

Developing social capital through outdoor education in Cumbria: a case study

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Abstract

Development of social capital in communities is a central theme within current New Labour policy in the UK (Johnston & Piercy-Smith 2003). In particular the social exclusion of many Cumbrian young people has been a key concern of policy makers across the county. This paper discusses the potential contribution of outdoor education to the development of social capital for young people at a community level. Key concepts within current debates on social capital are trust and reciprocity. (Sillence 2003). The paper will explore these concepts using data from recent research on an outdoor education programme designed for a group of socially excluded young people living in Cumbria.

Introduction

Cumbria is a rural county in the North West of England with a population of just under half a million. It is famous for its scenic countryside out of which a range of outdoor education providers operate. Traditionally farming has been the main economic activity of the area. However this is now changing through a considerable growth in the economic value of tourism in the county (WWW.tourismtrade.org.uk). The opportunity provided by the Cumbrian landscape to engage in outdoor activities has played a large part in the growth of tourism in the area. These changes, whilst bringing wealth to some Cumbrian communities, have produced economic decline and community breakdown in other parts of the county.

There are many communities in Cumbria which have been identified as socially excluded for a range of different reasons (CRAZ 2002). Current national government social policy concerns focus on reversing the trends in community breakdown. This has enabled considerable amounts of government and European funding to be accessed in Cumbria with the aim of creating greater community cohesion and inclusion across the county. The development of social capital in communities is an idea that is central within current government social policy because it is seen as an important step towards reconstruction of community life. This paper uses work by Putnam (2000) on the development of social networks to interpret research data from a case study undertaken with a group of Cumbrian young people taking part on an outdoor education programme. The paper discusses the potential value of outdoor education for initiating social networks which could contribute to the growth of social capital for young people living in different excluded communities in Cumbria.

Social capital and networks of trust and reciprocity

Social capital is a term which refers to the quality of the relationships which exist in neighbourhood communities. It involves the existence of social networks which empower individuals in communities to gain access to different opportunities. Clear links are made between social capital, 'Third Way' ideas and contemporary UK government Social policy (Sillence 2003, Purdue 2001). Current policy promotes the development of social capital as a means of tackling many issues which exclude people from mainstream societal activities. Although critics of the concept of social capital argue that it presents romanticized notions of community life (Muntaner, Lynch and Davie Smith 2000) many other writers highlight the value of social capital in communities. For example Forrest & Kearns (2001) discuss the opportunity for developing social cohesion and improvement in the quality of relationships that social capital provides in communities. Bynner and Parsons (2002) highlight the part social capital can play in enabling young people to access jobs after leaving education. Kawachi (2001) identifies the value of social capital for alleviating health inequalities in communities. Others write about the impact social capital can have on a range of issues such as urban deprivation and teenage pregnancy (Johnston and Percy-Smith 2002).

Definitions of the value of social capital emphasize a range of differing characteristics. Drawing on seminal work by Bourdieu (1993, 1997) many different writers give credence to the individual benefits that community participation offers (Narayan & Cassidy 2001, Walters 2002, Johnston and Percy-Smith 2002). Group involvement can provide people with economic, cultural and social benefits which are interlinked. Access to social networks is seen as a key component for individuals to engage with wider society. This access strengthens the level of social interaction and the level of social capital in communities (Johnston and Percy-Smith 2002). Therefore, the development of social networks in communities is a fundamental part of the building of social capital (Edwards 2003, Bynner and Parsons 2002, Kawachi 2001).

There are a number of primary components that have been identified as foundational for success within the building process. Two of these components are the development of a sense of trust and a sense of reciprocity in communities (Narayan & Cassidy 2001, Johnston & Percy-Smith 2002). These two factors require the establishment of shared norms and values within a group of people. Johnston and Percy-Smith (2002) state

What is common to all these definitions of social capital are the concepts of reciprocity and a generalised trust. In other words, individuals behave towards each other with the expectation that they share certain norms and values; they engage in actions which are of benefit to others in the expectation that those actions will be reciprocated at some point in the future (Johnston and Percy-Smith 2002 pp324-5)

This need for some form of mutual trust in social networks is also identified by Giddens (2000) as particularly pertinent in the production and reproduction of social capital.

