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WCER RESEARCH highlights

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A New Era for the Strategic Management of Human Capital

Over the past 18 months educators have seen the national education reform agenda transformed. Novel ideas and unique strategies have been placed on the national docket for serious consideration. This transformation includes a focus on developing talent and managing human capital, a core emphasis of the education agenda of President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan.

It's critical at this point to concentrate on developing great teachers and leaders, says Allan Odden. Odden is a professor of education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-directs the project Strategic Management of Human Capital (SMHC).

SMHC is pressing for a comprehensive and substantive national policy agenda on human capital reform in education. The project assembled leaders of major education organizations along with innovative superintendents and independent education reform groups.

SMHC recently released a report, "T*aking Human Capital Seriously: Talented Teachers in Every Classroom, Talented Principals in Every School*" http://www.smhc-cpre.org/. It's intended as a blueprint for the human capital agenda that needs to be addressed by districts, states (including Race to the Top proposals), and the nation. Some of its main points:

All schools need capable teachers and principals. Without strategic management of human capital, the nation's schools will not attain the goal of increased student achievement.

Human capital is the 'people side' of education reform. The strategic management of human capital involves a systematic process of aligning school district academic goals with school district organization and practices, from curriculum and assessment to teacher and administrator recruitment, retention, and compensation. In many large districts, unfortunately, human capital is not aligned with academic goals. Most urban districts face chronic teacher quality problems

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

In this issue you'll read about a new report, "*Taking Human Capital Seriously: Talented Teachers in Every Classroom, Talented Principals in Every School.*" Allan Odden and colleagues intend it as a blueprint for the human capital agenda that's being addressed by districts, states, and the nation.

Developing a teaching assessment for use in a strategic human capital management system is a complex undertaking. A process developed by Tony Milanowski and colleagues can help districts and states think about how to get started and what resources to gather.

Eric Camburn and colleagues discuss findings from their review of more than 100 large-scale national studies of instruction. Among other findings, they discovered that few studies examined instruction during important transition years such as 6th and 9th grades.

Cathy Compton-Lilly traces how students learn to see themselves as writers in a case study conducted over a 10-year period.

Adam Gamoran
WCER Director
Professor, Sociology
and Educational Policy Studies

and high rates of staff turnover. Odden says school reform must include recruiting and developing talent, building organizational capacity, redesigning human resource departments, and tying them to school improvement plans. More specifically, strategic HR means aligning all HR programs to the view of effective instructional practice embedded in the district's overall education improvement strategy so all HR elements are focused on systemically developing consistent and effective instructional practice in all classrooms and schools.

For the past two decades policy reforms have focused on standards and assessments. Reforms have not given high priority to the central role of human capital; in particular, how to cultivate and extend more broadly the expert performance of teachers and principals. Unless there are talented teachers in every classroom and talented principals in every building, policy reform will not be realized, Odden says.

Two major metrics are critical to education reform: measures of teacher and principal effectiveness and measures of student learning. Districts and states need better ways to assess teacher and principal performance and competence, and more thorough tests of student learning. Qualitative and quantitative data should inform decisions at the classroom, school building, and district levels. Performance assessment should be based on multiple factors and include, but not be limited to, student performance indicators.

Six guiding principles undergird the strategic management of human capital. Odden says they reflect emerging understanding of the 21st century school. The overarching issue is 'alignment.' Everything must work in harmony: learning goals, curriculum, standards, assessments, organization, professional development, human resources, and administration.

Principle 1: Improve performance and close the gap. A school district strategy to improve student achievement should include a rigorous curriculum, development of professional learning communities, use of student data to improve teaching practice, enhanced use of teaching and assessment technologies, extra assistance for struggling students, parent involvement, and teacher and administrator instructional leadership.

Principle 2: Place effective teachers in every classroom, effective leaders in every school. Teachers, teacher leaders, and principals are the education system's key people resources. Districts need a talent strategy to acquire, develop, train, reward, and retain the most effective people. Every district and state should take aggressive action to place effective teachers and principals in high-need schools.

Principle 3: Provide excellent instruction, successful learning. Teachers and principals must know and be able to do specific things; they must possess the explicit competencies that drive student performance, and strive relentlessly to attain that performance. These competencies are the basis of human capital management because they produce the ultimate goal—student learning.

Principle 4: Align systems for continuous improvement. Strategic human capital systems continually improve the teacher and principal workforce by responding appropriately to evidence of effectiveness on the job, using the measures of teaching practice and student learning. Well designed human capital management systems should continually improve the workforce by hiring those with the greatest potential to be effective, providing career-long professional development, rewarding effective performers, improving average performers, and improving (or ultimately removing) low performers.

