

Roots and Effects of Social Capital Formation: *Analyzing Bruderhof Schools*

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Introduction

Research has shown that social capital can have a profound effect on schools. If Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu and Coleman (1991) are to be believed, schools with strong social relationships among teachers, students, parents, and the wider community produce better academic results. In 1990, Coleman admonished that “social capital adheres in *the structure of relations between persons and among persons*. It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production” (p. 302; emphases added).

Coleman fueled the school reform debates in the late twentieth century with his discussion of social capital in Catholic schools; but the term *social capital* was first verbalized in the Progressive Era by L. J. Hanifan, who was a supervisor of rural schools in the state of West Virginia. Hanifan attempted to gain the support of businessmen for local schools and to instruct teachers in ways to develop social capital in the small, rural communities in which they were teaching. In 1916, he urged the involvement of community members in the local schools and coined the term *social capital* as “those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people, namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals who make up a social unit. . . .” (in Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

Smylie and Hart (1999) defined social capital more recently as the “intangible and abstract resources derived from relationships among individuals and from the social structures that frame those relationships” (p. 422). Therefore, social capital is a fluid, living construct, dependent on the continuous interactions of the actors.

Recently, social theorists have decried the decline of social capital in traditional institutional structures such as schools in the United States. Putnam (1995) suggested that conventional social capital mechanisms in American society have changed drastically over the last five decades, resulting in the potential loss of social capital in all aspects of community life, of which the schools are a major component. Five years later, Putnam (2000) clarified his gloomy prognosis by explaining that connectedness and civic engagement in American society have both intensified and declined cyclically over the last century, insisting that “it is within our power to reverse the decline of the last several decades” (p. 25).

Concern over the effectiveness of public schools in the United States has led to scrutiny of social capital theory as a means of improving educational efficacy. Proponents of this theory contend that increasing social capital among teachers in any school community results in the enhancement of human capital in *both the teachers and the students* in that community by developing interactive relationships which are inherently educative. Individuals learn in situations in which they can observe, listen, and interact in a meaningful way with others. The concept of *double loop learning* proposed by Argyris (1974), for example, lends support for the connection between social capital and human capital development. In his masterpiece, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Coleman (1990) further explains this vital connection:

Just as physical capital is created by making changes in materials so as to form tools that facilitate production, human capital is created by changing persons so as to give them skills and capabilities that make them act in new ways. Social capital, in turn, is created when the relations among persons change in ways that facilitate that action. (p. 304)

Although scholars have researched many of the academic and social effects of social capital, less attention has been paid to the root causes of high social capital formation and the ways social capital can be built in school settings. It is one thing to benefit from social capital: it is another to

understand the root causes of its formation -- and yet another to apply that understanding as useful recommendations for schools. Coleman (1990) assumes that families, neighborhoods, parishes, and the other “natural” social groupings will automatically have high social capital and thereby be more productive than groups that do not have such affiliation. Citing several examples of such affiliated groups, Coleman concludes that

Social organization constitutes social capital, facilitating the achievement of goals that could not be achieved in its absence or could be achieved only at a higher cost. There are, however, certain properties of social capital that are important for understanding how it comes into being and how it is destroyed or lost. (1990, p. 304)

This paper will address this task of understanding the development of social capital and its effects on children in schools through its examination of a unique situation that characterizes the prescriptions of social capital theory.

The Case

A new type of private school, those run by the communities of the Bruderhof (“brothers-house”), provide an useful opportunity to explore and analyze the roots of social capital formation and thereby to enhance understanding of the work of Coleman (1990; also Coleman, Kilgore & Hoffer, 1987). He prescribed four basic factors for the creation of social capital: (1) closure of social networks, (2) stability of social structure, (3) shared ideology, and (4) mutual dependence. The Bruderhof communities--and their schools--exhibit these four factors to a high degree and are therefore rich in social capital, providing an excellent opportunity to learn more about both the *formation* of social capital in education, and its *effects* on school and community.