Social capital is seen as a means of support for individuals living in a community. This form of support not only offers individuals a social opportunity but can also empower them as part of a network or group and offer a better quality of life. The maintenance of social capital in a community however requires individuals to establish trust through development of understanding of shared norms and values. Sillence (2003) also makes the point that social capital offers communities a means of social exchange which can improve personal happiness, increase democracy in local areas, make communities safer, enable economic development and provide solutions for problems through different forms of collective action.

These ideas are central to Putnam's acclaimed work on social capital (Walters 2002). His work, although drawn from the experience of community breakdown in the USA, is seen as also relevant to the UK situation (Sillence 2003, Johnston and Percy-Smith 2002). For Putnam the sites for the development of trust and reciprocity in communities are the voluntary associations and activities which act as bridges that create and sustain social capital (Putnam 2000, Edwards 2003). Putnam (2000) argues that a mutual sense of trust and reciprocity between people is central in the creation of social capital and ultimately the development of healthier communities. He highlights evidence to support the notion of a geography of social trust in which those communities that have greater social trust show reduced levels of crime and better health statistics. There is generally a better quality of life in existence for those people living in communities where there is social capital which yields an established sense of reciprocity and trust (Putnam 2000).

Putnam (2000) defines the generalised principle of reciprocity as

I'll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favour. (Putnam 2000 pp 134)

This approach where the doing of one favour in the belief of a return in that favour, belies not only a sense of trust in other people, but also trust in the continuity of a set of relationships which will ultimately yield and enable the return of the balance in favours.

Putnam (2000) identifies the significance of the development of two different forms of trust in communities that have strong levels of social capital. He calls these different types of trust 'thick trust' and 'thin trust'. 'Thick trust' is based upon the knowledge and experience a person has had in relation to other people they have known over a long period of time. This is a case of someone trusting another person because the other person over time has proven themselves to be trustworthy. He states that this is trust which is "*embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent, and nested in wider networks*" (Putnam 2000 pp. 136.)

This is a more person specific trust, whilst Putnam's (2000) definition of 'thin trust' relates more to a community norm based around a general trust in other people. This thin trust he argues is a trust in the 'generalised other'. He argues that 'thin trust' is even

more useful than 'thick trust' because "*it extends the radius of trust beyond the roster of people whom we can know personally*" (Putnam 2000 pp136).

Thin trust therefore relates more to a trusting environment, rather than to a specific person. In this environment people act in a trusting way towards one another without having indepth prior knowledge of that person. Putnam (2000) argues that communities which maintain a shared norm of thin trust enable individuals living there to feel safer, to act more honestly and more openly with one another, and to generally have a healthier lifestyle.

This paper will use data from a case study to examine issues relating to the growth of trust and the development of a friendship network within a group of young people who took part in an outdoor education programme. This will include discussion on the development of shared norms and values amongst the group.

The Outdoor Education Programme

In recent years a range of outdoor education programmes have been set up for young people who have been identified as socially excluded (Owen, Fletcher & Richards 2001, Kirby 2002, Chapman 2000, Surtees 2003). Social exclusion is identified when individuals or communities are perceived as unable to engage with different mainstream activities and processes. Exclusion may be from employment, education, housing, health or welfare provision, democratic or legal processes or a range of other factors (Collins & Kay 2003). Social exclusion is often linked to economic disadvantage. There are however many different reasons why social exclusion happens. In Cumbria for example, the isolated geographic location of some communities has been identified as one cause of exclusion (CRAZ 2002). The young people who took part in this study were all identified as socially excluded. Some of them were from geographically isolated areas whilst others were from housing estates identified as having high levels of economic deprivation.

The project that formed this case study started in September 2002 funded by both Central Government and the programme providers. Its' initial target was to work with young people who were at risk of dropping out of school. Sixty young people, most of whom were on alternative educational curriculums in three different schools, were offered the opportunity to get involved in the project.

