-class parents were more aware of resources embedded in social structures than were low-status parents. The study found that middle-class parents tended to seek more influential contacts within the school system to assist them in dealing with school situations. Unlike middle-class parents who are actively engaged with key personnel at an institution, working-class parents are apt to manage situations that arise in school on an individual, rather than institutional level. Middle- and upper-class parents understand the system and are more knowledgeable in terms of accessing resources. The pathway to obtain resources and the mechanisms that make the institution function seem more accessible to advantaged classes. In addition, those who possess influential resources in the system are mostly peers, who are occupants of the middle- and upper-classes.

Emmerik (2006) has explored the effect of gender differences in his application of social capital theory in his investigation of faculty members. The findings of his study noted that men

are better able to both create emotional intensity in ties and manipulate collective resources to create social capital of their own. Consequently, findings from the study justify concerns that gender does mediate the accumulation of social capital. However, the study failed to address the mechanisms of how and why gender differences became a variable within the inequities of social capital. Yet, a similar study by Lee (2003) supports Emmerik's findings.

Lee argued that women encountered more barriers when earning tenured professorships, because of their general exclusion from the dominant male group and the subsequent difficulty in constructing social networks within faculty groups. Therefore, since women are expected to experience more barriers during the process of gaining tenure, the consequences have been apparent in the disparity of female-to-male faculty members in higher education. There are fewer tenured female faculty members, but more part-time female instructors overall than their male peers (Curtis, 2005).

As I have previously mentioned, Lin (2001) defines social capital as resources embedded in social relations and structures. These resources can be mobilized when an individual intends to utilize them in a purposive action. Lin's notion of social capital contains three aspects:

- 1) Resources embedded in a social structure; the structural (embeddedness)
- 2) Accessibility to such social resources by individuals; opportunity (accessibility)
- 3) Use or mobilization of such social resources by individuals in purposive actions; (action-oriented (use) aspects.

The notion of social capital has been applied to minority students' educational processes. Stanton-Salazar (1995) has suggested that working-class students of color found it more difficult to accrue school resources than their middle-class peers. Resources embedded in the social networks of working-class minorities are often limited or even unavailable, because the working-class students experience can be hampered by inaccessibility to social resources through parents and through their own social networks. Therefore, Stanton-Salazar (1997) highlight the importance of key school personnel available to increase the likelihood of minority students' success in school. For these low-status students of color, the effective avenue for such students to gain resources is to include resourceful personnel in their social networks.

All in all, articulation of the differential perspective of social capital gives us the strengths

and weaknesses of the two camps. The normative perspective is particularly strong in addressing the production of social capital. Individuals obtain their identities recognized by other individuals in the group by following the norms, rules established by the group, and by the trust invested in that group. These characteristics of the group make social capital productive, which benefits individuals by transferring one type of capital into other key forms of capital, such as economic capital or human capital. The normative perspective, however, has less potential to empower individuals from lower status groups. For those individuals with little or no access to social resources, the normative perspective does not provide solutions for them in status attainment. Contrary to the normative perspective, the resource-oriented perspective considers the significant role of social resources embedded in the social structure itself. Advantaged individuals preserve resources by forming dense groups in which members of the group share information, money, authority, and access to social resources. In order to accumulate social capital, low-status individuals have to expand their social network and include contacts embedded in social resources. Therefore, social capital will be bridged and mobilized when individuals have purposive actions.

Followed by the articulation of two perspectives of the theory and their applications in education, this study provided a review to show how educational programs function as vehicles to bridge accesses for students with disadvantaged background.

Empowering Students-in-Need

One of the goals of this paper is to make a connection between the two theoretical frameworks as a lens that can be utilized in understanding the mechanism of an effective student schooling. More clearly, this study hypothesizes that low-status students will be empowered from the process of their network development embedded in schools. The process would steer individuals to engage social resources and social supports through assistance from new contacts of their social networks.

Empowerment is about enabling individuals to develop capacities and strengths as well as with helping individuals engage in resources that will alleviate the impacts from a deleterious environment (Ambrosino, Hefferman, Shuttlesworth, & Ambrosino, 2005). There are two strategies to empower low status students: social psychological strategies and sociological

strategies. Social psychological strategies put forth efforts to enhance students' intentions to counter the negative impacts. This strategy hypothesizes that individuals with high resiliency are more likely to recover from the negative influences of unhealthy environment (Zimmerman, Ramirez-Valles, Zapert, & Maton, 2000). This hypothesis leads to efforts to identify those factors that are in association with individuals' resilience. However, this strategy is limited by its focus on individuals' internalization and overlooks the influence of interpersonal interaction and social exchange.

