

The ESJ/Education Society Undergraduate Lecture

**Who succeeds and
why in
undergraduate
education?**

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November 2012**

Overview

- Why higher education?
- The changing landscape of higher education
- What does 'success' in undergraduate education mean?
- What strategies contribute to 'success'?
- What can we learn from the 'Paired Peers' project?
- Conclusions

Why higher education?

Arguments about:

- Globalisation, competition and competitiveness
- High skills/low skills economies
- Returns to individuals and to national economies from highly-skilled workforce

The globalisation, skills, competitiveness argument is used across the globe

21st Century Challenges

- New global labor market
- Developing countries are producing large numbers of high skilled low cost workers
- Internet makes workers available to the world's employers
- Successful firms in the future will focus on creative work

The globalisation, skills, competitiveness argument: India



Women in India: developing high level (IT) skills for future employment

The globalisation, skills, competitiveness argument: Michigan, USA



The changing landscape of higher education

Redefining HE as participation increases (Trow, 1973)

	Elite	Mass	Universal
Size	5%	15%	50%
Purpose	Shaping the mind and character of the ruling class	Transmission of skills for specific technical elite roles	Preparing large number of people for life in an advanced industrial society

What does 'success' in higher education mean? This...



.... Or this?



Euan Blair (son of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair) moved into a career as an investment banker with Morgan Stanley.

Source: Guardian 28.10.2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/oct/28/carole-cadwalladr-tony-blair-unpaid-interns>

.... or this?



Indie quartet Alt-J met at university and formed a band when they graduated.

Source: [guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk), Thursday 1 November 2012 22.37 GMT
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/nov/02/alt-j-mercury-prize-win?intcmp=239>

What strategies contribute to 'success'?

- Being a 'fish in water'
aka academic and social integration;
knowing the 'game' and how to play
successfully
- Time, focus and persistence
- Having meaningful goals and an
imagined future

What can we learn from the 'Paired Peers' project?

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

- ❖ To compare the experiences of students from different social class backgrounds, in 2 different universities – one post-1992 'mass' university, one 'traditional', elite university, in one city in England, in a range of different subjects
- ❖ To follow students over their 3 years of undergraduate study
- ❖ To explore what factors help students to academic success

‘Mobilising’ resources

‘Mobilising’ resources are ways in which students and their families seek to succeed. Resources or ‘capitals’ include:

Economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu (1986), Putnam (2001), Coleman (1997))

And also:

- **Academic/intellectual capital**
- **Moral capital** (Lehmann, 2009; Skeggs, 1997)
- **cultural-social capital or ‘ethnic capital’** (Madood, 2012)
- **Community capital** (Yosso, 2006)
- **Personal capital** (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011)

Additional capitals

Personal capital

Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011) use 'personal capital' to mean both 'hard' (credentials) and 'soft' (personal qualities) currency that can be exchanged in the market for jobs.

Cultural-social capital or 'ethnic capital'

Modood (2011) uses this version of 'capital' to refer to three different stages or dimensions: relationships, norms and norms enforcement, defined in relation to HE as familial adult-child relationships, transmission of aspirations and attitudes and norms enforcement. His focus is on the experiences of students from South Asian communities in the UK.

Moral capital

Lehmann (2009) talks of the construction of moral advantages by working-class students, such as those associated with a strong work ethic, maturity, responsibility, and real-life experiences, to overcome structural disadvantages.

Capitals can be cultivated, mobilised, and 'packaged'

- Lareau (2003); Irwin, S and Elley, S. (2011): the *concerted cultivation* of capitals by middle class families
- Brown, Lauder and Ashton (2011); Lareau (2003): increasingly overt and conscious strategising, particularly amongst the middle-classes, firstly to cultivate 'valuable' capitals, and secondly, to mobilise these capitals to gain advantage in education and the labour market.
- Tchibozo (2007); Tomlinson (2008): students need both tacit and explicit *know-how of how to 'package' their experiences, opportunities, and attributes* into valuable 'personal capital'.

Internships: mobilising family social capital to maintain advantage



Euan Blair (son of former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair) did work experience with a congressman on Capitol Hill, thanks to his dad.

Following that, he began a career as an investment banker with Morgan Stanley. Carole Cadwalladr of the UK's Guardian newspaper commented:

"It's hard to know whether it was nepotism, connections or that helpful glamour internship that really gave Euan the edge. But it certainly did no harm."

Meanwhile, Tony Blair's own office runs unpaid internships. A spokesman for the office of Tony Blair said: "We support all our interns by paying travel and lunch expenses." A graduate offered one of these unpaid internships, who asked to work only four out of five days so that he could continue to earn money in his part-time job to support himself, was told that this wouldn't be acceptable and the offer was retracted.