From the onset of the project in September 2002, The project leader visited each school weekly to discuss activities with the young people. Each young person who volunteered to be involved had to attend every session and activity. Failure to do so meant that person would be dropped from the project. The programme of activities took the form of:

- Weekly school meetings
- 5 days of outdoor activities in own school group at a Cumbrian Outdoor Education Centre

- 2 weekend outdoor residentials along with young people from the other schools
- Each School group doing a community project
- A two week residential at an Outdoor Centre out of Cumbria for the young people who had completed the programme
- Peer mentoring of 2nd year intake into the programme

Throughout the project the young people were encouraged to make the decisions about the outdoor activities they wanted to do. These activities included a range of outdoor experiences such as climbing, canoeing, caving and walking, as well as problem solving and team building activities using the outdoor environment. The thinking behind this was to make the experience different to their school experience through empowering the young people to have control over some of the programme content. The main project aim that this paper discusses was:

- To provide an opportunity for the group to establish good relationships with one another.

Other aims of the outdoor education project were:

- To offer the young people something different through school which might act as an incentive to stay in school. This aim was identified to try and reduce truancy by adding extra value to the school experience.
- To offer the young people the opportunity to achieve as much as possible during their time on the project because most of the young people in the group were seen as people who had not experienced much success in achieving goals and had very low expectations about their own ability to achieve.

Methodology

The case study approach

The research took the form of a case study for a number of reasons. Thirteen young people completed the first year of the project. It was felt that the size of the research population made a case study approach appropriate. Another factor that the researcher thought was significant in using a case study approach was the relationship established with the group. The resultant research methodology which grew from understanding acquired through interaction and the development of a relationship with the group was unique to this research project.

At the outset of the project the researcher was aware that her own background and attitudes were very different to those of the young people on the project. For this reason the researcher had a concern that the group could easily become closed to her if she presented herself in the wrong way to them in the first instance. Some considerable thought went into how the researcher would work with the group. At the first meeting the researcher dressed informally, was open about her research aims, and discussed how anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. She acquired informed consent of

both the young people and their guardians. The researcher attempted to appear relaxed, open, friendly and listening in her manner on all encounters with the young people. She specifically refrained from getting involved in disciplinary issues and assumed a quiet and non-judgemental stance when the group became boisterous. The researcher did not want to be perceived as a teacher or instructor because she felt this could impinge on communication between herself and the group. The researcher felt this approach worked, and from an early stage in the research the group communicated in a friendly and open way with her.

The researcher acquired a sense of what research methods would work with the group from getting to know them. Reflexivity in research presents valuable opportunities for gaining richness of data (Huberman and Miles, 2002). The reflexivity in research methods which derived from getting to know the young people involved in this project produced a unique methodology based on the researchers own intuitive understanding of what would be accepted by the group. A different relationship may well have produced a different kind of research methodology, and this was another reason why the researcher chose to conduct this research as a case study.

The research methods

In this research an ethnographic approach evolved to the data collection. Gratton and Jones (2004) highlight the value of this approach for gaining in-depth information in youth subcultures because it allows the researcher to work more closely with the group and to synthesize different types of data to inform understanding. The different research methods used in this ethnographic study are discussed below.

Participant Observation

Participant observation took place at five different activities. The first observation was for a day at a community gardening project that the young people undertook. The second was for a day at a camping residential, and the third was for three days at the final two week North Wales residential. It was through interaction with the group during the participant observations that the researcher felt she established a relationship with the group. Informal conversations and details of behaviour were noted in writing at different points during each day. The researcher's own subjectivity shifted through this interaction. Conklin (1968) discusses changes in researcher subjectivity. The researcher found that she grew closer to the young people in the group, enjoying their company, humour and antics through the participant observation. This fed into the positive perceptions the researcher had of the project which, no doubt, had some impact on the research analysis.

The two week residential diaries

Each of the young people who went on the two week residential in North Wales was given a diary to complete. Diaries have been used successfully in a number of different research contexts (Thornton, Williams and Shaw, 1997) In the diary used in this research there was a page for each day of the residential and the young people was asked to comment on what they had done and what they had learned that day. The diaries were completed at the end of each day of the two week residential. As a research method this

approach worked well producing some in depth data about the young people's feelings. Differing levels of literacy within the group clearly had some impact on the data provided by some of the young people. On completion the diaries were each photocopied and the originals returned to the young people for them to keep as a record of their activities.