The sociological approach is supported by the premise that individuals must engage with institutional resources. Ambrosino and colleagues (2003) define the role of social worker as a person whose responsibility it is to bridge individuals with existing services. Social workers need to work as brokers who align clients with perspective "buyers" that may be useful to them. This strategy stands on the viewpoint that individuals in need will be empowered when they engage with resources. With the provision of resources, individuals can be empowered to resist the impact of deleterious environments.

A critical element of empowerment resides in the process of participation. For instance, Speer and his colleagues (2001) proposed that individuals benefit from the positive effects of social cohesion. Their study defined social cohesion as participation with trust, connectedness, and civic engagement. The process of social cohesion is to move individuals from socially segregated phrases to active participation in the mainstream of society. The study by Speer and colleagues (2001) shows that those community members who were perceived to be disconnected from the community were also perceived as significantly different from other groups in the community. The authors suggest that participatory experience within the community may be a critical factor in understanding the mechanism of empowerment.

Indeed, after reviewing salient studies of enhancement programs, the paper reveals that adolescents in need can be empowered by caring relationships with institutional agents. Relationships with institutional agents become buffers in their plight of impoverished segregated adolescents (Maeroff, 1999; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The buffering mechanism includes emotional support and resources from school personnel. Emotional attachment strengthens the adolescents' abilities to cope with incidents inside and outside the school. Institutional resources are transformed into key forms of capital for adolescents in need, thus

helping them to progress in their schooling.

Croninger and Lee (2001) conducted quantitative research to examine whether normative social capital is inversely related to the high school dropout rate. The authors were interested in finding out whether social capital contributes to a reduction in the dropout rate of high school students. The study operationally defined “social capital” as student-teacher relations and students’ trust in their teachers. The study drew data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study to examine the influence of perceived social capital. Their findings suggested that those students who are at-risk socially and academically were more likely to drop out than their peers not categorized as at-risk. However, those at-risk students can possibly reverse negative influences by constituting institutional relationships with their teachers. If there is a high level of trust in their teachers and the underlying teacher-student relationships, the possibility of dropping out is reduced considerably. In particular, the study reported that rate of dropping out by low-status students of color often decreased because of these relationships.

Muller (2001) explored the influence of caring relationships between teachers and students with regard to math achievement. The research analyzed the teachers’ and students’ perceptions of their relationships and the effects of the perceptions on students’ math progress. The findings suggested that those at-risk students who perceived their teachers’ care benefited from the accumulated caring relationships. The author surmised that the students were particularly vulnerable to their teachers’ opinions if their math achievement was barely at the passing level. In such circumstances, encouragement from their teachers helped make a difference with regard to their future in school.

We need to be careful with the implication of caring relationship between educators and students. Muller’s (2001) finding presented a picture that disadvantaged students are likely to benefit from caring relationships. However, Stanton-Salazar (2001) called for an alert that the supportive relationship would not necessarily guarantee positive behaviors. The author agreed with the positive effects of caring relationships, forming buffers for low-status students of color. The empirical data of his study did not support similar findings—that caring relationships authentically produced help-seeking behaviors. Only when the educators commit and introduce resources to the students-in-need, do the supportive relationships have the potential to transform into positive buffers for students-in-need. In other words, regular and positive

interactions with institutional agents allow students to develop a fondness for and a psychological attachment to these school agents. This psychological attachment and emotional support becomes a critical feature in student resilience and academic motivation. However, only with the presence of resources introduced to students-in-need, can students benefit from supportive relationships to achieve academic success.

The Vehicle of Resources for Students-in-Need

In my own research I have noticed that educational programs have produced a promising number of high achievers. These participating students are better able to advance their educational objectives and to better achieve academically (Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Maeroff, 1999). Maeroff (1999) states that efforts to create social capital for schoolchildren in-need have to do with building a community. The community is resourceful, when children in-need receive needed direct support and guidance. Therefore, the programs are the vehicle through which to deliver necessary resources to build community for low-status students.

Educational programs are designed for disadvantaged students to mitigate the impact of absent resources. These programs serve as vehicles to empower students in many ways. Studies have reported that these programs have provided mentoring and academic assistance (Kahne & Bailey, 1999; Maeroff, 1999, Worthy et al, 2002). Program services are generally intended to close the gap between working-class and upper middle-class students whose accessibility to resources is their distinguishing feature. After-school tutoring, for instance, provides direct academic assistance to low-status students who have limited opportunities to obtain effective learning skills.

