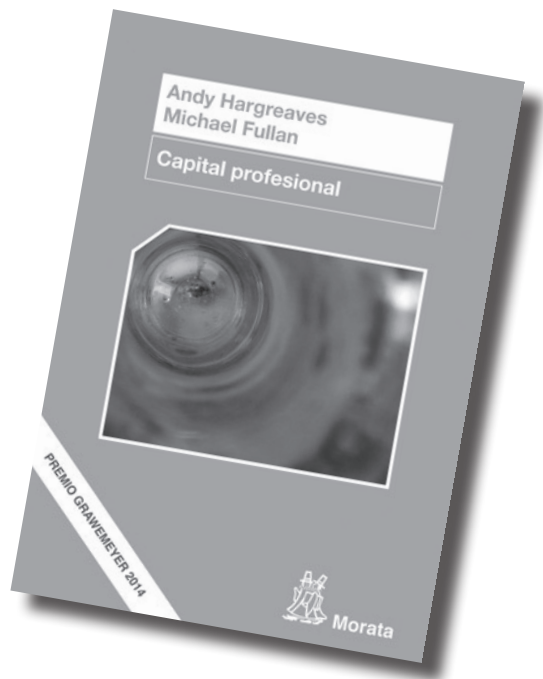


Transforming education through professional capital

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Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan (2012), *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School*, New York: Teachers College Press, 220 pp. ISBN: 978-0-8077-5332-3.

The authors of this book Andy Hargreaves (Lynch School of Education at Boston College) and Michael Fullan (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education) are relevant in the education area because of their theories and contributions on the educational change, which they started more than two decades ago with the revision of *What's worth fighting for in your school*. This way, in the text reviewed here, the authors expose in seven chapters a new approach to change education and strengthen (p. 28), promoting actions that allow improving the quality of teaching in the line of what has been already carried out.

This book proposes an educational change center on the power of professional capital, understood as a “fundamental concept that defines and gathers critical elements of what is needed to create a high quality and performance in the exercise of all professions, including teaching” (p. 132). The definition exposed by the authors establishes a direct relation between capital and the value of the individual or group, which implies an investment in education that falls on the educators and on a high-level education.

However, the conundrum of teaching and the concern about its quality, positions the educators on the focus of attention as the main internal factor that affect learning and performance. From this point of view, in order to have quality professors, it is necessary that “they are fully committed, well prepared, continually training, well paid, and good teamwork so that they maximize their own progress and that they are capable of make effective judgments using all their capacity and experience” (p. 23). This way, Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan use the basic idea of capital and express its importance for capability and professional effectiveness, influencing on collective professional responsibility, which in the current Spanish context has especial depth (in the time of collectiveness and communities at social, economic, political level, etc.).

An interesting idea is that the professional culture “connects the way in which people do their job with their way of life” (p. 173). Hence, individualism is considered a defect or personal weakness associated with a bad teaching practice, since it keeps the educator from valuable feedback for effective decision-making. The collaborative culture in which educators are capable of working, planning and making decisions with their peers significantly increases the basic principles of professional capital.

Because of this, the authors insist on the need for a collaborative professional culture before the individualist one, in which responsibility and collective power suppose the central axis of the book, as the excellence of professionalism allows “improving as an individual, increasing team performance and increasing quality

in every profession” (p. 47). Because of this, there has to be investment on the professional capital of the educators as a means to revolutionize all the educational systems; however, for it to become successful and sustainable progress, it can only be carried out by and with the educators (p. 71).

From this stance, the authors approach in their work the development of three sorts of capital as fundamental elements for the teaching profession. In such manner that the professional capital integrates human, social and decision capital. Human capital is understood as “the development of knowledge and dexterities necessary for the profession” (p. 118); this concept refers to knowledge and dexterities developed in people by means of training and education and they have economic value. Social capital, “referred to the quality and quantity of interactions and social relationships between people that affects their access to knowledge and information” (p. 119); it is a resource that contributes to productive activities and that is especially linked to human capital. Decision capital is understood as the “capability to make discretionary judgments (p. 123). This way, professional capital yields effective teaching from the combination of these three sorts of capital that mutually potentiate.

Although professional development is still relevant in the very practice, where the reflection of practical actions and professional collaboration suppose key elements for professional development, in this context the authors attribute Professional Learning Communities a fundamental role for professional development, as they influence on the professional dimensions, since interactions among educators are the necessary social capital for improvement. What is more, from its inception in the 1990's, Professional Learning Communities have extended as a part of the informal collaborative culture “attracting the people's interests toward the interesting change for the motivation produced by the process, the stimulating sensation of commitment and the creation of a committed and efficacious learning culture” (p. 161).

In this sense leadership becomes fundamental, as it is indicated by the authors “in the educational change, sometime it is said that human beings prefer remain immovable and stay just where they are” (p. 161), therefore, leadership can become the driving force. However, who is the ideal person to be the leader? From the educational debate emphasis is given on “the head as information leader” for “the basic principles upon which they are supported and which create capital in schools are the same that cultivate and circulate the professional capital in all the system” (p. 175).

On the other side, information and communication technology has been used for years to create Virtual Learning Communities, in views of facilitating cooperative learning among the members who share a common objective. Nevertheless, “Virtual Professional Communities” emerge more easily every day, as they contemplate various elements that facilitate the cooperation and generation necessary to interact among them and produce significant learning, directly influencing on professional capital. And although this book encourages the professionals of education to support the educational transformation, many are those who have started from the information and communication technologies as one of the conditioning elements of current society.

From a global vision, the reviewed book develops, in successive chapters, those aspects fundamental to accomplish a good teaching practice. In the first place, it approaches the idea of professional capital facing the opposed, wrong and stereotyped teaching perspective and stresses the need to invest on capability and commitment (aspects developed in chapters two and four). Chapter five approaches the main topic, which gives the book its name, “professional capital”. Then, the cultures of teaching profession are studied, carrying out an analysis of the individualism and collaborative cultures that make room for Professional Learning Communities, paying attention to the obstacles in their formation and their potentialities to develop a collaborative culture among educators, not leaving aside the relevance that leadership acquires in this respect.

Finally, in chapter seven the authors point out a set of patterns for educators, as well as a series of directives aimed at school and national and international organizations that develop educational policies. In like manner, they make a revision on how the change will take place in the future.

In the crossroads where we are, the authors clearly and frankly grasp the problem of quality in teaching criticizing along the pages those failed reforms, which allows them to exemplify and bet on the new change strategy. Times are complex and after a continual legislative changes, we only have to develop teaching professionalism, which be potentiated in a collaboration context where professional capital produces good educators, part of a professional learning community that will promote changes in teaching. This way, Hargreaves and Fullan present a new movement to strengthen the teaching profession and the improvement of education, accompanied by a set of actions to be done in the teaching practice and sustain this movement, as they indicate “we do not want to write a new book on how change takes place. We have already done it before. What we are talking here is of a specific sort of change that looks more like a movement” (p. 180).

All in all, the authors have pointed out right and wrong actions in the process of transformation, employing the best examples of various educational systems; but above all, they offer ideas and practices to improve teaching effectiveness as a process which has repercussions on the very individual, on knowledge society and in the student of generations to come. This is why, bearing in mind the importance of technologies and technologic innovations in knowledge societies, I think that it would be interesting to combine this read with *Stratosphere: Integrating technology, pedagogy, and change knowledge* by Michael Fullan or *Digital Leadership: Changing Paradigms for Changing Times* by Eric Sheninger.

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