

Broadening professional communities through collaborative partnerships

Positive changes in school practices require challenging conventional thinking and developing new knowledge in safe and supportive environments that value ongoing engagement in professional communities (see Dweck, 2012; Dufour *et al.*, 2005; Earl and Timperley, 2009; Payne, 2008; Schleifer *et al.*, 2017; Timperley *et al.*, 2007). Harris and Jones[1] in their Disciplined Collaborative Maturity Model, offer a helpful framework that outlines the progression of professional learning from emerging (belief in student-centered learning), engaging (value of professional collaboration), embedding (implementation of professional learning communities), extending (data-informed shared learning across the school), to empowering (impact-focused, teacher-led professional collaboration and learning). To reach the empowering stage, professional communities become, in the words of Wenger (1998), social learning systems: relational, structural, cognitive, and engaging (see Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Duffy and Gallagher, 2016; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). This special journal issue explores professional communities across the spectrum, from emerging to empowering.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) in their book, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, identify professional capital as a sum of three core elements: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. The first element is human capital, comprised of individual knowledge, competencies, skills, and abilities (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Social capital is the second element, defined as how “the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectations, obligations, and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same norms or codes of behavior” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 90). As they note, one of the most effective ways to improve teaching and learning is to focus on networks and cultures, on the interpersonal relationships and organization-wide changes (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Decisional capital is the last element, referring to educators’ ability to make informed judgments, particularly in the moments of ambiguity (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Together, these three elements offer a new medium for rethinking the role of teachers as leaders and educational change agents.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also identify five “Cs” of professional capital: capability, commitment, career, culture, and context or conditions of teaching. They note that collaborative cultures that exemplify system change are opportunities where educators, young people, and community work together to achieve shared results. This special issue is situated at the intersection of 2 Cs – culture and context – paying attention to how teachers build their own professional capital by extending their networks into the community that surrounds them, as well as the opportunities and tensions that emerge when conventional approaches are challenged with new collaborative practices.

The articles presented in this special issue represent diverse, global perspectives on professional capital, raising discussion on how we think about strengthening human capital, growing social capital, and supporting decisional capital among teachers and other key partners. The articles illustrate practices in Australia, Iceland, Kenya, and Hong Kong, each addressing reimagining of professional communities within, across, and beyond schools. The authors invite exploration of emerging practices across contexts and pose questions for further research.



Teacher-to-teacher partnerships

Quinn and Fullan (2018) describe system cultures as one of the key elements of coherent systems:

A culture of growth is essential to foster risk-taking and innovation and build trust. Organizations that build strong system cultures set a norm that acknowledges it is OK to make mistakes as long as we are learning from them. They focus on solution finding by developing talent from within rather than relying on prepackaged external consultants and products. They nurture talent while at the same time building the internal capacity to solve even greater challenges. They establish mechanisms to learn from the work (the early innovations) so that knowledge is built and shared intentionally across the organization (p. 228).

Fullan and Quinn's (2016) observation about trust, innovation, and ongoing learning are elements articulated by this issue's authors as necessary components of collaborative cultures; cultures that prioritize deep, purposeful engagement within a professional community, one that has clear goals and parameters, that invites innovation and continuous improvement. The first article, focused on purposeful professional engagement within schools, illustrates this concept.

This special issue opens with the research article, "Disciplined Collaboration and Inquiry: Evaluating the Impact of Professional Learning," by Alma Harris and Michelle Suzette Jones, in which they describe an Australian model of an emerging collaborative culture focused on impact. Collaborative inquiry, the Disciplined Collaboration and Evaluation of Professional Learning (DCEPL), is a multi-year project in eight schools across a territory and several states, focused on the creation of collaborative inquiry cycles and deep teacher engagement. DCEPL represents a project aimed to understand the effectiveness of a data-informed model of inquiry where teachers could develop innovations that fit their local context and where they design practices that are well-planned, data-informed, and embedded in the school culture. As Harris and Jones (2017) synthesize in their article:

Collaboration, research shows, is most effective when it is relevant, relational, authentic, engaging, practitioner-driven, contextual, and ongoing (see e.g. Timperley *et al.*, 2007), as well as intentional in its content, purpose, goals, and desired outcomes that balance individual classroom needs with the broader school and system (Campbell *et al.*, 2016; Campbell, 2018; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012).