Since their arrival in the US in 1954, the Bruderhof have founded seven communities with schools covering grades kindergarten through eighth or ninth, mostly in New York state, and are growing and prospering. (Currently, after

eighth or ninth grade, the Bruderhof students attend local *public* high schools.) In each Bruderhof, families and single men and women live and work together, following the prescriptions of Jesus Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. They profess belief in the love of both brother and enemy, nonviolence, and service to others. These closed social networks promote the interdependence of their members in a stable Christian ideology, and embody the characteristics of Coleman's formulation: i.e., boundaries, interdependency and shared ideology.

Relying on a communitarian perspective that "persons are drawn to relationships and that their happiness and well-being depend upon the ability to construct satisfactory connections with others" (Beck & Foster, 1999, p. 339), the Bruderhof are unique in their communal beliefs--where all property is owned and managed by the community; where dining, praying, and educating are done in common; and where key decisions about life and membership derive from unanimous votes by the members. Much like the characteristics of an Israeli kibbutz, land, property and industrial production are owned by the Bruderhof; and even their teachers are not paid salaries but rather work in schools as their contribution to the life of the community.

A basic tenet of social capital formation is a network of trust and obligation among the members of any social arrangement. Coleman (1990) explains that "individuals in social structures with high levels of obligations outstanding at any time, whatever the source of those obligations, have greater social capital on which they can draw" (p. 307). Each of the Bruderhofs is a self-contained community that plays a specific and critical role in the economic structure of the larger Bruderhof organization. Members of each community perform specific functions that benefit all the communities combined in various economic endeavors that, in turn, support the individual communities and the members of each Hof.

The Bruderhof community as a whole runs two businesses directly related to the needs of children. The first, Community Playthings, produces wooden children's toys available for sale through catalog and the extensive Bruderhof website. Requests from neighbors of one of the Hofs led to the

development of a second business, Rifton Equipment, which constructs adaptive equipment for children with special needs. School districts throughout the nation use Bruderhof furniture and devices for both mainstream and adaptive classroom situations. The Bruderhof explain that the businesses are manifestations of their commitment to the well being of children. “Community Playthings and Rifton Equipment are more than just businesses to us. They are expressions of our faith and our love of all children, including those with special needs. We’re glad to make products that help bring happiness and joy” (Bruderhof Community at Rifton, 2000, Inside Cover).

Coleman (1990) explains that an “organization brought into existence for one set of purposes can also aid others, thus constituting social capital that is available for use” (p. 312). Further analysis of the Bruderhof schools reveals that they have begun to accept special needs, non-Bruderhof children from the surrounding neighborhoods into Bruderhof private schools, providing services unavailable to those children in the established public schools. As the Bruderhof have grown in number, their impact on the surrounding educational environment has also increased.

Growth of the Bruderhof in the United States

When the Bruderhof arrived in Rifton in 1954, they were a community of 37 people, 11 of whom were children. Within one year, their number had grown to 150 people. Many families with small children joined at that time. Currently, the Bruderhof comprise approximately 401 families in the world, the majority (370) of them in the United States. Table 1 outlines the demographics for Bruderhof families and children in the United States. Showing

Table 1--Bruderhof Demographics: 2002

Community Name/Location	Date Founded	#Families	#Children 0-9 th grade	#Children Pre-K - 9 th	#Children 10-12 th grade

Woodcrest Rifton, NY	June, 1954	65	142	90 (K-9 th)	13
New Meadow Run Farmington, PA	July, 1957	61	171	130 (K-9 th)	17
Maple Ridge Ulster Park, NY	May, 1985	55	170	123 (K-9 th)	28
Catskill Elka Park, NY	April, 1990	50	142	114 (K-8 th)	20
Spring Valley Farmington, PA	June, 1990	59	145	100 (K-9 th)	20
Foxhill Walden, NY	November, 1998	17	25	11 (K-8 th)	4
Bellvale Chester, NY	July, 2001	18	38	53 (K-8 th)	11
Totals		325	833	621	113

in column 4, Pre-K through 9th grade (the years of Bruderhof schools) enroll a total of 621 children in their seven sites. Nine non-Bruderhof students also attend their schools, of whom eight have special needs. The 113 Bruderhof high school students attend local public high schools since the communities do not operate schools beyond ninth grade.