Principle 5: Rethink career progression and pay. Evaluation systems must differentiate between higher and lower performing teachers and principals. Performance evaluation systems should inform key decisions including assignment, induction, professional development, tenure, career advancement, compensation, and retention. Top performers should be recognized and rewarded generously. Low performers should be counseled and given opportunities to improve, but if performance is consistently inadequate, they should be dismissed.

Principle 6: Core competencies: explicit, transparent, accountable. District human resource management quality is measured by its success in supporting and realizing the district's education improvement strategy. Districts must review how well HR systems align with their education improvement strategy, maintain strong programs to develop and improve teachers and principals, develop ways to measure the quality of their human capital, and evaluate how successfully the systems perform.

Odden says implementing an integrated set of strategic state and local human capital policies will provide and develop the effective education talent the nation needs. Putting this all together will require close cooperation between states and districts, determined commitment from all parts of the education policy community, including teachers, teacher unions/associations, and administrators, and strong political leadership and support. With these supports in place, higher levels of learning for all students are within reach.

To read and download the entire report, including strategies for states and for local districts, see http://www.smhc-cpre.org/

Allan Odden

Developing as a Writer

Students develop as writers over a number of years, interacting with a complex array of influences. Individual and environmental conditions work to advance—or inhibit—students' abilities to express themselves.

How students learn to see themselves as writers is a question that has fascinated UW-Madison education professor Cathy Compton-Lilly for decades.

She watched African American students develop into skilled writers over a 10-year period. Her case study of one of them, Peter (a pseudonym), shows how he accumulated what's called writing capital.

For her study, Compton-Lilly gathered and studied samples of Peter's writing, weaving them together with notes from her interviews with him, his mother, his grandmother, and his high school English teacher. She explored the complexities of being a successful writer in school and considered how Peter's accomplishments were contextualized within school and society.

Many researchers describe their work as longitudinal, but little of that research extends beyond 2 or 3 years. Compton-Lilly argues for longitudinal research over longer periods—5, 7, 10 years or more.

Over the 10 years of her case study, Compton-Lilly observed how Peter developed habitus as a writer. Habitus is a social, historical, and collective construct: A student's habitus is affected most by what is compatible with his or her past experiences. What resonates with existing habitus is most likely to inform his or her evolving habitus.

In first grade, Peter attended a large urban school where 97% of the students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch. The city had the 11th highest child poverty rate in the nation. The school was on the state's list of "schools in need of improvement" and was at risk of being taken over by the state if test scores did not improve during that first research year.

Peter existed within a social field of schooling that values particular ways of being, and of being a writer. Specifically, writing success in contemporary classrooms requires honoring the conventions, organization, and craft of writing. Peter's writing success was confirmed by his ability to pass tests and achieve institutionally sanctioned benchmarks.

However, success within this social field involves more than simply writing abilities; it involves other ways of being that are valued and productive within the school context. Good behavior, high grades, and academically productive relationships with friends are also valued. Compton-Lilly focused on four dispositions that contributed to Peter's habitus as a writer. These dispositions relate to behaving well, making good grades, being a friend, and being a writer.

Peter's development of habitus was grounded in his early experiences with literacy and his mother's (and his grandmother's and even his great-grandmother's) commitment to literacy and education. But a series of contingencies threatened to complicate Peter's educational future beyond high school. While in high school he said that he planned to study journalism in college, but he had not taken a journalism class and was not involved in producing the school's news sheet. He said that he wanted to study journalism at Columbia University but seemed unaware that Columbia did not offer an undergraduate journalism program.

While Peter passed all his high school classes with Bs and Cs, he did not always complete his schoolwork. Although Bs and Cs were considered good grades in Peter's urban high school, they are not competitive in the larger field. When Compton-Lilly had her final interview with Peter in May of his 11th-grade year, he had not taken either the PSAT or the

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Surveys of Learning Reveal Strengths, Weaknesses

Over the past two decades, large-scale surveys have generated a wealth of generalizable evidence on instruction. But until recently, this vast body of research has not been summarized systematically.

UW–Madison education professor Eric Camburn and Sociology graduate student Seong Won Han set out to remedy that. They reviewed and analyzed evidence on instruction from all surveys conducted between 1987 and 2005 that used nationally representative samples to measure classroom instruction.

Camburn and Han reviewed 145 studies that used data from 19 national surveys to investigate instruction. They found that

- more than half used data at least a decade old;
- few studies examined instruction during important transition years such as 6th and 9th grades; and
- subject-area emphasis was lopsided (mathematics and science instruction received much greater attention than English/language arts and social studies).