Harris and Jones (2010) describe how and under what conditions professional collaborations yield intended outcomes, and the cultural conditions and collaboration skills needed to underpin professional capital. The authors introduce the 5Ds maturity model – diagnosis, data, development, distributed leadership, and drive – arguing that schools in which the maturity model is present, data-informed practices, shared expectations, and mutual support become a part of the school's cultural fabric, linking school-community practices with student-level achievement outcomes.

Collaboration, as Campbell (2018, p. 125) asserts, "deprivatizes teacher knowledge" by allowing teachers space to step outside of their classrooms and engage with each other in dialogue and co-creation of practices that not only build capacity and competences of individual teachers, but benefit the learning community. Harris and Jones explore a new approach in achieving authentic professional collaboration that impacts student-level learning. Their article adds to the literature on professional capital and community by exploring a strategy that intentionally links collaborative practices with evaluative qualities, linking process and purpose in support of improving student learning.

Professional community: teachers and beyond school partners

A growing number of school-external partnership models across the globe on both the school and systems levels (e.g. collective impact, place-based initiatives, family engagement

strategies, and school-based health) indicate that the education field has moved beyond school vs non-school factors and toward an equity frame that embraces schools as community hubs, community schools, that interact with external contexts and that those interactions can add up to meaningful changes in the teaching and learning processes (Ainscow, 2012; Henig *et al.*, 2012, 2015; Melaville *et al.*, 2006). When school-day teachers have an opportunity to partner with service providers in their community, the collaborative networks have been found to have a positive effect on the classroom (e.g. teachers feel more supported, feel a sense of community, are able to link and align curriculum with the local context) (Ainscow, 2016; Friedlaender *et al.*, 2014; Harvard Family Research Project, 2010; Henderson, 2011; Malone and Jacobson, 2015; Seashore *et al.*, 2010). In other words, burgeoning body of research suggests that in-school and out-of-school systems are no longer that distinct from each other, and that there is an opportunity to broaden professional communities and strengthen professional capital by building intentional linkages between teachers and community partners (Blankstein and Noguera, 2016; Malone, 2013). Although partnerships by themselves are not a sole solution for school effectiveness and improvement, the role of external partners cannot be overlooked (Blankstein and Noguera, 2016; Carter and Welner, 2013). The next three articles focus on such professional communities that extend beyond schools.

Teacher-leisure-care provider partnerships

The second article in this special issue expands the conversation about collaborative inquiry to school-community partnerships by making the case for expanding professional communities to be inclusive of community partners, namely, leisure-care personnel. Kolbrún Pálsdóttir, in her case study article, “Integrated Learning in Schools: An Icelandic Case Study,” discusses the Icelandic project designed to integrate schools and leisure-care centers[2], and the inherent opportunities and tensions that arise in bridging the two systems together. Her multi-case study of five Reykjavik elementary schools builds from the city’s “The Day of the Child” 2012 project. Her research questions center on how schools and leisure-care centers build professional communities to support students during, and outside of school hours, and how this approach expands our notion of professional capital and community.

There are inherent benefits to bridging school and leisure-care worlds. The adults supporting school-age children during after school hours are supporting the same students as school-day teachers. The pedagogical training of teachers and leisure-care adults, Pálsdóttir argues, offers complementary perspectives to the development of the whole child, coupling academic learning with positive youth development principles. As my colleagues and I have argued elsewhere:

The school-community partnership model asks teachers to be attuned to individual students’ needs, to have the capacity to put a student and family in touch with needed services, and to know how these programs affect students. Further, some teachers might benefit from opening their doors to classroom aides or paraprofessionals who run afterschool and summer programs as a way to link and align instructional practices with academic supports available outside the traditional school hours (Henig *et al.*, 2012, p. 126).