Caring relationships embedded in the programs secure participating students from alienation. Muller (2001) investigated both students' and teachers' perceptions of their relationships. The study hypothesized that student achievement in mathematics could be correlated with their perception of the teacher-student relationship. The author suggested that students at-risks of dropping out of high school were particularly vulnerable to their teachers' opinions and feedbacks. In other words, the students' perceptions toward teachers play a critical role in their academic success. In Muller's study, caring teachers did orchestrate a classroom environment where achievement among at-risk students was advocated through successful

completion of class work and homework. The caring relationships create trust between teachers and students. Given the safety blanket of caring relationships, students are more willing to engage in learning skills. However, Muller (2001) did not address the effect of opinions and feedback from caring teachers outside the context of authentic empowering and trust-filled relationships. Empowering students, in some scenarios, means having to provide constructive criticism of the students' performance along with the personal commitment to help them improve. The depth of this kind of relationship is truly different from relationships shaped by simple daily greetings between teachers and students. Additionally, in his study, Muller was unclear as to how a caring teacher-student relationship could be promoted. If caring relationships have the potential to make a difference for at-risk students, then the opportunity to create this scenario should be increased for students-in-need.

Maeroff (1999) has also addressed the importance of caring relationships in her book where she reviews the efficacy of educational programs. Caring relationships with program staff in successful cases will allow the process of modeling to develop in the program. Most important is that participating students find a resourceful community with which to connect. This is another designed community connecting students, schools, neighboring communities, and parents where learning is accomplished together (Maeroff, 1999).

Kahne and Bailey (1999) have explored how effective programs work and why they perform better than other programs, which are considered less successful. They studied the I Have a Dream (IHAD) program in Chicago by conducting two successful subprograms. Through the lens of social capital, the authors found that effective programs must be able to encourage the development of long-term supportive relationships between participating students and program staff. These long-term relationships secure the provision of emotional support and institutional resources, such as crisis assistance and academic consulting. The relationships are avenues for driving motivation and reinforcing pro-social norms of behavior and academic commitment. In addition, they suggest that effective program depends on two themes. One is the strong trusted relationship. The other is mutual commitment and careful maintenance. Close relationships among program providers (i.e., directors, staff, and tutors) and participating students support trust and understanding.

Incorrectly, programs have often assumed that basic relationships could develop among

participants and program providers after they have gone through several program activities. The assumption has been that friendships would be initiated automatically among participating students. However, most of the time, the outcomes have not been consistent with these assumptions. Resulting relationships, either among participating students or between students and program providers, did not necessarily appear to correlate with the institution's objectives.

Kahne and Bailey's study (1999) identified two major influences that contributed to program failure: a) high staff turnover during the data collection periods, and b) insufficient staff. With program staff, for example, who only serve in the program for a short time, there is not enough time for participants to develop close relationships strong enough to make promised commitments to each other. In addition, a limited staff often becomes exhausted due to job overload. Therefore, an overloaded staff can lack the energy to give proper care to low-status, students-in-need.

Maeroff (1999) examined the effects of various programs on participating students across the country. His findings described four senses critical to effective projects: a sense of connectedness, a sense of well-being, a sense of academic initiative, and a sense of knowing. The work by Maeroff explains why and how programs across the country work effectively according to his four-sense theme. First, his study concluded that participating students in effective programs made significant connections to program staff and the institutions. For example, the El Puente Academic program exemplifies how a program helps students make connections with the program. Such connections strengthen them in direct and indirect ways. Connections to program personnel and to the institutions provide guidance and resources. Moreover, close relationships create an avenue for the students to obtain program staff's social capital, which is mobilized to meet participating students' academic or emotional needs. Connections to the institution benefit students with direct assistance, such as financial support and tutoring services. Second, educational programs also play a role in providing emotional and health support by offering the potential for programs to directly put students in contact with social welfare services and resources. The programs ensure that these participating students are under health care both physically and psychologically. Third, a sense of academic initiative is there to facilitate that the students learn "how to." The knowledge of "how-to" is imparted by educational programs with role models and mentors. At last, the sense of knowing is to enhance

the other three senses because it involves full coverage of the students' academic dimensions and social knowledge. The sense of knowing is an essential knowledge that connects the schooling with future objectives. For instance, youths in the I Have a Dream Program in Chelsea-Elliott are required to cooperate with adults in the house cleaning, but they also need to schedule time to complete homework in this after-class program. In other words, although academic success is a significant goal for most programs, to be able to transfer youths' knowledge to real life is also important for these youths in need.

