Does participation in community education strengthen our communities, especially those that are marginalised?

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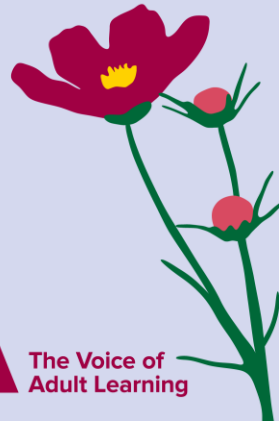
My aims

- To outline the benefits that research has identified of participating in community education (CE)
- To show how the work of CE can promote social justice.

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Identified benefits of CE

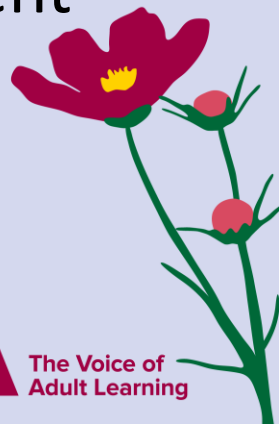
- Helping marginalised groups to engage with, and make progress in, learning;
- Helping communities and individuals develop resilience, self-confidence, and social capital because of their participation in learning;
- Helping to improve health and well-being.



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Engaging in learning

- Education can reduce social disadvantage, but privileged communities are the most likely to access and engage in post-compulsory education.
- On the other hand, marginalised communities are more likely to believe that ‘learning is not for them’.
- This means engaging these communities is an important achievement that requires time, effort and imagination.

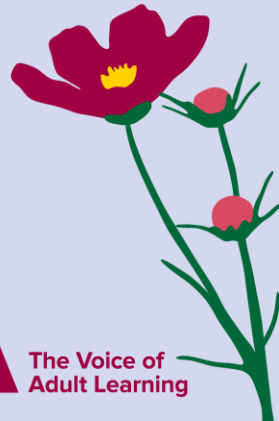


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Engaging in learning

It is most effective when practitioners:

- Build on their knowledge of the community and specific marginalised groups;
- Use outreach activities to identify and provide easy access to appropriate provision;
- Link to other professions and institutions.



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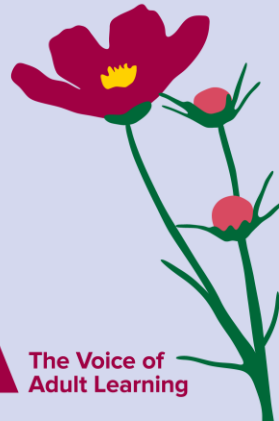
Making progress

- Once communities are engaged in learning, they are most likely to continue when their goals are recognised and supported.
- Participants value increasing self-confidence, especially when they are adjusting to changed circumstances, but this can contradict funders' goals of increasing skills.
- A learner-centred pedagogy should be used that challenges as well as supports learners and helps them to develop a critical stance on their current situation, rather than accepting it.

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Promoting resilience, self-confidence, and social capital

- Resilience means adapting well in the face of adversity and bouncing back from difficult experiences.
- Participating in CE helps communities develop resilience and grit and build confidence. This then enables them to do things differently and apply what they have learnt in a range of contexts.



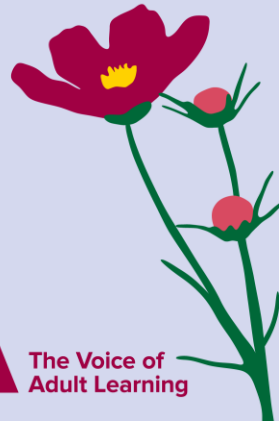
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Promoting resilience, self-confidence, and social capital

For example:

- Developing a stronger belief in their community's potential and achievements;
- Increasing their own skills;
- Having a greater ability to deal with conflict and stand up for themselves.

CE also builds social capital.



