



## Being an Inclusive Faculty in New Zealand Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*This article looks at the imperative to be an inclusive faculty, particularly where new immigrant teachers are concerned. It reviews the cultural, human, intellectual and social capital of schools and introduces the concept of teachers' professional capital. The question of its transferability from one school to the next is then raised. In particular, the transferability of an immigrant teacher's professional capital to the New Zealand context is explored. Teachers are urged to value the professional capital of all new colleagues so that inclusive attitudes and practices among staff will engender stronger professional networks.*

### INTRODUCTION

The world economic crisis has brought the question of capital value to our attention. The amount of liquid cash or saleable assets we have determines our options, expanding or limiting our financial effectiveness. In education, capital counts too. Although all schools work within budgets and financial accountability, they also have very different forms of capital: forms that are able to influence our educational effectiveness, in a similar way that monetary capital influences our financial effectiveness.

The first and most well known form of educational capital is Bourdieu's (1973) cultural capital of the students. This is comprised of the knowledge and skills a student brings into their school interactions and learning. Cultural capital is formed by prior experiences, especially those in the home. It acts as a gate-keeper to knowledge. Learning potential is maximized when the students' cultural capital closely aligns with the school's values and ways of knowing. If, however, a student's cultural capital is distinctly different from the school's, then the student may have difficulty accessing the curriculum. The concept of cultural capital and its effects can apply to teachers and even parents as well, not just students.

In addition to cultural capital, educational economists research how human capital increases workers' productivity and lifetime earnings (Woodhall, 1987). Human capital is concerned with the economic effects of training and the professional development of staff. These effects are measured both personally for the staff member and socially for the wider society.

Hargreaves (2001) introduced the concepts of a school's intellectual and social capital. Intellectual capital is the combined knowledge and experience of a school's staff. It is through intellectual capital that existing knowledge transfers between people and situations, generating new knowledge. Social capital is the amount of trust and collaboration that exists in the school. Establishing a strong staff network of trust and professional respect is essential before a school can build a reservoir of intellectual capital (Hargreaves, 2001). Therefore, in our staff-rooms it is social capital that must come first, then the development of a collective intellectual capital will follow.

I would like to propose a fourth form of capital, professional capital. I define professional capital as the knowledge and skills, both specialized and general, which a teacher develops within their training and experience. It is all that gives them competence as a professional teacher. It encompasses their cultural capital but also their beliefs and assumptions about good teaching and how students learn best – it is essentially, what makes each teacher tick. Whether or not a school has strong intellectual and social capital, I believe that all teachers do have personal professional capital. While a school's intellectual and social capitals are corporately realised (Hargreaves, 2001), professional capital is by contrast very personal. This is due to the relational nature of teaching, so that professional capital is woven into the very fabric of a teacher's professional identity.

Teacher identity is extremely personal and particular. How teachers think, how they make moment by moment pedagogical decisions, their emotional relationships with students, colleagues, parents and their knowledge about a subject and how to best teach it are all tied into teacher identity. A teacher's identity is embodied; a part of their very being, their skin (Gaudelli & Ousley, 2009). Teachers with a strong sense of professional identity experience a large measure of professional capital.

## **TRANSFERRING PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL TO NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS**

When New Zealand teachers move between schools, they may expect that their professional capital will transfer fairly well and will be respected by new colleagues. However, the immigrant teacher's experience of major educational change provides more of a challenge regarding the transferability of their professional capital.

Many immigrant teachers who responded to the teacher shortage of the mid-1990s (Sarney, 1996) experienced this challenge. At that time, New Zealand schools sought experienced teachers from English-speaking nations, like England, Scotland, Australia and South Africa. How well did the professional capital of the immigrant teacher transfer to the New Zealand school setting? How did their New Zealand colleagues receive immigrant teachers? Did past professional experiences enable them to have a voice in staffroom discussions, or did they have to abandon aspects of their professional identity to assimilate into the New Zealand school experience?

Watts and White (2004) suggest that there is a high expectation from New Zealand society that immigrants should completely assimilate. This leaves many new immigrants feeling that they need to lose integral parts of their

identity to be fully accepted. Immigrant teachers may discover that their professional capital is actually afforded little value by New Zealand colleagues within the day-to-day job of teaching and the discussions of the staffroom. Instead immigrants are often expected to 'go native', to completely assimilate and conform to New Zealand's values and norm. In a study following immigrants, Williams (2007) found that too often immigrants are expected to replace their knowledge with a new knowledge framework when they arrive in a new country. The subsequent loss of professional capital may leave the immigrant teacher feeling professionally impotent, affecting their self-confidence and identity, especially if they are actually highly experienced teachers in their native land (Sabar, 2004).