Bruderhof Educational Philosophy

The Bruderhof--a Protestant religion, related originally to the Hutterites (an Anabaptist denomination)--has a distinct education philosophy rooted in early 20th century German pedagogy (Froebel), romanticism, and shared responsibility. “The Bruderhof is an educational community, both humanly seen and in the sense that everyone of us has to be taught by God. That process is never finished” (Yoder, 1984, p. 156). These words of the Bruderhof’s founder, Eberhard Arnold, spoken at a members meeting of the Rhon Bruderhof in Germany in 1932, crystallized the educational philosophy of

their founder and characterizes the beliefs of members of the community today. All Bruderhof members share an ideology that requires them to strive to learn more about God and their relationship to that Supreme Being and each other.

These social-religious relationships lead to the establishment of norms that are essential to the creation of social capital (Coleman, 1990). The Bruderhof believe that all adults should help the children grow in the midst of a loving adult community, based on the tenets of Christ's Sermon on the Mount and a spirit of true brotherhood and service. Conversely, the adults learn from the childlike openness of the children. Members live as single adults or in monogamous families wherein children are welcomed as ". . . a new beginning in the light (of the Holy Spirit)" (Arnold, 1935/1976, p. 1). Moreover, the community is critical to the education and development of the child. "The strongest element in education is example...Therefore, it is true that not only our teachers and educators help to mold the children's lives but also the community as a whole" (Arnold, 1935/1976, pp. 16-17).

Coleman (1990) explains that mutual obligations among individuals in a community amplifies the social capital available to the members of that community, working as follows:

Individuals in social structures with high levels of obligations outstanding at any time, whatever the source of those obligations, have greater social capital on which they can draw. The density of outstanding obligations means, in effect, that the overall usefulness of the tangible resources possessed by actors in that social structure is amplified by their availability to other actors when needed. (p. 307)

Coleman further asserts that closure in social communities allows the members to draw on the social capital derived from the establishment of mutual obligations. Bruderhof families live and work within each community. Each adult performs a job or function in accordance with the needs of the

community as a whole. The children live with their parents in single-family apartments throughout each location. From birth until Pre-Kindergarten, Bruderhof children spend their mornings in the community's day care center, while their mothers conduct their work assignments within the business and organization of the community. Mothers of newborn children are given time to tend to the needs of their children, as well as taking part in the communal work.

From pre-Kindergarten until at least grade 8, Bruderhof children stay in the local community school, which is staffed by Bruderhof members. These teachers have been selected and trained in a complex apprenticeship-based program that conveys the basic philosophy of hands-on experiences combined with a love of nature. This training program reinforces the shared ideology of the adults in the Bruderhof community, creating social capital by “imposing on an individual who holds it the demand that he act in the interests of something or someone other than himself” (Coleman, 1990, p.320).

Bruderhof children benefit from this altruism because their parents and their teachers share the common values, living and working together in the same community--and so do children attending many other religious schools. For example, Putnam (2000) summarizes the Catholic school effect described by Coleman and Hoffer (1987) as the “multi-stranded relations” (p. 302) of parents and teachers who work for the benefit of the school children. Putnam (2000) further maintains that these relationships--and the resulting social capital--are eroding in Catholic schools because “both the church and the family have lost strength and cohesion” (2000, p. 303). The Bruderhof schools exemplify the cohesiveness prescribed by Coleman (1990) and bemoaned by Putnam (2000) as lacking in public school communities and declining in Catholic schools.

In short, as the twenty-first century opens, Americans are going to church less often than we did three or four decades ago, and the churches we go to are less engaged with the wider community. Trends in religious life reinforce rather than counterbalance the ominous

plunge in social connectedness in the secular community. (Putnam, 2000, p. 79)

The Bruderhof provide a stable community that allows them to educate their children in an environment rich in social capital. Much of that stability derives from the organized curriculum that each Bruderhof school follows.

Curriculum

Bruderhof education has its roots in the works of Friedrich Froebel who started the first kindergarten in Germany. Together with his contemporary, Maria Montessori, Froebel focussed attention of twentieth century educators on the needs of young children and on ways to cultivate their natural sense of wonder. The Bruderhof web-page on education proclaims these words of Froebel: “I would educate human beings who with their feet stand rooted in the earth, whose heads reach even into heaven and there behold the truth, and in whose hearts are united both heaven and earth” (see Bruderhof Website). These words guide the Bruderhof curriculum.