The Focus Groups

A total of 13 young people took part in three focus groups. For certain research populations focus groups are seen as a less threatening way of collecting research data than perhaps individual interviews (Burgess, 1996). Two focus groups were held during the residential in North Wales in August 2003 and one took place in Cumbria in February 2004. The aim of the focus groups was to explore the feelings the group had about their involvement in the outdoor project. The final focus group was again used to discuss the group perceptions of their involvement and relationships after six months had passed by. With consent from the young people the discussions were taped. The young people were enthusiastic to share their views however they would often talk all at once. The researcher therefore had on occasions to take control of the conversation to clarify certain points which were noted down. Notes were also made at the end of each group discussion and the tapes transcribed.

In depth interviews

In depth interviews are frequently used as a way of collecting rich qualitative data on issues (Green and Chalip, 1998). Two in depth interviews were conducted with the outdoor project leader. The first of these took place prior to the researcher meeting the young people. The reason for the first interview was to gain understanding about the aims, philosophy and structure of the project. The second interview took place after the North Wales residential and was aimed at learning about how the project leader felt things had gone. An instructor who worked with the group for the two weeks of the residential in North Wales was also interviewed over the telephone and asked about his perceptions of the group and the project. The face to face interviews were taped and transcribed. Notes were taken during the telephone interview.

Data Analysis

A thematic approach was taken to analysis of the data. Emergent themes were identified across the data from all of the different research methods. These themes were consistent and related to the nature of the relationships which formed amongst the young people during the project and to the ways in which the project leaders and instructors facilitated that development. Triangulation occurred through the identification of the same themes in the data, which had been collected by the different research methods. Triangulation is a useful technique for strengthening the validity of research because it verifies the similarity in findings from a range of sources (Gray and Denston, 1998). For this reason this research has validity as a case study which raises some interesting issues for further more in-depth research. However these research findings may not necessarily be reproduced with reliability in another study due to the subjective and reflexive nature of the chosen methodology in this project.

Research findings

The development of good relationships

Data from the in depth interviews and observations:

In the interviews the project leader and instructor revealed that they shared a common approach towards the centrality of good relationships between the young people on the programme. The project leader spoke about facilitating the development of a good team relationship which had a basis as “*an informal team of friends in which the young people supported each other and were able to share their fears and concerns about school and in general*” (Project Leader Interview)

The project leader aimed from the outset of the programme to develop activities with a focus on the development of good group relationships, rather than being task oriented. The interaction between the people involved was of primary importance. The initial design of the programme was aimed at providing such a context. The groups were gradually introduced to one another, to the staff and to the programme philosophy through the weekly meetings and residentials. This was with the aim of establishing a friendly relationship with the group in which the project leader could ‘*listen to them and talk to them about their hopes and concerns*’ (Project leader interview).

The project leader felt that the initial contact with the young people was very important for establishing a context in which good relationships could be developed. At the weekly meetings, which were held in each of the schools, the programme leader spoke with the young people about opportunities and expectations attached to the project. He specifically chose to work with the young people in a way which identified him as different to their school teachers. He discussed how he initiated this in his first encounter with the groups when he left it to the groups to mediate their own noise levels and behaviour, with a view to getting the group to take responsibility for their own behaviour. He admitted that this took a few weeks to establish and some of the teachers present at the sessions found this difficult to be part of because they were used to telling the group to be quiet. However by just waiting for the group to realise that they had to be quiet before anything would happen, the young people started to be self monitoring of their noise level. The project leader felt that this approach created a less formal and closer working relationship with the young people and the staff who were on the project. It also contributed to the development of a sense of group responsibility which was seen as central to the production of good relationships throughout the project.

From the start the project leader kept talking to the group about their fears and concerns. In an early discussion one of the young men on the programme voiced worries about meeting new people from the other schools involved in the programme. When asked what he would do, he said “*I’ll probably fight with them, because I don’t know them and I’m scared of them*” (Project leader interview). For the project leader this comment was something of a revelation which allowed him to reflect on some of the complexities of

bringing together groups of young people from different schools who had not met each other previously.

The inter-school activity weekends took the form of mini-expeditions. The second weekend was held under canvas at a site in the Lake District. The groups had chosen to go mountain walking or mountain biking for their activities. From observation of the activities it was apparent that the young people from the different schools had, based on the first weekend residential, begun to get to know each other and to mix much more comfortably with one another. They laughed and joked with each other and from observation appeared not to stick to the rigidity of being only with their own group. The lines of division between groups appeared to be more related to gender than to school identity at the second inter-school activity. The project leader identified this as a very positive step towards achieving the project aim of creating good group relationships.

