

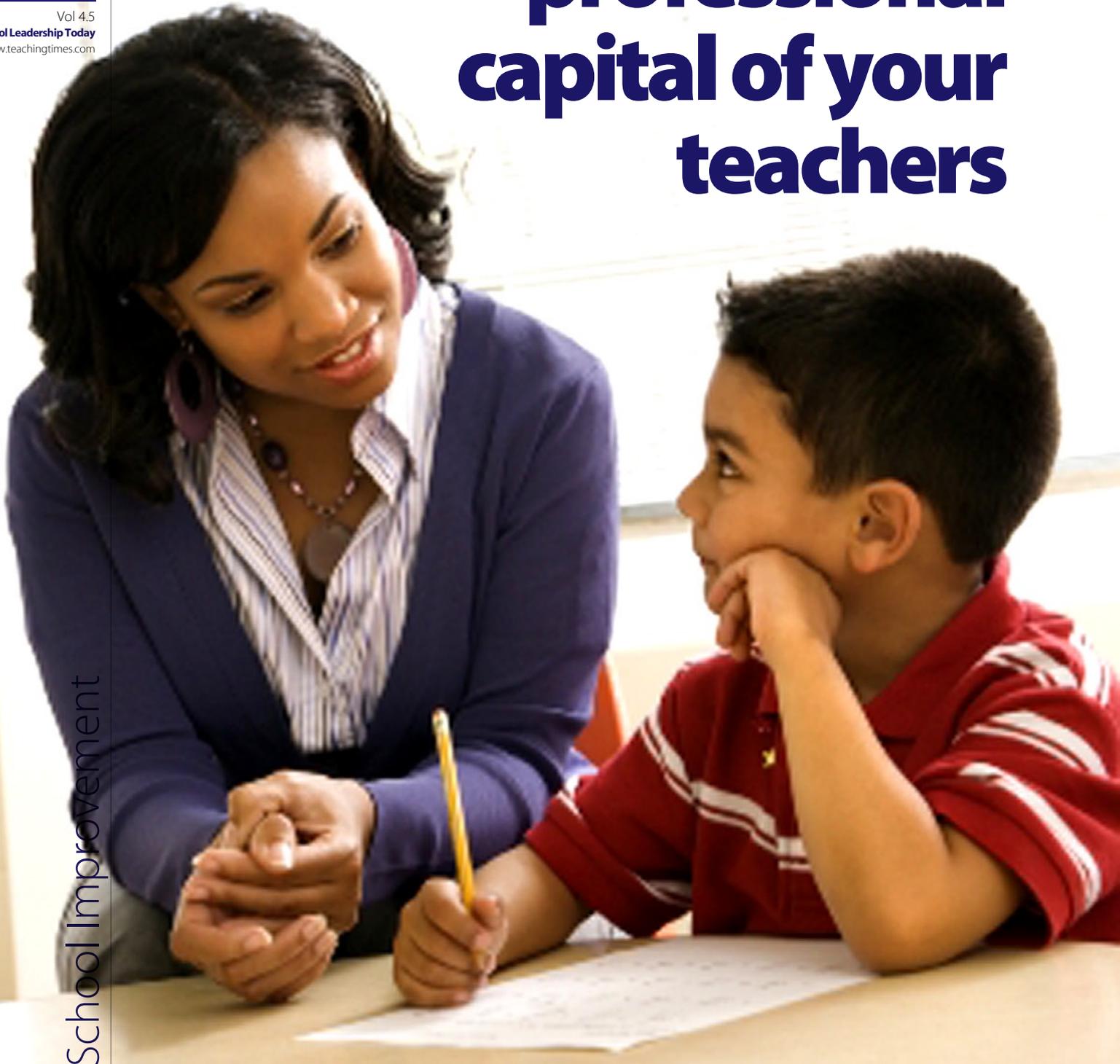
Schools are constricting the development of their teachers so much that they are now driving the best people out of the profession, according to Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan. **David Crossley** explains how their concept of professional capital could be a much needed antidote.

Liberating the professional capital of your teachers

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The recent OECD study *Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century*¹ put UK heads top of an index that showed they were more involved with the details of education and teaching than their counterparts in any other industrialised country. They cited the impact school leadership can have on improving school outcomes by influencing the motivation and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment.

For those of us who work in the system, it is not difficult to understand why leadership in England is rated so highly. Part of the reason is our long tradition of school autonomy requiring a wider range of skills than is normally the case. In addition, our focus on developing a self-improving system is requiring school leaders to work beyond their own schools which both promotes two way knowledge transfers and in turn, further distributes leadership within schools.

However, it was interesting to note that two of the countries that were at the bottom of this index were South Korea and Finland, yet both are top of the international tables on student outcomes as judged by PISA. Finland has also been noted for attracting the best into teaching but perhaps more for the commitment to informed professionalism and professional responsibility driving improvement. This informed a key recommendation of the 2010 McKinsey study² on how systems move from good to great: *“The journey from great to excellent systems focuses on creating an environment that will unleash the creativity and innovation of its educators.”* This led me to reflect that perhaps we are missing something here in Britain - and that something is making the most of the teachers we have.

Professional Capital

Professional Capital - the synergy of human capital (personal skills and competences), social capital (interpersonal relationships) and decision capital (the ability to make discretionary judgements). Our system in the recent past has treated teachers almost as technicians whose main responsibility has been to deliver a pre-determined pedagogy in a prescribed way. This hardly justifies a graduate profession and risks not making the most of our teachers' capabilities and expertise. The approach may be good at raising the floor of a system but is unlikely to raise the ceiling, something that any system wanting to progress as effectively as the best in international terms needs to do. This notion of making the most of the teachers we have is supported in a new book *Professional Capital: Transforming teachers in every school* written by two of the world's leading educational thinkers - Professors Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan.³ It offers their prescription to remedy the failings of educational systems like ours, informed by what they have learned from the world's best systems. Its focus is on teachers and the educational system's professional capital, and it begins by identifying some of the wrong roads that educational systems, including the UK, have taken.



