

# THE POWER *of* PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL

WITH AN INVESTMENT IN COLLABORATION, TEACHERS BECOME NATION BUILDERS

By Andrew Hargreaves and Michael Fullan

**P**rofessional capital has a fundamental connection to transforming teaching every day, and we've seen many examples of this at work in schools and school systems around the world. Here, we explore the powerful idea of capital and articulate its importance for professional work, professional capacity, and professional effectiveness. Systems that invest in professional capital recognize that education spending is an investment in developing human capital from early childhood to adulthood, leading to rewards of economic productivity and social cohesion in the next generation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Professional capital requires attention not only to political and societal investments in education but also to leadership actions and educator needs, contributions, and career stages.

## THE CONCEPT OF CAPITAL

Many teachers find the concept of capital a difficult idea because of where it comes from. Capital is not something we'd normally associate with teaching. The original idea of capital comes from the economic sector, and whether you are Warren Buffett or Adam Smith or Karl Marx, one part of the idea is basically the same. Capital is something that adds value to net worth. If you want to get a return, you need to make an investment.

## TWO APPROACHES TO TEACHING

Right now, there are two visions for capital and how it can be used to improve teaching in the U.S. and elsewhere. One is a business capital approach. In this view, the purpose of public education is increasingly to yield a short-term profit with quick returns for its investors. The purpose of public education is to be a market for technology, for testing products, for charter schools and companies and chains and their look-alikes in Sweden and England and other parts of the world.

There's nothing wrong with business or making a profit. But when the overwhelming orientation of public education is to yield short-term profits in a fast market, it distorts fundamentally what it is that we do, and it carries troubling assumptions with it about teachers and teaching. One of the ways you increase the returns on public education in the short term is by reducing the cost of teaching, education's greatest expense.

In the business capital view, teaching is technically simple. Teaching doesn't require rigorous training, hard work in universities, or extensive practice in schools. In this view, teaching can be learned over six weeks in the summer, as long as you are passionate and enthusiastic. Imagine if we said that about our doctors or architects or engineers.

A business capital approach says that teaching can be driven by data, that data give you all the answers, that numbers and spreadsheets will set you free. This business capital view of teaching also says that technology can often replace teachers.

The opposite stance toward teaching is a professional capital approach. In this approach, teaching is hard. It's technically difficult, for example, knowing the signs of Asperger's, differentiating instruction, learning all the skills to deal with difficult adults. It requires technical knowledge, high levels of education, strong practice within schools, and continuous improvement over time that is undertaken collaboratively, and that calls for the development of wise judgment.

Over time, professional capital policies and practices build up the expertise of teachers individually and collectively to make a difference in the learning and achievement of all students. In a professional capital approach, teachers should and do work with technology to enhance teaching, but not where the mouse becomes a replacement for the teacher.

Our book spells out the three kinds of capital that comprise professional capital: human capital (the talent of individuals); social capital (the collaborative power of the group); and decisional capital (the wisdom and expertise to make sound judgments about learners that are cultivated over many years). That's the vision of professional capital.

### CAPITAL AT WORK

A simple but powerful study from Carrie Leana of the University of Pittsburgh helps to illustrate the idea of the relationship between human and social capital. She did a study in New York City with a sample of 130 elementary schools (Leana, 2011). She measured three things. She looked at human capital — the qualities of the individuals, their qualifications and competencies on paper. She measured social capital with questions like: To what extent do teachers in this school work in a trusting, collaborative way to focus on learning and the engagement and improvement of student achievement? And then she measured math achievement in September and June as an indicator of teachers' impact.

Leana found that schools with high social capital showed positive achievement outcomes. Schools with strong social and human capital together did even better. Most important, Leana found that teachers with low human capital who happened to be working in a school with higher social capital got better outcomes than those in schools with lower social capital. Being in a school around others who are working effectively rubs off on teachers and engages them.