The culmination of the different programmed activities was the two week residential at an outdoor centre in North Wales when those young people who were still committed to the programme went as a group, to participate in a range of outdoor activities together.

The project leader highlighted a particularly significant moment for him which occurred on the coach trip down to North Wales. This was when he realised that although the group was made up of young people from three different schools, it was difficult to see any divisions amongst the whole group through the way they related to one another. The three groups from the different schools had become one group and school based divisions were not evident to the project leader at that stage. This was seen as significant because it revealed development of shared understanding and communication (Project leader interview).

The Young Peoples' experiences

Data collected at the two week residential in North Wales and the final focus group revealed many instances when the young people identified how, from the the initial friendships that had been established earlier in the programme, a level of understanding and reciprocity appeared to be developing amongst the group.

Data from the two week residential daily diaries

The outdoor activities which were part of the organised programme were identified by both the young people and the staff as sites where the young people felt their learning about one another developed. After a rock climbing activity one student wrote in his daily diary

Today we went climbing on Barmouth slabs. I climbed to the top on the lower tier and higher tier, I also belayed some people.....I've learned that I can trust people more than I knew, also that people trust me. Parts of the climbing was difficult as I couldn't find footholds. I had my friends help me by telling me where to move. (diary – young man)

This young man identified learning to trust the other people in his group and the trust that they gained in him as significant on the day that he went climbing. He also indicated the initiation of a culture of reciprocal support within the group where the other young people assisted each other through offering advice and encouragement to one another on where to move on the rock face.

Another instance of being supported by the rest of the group also occurred for this young man when he was abseiling. He wrote

Today was a good day because we all got to bond and chat with each other. I found abseiling hard because I've never done it before, but with encouragement from ... (instructor) and my friends I got down. (diary – young man)

A young woman wrote this when discussing another activity:

The trapeze – this was difficult, but I am sure that I would not have accomplished it without everything (instructor) has taught me. Looking back now on this, it will probably be one of my most frightening moments. Without the support of my friends and what the course has shown me I'd have failed. (diary - young woman)

Another young woman also wrote about the trapeze activity. She said

Today I went on a wobbly plank over a pool of water, climbed the wall and I even tried the trapeze. I learned how to work as a team, and co-ordinate with the whole group, as a whole, I think we all learnt to trust each other. I found jumping the trapeze hard, due to the height, but with a little encouragement from the rest, I did it easily. (diary - young woman)

These are just a selection of some of the written comments from the young people's diaries which revealed instances where they felt that a sense of trust and reciprocal support had been a significant contributor to their success at an activity.

Data from the focus group discussions

In the focus group discussions the young people also talked about the importance of the relationships they were establishing with the others in the group. One young woman said “*The absolutely best thing has been meeting all these people and getting to know them better*”. Similarly another young woman said “*for me the best bit is the talking with people and having fun between activities as well as in them*”.

The significance of getting to know lots of new people well was also mentioned on a number of occasions by different young people. When asked in one of the focus groups,

about what they thought they would feel at the end of the project the young people made the following comments

I'll be sad because I won't be with everybody that I've got to know really well. (young woman)

I'll be sad because I'll be leaving all these people. (young man)

I'll have mixed feelings, I'll be glad to get home, but I'll miss all these people I've got to know. (young man)

In the focus groups it was made clear by the young people that the development of a sense of friendship and support amongst the group was very important. For many this friendship was based on having gained a greater understanding of the other people in the group. The different formal and informal activities that presented themselves through the project appeared to further strengthen these bonds and establish group norms relating to trust and reciprocal support within the group. The sense of trust that the group identified was in line with Putnam's (2000) definition of 'thick trust'. This project gave the young people the opportunity to establish strong and frequent interactions. This enabled them to gain a more in-depth understanding of each other based on knowledge and experience which had been gained over a period of ten months.