Meaning, by broadening professional community to be inclusive of community partners, such as leisure-care centers, both the teachers and leisure-care personnel, as exemplified in the Pálsdóttir article, expand their human capital (e.g. teachers gaining new pedagogical perspectives rooted in child/youth development), social capital (e.g. teachers and leisure-care personnel engage in joint planning sessions, work side-by-side inside the classroom, and support each other throughout the learning day in diverse role capacities), and decisional capital (e.g. teachers’ decisions are informed by a broader set of considerations

as to the contexts, environments, and practices that support student learning, engagement, and sense of agency).

Noam *et al.*'s (2003) typology of partnership intensity is a helpful illustration of the continuum in the expansion of professional communities, whereby collaboration begins on one end of the spectrum with self-contained (minimal relationship) and associated (transactional relationship such as use of space, sharing tools), to integrated partnership (teachers and leisure-care workers trust each other, have deep relationships and meaningful engagement), and unified (transformative partnership where school day and community services are linked and aligned in a seamless way; where teachers and leisure-care workers seek and resolve problems focused on students at the center; where they have shared planning, collaboration, and decision-making capacities). Pálsdóttir's case study could be interpreted as situated in the integrated phase, where teachers and leisure-care workers share space, pedagogical practices, and professional development, but where issues of power, roles, and leadership are being negotiated.

The article points to the challenges and opportunities in building professional community within schools by integrating critical partners into the school (see Bryk and Schneider, 2002). Her findings point to the need for trust and relationship-building, clear articulation of goals and collaboration mechanisms that are student-focused and supported by school and leisure-care providers alike. The findings also offer exploratory observations as how a school-beyond school approach to professional capital can broaden teachers' knowledge and perspectives, expand their professional circle of support, and increase their ability to design inclusive professional school cultures.

Teacher-family partnerships

Similarly, families are key partners in successful professional communities. Decades of research point to the critical role families play in supporting student learning both within the school day and at home (see Henderson, 2011; Henderson and Mapp, 2002; Moll *et al.*, 1992). Literature on parental involvement, and most recently, broadened to a concept of family engagement, has noted that families are critical partners to teachers and a part of the school community. Epstein *et al.* (2002) identify six types of family involvement, including skills, communications, volunteering, learning at home, school decision making, and collaboration. In the US context, the recent emergence of the dual-capacity framework focuses on building capabilities, connections, cognition, and confidence designed to support strong school-family engagement (Mapp and Kuttner, 2013, p. 8). As Moll *et al.* (1992, p. 133) argue, families have "funds of knowledge"[3] that can benefit the school-family-community partnerships.

The acknowledgement in both scholarship and practice that families are critical partners in the school community continues to grow; however, professional development and human capital development of teachers regarding family engagement remain peripheral. Research has pointed to a lack of capacity-building available to both teachers and families, to the inherent school practices that can, at times, privilege particular types of social capital, and as such, make it challenging for families to be involved in inclusive ways (see Moll *et al.*, 1992; Warren *et al.*, 2016).

In his research article, "A Survey of School-Family-Community Partnerships in Kenya," Benard Omenge Nyatuka presents one of the largest county-wide studies to date in Kenya focused on the school-family community, with attention to the state of teacher's social capital in engaging families in authentic ways. Deploying a stratified random sample of 361 teachers in 34 primary schools across 12 districts of Kakamega County, Nyatuka discusses teacher-reported family engagement. According to his findings, teachers that responded to the survey indicated a lack of adequate foundational knowledge of how to engage families and a lack of access to professional development that could facilitate such growth. Thus, most of the self-reported interaction focuses on transactional, rather than

transformational practices (Noam and Tillinger, 2004). The article offers exploratory considerations into teacher-level development of both human and social capitals, and the overall need for expansion of professional school communities to be inclusive of families they serve.