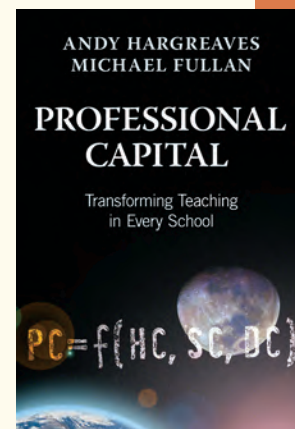
Human and social capital are both important, but hu-

This article is adapted from a keynote address by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan at

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The concept of professional capital and how it can affect the future of teaching and public education is also the subject of their book, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (Teachers College Press, 2012). *Professional Capital* shows how to

demand more of the teaching profession and from the systems that support it. The book includes action guidelines for groups, individual teachers, administrators, schools and districts, and state and federal leaders. Available at <http://store.learningforward.org>.



man capital is not as influential as social capital as a lead strategy. To enact change faster and more effectively, to reduce variation in effective teaching in a school or between and among schools in terms of networks, our advice is to use social capital. Use the group to change the group. This means developing how teachers as a team or group can best identify and respond to the needs of individual students. Back this up with the human capital that comes with being able to attract the best people in the profession, develop them as they come in, and build on that to be effective.

To attract people to the profession, you need a good set of schools for those people to work in. Continuous professional development pays off in Finland, Singapore, Alberta, and Ontario. The best way you can support and motivate teachers is to create the conditions where they can be effective day after day, together. And this isn't just about intraschool collaboration. It's about interschool and interdistrict collaboration. It's about the whole profession.

### DECISIONAL CAPITAL

We know that both human and social capital have links to student achievement. Decisional capital, a notion that comes from the field of law, is about how you develop your capabilities over time, particularly your capacity to judge. All professions involve judgment in situations and circumstances where the evidence and the answers aren't incontrovertibly clear.

Judges have to judge because the facts of the case do not speak

for themselves. How do judges learn to judge? By dealing with many cases over many years, by themselves, with other people, in the courtroom, out of the courtroom reflectively, alone introspectively, and collectively with their colleagues. This is what all professionals do. In part, Finland does so well in education because of the amount of time teachers spend in their day outside of the classroom. They spend less time in the classroom per day than any other country, which gives them time to reflect, discuss, and develop judgment.

### THE ROLE OF CAREER STAGES

In teachers' development, we look at a couple of factors that bear on the development of decisional capital. One is commitment: How enthusiastic, how dedicated, how driven by a moral purpose are you as a teacher? The other is capability: How good are you, can you do the job, can you manage a class of kids, can you differentiate instruction? Both of these things are important, but one is often confused for the other.

There are three career stages that are critical in considering the development of decisional capital. In the early career — one to three years' experience — teachers are, on average, more enthusiastic than at any other point in their career. They are more committed, more dedicated. But, on average, they are less competent; there's still a lot to learn.

In the later years of teaching — 22 years and onwards — we see that teachers' commitment is, on average, declining. It has to do with many things — their lives, aging parents, experiences with change, principal turnover, etc. And their capabilities are all over the map.

The stereotype is that teachers late in their career are resisters, but, in fact, there are four types of teachers. There are the *renewed*, who are constantly learning and challenged. The *disenchanted* teachers were once very excited about change, but through negative experiences have become discouraged; however, they can be re-enchanted. Then there are the *quiet ones*. Introverts are more likely to work with two or three people rather than the entire school to make improvements, and that's the best way to work with them. The fourth group is the *resisters and reprobates*. These are the educators that those running performance evaluations often focus on, the deadwood to get out of the way. While there may be a few teachers in this category, don't confuse the other types of late-career teachers with them.

And then there are teachers in the mid-career range — with anywhere from four to 20 years' experience. These are, on average, the most committed and capable. Their time in teaching adds up to about 10,000 hours, which is the time that Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers* tells us is how long it takes in any profession to become the equivalent of orchestra class as a musician (Gladwell, 2008). If you want to play in the pub on a Saturday night, it will take you about 4,000 hours, which is about the equivalent of three years of teaching.

In teaching, do we want to create teachers who are good



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enough to play in the pub on a Saturday night, with three years or so of experience? Or do we want to keep developing, to wire in all the skills and stretch the capacities, so educators reach that moment where they're in the zone, where they can improvise with a range of strategies effortlessly? If so, it takes most teachers an investment of around 10,000 hours to get to that point.

This career stage is important — and it's the one we commonly neglect. We focus on the first three years to get teachers going. And then we focus on the people who may sometimes prove difficult at the end. We think we can leave the people in the middle alone. If we leave them alone, though, there's the danger that things become too easy, that they won't stretch themselves. And then we're headed for a worrying end, and instead of quiet ones or disenchanted ones or especially renewed ones, we find ourselves dealing with reprobates — and we created them. We need to focus more on the teachers in the middle and to keep challenging and stretching them.