Reflecting, in one of the focus groups on his experience of meeting new people, one young man also spoke about how his feelings about meeting new people had changed due to his experience on the project. He said

Sometimes its hard when you meet new people, you don't know how they are going to be with you, like (name of other young man in group) I thought he was really hard when I first met him, but he's quiet and likes people and he was alright with me.....when I meet new people in the future this will have helped and I won't worry because its been ok meeting people at (name of centre).
(young man)

From this comment and others made by the young people it appeared that for some of them, the project had made them reflect on the way that they engaged with people they were meeting for the first time. These comments indicated the development of a wider trust in people similar to Putnam's (2000) notions of "thin trust" which is a trust that extends to the wider community.

A further point of interest that came out of the final focus group that was conducted six months after the two week residential was that members of the group kept in touch with one another on a regular basis. The group had not managed to do any further outdoor activities together due to lack of resources such as transport and equipment. However the group did talk about meeting in a local town on Saturdays. From the discussion it was apparent that a social network had developed amongst the young people and that they

kept in regular contact. As a group they also talked enthusiastically about the mentoring role which they were due to embark on with the next intake of young people. The interest in outdoor activities did not appear to have diminished. Lack of resources and expertise had however meant the group had not managed to pursue the interest further at that stage.

Summary

The sense of reciprocity that developed amongst the group was evident in the support that the group gave each other during the programme. There were many different instances identified in the research that highlighted how the group encouraged each other. This was done without an expectation of an immediate payback for those people offering the support. A positive attitude towards supporting one another appeared to evolve amongst the group as their friendship developed. The programme leader and instructors were also quick to commend and facilitate intergroup support, through their encouragement and feedback.

Another aspect of the programme which revealed a type of reciprocity within the group was their individual willingness to train to be peer mentors for the group of young people who would be involved in the project the next year. The young people who volunteered to be mentors were clearly aware of the benefits to themselves in that it would enable them further access to outdoor activities. In the focus groups they also discussed how their desire to support other young people was also based on the fact that their experience had been very positive and they wanted other young people to have the same experience.

The enthusiasm of the young people to be involved in helping others within the project also revealed another type of trust. This trust was in the structure and provision of the programme. They clearly expected the programme to continue to be run in the same way and to provide the same positive experiences for other young people in the future. This belief appeared to be based on the consistent way in which the organisation of the programme had been communicated by the programme leader and instructors.

Implications

The use of outdoor education programmes for the development of trusting relationships is not a new idea. This idea has been an underpinning principle in many team building activities which have taken place in the outdoors (Mitten 1995). To some extent the findings in this research further support this idea in that they indicate that the young people involved in this programme placed considerable importance on the supportive and trusting relationships they were establishing throughout the duration of the project.

The focus of this discussion however has been about the ways in which findings from this research have revealed instances where Putnam's (2000) concepts of 'thick trust' and 'thin trust' and a developing norm of reciprocity have been indicated in the data

collected from the people who took part in the programme. The data from the participants in particular revealed a perceived sense of them learning to trust in both a 'thick' and a 'thin' way during the project.

The data highlighted how the different types of trust and a level of reciprocity developed and permeated the activities of the group. That reciprocity taking the form of mutual support for one another's activities and a willingness to commit to being a peer mentor for other young people taking part in the project the following year.

Putnam (2000) makes the point that "trustworthiness, not simply trust is the key ingredient" (p136) in the development of social networks where there is a generalised sense of trust and reciprocity. Throughout the range of formal and informal activities that have taken place on this outdoor programme to date, the young people and the programme leaders have been negotiating and establishing a sense of their own trustworthiness, as well as their own ability to trust. Not only were the young people exploring their own ability to trust their contemporaries, the project leader and instructors also had to project and maintain a consistent presentation of the programme aims, rules and plans to attract and develop the confidence and trust of the young people.

Much of the literature on the development of trust in social networks highlights the significance of a shared sense of norms and values as a start point for developing trust (Johnston & Percy-Smith 2002, Sillence 2003). Through a consistent approach to the management of this project, the project leader and instructors developed a shared understanding about what was appropriate behaviour. This approach which placed the importance of friendly open communication and behaviour as central to all activities formed a basis of shared norms and values for all the people involved in the project. This development of a shared understanding of which values and behaviour were acceptable during the life of the programme appeared to establish a group culture that enabled the young people, the project leader and the instructors to communicate with and support one another.