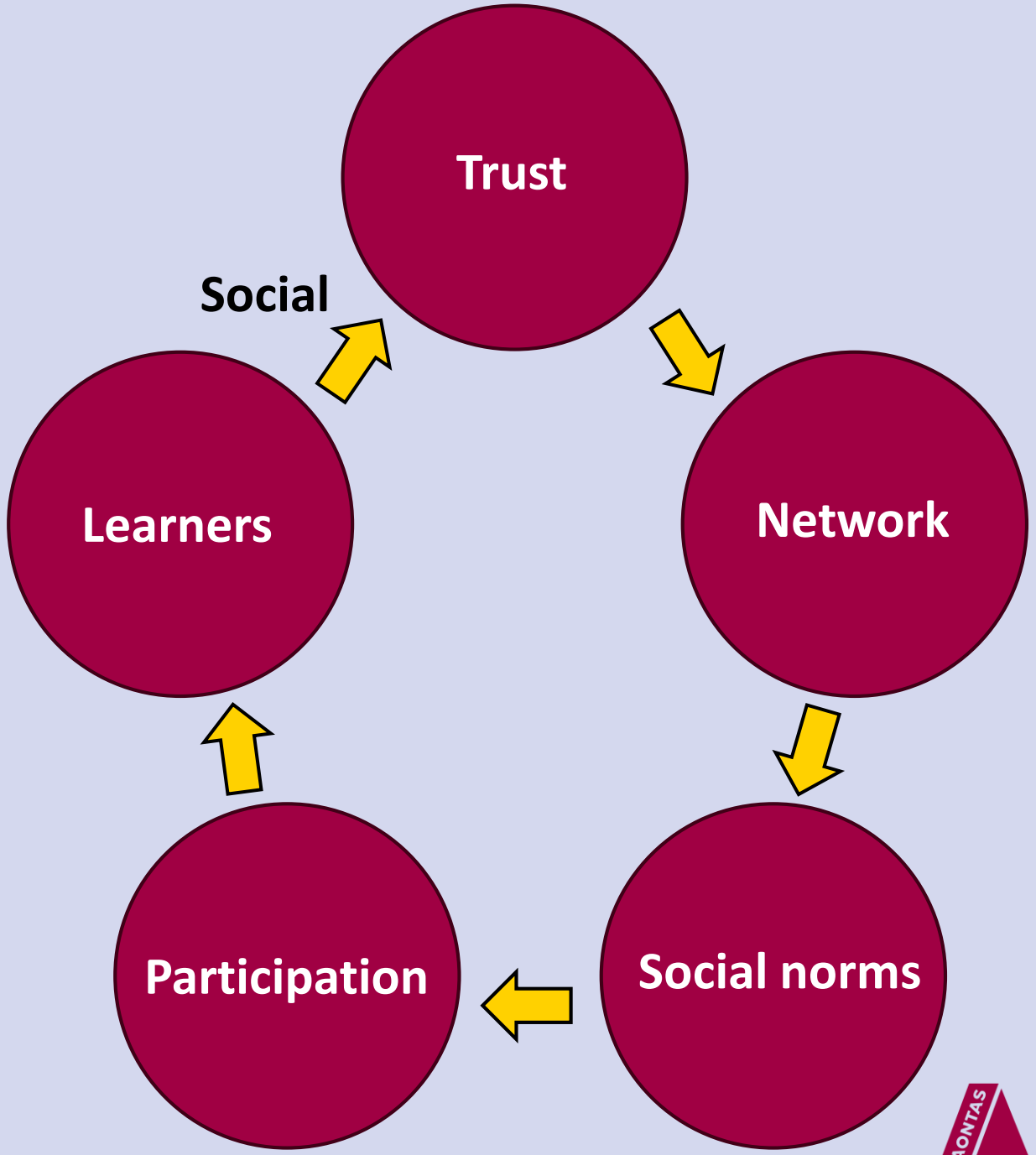
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Social Capital

- Two dimensions:
  - Trust in people
  - Involvement in social activities
- When people participate in social networks it helps to form **bonds** between similar people, and **bridges** between different people.
- **Bonds** help to develop trust, and **bridges** encourage the development of new ideas and perspectives.

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Bonding Social Capital



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Bonding Social Capital



Learners — Different ideas

Staff — Working with a range of people

Other professions — New perspectives

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Health and well-being

- Socio-economic disadvantage leads to poor health because people lack control over their lives, experience greater levels of stress and anxiety at the individual level and lack of social cohesion and trust at the community level.

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Health and well-being

- CE provision that responds to participants through recognizing and building on their strengths, results in an increase in well-being, and a decrease in anxiety, social isolation, and loneliness.
- Taking an asset-based approach based on the resources and skills in communities and individuals is effective because it leads to solutions that maintain and sustain health.

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Support for practitioners

- Opportunities for exchanging experiences and opinions, taking collective action and seeking mutual aid.
- Support from colleagues and inspiration from participants can help people to keep going in challenging circumstances.

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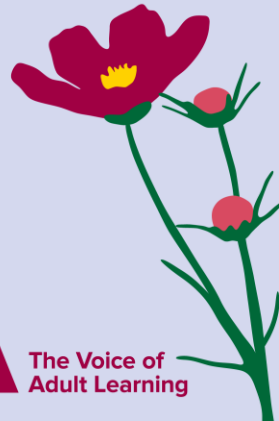
Support for practitioners

- Developing partnerships and good working relations with other professions and organisations also provides support.
- Undertaking research and developing strategic thinking that documents and values learners' experiences is another resource that can offer alternative concepts and analyses.

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Greater social justice

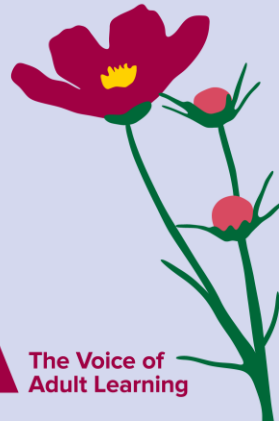
- Participating in CE leads to greater social justice because it changes people in communities and enables more equitable outcomes.
- In addition, building on communities' experience and sharing their knowledge makes institutional systems and spaces of government more transparent and accessible.



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Greater social justice

- Creating larger alliances of like-minded groups can help to address the lasting structural changes that social justice requires and build resources of hope.
- Together these acts can build resistance and disrupt the “ideology of fatalism” (Freire, 2014 p. 33) that leaves people despondent.



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Conclusion

- Community education can serve as a source of hope for marginalised groups through revisiting negative past experiences and engaging in social networking and education.
- Hope in turn contributes to increased self-development and better health and well-being outcomes.
- When local communities act on the issues that matter to them this can inspire them to be more proactive about contesting solutions that are imposed.
- Although community education cannot bring about radical changes in society, it can help to level the playing field for marginalised groups.

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Thank you!

Thanks for listening

If you have any comments, please get in touch by emailing me at:

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