

Book Review

*Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School**Annie Opat, Emporia State University**Roger Caswell, Jones Institute for Educational Excellence*

School reform has been in the spotlight for decades. Everything from the architecture to the curriculum to the testing has changed in the educational system. Educators and policymakers need to search inward and approach school reform through the power of people. In Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan's 2012 book, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, they redefine how to improve every school and system through collaboration and professional capital — human, social, and decisional. They believe “the most important [factor] is the teacher — not standards, assessments, resources” (p. xii). The sense of urgency in positive change begins with the teacher (human capital) and continues through social capital, as Hargreaves and Fullan explain,

Whole system change, we have learned, is not a kind of magic. It involves and absolutely requires individual and collective acts of investment in an inspirational vision and a coherent set of actions that build everyone's capability and keep everyone learning as they continue to move forward. (p. xvii)

Reading Recovery professionals understand the validity of this statement. Training in Reading Recovery gives the gift of reflection through observation, continuous and contingent decision making, and analysis.

Through the action of working with those who struggle most in learning to read and write, capability as educators is built. Additionally, professional development in Reading Recovery strengthens learning and embellishes shared trust. Learning is ongoing and moves forward. Reading Recovery professionals “must learn to articulate rationales for children's observed behaviours and for the teaching that must follow, and they must continue to learn from children, and from colleagues” (Clay, 2001, p. 300).

Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School is sequentially organized in seven chapters. Each chapter presents the next step of the journey toward transformation: acknowledgement of the present climate and beliefs through an understanding of what are contrasting investments.

We can treat teaching as just a short-term investment of business capital, and finance the present by mortgaging our children's future. Or we can make teaching a sustainable investment of professional capital, and give birth to a world of many happy returns to come. The choice is ours. (p.186)

In chapter 1, “A Capital Idea,” Hargreaves and Fullan lay the foundation for discussion by sharing

two types of capital — business and professional. Both are views of how to treat, or change, the structuring of education. Business capital is organized to get quick returns; its purpose “is to serve as a big market for investment in technology, curriculum and testing materials” (p. 2). Whereas, professional capital “is a long-term investment in developing human capital from early childhood to adult life” (p. 2). The former is the current view of the United States; the latter view is that of “the highest performing economies and educational systems in the world” (p. 2). Hargreaves and Fullan provide the example of how the United States is putting resources “into schemes like Teach for America and other kinds of alternate certifications. . . These schemes sometimes attract outstanding *individuals*, but they will never change the *system*” (p. 6).

With a basic understanding of the two types of capital (business and professional) established in chapter 1, the authors further explore the differences between the two in chapter 2, “Competing Views of Teaching.” Hargreaves and Fullan caution the reliance on individual-teacher quality is a barrier to transforming the entire educational system. It's “not just the bottom 20% and the top 20%, but the whole 100%. There is no getting around that hard fact!” (p. 16). For this reason, rewarding the individual

teacher (such as with merit pay) is a flawed strategy. The authors reference the 2009 work of Daniel Pink, “merit pay doesn’t even work in the corporate world except in the simplest and most standardized of jobs” (Pink, as referenced in Hargreaves & Fullan, p. 19). The authors add, “So either merit pay will make the best teachers worse, or teaching will have to be turned into standardized, simplified, and scripted operations so the reward system can have a positive effect” (p. 19). This chapter concludes with the authors’ view of

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teaching like a pro: “improving as an *individual*, raising the performance of the *team*, and increasing quality across the *whole profession*. It is about developing, circulating, and reinvesting professional capital” (p. 23).

“Stereotypes of Teaching” (chapter 3) describes various aspects of the teaching field — both positive and negative. As children we were taught by teachers, so each of us believes we possess an understanding of teaching. However, “our memories miss the majority and the complexity of what teaching is or can be” (p. 24). Teachers are expected to work endlessly with limited resources and not

complain. They are often overloaded, feel isolated and unsupported. High-stakes tests create additional stress and negatively change how teachers teach. On the other hand, teachers can look past these tests and discuss children based on authentic tests while getting to know each child. There is joy in teaching, but in order to impact a positive and sustained transformation in education, teachers must be involved. Hargreaves and Fullan share how teaching is work; they share how teaching today, though continuities exist from 20 years ago, is much more intensified. The authors present failed solutions as well as new opportunities and challenges. Educational reform “requires leadership, but it is the kind of leadership that reconciles and integrates external accountability with personal and collective professional responsibility” (p. 45).

In chapter 4, “Investing in Capability and Commitment,” Hargreaves and Fullan reveal varying examples of best practices and differing levels of commitment.

Like all professional practice, teaching cannot be politically and administratively prescribed line by line. The best chefs don’t rely literally on cookbooks. . . . And classroom practices are just as unpalatable when they are prescribed down to every last sentence in the manual. (p. 50)

Finland, a top-performing country on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), is an illustration of success and best practice. For example, teachers create the curriculum and pedagogy together. Teachers also spend less time in the

classroom teaching and more time collaborating. Teachers need time to reflect, think, and collaborate to be the most effective. “Professional capital is about communities of teachers using best and next practices together” (p. 51). The Reading Recovery intervention embraces time to reflect as teachers observe, discover what the child can do, and communicate with colleagues — in essence, propagating professional capital. Clay states,

There must be times when the teacher stops teaching and becomes an observer, a time when she must drop all her presuppositions about a child, and when she listens very carefully and records very precisely what that particular child can in fact do. (2005, p. 11)

Hargreaves and Fullan reference John Hattie’s meta-analysis of effective teaching practices which include teachers enabling students to become independent learners, providing specific feedback in response to students’ work, and problem-solving teaching. In order to accomplish these practices, teachers must fully understand their child, how the child is learning, and initiate effective teaching decisions. Reading Recovery professionals will connect to these teaching ideas as they are typically accomplished during each Reading Recovery lesson. “This is the essence of *professional capital*—capability and commitment that are constantly developed, applied, and refined with colleagues within the school and beyond it” (p. 76).