Ultimately, there is a need to be cautious of the effectiveness of educational programs. Hernandez (1995) has called attention to the fact that educational programs need to be more alert to every aspect of their on-going practice. The author investigated the effects of role models adopted in a mother-daughter program. His findings suggested that the "one-shot" presentation by so-called "role models" is only effective for a few participating students who are already highly motivated. For most of the students, they believe the role model's success was beyond their reach. Although the conclusion of the study is limited because of its relatively small samples, the study provides a caution to educational programs when they intend to use role models to encourage participating students. Thus, if educational programs intend to empower students-in-need, they need to be more cautious of program practices, and carefully determine which practices are meaningful and beneficial to students.

In summary, we view empowerment as a process rather than merely a result. Through the process of network development, individuals build social relationships with resources embedded in contacts. Specifically, students in educational programs constitute the social relationships with program staff and peers. The dense connections underlying these caring relationships get the students closely engaged with institutional resources of the programs. In other words, the process of network development encourages the participating students to be involved with program activities and services. Through their participation in the program services, the institutional resources of the program enable the students to counter the deleterious effects of their past environment.

For next section, we reviewed studies that proposed a pioneering research direction in the education domain. Several scholars have put their efforts on addressing the significant role of personnel in educational programs. The scholars believed that articulation on the role of the

personnel was vital for the personnel in educational programs fully function. If they clearly understand their capability to bridge resources for the students in program, students' schooling would be advanced.

Institutional Agents

It is important to give our attention to the positions serving a significant role in the students' well-being. As discussed above, school teachers and program staff play important roles in promoting student academic success, as well as encouraging them psychologically. For low-status adolescents, schoolteachers and staff may not always function as helpful resources. This does not mean that the educational system leaves these low-status students unattended. The truth is that students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds may have significant barriers that hinder them from fully accepting the assistance offered to them. Stanton-Salazar (1995; 1997) addressed the inequities in distribution of institutional resources both embedded in school and in society. In particular, his studies focused on minority students' socialization in school (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995, Stanton-Salazar, 1997, Stanton-Salazar, 2004). He has suggested that due to cultural barriers and societal inequities, accessibility to institutional resources for low-status minority students is problematic. His model suggests that low-status students of color need to construct instrumental relationships with those individuals, namely, school personnel who have access to school resources and leaders in church and other organizations within the local community to act as informal mentors for low-status students.

Stanton-Salazar (1997) defines institutional agents as "those individuals who have the capacity and commitment to transmit directly, or negotiate the transmission of institutional resources and opportunities" (p. 6). In other words, institutional agents are those caring individuals who are able and willing to lead students-in-need to institutional resources. Additionally, institutional agents should be defined by their functions. Those caring adults can be seen as institutional agents when they are acting to provide access to institutional resources. Hence, institutional agents may include school personnel, counselors, social workers, community leaders, and middle-class family members (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

When school resources become unavailable or access becomes severely limited to these low-status minority students, their disadvantaged status easily transforms into low performance

as measured by many academic indexes in terms of years of schooling, standardized tests, college admission, and so on (Ream, 2005). Stanton-Salazar (1997) has suggested that empowering students depends on the instrumental relationships with key persons who are capable of, and committed to, negotiating access to educational opportunities. In his model (Stanton-Salazar, 1997), he proposed two avenues to empower minority students of low status: “decoding the system” and “join the power.” First, the school system constitutes mainstream culture as embedded in both the curriculum and the school structure. The very barriers that hinder culturally diverse low-status students from understanding mainstream culture, are also the barriers embedded in the curriculum and the school on a systemic level. These barriers keep students from achieving success in school. Therefore, the primary goal of positive student achievement begins with helping them make sense of the school system. Integrating their own cultures with the mainstream culture enables students to develop social cohesion, in which the process encourages students to put more effort into their school performance and achievement (Speer et al., 2001).