Putnam (2000) states that "An effective norm of generalized reciprocity is bolstered by dense networks of social exchange". The nature of the relationships established through this outdoor education experience appeared to bear some similarity to the relationship that Putnam describes in his research, although this was based on living in neighbourhood communities in America. When discussing the value of outdoor education residential Owen, Fletcher & Richards (2001) state that

Experiential personal development courses have tended to take place within a residential setting, and for good reason. In living together as well as working together, individuals establish what is, in effect, a temporary community, with all the mutual support, co-operation and potential for conflict that 'community' implies. These shared experiences, set against a back drop of challenging activities (for example, adventurous activities, problem solving

tasks and creative projects) form the basis for personal reflection and learning. (Pp 27.)

The social opportunities available on an outdoor education programme have the potential to aid the development of social capital. The intensity of an outdoor education programme which demands that the participants live together, do risk taking activities together and socialise together offers a unique opportunity for those involved to get an in-depth understanding of one another. This type of understanding may only be established over a much longer period of time in a neighbourhood community context where the nature of the social interaction would be much less regular and less intense compared to residential experiences on an outdoor education programme. It is perhaps therefore reasonable to attribute some significance to the level of intensity of social involvement that the young people on this programme experienced in relation to their developing shared understanding and learning to trust one another. Obviously this is not a scientific measure of that significance however it is an issue that perhaps warrants further in-depth investigation.

Conclusion

Quite clearly some of the factors that contributed to the positive nature of outdoor experiences of this type are outside the control of the programme organisers. For example, personal history and circumstances, personalities, the weather, health issues, and many other factors can all impact on group experience. These factors can quite easily contribute to the development of 'bad chemistry' as opposed to 'good chemistry' in a group experience. The young people who went on the final two week residential experienced exceptional weather, good health and were perceived by the project team as a group who worked well together. If some of these variables had been very different, quite possibly this project may not have been seen in such a positive way by the young people involved.

This project was perceived to work well within its aim of developing good relationships within the group. The data revealed instances when both 'thick' and 'thin' trust (Putnam 2000) were identified in relation to the behaviour of the young people. Some factors that were highlighted by the research as significant in the development of those relationships were:

- the empowering way in which the group were initially introduced to the project;
- the facilitation of activities which allowed the formation of norms and values which enabled open, friendly and trusting relationships to develop;
- the provision of future opportunities for the young people to proceed to after completion of the first year of the programme.

The regular social contact and the social network that the young people identified as a result of their experiences together on this project was seen as an important outcome with significant potential for future development. The data indicated that the young people were still keen to do different outdoor activities, that they wanted to work with other interested young people, and that as a group they remained in regular contact. The development of trusting relationships which appears to have occurred for these young people as a result of their experiences on this outdoor education programme provides exciting potential.

The young people who took part in this project are from different socially excluded communities in Cumbria. They now have a greater knowledge of outdoor activities and a network of contacts who have a similar interest developed from the understanding and trust they gained through their experiences on this project. As a group they have expressed interest in supporting other young people who want to get involved in outdoor activities. The opportunity that this presents is considerable. The social, physical and economic benefits that outdoor activities in Cumbria could offer such young people through either recreational or vocational involvement has much potential. Current national concern about social exclusion and recognition of the need to develop social capital in communities in Cumbria highlights the value of a project such as this for initiating trusting relationships which can lead to the development of social networks. With support the young people who took part in this project could further develop their own outdoor involvement, possibly to the extent of working in the outdoor education industry. They could also encourage and help other Cumbrian young people to get involved.

However there needs to be much greater understanding of the ways in which young people, such as the ones who took part in this project, can be further supported in their involvement in outdoor activities. There are a range of agencies who offer a support role for young people in Cumbria. The opportunities they provide need to be more widely understood. This requires more in-depth research. The exclusion that different Cumbrian communities experience is not homogenous (CRAZ 2002). The nature of the exclusion experienced differs from one community to another. Much greater awareness of the localised nature of the experiences of young people in these Cumbrian communities is required if suitable support is to be realised. Much more indepth understanding is also needed about the provision and constraints operating for young people in Cumbria if opportunities such as the one discussed in this case study are to be fully utilised.

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