

EADTU: Educational Research & Technology Learning Communities and Social Capital

Duncan Timms¹, Philip Crompton¹, Sara Ferlander¹ & Liz Timms²

¹ CRDLT, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of Stirling

² Department of Social Work, University of Edinburgh

Abstract

There has recently been a considerable growth of interest in the implications of the Internet for social integration and in relationship between learning communities and local communities.

In this presentation we examine the use of an on-line learning environment designed to promote collaboration between participants in a number of peripheral communities. We report on a trial run of a continuing professional development module, "*Community Portraits*", designed for health and welfare workers in geographically remote areas of Finland, Germany and Scotland and consider how the approach adopted can be used to foster social capital in marginalised communities. Can participation online lead to more participation in the community or does it result in further fragmentation and isolation? What role can online learning communities play in helping to bridge barriers between local communities and the rest of society?

In the autumn of 2000 a version of *Community Portraits* is being run as a means of connecting groups of lone parents in marginalised communities in Sweden (Stockholm) and Scotland (Glasgow). The development of learning communities, based on online collaboration in the production of community portraits, is presented as a potential way of bridging gaps between groups. Initial analysis of a survey administered in one of the communities involved suggests a relatively low level of social capital, but a high degree of optimism about the potential impact of the local net and considerable enthusiasm for online collaboration.