Chapters 5 and 6, “Professional Capital” and “Professional Culture and Communities,” further explain aspects of professionalism, culture and community within school sys-

tems. Hargreaves and Fullan believe there is a difference between being professional and being a professional. Quality and character pertain to being professional. Being a professional, on the other hand, relates to teaching like a pro — specialized knowledge, shared practice, self regulation, autonomy to make informed judgments, commitment to continuous learning and professional upgrading. If you are teaching like a pro, you connect theory and practice and are constantly perfecting, improving your teaching.

According to Hargreaves and Fullan, *human capital* relates to investing in the talent of teachers. Individual talent is necessary but the most powerful professional capital is *social*. Collectively, shared talent bolsters the success of schools. Networks, a sense of trust, and constructive/challenging feedback are all part of social capital. If the social capital is weak, the school system is in dire trouble. *Decisional capital* is the ability of teachers to make wise judgments in various circumstances. This capital is acquired through practice, reflection of teachers themselves, and of learning through others. “Ten thousand hours, Gladwell says, is the figure that comes up time and again as the number of hours it seems to take the brain ‘to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery’” (Gladwell, 2008, as cited in Hargreaves and Fullan, p. 95). However, practice—as well as teaching—must be shared, reflective, and thoughtful in order to drive improvement. Reading Recovery provides this shared and reflective practice through observation and decision making during behind-the-glass teaching — improvement through reflection about action.

Working environment and conditions relate to culture within the educational system. Culture can also either be supportive, collaborative, or one of isolation and individualism. Collaborative cultures cultivate trust, security, and continued relationships. Individuals are valued and they contribute to the group as a whole. Teachers are able to communicate and question freely. They do not feel threatened when disagreements arise, because there is trust and professional capital. For example, physically sitting in a circular setting (as done in

Professional learning communities (PLC) originated in the 1990s with the intention to work in committed teams in order to strengthen students’ learning and teachers’ instruction collaboratively with solid judgment. However, often PLCs have been ineffectively implemented and have generated narrow, data-driven spreadsheets imposed from the top. Once again, in order to work effectively through collaboration, there must be time, a purpose, and capacity building — a shared vision. Teachers must reciprocate and sup-

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Reading Recovery) during discussion of children’s strengths and teaching decisions develops professional capital in culture. This seating arrangement places everyone present equally as each person contributes openly to the discussion.

Trust and collegiality must be nurtured, not contrived. “Collaborative cultures take much more time, care, and sensitivity than speedily implemented changes or hurriedly assembled teams allow” (p. 119). Hargreaves and Fullan assure us that, “collective deliberation must become *job embedded* into the profession of teaching. It must become just as regular a practice as classroom teaching—as is true in all the top-performing countries” (p. 125).

port one another, which must be genuine and not contrived. Leaders must become facilitators and should focus on building relationships with teachers, parents, and the community.

Hargreaves and Fullan’s concluding chapter, “Enacting Change,” offers excellent perspectives of how to transform education in every school. Education is at the crossroads: “It is time to invest and reinvest in our own and our colleagues’ professional capital” (p. 148). The authors offer a plan of action for school administrators and district leaders; for state, government, and union leaders; and for teachers and teacher leaders. Professional capital is regenerative and worth the investment.

District and national leaders must take steps towards professional capital in order to enact positive change in education. Local leaders must know the lives of their teachers and cultivate genuine trust. They must also start with themselves in building professional capital, especially the culture of school. District leaders should be evidence-informed instead of data-driven. Evidence must be human and inclusive in order to serve each student, which builds professional capital. “It’s about developing, gathering, and drawing on collective professional capital to administer and improve a system by increasingly highly capable people who understand it the best” (p. 177). National leaders must remember that teachers are the nation builders.

Teaching is a complex, difficult, but rewarding profession — teachers should be valued. Teachers who remain in the field should be rewarded and paid accordingly, especially if they serve those with the greatest need. Leaders should also reach out to other successful school systems for new insights, even when they are at the top of their game. Educational systems such as those in Finland, Singapore, and Canada are mentioned throughout this book as examples of how to facilitate professional capital. “The larger agenda is, after all, not about improving one’s own country but really about building a better, more socially just world for all” (p. 185).

Finally, as Hargreaves and Fullan explain, teachers need to teach like pros. Individually, they can take the first steps in building their own capi-

tal, making a commitment to continuous learning (professional capital), building relationships with colleagues to promote professional growth (human capital), and extending their spheres of influence by making good judgments and engaging in reflective practice (decisional capital).

Referencing Mahatma Gandhi, “Be the change you want to see in the world” (p. 155). Ultimately, it is teachers who can take this important first step — for themselves and their students, for their colleagues, their school, the system, and society.

About the Authors



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