Teacher-health provider partnerships

The last article expands the professional community even further, beyond teachers, leisure-care personnel, and families, by focusing on teachers and health professionals within schools. Albert Lee and Robin Man-biu Cheung, in their article, “School as Setting to Create a Healthy Teaching and Learning Environment: Using a Health Promoting School Model to Foster School-Health Partnerships,” offer a review of over two decades of research and evaluation they have conducted tracking the implementation of health promoting schools (HPS). Their article focuses on how teachers enhance their professional capital by working with health educators to transform school cultures into ones focused on the whole child (ASCD, n.d.). HPS, the authors note, has been a long-standing initiative in Hong Kong, designed to address the rise of adolescent behavioral and psychological pressures, which have ramifications within schools, as well as outside.

As the authors note, the HPS model focuses on establishing trusting relationships between teachers and health professionals, creating shared responsibility for health outcomes of students, linking instructional practices and students’ well-being (see e.g. Lee *et al.*, 2000; Lee, 2003). Teachers over time moved from informal professional learning networks to formal professional communities that engaged in building individual teachers’ knowledge about health promotion through focused training; ongoing peer-to-peer engagement and data-informed innovation; and intentional and authentic engagement of families, community members, and health professionals as mechanisms to grow social capital and widen the school community.

The article is significant because it highlights a system-wide, longitudinal initiative aimed at changing cultural and behavioral practices of teachers inside schools – tightly coupled, intentional, and solution-oriented. The article also offers an example that falls under Harris and Jones’ typology as an example of empowered professional community. Lee and Cheung also pose important questions pertaining to professional capital and community, namely, what factors influence and promote the adoption of HPS in schools? What type of data support sustained implementation of school-health partnerships? What policy and school contexts foster professional communities that include a whole-child perspective?

Conclusion

Improving instruction and supporting learning involves addressing challenges and opportunities within classrooms and with external partners (Ainscow, 2012; Ainscow *et al.*, 2012). Authentic and intentional collaboration among teachers and with teachers and external partners must become central focus in our discourse about professional capital. This journal issue recognizes the reciprocity that exists among teachers and between teachers and external partners, and offers global examples of collaborative networks designed to change school cultures in support of teachers, the whole child, and surrounding community (Lewallen *et al.*, 2015).

The articles in this issue approach professional communities with an aim to lead to positive changes in practices, policies, and overall organizational cultures, both on the institutional and system levels. The importance of collaboration within and across schools has become a mainstream reform strategy (Hargreaves, 2003; Sebring *et al.*, 2006). However, as Hargreaves (2003) warns, contrived collegiality, or professional learning communities that are focused on existing practices, replication, or networking for their own sake (Harris, 2013), do not necessarily translate to meaningful organizational or systemic changes

(Anderson, 2013). What could facilitate such change rests on collaboration and continuous improvement with a strong orientation to what works and how to propel knowledge forward (Bryk *et al.*, 2015; Hargreaves, 2003; Harris, 2013; Schleifer *et al.*, 2017). As Harris and Jones remind us in their contribution in this issue, group-think and consensus building do not equate with automatic advancement in student outcomes; rather, positive change is optimized under authentic approaches to collaboration.

Foundational to professional collaboration are relationships built on trust, shared vision, and common goals (see Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Rincón-Gallardo and Fullan, 2016a; Oakes *et al.*, 2017). For instance, Pálsdóttir points to the benefits of both informal and formal relationship-building between teachers and leisure-care professionals as means of improving instructional practices, broadening pedagogical stances, and reshaping learning environments that benefit the whole child. In absence of trust and relationships, as Nyatuka warns, much of the interaction becomes transactional knowledge-transmission without strong association with shared accountability or systemic transformation.