Eberhard Arnold, the founder of Bruderhof, prescribed a level of excellence for Bruderhof schools that should exceed that of local educational institutions. He wrote: “In our schools, teaching should be on a deeper level, more thorough and more inspiring than anywhere else; it should awaken the children’s keen interest and encourage independent and conscientious work” (Arnold, 1935/1976, p. 35). While emphasizing the development of basic skills, Bruderhof teachers encourage individual and small-group explorations that develop higher order thinking skills. History, both of the world in general and especially the community in particular, is very important.

Bruderhof children readily share their own personal lineage in the community as well as the history of the group from its origins in Germany. The Woodcrest Community, in Rifton, New York, headquarters for all the Bruderhof communities, houses a comprehensive Bruderhof museum with exhibits designed and executed by the children and their teachers. A common history

and an active recall of shared lineage increase the social capital available to the children of the Bruderhof.

Hands-on experience, a love of nature, and value formation further characterize the Bruderhof school experience, summarized as: “Bruderhof education goes far beyond academics, for learning to work with one’s hands and to be a person of character are just as important” (see Bruderhof Website). This emphasis on shared ideology imposes on individual members of the Bruderhof the responsibility to be attentive to each other as equally valuable in the community. From this responsibility derives an enhanced sense of social capital.

The children spend the morning in class learning skills in relatively small classes. The smallest school in the Foxhill Community has a total of 11 children in all grades Pre-K-9, while the largest school, New Meadow Run, has 129 pupils. Children are valued equally for their practical, artistic, physical, and academic skills. Music and art are important parts of the curriculum. Bruderhof communities sing regularly at meals and gatherings, so that music provides entertainment and religious expression, as well as a means of transmitting culture and values. The Bellvale Community, in Chester, New York, is the site of a huge mural of the New York skyline resting on a base of lilies, the Bruderhof symbol of peace.

Older children from the contiguous Bruderhof communities, as well as their teachers, created the mural to commemorate the six-month anniversary of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Communal activities such as these unite the individual members of each *Hof* [“house”] or community in a common identity that reinforces the stability of their social arrangement, an essential factor in the creation of social capital.

After morning classes, the children join their parents for lunch, where all Bruderhof members eat a daily communal meal, seated with their families. Guests are welcome at these meals and are introduced to the community. At this time, various group members share news and announcements about the group’s current concerns and impart lessons about the group’s cultural history.

The entire community celebrates birthdays and anniversaries at these communal meals, singing songs from the community repertoire and Bruderhof songbooks and hymnals. Since the communities do not have televisions or even computers in their schools, music and singing are a major form of entertainment. The children are encouraged to put on plays and skits for the community. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) categorize these interactions as examples of “intergenerational closure” that enhances social capital development for all participants and is particularly beneficial for children.

After lunch, the children spend an hour with their mothers to discuss the morning events and relax before returning for the afternoon’s explorations. Nature walks, science projects, practical arts, games, and community work projects complete the rest of the school day. The children then return to their homes to have dinner with their families unless the community has scheduled a dinner for that evening. For the younger children, the evening hours are free for family interactions and play time since Bruderhof teachers assign no homework until grade 5, and even then it is kept to a minimum.

On the other hand, the older children are expected to be diligent about their homework assignments, which are pertinent to the work of the day. The curriculum includes traditional reading, writing, and mathematics instruction, explorations of the natural environment, history, and the study of Spanish as a second language for all students. Many of the older members of the community speak both German and Spanish, because of their history in both countries (Bruderhof was founded in Germany, escaped to Paraguay during the Nazi era, and immigrated to the US in the 1950s). The children also are familiar with the German language through the folksongs that form part of their cultural experience.