In our educational system, 'going native' is not an easy accomplishment and it may not be possible for all immigrant teachers. This is because not all of an immigrant teacher's professional capital will transfer smoothly. New Zealand's unique heritage – its colonial history and the implications of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the ethnic make-up of the students and the need for an awareness and a measure of comfort with Te Reo and Maoritanga – all present challenges to the immigrant teacher. Additionally, New Zealand's culture of high egalitarianism, individualism and tolerance for ambiguity (Hofstede, 1984) creates unique classroom dynamics and pedagogical practices.

As new immigrants, many of these teachers will experience the usual phases of culture shock. This is characterized by an early honeymoon phase where everything is wonderful, followed by an often extreme dip in emotions during the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> month after arrival. The immigrant teacher longs for the familiarity and competence they felt when teaching in their former home country. During this time, criticism of the new school system can often be strong and vocal. They may struggle to fit their existing professional knowledge into the new context, and their new knowledge within old understandings. In a professional setting, the self-doubt that is cast by immigrant teachers on the transferability of their pedagogical knowledge is referred to as 'transitional shock' (Sabar, 2004). In a study into how teachers coped with pedagogical change, Dellinger *et al.* (2008) found that without a secure belief in one's ability to successfully acquire new pedagogical structures, teacher identity becomes very fragile in the midst of change.

The immigrant teacher has the compounding difficulties of both culture shock on moving to live in another country and the transitional shock of switching to a very different school system. When a staff member's professional capital is not valued, they may resort to measures of self-protection, such as denying the validity of new methods and clinging to old ways, even if they are inappropriate within the new setting (Sabar, 2004). In an effort to preserve their professional integrity and identity, they may simply close their classroom doors, exhibit defensiveness of their pedagogical decisions, or only pay lip service to the educational practices expected in the new school.

It is important, therefore, to respect the space and time that the immigrant teacher needs in order to engage with new ideas and practices. A healthy scepticism of the different way things are done in New Zealand schools shows that they are actively engaging in professional inquiry. This is essential if they are going to truly understand and develop competence in the pedagogical

practices of New Zealand teachers.

It is important during this phase to keep a calm and open dialogue. When colleagues do not communicate and share best practice, disparate outcomes within grade teams may result, with a further break down of trust as teachers move into situations of competition over collaboration. This can lead to social marginalisation and professional alienation within the staffroom when the immigrant teacher is at their most vulnerable stage (Sabar, 2004).

An immigrant teacher is often able to bring perspective and insight into our encultured and embedded programmes and practices (Williams, 2007). These are practices that are so deeply rooted within the New Zealand educational experience that they have ceased to be questioned and critiqued. An immigrant's fresh perspective can help us analyse and identify those practices that strengthen student learning and those which have merely become an educational habit.

### **FACILITATING THE TRANSFER OF PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL TO NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS**

Hargreaves (2001) urges that schools 'must find new ways to manage and exploit their intellectual assets, particularly those of the teachers' (p. 498). In supporting this statement, teachers themselves must realize that they need to value each other's knowledge, skills and experience. This is not a responsibility for management alone.

New immigrant teachers are not only intellectual assets that may or may not be fully utilised by schools, but they are primarily human beings with very personal identities. They have a history, a vision, a hope, and a passion for the future that has motivated them to dare to make a new world their home.

Although immigrant teachers will naturally experience the loss of professional capital that is no longer needed, they will also gradually incorporate new knowledge. This process of loss and gain has been documented as common among immigrants and has been found in the experiences of novice teachers (Sabar, 2004). It is important to remember that immigrant teachers are often very experienced; their professional capital is well established and woven into their teacher identity, so the pain of the loss is particularly poignant. There is much that New Zealand teachers can do to welcome them and help them settle well here.

New colleagues can ease this difficulty by valuing the immigrant teachers' professional capital. Williams (2007) urges us to consider that the unique knowledge they carry should be valued 'precisely because it is different' (p. 366). Cope and Kalantzis (1997, cited in Watts & White, 2004) also urge us to take advantage and to value the diversity dividends immigrants bring to the workplace.

New Zealand colleagues can listen with open hearts and not take criticisms of the New Zealand educational system or their particular school too seriously. These are better shelved for later discussion, when a more balanced perspective is restored. Valuing the immigrant teacher's perspectives and questions, strengthens the school's social capital. This then paves the way for an increase in shared intellectual capital.

## CONCLUSION

A school that fails to mobilise the professional capital of its new staff, immigrants and nationals, may in the long-term damage its corporate social and intellectual capitals. New Zealand teachers are urged not to overlook or devalue the professional knowledge, the expertise, diversity or perspectives new teachers bring to their existing teaching teams. When professional capital is valued, the new teacher is able to reintegrate knowledge from their past experiences into new frameworks for teaching.

The professional capital of a teacher is personal, not corporate; however, with the right climate of encouragement to share and collaborate, a school's intellectual capital will rise. A win-win situation results for both professionals and students when teachers can share best practice and freely bring new educational ideas and perspectives into staffroom discussions.

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