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Stuck in the past

In Hargreaves and Fullan's words: ***“You cannot improve teaching by retreating to a four decades old version of it.”*** However, this is a positive not negative book that offers a persuasive and energising way forward and a number of new insights that few could argue with. They offer an alternative to what they describe as the “business capital” approach by a focus on people and argue that ***“building professional capital is an opportunity and a responsibility for all of us”*** – from the role of each teacher in supporting and working with the teacher next door, to the role of system leaders transforming the entire system.



Involving teachers themselves

Their book begins by identifying the fact that the best systems attract the best people to be teachers, and that is the answer to how good and improving systems can compete with the best. Again, they argue that teachers and teacher leaders as well as governments all have a part to play. They criticise the undue focus on failing teachers, the neglect of the majority and the need to focus on each teacher as an individual rather than teaching as a collective endeavour. They progress to comment on the failure of virtually all of the supposed silver bullets used by governments to improve teachers or teaching. In their words, ***“most silver bullets make good political headlines but concentrate on the wrong things.”*** They provide a long list and explain their rationale for better alternatives including professional capacity building, teamwork and collaboration, moral commitment and inspiration, more rather than less professional discretion, a personal engaging curriculum, and better and broader performance metrics. They favour school to school assistance rather than intervention from on high and conclude with the view that if you want to change teaching, you have to first understand it and appreciate it. In their words: ***“successful and sustainable improvement can therefore never be done to or even for teachers. It can only ever be achieved by and with them.”***

The teachers we deserve?

For me, the most powerful part of the book offers a manifesto to reinvent our approach to teacher development and a way to maximise the effectiveness of the profession as a whole. It was the section that explored the stage in their career when teachers are the most and least effective, with veterans and new teachers being the most vulnerable and mid-career teachers the most neglected. Hargreaves and Fullan’s big idea? Make a big move in the middle and you will generate real forward momentum to the whole. In effect, they argue for differentiation in the professional development offered to teachers – just like when we teach students, one size should not fit all. We know teaching makes the most difference to student outcomes, so making teaching the best we can is the key. However, school systems and countries often end up with the teachers they deserve.

The later sections of the book identify and explore ways forward for teachers to “teach like a pro” and for systems to make the most of teachers they have and attract the best to join the profession. Hargreaves and Fullan’s answers lie in effective and empowered collaboration and they argue that for them, social capital strategies are at the cornerstone of transforming the profession, as cohesive groups with less individual

talent often outperform groups with superstars who don't work well as a team.

Making the most of opportunities

I saw the potential of this approach on a visit to a teaching school alliance at Shenley Brook End School in Milton Keynes. It became an outstanding school in 2006 but had achieved a Grade 2 for teaching and learning. They set about exploring how they could make their next steps. The answer was, in their words, to "lift the lid" on the school and unleash the creativity of their staff. They began by asking them what inhibited them. Their answers were a set of fears which represent a sad indictment of our system and reveal the flaws in our current approach to accountability. The school had the confidence to rise above these pressures and the outcomes are remarkable in both conventional ways – in their last inspection they remained outstanding but this time were awarded a Grade 1 for teaching and learning – and in the impressive impact of the focus they now put on the wider development of their young people.

Our system offers two very different faces - one that inhibits, and one that encourages change... but only if we have the confidence to embrace the opportunities it provides. We talk of a self-improving system, but do we make the most of it?



One of the ways this school has distributed leadership and fostered these changes was through the Middle leadership Development programme. Some 30 teachers had undertaken the programme and completed a leadership challenge which engaged with research but also focused on making a demonstrable impact on their students. The outcomes of their studies had in a number of cases been taken to scale, demonstrating potential and impact of both within school and between schools' collaboration.

Thinking, creativity and problem solving

This approach at a school level models what Andrew Schliecher of OECD argues we most need to do as a system. In his words: "Today, schooling now needs to be much more about ways of thinking, involving creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving and decision-making."⁴ This view was also echoed recently by John Cridland CBI Director General in their conference, who said: "Employers sought school leavers who did not just possess a clutch of examination passes but were rounded and grounded. Emphasis on exams and league tables has produced a conveyor belt rather than what I would want education to be - an escalator."⁵

As the UK begins to develop a network of Teaching School alliances, Professional Capital contains clear guidance on how to make collaboration effective and even has



a new insight on effective competition, stating that it can be a force for good when collective responsibility and collaboration come together. They use the business phrase 'co-petition' - how can we outdo ourselves as well as each other for the good of the whole? In this way, collaboration and competition come together to form an unbeatable combination.

That certainly is a manifesto for our times in a book that has the potential not only to reinvigorate teachers but also to offer what is probably the only way for us to move forward as schools and a system, and as a whole. However the impetus for this will not come from above and in this time of recession, there is unlikely to be any new money for it. But for once, a set of beliefs, a philosophy and an approach are likely to be important levers for change. Therefore this is something schools leaders will need to commit to and invest in for themselves. An advantage of school autonomy is that these sorts of choices are in our own hands. It will involve difficult choices. It will involve stopping doing something we do now and redeploying or refocusing some of our current resources.

However, isn't making it a priority to invest time and resources in making the most of staff to achieve something many really believe in the most important choice to make of all?

Six ways to improve teachers and teaching:

- Professional capacity building
- Greater teamwork and collaboration
- Moral commitment and inspiration
- More professional discretion
- More engaging curriculum
- School to school assistance

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