When interviewed, Bruderhof parents describe their children, especially the pre-adolescents, as “pretty normal” in the range of their responses to homework assignments and class activities. When children complain about the policies or routines of a particular teacher, the parents seek to handle difficulties and misunderstandings quickly by visiting teachers at their homes in

the evening to resolve any problems or concerns. In this regard, the Bruderhof members are following their founder's prescription of *straight talking in love*: "There must never be talk, either in open remarks or by insinuation, against a brother or a sister, against their individual characteristics—under no circumstances behind the person's back. Talking in one's family is no exception" (Yoder, 1984, p. 130). This policy exemplifies Coleman's description of the effect of closure on creating social capital. "In a community where there is an extensive set of expectations and obligations connecting adults, each adult can use his drawing account with other adults to help supervise and control his children" (Coleman, 1990, p.316)

Maintenance of Norms

All Bruderhof schools follow the same policies and procedures as dictated by the community as a whole. Major pedagogical decisions result from discussion throughout all the *hofs*, and a comprehensive curriculum guide governs activities in all Bruderhof schools. The educational administration revisits and revises the curriculum regularly. The curriculum itself is fairly traditional, relying on basic skill building in the primary grades together with extensive art, drama, and music instruction. Current events and community service are incorporated into the daily curriculum, ". . . giving students a deep and lasting social consciousness and empathy for the suffering of others" (see Bruderhof Website).

The establishment of norm-based curriculum policies is an important factor in Coleman's prescription for the creation of social capital. "Norms are intentionally established, as a means of reducing externalities, and their benefits are ordinarily captured by those who are responsible for establishing them" (Coleman, 1990, p. 317). Individuals in the community who do not have control over the closure required for the maintenance of such norms, nevertheless benefit from the measures taken to provide closure and establish those norms for everyone collectively.

For example, since the Bruderhof have an extensive website, administered by members of the community, the implementation of technology in the schools was a logical and natural outgrowth of the community's technological capabilities. However, the teachers and parents soon found that the children were drawn to the technology more than they were to natural explorations. Teachers and administrators from all seven communities convened to discuss the problem and decided to remove all computers from use by students in their schools until they reach high school, when they have computers available to them for school projects.

Non-Bruderhof Children in the Community's Schools

The Bruderhof educational administration adopted the Orton reading method that has proved to be successful for them and has made the Bruderhof schools attractive to neighboring non-Bruderhof families seeking an alternative to the local public schools. Bruderhof schools accept a very small number of children from outside the community, a total of nine in 2002. Although low-profile and largely unknown outside their local areas, Bruderhof communities strive to coexist comfortably with their neighbors outside their communities. Therefore, they welcome guests informally on an individual basis and for periodic large-scale gatherings open to the public. Because of this interaction, over the years, various neighboring families have been drawn to the Bruderhof educational philosophy and have sought a place for their own special needs children within Bruderhof schools. The community attributes this interest to its value-based curriculum as well as their specific pedagogy.

Since the mission of the schools is to educate their own children within the Bruderhof community, acceptance of non-Bruderhof children depends upon the capability of the school to accommodate the child's needs and to help each child grow both intellectually, socially, and even physically. Critical to this goal is Rifton Equipment, one of the three main Bruderhof industries, which creates and supplies adaptive devices for children with physical and

intellectual disabilities. Equally critical, however, is the interaction with the child with the children of the Bruderhof community.

One young boy from the Rifton area, a victim of cerebral palsy who is currently fifteen years old, has flourished in the Bruderhof school in Rifton. He interacts comfortably with his peers who readily help him maneuver his way through the day. Currently in the eighth grade at the school, he is an integral part of the school community, returning to the welcoming environment of the Bruderhof community school after several extensive surgeries. His mother reports that the local school district had been unable to contend with his many difficulties. She feels that they had virtually given up on him, but at the Bruderhof school, the mother report, “they listened to us about who Travis is and what he is capable of” (Rifton Equipment Catalog, 2000-2001, p. 3). According to Coleman (1990), this success results from the availability of social capital beyond the needs of the specific organization. In other words, the Bruderhof generate and have social capital to share and spare.

Transition of Bruderhof Children to High School

Bruderhof schools are non-public independent schools, exempt from state attendance and curriculum requirements. The children do not take standardized tests within the community school, but they must be ready for assimilation into the local high schools. Those who live in New York State must take the required Regents examinations when they are in high school, and those who plan to go to college take the SAT tests. At this time, most Bruderhof children go to the local public high school starting in ninth grade, although a few communities keep the children in their own school until tenth grade.