Another through-line pertains to authentic collaboration, collaboration among partnering adults in a space open to risk taking, innovation, continuous learning and debate, and open communication about issues and challenges facing individuals and the group (Research for Better Teaching Inc., 2015; Saphier, 2018, p. 96). The Harris and Jones maturity model points to the importance of mutual support, shared values, distributed leadership, collective responsibility for results, and problem-seeking, data-informed, deliberate culture that values authentic engagement in a shared enterprise of learning.

As Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) astutely noted in their book, *The Global Fourth Way: The Quest for Educational Excellence*, there is a need for a global evolution beyond a third way of educational change, one that emphasizes binary approach to improvement or innovation, and toward a fourth way, one that moves systems toward improvement with innovation. They define the third way as practices focused on closing gaps, service delivery, pragmatic partnerships, customized learning, data-driven and dispersed networks, and targeted interventions that oftentimes incrementally move the needle of progress (see Hargreaves and Shirley, 2012, p. 10). What they encourage the education field to embrace is a more transformational approach to change, one that fosters inclusive environments, public and community engagement, voice, authentic partnerships, mindful teaching, evidence-informed communities of practice, and responsive teaching (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2012). However, strategies and systems that operate in the fourth way, while growing in number, remain infrequent.

The articles in this issue could be categorized as collaborative school communities that are moving within their local contexts from third to fourth way of approaching educational change in their schools, communities, and systems (Hargreaves and Shirley, 2012). Articles that explored collaborative inquiry found that, over time, teachers developed deeper bonds, increased their professional capital, and collaborated toward shared goals. Applying Hargreaves and Shirley's framework, the articles illuminate the following shifts:

- Harris and Jones describe school cultural shifts from data-driven to evidence-informed practices, whereby teachers are viewed as changemakers, engaged in communities that are not only focused on problem solving but rather on local innovation and shared pursuit to improve learning outcomes.
- Pálsdóttir addresses strategies that move community service delivery toward community engagement, where partnerships between schools and leisure-care centers move beyond pragmatic to authentic, and where students experience integrated learning modalities (e.g. infusing personalized, experiential learning, and free play into the school day).
- Nyatuka explores the importance of bridging teachers and families beyond service delivery and toward public engagement, exploring the state of in-services practices and ways schools could be intentional about family engagement.

- Lee and Cheung discuss system-wide transformations where health-promoting schools are not only broadening and deepening their professional communities to be inclusive of health perspectives, but where school cultural practices are transformed toward a whole-child orientation.

The authors note that such shifts are promising, but inherently challenging, and leave us with pressing questions, including:

- Under what conditions can collaborative inquiry work? What are the mechanisms by which schools can move away from models and toward cultural norms? What are the implications for school leaders?
- How can schools create integrated learning environments? What are the effects on students? What are the implications for teachers and external partners alike? How can systems broaden approaches to both teaching and learning?
- How can schools and districts/regions support pre- and in-service teachers in helping them build skills, capacities, and capabilities to engage with families? How can schools create collaborative cultures with families?
- What sustains cultural shifts, such as health-promoting schools, over time? What factors influence the adoption of new practices and the sustainability of change?

This issue is designed to start a dialogue about the need to broaden our notions of professional collaboration and community in a way that leads to cultural shift within and beyond schools, from emerging to empowering, and indeed, toward a fourth way of educational change.

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Notes

1. Table depicting Harris and Jones (2017) framework on the progression of professional learning is available in the first article of this special issue.
2. Leisure-care centers are after school programs designed to offer child- and youth-centered, developmentally appropriate experiential experiences, coupling free outdoor play with organized group work that focuses on social emotional, physical, and cognitive activities. They can operate before, during, or after school hours.
3. Moll *et al.* (1992, p. 133) define “funds of knowledge” as “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being.”

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