The review also confirmed that students of low socioeconomic status (SES) received diminished learning opportunities compared to their more affluent peers.

Camburn identified positive relationships between six dimensions of instruction and student achievement (see sidebar: "Dimensions of Instruction"). The dimension of instruction with the greatest number of positive results was interactions for learning. That refers to the ways students tap informational, human, or material resources to support their learning.

The review also showed several positive relationships between focus of learning (content coverage) and student achievement. Among the nine studies reporting a significant relationship, five examined the amount of content covered, and four examined the coverage of specific topics or the integration of topics.

Type of cognitive activity was shown to be positively associated with achievement in seven studies.

Five studies documented a positive relationship between time on learning and achievement, while one study found a negative relationship.

Finally, five studies found a positive correlation between achievement and control of learning (i.e., whether the pace of instruction is controlled by students or the teacher).

Camburn also evaluated the studies' rigor, using two indicators: analytic approach and publication venue. Regarding the former, 49 studies used inferential statistics to investigate some aspect of instruction. (Inferential statistics are preferable to descriptive analytic techniques because they take sampling error into account and are better suited to understanding complex relationships among multiple variables.)

With regard to publication venue, only 26% of the studies were published in refereed journals. A majority (59%) of the studies were reports that tend to not be subjected to the peer-review process.

The review showed that learning opportunities were unevenly distributed among low- and high-income students. Lower SES students received less time on instruction overall and were exposed to a smaller proportion of mathematics textbooks. These students also were less likely to (a) be exposed to authentic instruction, (b) engage in meta-cognition and problem solving, and (c) read trade books.

Mathematics instruction received the greatest attention (37% of the studies reviewed). Science instruction was the focus of 17% of the studies, and science and math together accounted for 66% of all studies. English/language arts accounted for 19% of the studies, and social studies instruction, only 5%.

Based on this analysis, Camburn calls for more research on instruction at key transition points, particularly grades 5, 6, and 9. More research is also needed on high school instruction, particularly grades 9–11. And more research is needed on instruction in English/language arts and social studies.

Camburn also encourages fellow education researchers to engage in more scientifically rigorous inquiries when they use large-scale survey data to study instruction.

See Camburn, E.M., and Han, S.W. (in press). Two decades of generalizable evidence on U.S. instruction from National surveys. *Teachers College Record*

DIMENSIONS OF INSTRUCTION

Interactions for learning (86% of all studies examined): The ways students interact with each other and with teachers, or with instructional tools and artifacts (e.g., computers, manipulatives, textbooks, written assignments)

Time on learning (61%): The amount of time students and teachers spend on learning

Focus of learning (55%): The academic content of instruction (e.g., subject areas and topics)

Grouping for learning (41%): Whole class instruction, ability grouping, and student collaboration

Cognitive activity (41%): The kinds of cognitive activity demanded of students during instruction (e.g., memorization, application of specific skills, understanding of relationships)

Control of learning (33%): The degree to which instruction is controlled by students or teachers

Support for learning (6%): Cognitive and emotional support

Using Teacher Performance Assessments For Human Capital Management

What aspects of teaching most influence student learning?

What specific local strategies most improve student achievement?

States or districts designing systems for assessing teaching practice need to answer these questions. In doing so, they begin to develop a competency model to guide teaching assessment design, and more broadly, their entire teacher human capital management system. Competency models can reflect both what is common to good teaching across states and districts, and the local vision of instruction and local improvement strategies. A competency model for teacher performance usually specifies key performance domains. Within each domain are specific behaviors. For example, most competency models include a domain pertaining to delivery of classroom instruction. Within that domain will be numerous instructional behaviors such as *using assessments in instruction*. Examples of other common domains are instructional planning, classroom management, interactions with staff and parents, and professionalism.

Developing a teaching assessment for use in a strategic human capital management system is a complex undertaking. A paper by WCER researcher Tony Milanowski and colleagues can help districts and states think about how to get started and what resources to gather.

Milanowski and colleagues set out to identify the teacher competencies common to seven state-of-the art teaching assessment systems (see sidebar).

They assessed the similarity of the systems in two ways. First, they counted how many performance dimensions in each system referenced eight important competencies that underlie the kind of teaching that is often regarded as most likely to improve student achievement. Second, they laid out the system rubrics side by side to identify competencies that were mentioned in at least three of them. The two approaches yielded substantially similar results.

Milanowski found that the most comprehensive assessment systems were the Framework for Teaching and the Formative Assessment System Continuum of Teacher Development (University of California, Santa Cruz).