Bruderhof high school students, when interviewed, describe themselves as having average ability but a strong work ethic that allows them to succeed in the local public high schools. However, they comment that teachers in the public high schools tend to regard all Bruderhof children as smart, perhaps due to their seriousness, courtesy, and diligence. In New York at the regional

service center, the BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services), the Bruderhof high school students routinely take courses in the practical arts, like carpentry, electrician's skills, and practical nursing, that allow them to develop skills that will enhance their involvement in the community should they decide to join the community as adults.

Bruderhof teenagers support the regular activities of the public high school, but they usually do not participate on athletic teams, another decision made by the central Bruderhof administration. However, when the local high school was having a fundraiser for a local student who had a rare disease, Bruderhof students participated in the school's efforts. Within the public high school, Bruderhof adolescents develop friendships with non-Bruderhof teenagers and invite them to visit the community for barbecues and songfests. They also socialize on a personal and limited basis with their friends outside the community.

Bruderhof Young Adults

The Bruderhof shelter their children until they reach the age of 18 or 19 when they must then decide whether to seek formal entrance into the community as adults. That involvement is welcomed but never assumed, because the Bruderhof readily admit that their way of life is not for everyone, even those who have grown up in the community. Bruderhof founder Eberhard Arnold prescribed strictly voluntary involvement based on acceptance of the group's shared ideology. At a members' meeting of the Rhon Bruderhof in 1933, he admonished them that, "When anyone talks about wanting to leave, all we can say is, go then. . . . A man cannot tread this path for the sake of a girl he loves, nor can a wife do so for the sake of her beloved husband, nor parents for the sake of their children, nor children for the sake of their parents, nor friends for each other's sake" (Yoder, et al., 1984, pp. 129-130). Therefore, Bruderhof encourage young adults to enter a period of "discernment" before making their decision to apply for membership into the community as adults.

After high school some of the young adults return to work in the various businesses and trades of the community. Those invited to be teachers enter the teacher-training apprentice program. Others attend two-year colleges for nursing or business courses. Still others are invited to go to a four-year university to study medicine, dentistry, or law, as fits the projected needs of the community. All work relates to the needs of the community above that of the individual. And members accept the assignments that they are given, according to the needs of the community, even if it means moving self and family to the work site in a different Bruderhof community.

Frequently, young adults will travel to overseas Bruderhof communities, in Great Britain or Australia, to explore their talents and determine whether they have a vocation to become an adult member of the community. Sometimes, they join missionary or community service organizations. One young man, who made the decision to return to the community after the events of September 11, 2001, had been living in a community of Catholic brothers and working in their high school as a teacher's aide. He described himself as being "at loose ends" until the terrorist attacks helped him make his decision to pursue a religious life as member of the Bruderhof. He returned to the community where he is currently working as an apprentice in a woodworking shop.

Impact of the Bruderhof Educational Philosophy on Mainstream Education

In addition to their contributions to the effectiveness of special education classes throughout the nation, the Bruderhof have sought to influence the mainstream educational community with their philosophy of pacifism and brotherly love. Johann Christoph Arnold, grandson of the founder, is a prolific writer and effective public speaker. In his recent work, "Endangered: Your Child in a Hostile World", he admonishes contemporary American society for being too busy to acknowledge the real needs of children.

In the wake of concerns about school violence, he urges “laying aside our analyses about the endangered state of childhood and concerning ourselves with children themselves. It will mean starting to live as if children really mattered to us” (Arnold, 2000, p.10).

Christoph Arnold himself has traveled to various public high schools and middle schools to discuss school violence and promote pacifism in daily living. He has joined forces with Steven McDonald, a New York City policeman who is a quadriplegic because of an attack by an assailant during an arrest over 20 years ago. Together, these two men speak to assemblies of young people urging acceptance and conflict resolution. Arnold and McDonald are in great demand, as public schools scramble for ways to counteract the threat of violence among their students.

Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, a troop of Bruderhof children has been touring local schools and other public venues to sing songs of reconciliation and peace. Called the “Peace Children”, these young people have a large repertoire of old and new folksongs, some of them composed by the children themselves. Plough Publishing, the Bruderhof’s third business endeavor, publishes a songster entitled, *Sing through the Day: Eighty Songs for Children* (Rifton, NY: 2000) that the children use for practice during the school days and for performances. The abundance of social capital within the Bruderhof communities allows the members to share those values with others. This interaction with the wider world has a reciprocal effect in producing even greater social capital for the Bruderhof children.

Lessons from the Bruderhof

The Bruderhof present a comprehensive, self-contained approach to education of their children and are living examples of what Coleman and colleagues have described in theory and have analyzed in fact. Their philosophy and methods result in abundant social capital for their own children and others with whom they interact. Social capital building begins in each nuclear Bruderhof family but grows in continuing, geometric proportions in the

extended Bruderhof community. Bidwell (1991) explains that from Coleman's seminal idea of family capital and its effect on children: "it follows that what the child learns - in both moral and cognitive terms--is the outcome of continuing, rather than discrete and sequential, family and school influences" (p. 192).

The challenge for public education is to build relationships with, and support from, the families of the children it serves. From those connections, social capital will necessarily flow. "If a child has strong, dependable, and extensive interactions with individuals in these three social environments (i.e., family, school, and community), then that child has access to high social capital. Being imbedded in such a rich social capital environment is likely to translate into higher educational achievement for that child" (Beaulieu, Israel, Hartless, & Dyk, 2001, p. 122).

Public schools then should invest teachers with the mission and skills to reach out to children and their parents and to provide an experience that engenders social capital. Thus, like the Bruderhof, parents readily and easily interact with the teachers on issues of mutual concern regarding the children. In addition, schools should also offer parent education that promotes a more nurturing and monitoring environment for the children and emphasizes the role they play in the formation of their children.

Finally, schools should create a presence within the neighborhoods and municipalities they serve because students succeed "who have access to, and who actively engage in caring and guiding environments not only in the home, but also with other adults located with the school and broader community settings" (Beaulieu, et al., 2001, p. 125).

The Bruderhof choose to live in community and to have their children schooled within their communities. These environments provide the closure, boundaries, common beliefs, stability, mutual support and interdependence, and shared ideology, which engender social capital. A recent study of four public school districts in the New York metropolitan area concluded that social

capital increases when parents are able to choose the schools their children attend, as follows:

Our research suggests that the design of the institutions delivering local public goods can influence levels of social capital. The act of school choice, in these examples, has stimulated parents to become more involved in a wide range of school-related activities. School choice, far from atomizing citizens or turning them into mere consumers, helps build communities of concerned and engaged parents. School choice can do this in suburban communities where most Americans now live, and in inner-city neighborhoods, where the stock of social capital may be most depleted and where its absence may have the most deleterious effects. (Schneider, Teske, Marschall, & Roche, 1997, p. 90)

Social capital is complex and “most difficult to nurture in the places that need it most” (Lee & Croninger, 2001, p. 168). However, public schools should view social capital formation as critical to learning as any cognitive goals prescribed by local, state, and national policymakers. As the Bruderhof have illustrated in microcosm, communities rich in social capital produce positive results both cognitively and emotionally for the children in those communities.

Conclusion

Although small in size and number, the Bruderhof communities continue to make a definite and increasing contribution to the spectrum of educational services available in the United States. Membership is growing slowly but steadily, and Bruderhof influence in the larger education community and the world at large is also spreading. Most important, Bruderhof schools represent the essence of a pluralistic environment in which citizens can choose to educate their children in ways that are consistent with their personal philosophy. And at the same time, these schools--and their communities--are supportive of the good of the entire society: they exemplify the characteristics

of strong social capital that grows from the Bruderhof community and pervades their schools and participants' lives.

The Bruderhof themselves express their confidence in the freedom to choose the educational structure for their children, in this way:

We strive to provide an environment in which our children can remain children for as long as possible, unencumbered by the violence and materialism so rampant in our society. At the same time, we try to instill in them a sense of personal and social responsibility, so that by the time they are young adults, they are able to function as independent and productive members of society. (www.bruderhof.com)

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