SOCIAL CAPITAL AIDS SCHOOLWIDE REFORM IMPLEMENTATION

In the era of teacher accountability, the book *Assessing Teacher Quality: Understanding Teacher Effects on Instruction and Achievement* edited by Sean Kelly examines the intricacies involved in measuring the effect that teachers have on their students. The social context of teachers is one important element to pay attention to when trying to understand teacher quality. This element is examined in a chapter of the book by Michigan State University professor Ken Frank and colleagues. Specifically, the authors look at what they refer to as social capital, or the resources and expertise that teachers obtain through their ties with others, in relation to schoolwide reform implementation. The title of their book chapter is “Teachers’ Social Capital and the Implementation of Schoolwide Reforms.”

A TEACHER’S SOCIAL CAPITAL IMPACTS IMPLEMENTATION

Frank and his collaborators explain that the interactions that teachers have with their colleagues in their social networks can help them implement schoolwide reforms in their classrooms in two ways. First, interactions with colleagues exert *normative pressure* on teachers to adopt particular practices within a school. In other words, particular practices within a school become norms and teachers within the same social network feel obligated to conform and uphold those norms. Second, interactions with colleagues give teachers access to *new knowledge* needed to implement reforms.

The researchers found evidence of both normative and informational effects in 21 schools engaged in a locally defined schoolwide reform. To do so, they analyzed how patterns of collegial interactions are related to changes in the reform implementation of individual teachers. Frank and his colleagues surveyed teachers twice in a school year (fall 2004 and spring 2005) to measure the social ties among teachers at each school, their patterns of interaction around instruction, and how much the reform influenced teaching practices. They found normative effects because when teachers interacted with others about instructional matters, they tended to conform their own practices to those of colleagues with whom they interact most frequently. They also found informational effects because information obtained from teachers implementing reforms and from professional development influenced changes in instruction by providing teachers with direct access to new knowledge to implement the reform. Furthermore, the more help that teachers got from others who are experienced in implementing the reform, the more likely they are to increase their own implementation.

The authors of this study suggest that this research illustrates the potential contributions of network measures of social capital to improve teacher effectiveness. Models that use social network measures can be used for measuring changes in teaching quality, indicating to school and district leaders that a reform is taking hold. Using social network measures to assess teacher quality reconceptualizes the value-added measures of teacher effectiveness that are currently gaining increased popularity in teacher evaluation practices. Compared to value-added assessment models, social network models place more focus on how teachers help each other and on the school as a whole rather than only on a given teacher’s classroom outcomes. As a result, a social network approach views teaching less as a solo practice and more as a practice that evolves within a broader social and organizational context.
WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU

School and district leaders may want to consider recognizing the importance of social networks in helping or hindering reform efforts in their schools. The findings of this study encourage school and district leaders to think about ways to influence the social capital of teachers at their schools in order to make their schoolwide reform implementation more effective. For example, ensuring that teachers have common planning time to share ideas and information, and have opportunities to go into each other’s classrooms to observe reform in action can help increase their social capital. With increased social capital, teachers are more likely to implement reforms through normative pressure and gaining access to new information.

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