Less comprehensive, but arguably more focused on the specific aspects of instruction likely to influence student achievement, were the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching's Teacher Advancement Program and the Cincinnati school district's system (itself based on the Framework for Teaching). Milanowski says these systems may represent a worthwhile trade-off of breadth for depth and focus on competencies key to the developers' strategies for improving student achievement.

Based on this comparison study, Milanowski and colleagues propose a preliminary set of specifications that states or districts may consider when deciding how to assess teaching. The specifications attempt to present what a state-of-the-art teaching assessment system would look like, based on the best features of the systems reviewed.

Milanowski and colleagues do mention a few cautions. First, no matter how well designed the competency model and the assessment processes, if the assessment system is not implemented as intended, it is unlikely to realize the desired benefits. Second, there is unlikely to be one best data collection approach for all of the uses of teaching

ABOUT THIS STUDY

This study reviewed seven teaching assessment systems:

1. The PRAXIS III teacher licensing performance assessment
2. The Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT)
3. The Formative Assessment System Continuum of Teacher Development (University of California, Santa Cruz)
4. The Framework for Teaching (Charlotte Danielson) and its implementation by the Cincinnati Public Schools
5. The Teacher Advancement Program (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching)
6. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) assessment system
7. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; University of Virginia)

assessment. Third, while there probably should be multiple methods of data collection customized to specific uses, all of the methods should be based on a single competency model in order to preserve the alignment of the system.

With these cautions in mind, these WCER researchers outlined the following eight specifications for a state-of-the-art district teaching assessment system:

1. The system should be based on a competency model that includes the drivers of student achievement and the actions teachers need to take to implement district strategies for improving student achievement.

2. The competency model and the basic structure of the rubrics need to apply to all grade levels, career levels, and subjects. However, to ensure that grade- or subject-specific instructional strategies or skills are included, the model should use customized language in performance dimension definitions and rubrics when needed.

3. If the intention is to assess teacher content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge for consequential purposes (e.g., decisions about tenure or career ladder progression), the assessment system should include standardized performance tasks that ask teachers to demonstrate this knowledge. These tasks can be planned to assess the same key content-related knowledge for all appropriate teachers.

4. Content-knowledgeable assessors with experience in the relevant grade levels should be used to judge teaching performance. The use of such assessors promotes more valid judgments and adds credibility to ratings and to any coaching provided using the assessment.

5. When assessment is done for consequential or summative purposes, the system should include features that promote reliable and valid measurement.

6. The system should include features that promote teacher learning.

7. The assessment process should be standardized and documented.

8. The system should use technology to reduce workload and improve administration.

More: http://www.smhc-cpre.org/download/69/

Anthony Milanowski

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Developing as a Writer

SAT. He had no timeline for completing college applications, and his high school English teacher was unsure of his future as a writer.

Peter was interested in college but lacked knowledge of some of the processes that accompany college admission. His grandmother offered strong support, but he worried about his mother's and his father's situations. With middle-class resources, many of these issues might be alleviated, Compton-Lilly says.

While Peter's habitus as a writer and as a student had problematic gaps, it did involve action and movement—albeit sometimes awkward and stumbling—toward goals. It brought constraints grounded in his past experiences but also a wealth of possibilities. This notion of habitus explains both the limited success of many of Peter's peers and the notable success of some who manage to navigate complex social fields by activating existing capital in unique, creative, and strategic ways.

The larger picture

Compton-Lilly says three intersecting fields complicated Peter's potential as a writer: education, literacy, and economic advantage. Each of these fields operated on Peter individually and in combination. They functioned together as part of larger social and economic systems that act on, and through, students to maintain existing social and economic structures. They privilege the privileged and disadvantage the disadvantaged. A few strategic and lucky students do gain advantage; this reassures educators and the larger public that equity exists and that natural ability and hard work prevail.

Compton-Lilly's study illustrates the potential power of long-term qualitative research. It's only by looking back over 10 years that we can see how Peter accumulated writing capital, how that capital supported the development of his habitus as a writer, and ultimately, how social and economic fields constructed over long periods served to limit that habitus.

Certainly some children do succeed, and Peter may easily be among those success stories. But for every child from underfunded, inner-city schools who succeeds, far too many are denied their potential, and the status quo prevails.

More: http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/workingPapers/Working_Paper_No_2009_07.php

Cathy Compton-Lilly

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DIRECTOR Adam Gamoran
EDITOR Paul Baker
EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS Rebecca Holmes & Cathy Loeb
PRODUCTION Media Education Resources & Information Technology

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School of Education • University of Wisconsin–Madison
1025 West Johnson Street • Madison, WI 53706

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