Source: Guardian 28.10.2012

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/oct/28/carole-cadwalladr-tony-blair-unpaid-interns>

Internships: mobilising family social capital to maintain advantage

It is a case of who you know not what you know in some cases. So I am trying to pull in any family ties...like my dad's quite friendly with one of the traders at [major bank]...he was head of the internship scheme...(and) my mum's a governor at my old school and one of the governors was a trader at [major bank], so I am trying to pull some strings there too.

(Dylan, middle-class UWE)

Internships: knowing what your family has not got

I find it so weird when people have parents that are lawyers or doctors and they can get you work experience in a hospital or....I just think “that’s crazy” that’s like something I’ve never experienced. Because my parents do just ordinary jobs. I don’t know how they would help me. I don’t think they would be able to.

(Anna, working-class, Bristol)

Cultivating capitals through extra-curricular activities

- Sports
- Leisure societies – debating, reading, photography
- Political societies
- Subject societies – philosophy, history, engineering, English

**‘We want it.’
The ‘personal
capital’ you
demonstrate
through extra-
curricular
activities.**

**Seen in a sports
centre near you
(Univ of Bham,
Oct 2012)**



The thing that makes
someone get up
at 5am and ride.

We want it.

Graduate Area Manager £40,000
rising to £63,500 after 4 years.

Fully expensed Audi A4.
Opportunity for directorship within 5 years.
International secondment opportunities.

aldirecruitment.co.uk/applyyourselfhere

 

 Apply yourself here.

Active cultivation of capitals

I'm...carrying on really, trying to do well in academic side of it but also keep up like the sports and stuff, because that's...so many people have good academic skills and academic qualifications. And also you're up against pretty much a lot of people from other countries as well, because I always forget it's not just like English unis.

Francesca: M/C, UWE, Law

Active cultivation of capitals

assuming positions of responsibility: being on committees, becoming secretary of the cheer-leading squad (Harriet, UWE, middle-class), Vice President of the Aero Society (Jennifer, UoB, middle-class) and president of the English society (Melissa, UoB, working-class).

Instinctive cultivation of capitals

Jack carries on where his parents left off. He explains what they did:

Oh just making sure we've got something that we can have for the future, like windsurfing, surfing, trumpet, climbing, I've done so many activities when I was little it's just stupid. And then so now my sister's now working all round the world doing windsurf teaching and stuff like this, and I've taught break dancing and stuff like that. So kind of setting us up for the future rather than just giving us PS3s [PlayStation 3 games machine]. (Jack, middle-class, UWE)

Instinctive cultivation: The rise of *boffin rock*



Indie quartet Alt-J won the prestigious Mercury prize for their album *An Awesome Wave* (November 2012). **The four-piece met at Leeds University in 2007 where they were all studying** (fine art and English literature)

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Barriers to the cultivation of capitals through ECA

I love to meet new people so it was a bit disappointing, [...] but this year unfortunately I couldn't really afford to join any societies or anything. But I have been playing football and stuff with my mates just down the local park and stuff [...]. (Henry, working-class, UWE)

Barriers to the cultivation of capitals through ECA

I physically don't have time. [...] I'd love to get involved but I physically can't. Which is another frustrating thing then because I feel like I am not making the most out of my time here. (Zoe, working-class, UoB)

Barriers to the cultivation of capitals through ECA

the person who runs the society isn't one we'd sort of generally think that we'd include in our social group as it were. [...] The sort of vocabulary he uses and things like that, sort of very well spoken vocabulary whereas ... we use sort of more relaxed vocabulary as we're good friends, because when you're with friends you don't use a form of vocabulary like you would for example in an interview or something. (Rob, working-class, UWE)

Enabling success in undergraduate higher education

Addressing structural barriers - where HE institutions and systems can and should intervene e.g.

- Providing resources that help students to succeed (bursaries, libraries, technologies, extra-curricular activities)
- support with the generation of social capital and valuable 'connections'
- overt work to develop students' capacities to mobilise their resources effectively.

Developing individual strategies to enhance chances of success

- setting academic and future goals during the course of academic study
- working out how to achieve them and using the resources available at the university as well as beyond to help achieve goals
- Developing an 'imagined future'
- Making the most of what the university offers to work towards that future.

Research Project links

The Paired Peers project (2010-2013)

www.bristol.ac.uk/pairedpeers

funded by the Leverhulme Trust

Project team:

Harriet Bradley (University of Bristol), Ann-Marie Bathmaker (University of Birmingham), Jessie Abrahams, Phoebe Beedell, Tony Hoare, Nicola Ingram, (all University of Bristol), Richard Waller (UWE Bristol)

NOTE: references in this presentation are provided in a separate document