In addition, those caring characteristics are to be found in the key persons who will help the students merge with the mainstream system in place at school (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The caring characters are the key persons who have access to institutional resources for students of low status. Establishing instrumental relationships with these key persons is important because the relationships will enable the students to gain access to key forms of “institutional support.” For low-status adolescents of color, the ability to overcome the impact of the cultural barriers they have experienced, allows them to develop through supportive ties with institutional agents within the community and family (Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Stanton-Salazar’s (2001) quantitative and qualitative data has reflected the good nature of school staff, such as teachers and counselors, on behalf of low-status minority students (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Helping adolescents from impoverished communities not only depends on their talent and determination, it also has to involve the caring persons who will mobilize their social capital to bring the needed resources to these adolescents. The significance of an adolescents’ changes come from the quality and quantity of the connections with caring institutional agents and informal mentors in communities. Stanton-Salazar (2003) conducted his research utilizing mixed methodologies to explore how adolescents of Mexican origin, seek

help in finding and connecting to social networks. His study found that in such an endeavor, individual access provides more substantial support than group access. Those informal mentors and role models, who have overcome similar environments as their low-status students, play a meaningful role in the empowerment of these low-income, immigrant adolescents.

Maeroff (1999) has stated that educational programs create social capital for participating students, because the program extends student networks to provide wider opportunities to make contacts. The strength of contacts enables students to transform social networks into key forms of capital. It is like a ladder constructed to enter the upper levels of a warehouse. Also, bridging outside sources allows these working-class adolescents to ascend from poverty.

The concept of bonding and bridging social capital was Putnam's (2000) focus in his study on social capital. The result of bridging members between groups can often be found in the activities of organizations and also the political activities they engage in (Putnam, 2000). The exchange of information and opportunities provide better chances for individuals to achieve their career objectives or simple self-improvement. Of course, resources embedded within the group might not be applicable to dealing with every member's needs. Through members' contacts outside the group, other individuals are invited. More resources are bridged for individuals to realize purposive actions.

There is a need to clarify the roles of institutional agents. Since these key persons lead the low-status students to a metaphorical warehouse of resources, their identities assume many different forms for the students such as teachers, counselors, staff, social workers, church leaders, peers, and the like (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Stanton-Salazar defines those caring characteristics accessible to social resources as institutional agents. However, the author's definition seems a static approach to delineate those characteristics that are able to provide institutional resources for the students-in-need. However, when those characteristics are not helpful, the definition of institutional agent does not apply. Although they are assigned to positions designed to be helpful to students, they do not necessarily act as institutional agents. Therefore, we should further embrace the definition of institutional agents from a dynamic approach. Only individuals, who commit to transmitting authentic forms of social capital and are acting to materially help students-in-need, can be recognized as institutional agents.

Maeroff (1999) points out a problem that contributes to the failure of educational

programs. The author implies that the instability of program leaders directly leads to the quality of performance of student interventions or programs. He found that many programs are unsuccessful due to the inactive role of program leaders. In other words, when program leaders are not fulfilling determined roles within an educational program, the lack of leadership can damage services provided by the programs. Program leaders are to guarantee the provision of services. The role of program leaders is more than administrative and extends beyond solely monitoring program performance. One of their roles is to activate existing resources both within and outside the program. Baker (2000) has articulated that business leaders not only recognize the importance of accumulating social capital, the critical part of the leaders' job is to mobilize that social capital. In this sense, program leaders are the same as business leaders. When program heads assume the role to lead the program, they are expected to establish social networks, which may potentially benefit the program in multiple ways.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper presented previous studies on the social capital theory within several domains.

First, this paper was made by articulating a distinction between different theoretical perspectives of social capital. This articulation was designed to enable readers to understand the foci of two differential perspectives of social capital theory, their strengths and weakness, and their applications in education. Followed by the distinction of differential theoretical perspectives of social capital, this paper further discussed the application that applied social capital theory in education.

Second, I borrow the idea of empowerment theory as a lens to review the studies that investigated low-status student experience in school and educational programs. Those studies analyzed participating students' socialization in educational programs. Studies indicate how and in what ways the programs can be utilized as vehicles to impact the lives of participating students by providing them access to institutional resources. In other words, those studies reviewed in the paper show that participating students are empowered through a network development in which key persons who have access to social resources can be included within the programs. The network development within the programs steers those participating students

to engage in resources by including the resourceful key persons.

Third, this paper calls attention to the persons who are keys to enabling the lives of low-status students. The instrumental relationships with the institutional agents are critical to empowering students-in-need. And last, after reviewing these studies, I have identified a gap in the field, namely that these studies have not made the effort to understand the critical role of the program leader.

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