### SOCIAL CAPITAL

In considering how to create a professional capital culture, it's critical to know that there isn't just one way to collaborate. Social capital is not only or sometimes even mainly about professional learning communities sitting down and looking at spreadsheets of student data together. Here are five examples from five countries that we've worked with that use social capital in different ways.

**Finland: Local curriculum development**

One of the things teachers do in Finland that makes them effective is that they create curriculum together, school by school, district by district. They don't just implement curriculum, they create curriculum together.

**Singapore: Give away best ideas**

Singapore is the highest-performing country on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and it's a place where people excel at every level. Here, educators give away their best ideas to other people. Think of that at a school — this notion makes educators have to keep inventing new ideas to stay ahead. They don't hog their ideas. How can you expect your teachers to collaborate if their schools compete?

**Alberta: Collaborative innovation and inquiry**

Alberta is one of the two highest-performing provinces in Canada. For the last 11 years, in collaboration with the government, the Alberta Teachers' Association has spent 50% of its resources on professional development. The College of Alberta School Superintendents has also worked cooperatively to promote inquiry and innovation in schools and districts. Professional inquiry fostered by leaders at all levels has become central to the development of the profession.

**Ontario: Collective responsibility and transparency**

When teachers look at data together in Ontario, they aren't just looking for quick fixes for how to lift up achievement scores. Behind every number is a child. Teachers sit together with the transparency of the data, and all teachers take collective responsibility for all children across grades. The teachers say, "They're our children," not "my children, my class." It's what's behind the data, not what's in the data that is most important for Ontario.

**California Teachers Association: Teacher leaders drive system change**

California is of the lowest-performing states in the U.S. Years ago, the California Teachers Association sued then-Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger for several billion dollars. With the money that it won, the association collaboratively set up the Quality Education Investment Act for several hundred low-performing schools in the state. The early data indicate that with teachers as drivers of system change, achievement gains are being made, especially with Hispanic and African-American populations.

**PUSH-PULL-NUDGE LEADS TO PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL**

Professional capital is a function of the interactive, multiplicative combination of the three kinds of capital discussed above. With our responsibility to move professional capital forward, proactive action is necessary. A combination of push, pull, and nudge will move systems forward. We explore a range of actions for leaders to take in our book, but here is a quick overview of

the push-pull-nudge idea.

*Push* is when you assert, pay attention, and intervene for more professional capital. When you push someone who is reluctant, they change, and they thank you afterwards. But you can be too pushy, and what started as a push for people's own good can turn into a shove that is enforcing compliance for its own sake. It can be your habitual first move, rather than your next or last one when other strategies fail. *Pull* is when you draw people into the excitement, into the vision, into the development. But not everyone is always ready to be pulled in this way. In between is nudging. *Nudge* is a way to enable people to make choices but to try and guide them a bit at a time into making better ones. Some of the ways to nudge people are: to use key language constantly that repeats and affirms what is important; to adopt tools like data walls that are visible to everyone, conceptual anchor charts in every classroom to emphasize key learning skills, or critical friends protocols to promote deeper discussion; or to change the structures by positioning a struggling new teacher alongside an experienced pro, rather than placing him or her out in a portable hut where no one else wants to teach.

All good leadership is a judicious mixture of push, pull, and nudge. This is a sophisticated practice. It's a combination of nonjudgmentalism, not being pejorative about where people are at the beginning, combined with moving them forward. In all this, there is a not a reluctance to insist on collaboration, but there is a sensitivity to career cycle issues and different starting points. In the end, it's best to pull whenever you can, push whenever you must, and nudge all the time.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

As we state in our book, "Professional capital is about enacting more equal, higher-attaining, more healthy countries in just about every way that counts. This is why successful countries treat their teachers as nation builders, and how they come to yield high returns in prosperity, social cohesion, and social justice," (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 185). But this can't be just a slogan. Our book has hit a responsive chord with educators at all levels of the system. Professional capital has turned out to be a "sticky concept" — it resonates with where people are and what they see as a promising and necessary solution. What we need now is a committed effort to implement this powerful conception of the profession across the system. The responsibility is ours. Let's make professional capital our primary investment.

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