Autonomy, professionalism, and the role of generation in professional capital

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to describe how teachers' generational interpretative frameworks influence their career experiences and to demonstrate how these generational differences impact the power of professional capital to improve teaching and learning.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper utilizes data from a multi-year, mixed methods study of mid-career teachers in Massachusetts. Data in this paper come from semi-structured interviews with 12 Generation X teachers (born 1961-1980).

Findings – Generation X teachers have a unique self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, and future perspective that form their generational interpretative framework. This framework is different from that of the prior generation.

Originality/value – These generational differences have implications for how Generation X teachers view professionalism and autonomy and how they see their careers over time. Drawing upon Hargreaves and Fullan's (2012) suggestions for school leaders, three implications are highlighted. First, a model of professional capital that incorporates teachers' generational differences must be aware of how teachers view their work before engaging in changing it. This implication ties directly into the second, which is that leaders must know their teachers and understand the culture in which they work. Together, these two implications suggest that implementing a model of professional capital is not enough; it must begin with deliberate thought as to who the teachers are who are being asked to change. Finally, to secure leadership stability and sustainability, leaders must respect generational differences that influence teachers' desires to move, or not move, into formal leadership roles.

Keywords Professionalism, Autonomy, Professional capital, Generation, Teacher

Paper type Research paper

In response to concerns about declining student achievement and global competitiveness, school systems around the world have tightened their focus on the work of teachers, trying to find ways to manage and control teachers' work through more monitoring and accountability. Such efforts, including alternate teacher certification and increased curriculum standardization, use what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) identify as a business capital approach to teacher improvement. In this approach, recruiting and retaining high quality teachers means seeking out existing human capital – which includes "the economically valuable knowledge and skills that could be developed in people – especially through education and training" (p. 89) – and replacing teachers when they burn out or move on, rather than investing in and developing other more durable forms of capital.

These business capital efforts are seen to challenge teachers' professionalism (Shirley, 2016), particularly those efforts which seek to standardize teachers' work. At its most basic level, professionalism is defined as "improving the quality and standards of practice" of teachers (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 152). Darling-Hammond (1990) argues that professionalism rests upon three principles:

(1) knowledge is the basis for permission to practice and for decisions that are made with respect to the unique needs of clients;

(2) the practitioner pledges his first concern to the welfare of the clients; and

(3)   the profession assumes collective responsibility for the definition, transmittal and
      enforcement of professional standards of practice and ethics (p. 25).

This definition includes both organizational and occupational professionalism. Organizational
professionalism "incorporates rational-legal forms of authority and hierarchical structures of
responsibility and decision-making" and "involves the increased standardization of work
procedures and practices and managerialist controls. It relies on externalized forms of
regulation and accountability measures such as target-setting and performance review"
(Evetts, 2009, p. 23). Occupational professionalism, in contrast, is a "discourse constructed
within professional occupational groups" and "is based on autonomy and discretionary
judgment and assessment by practitioners in complex cases" (Evetts, 2009, p. 23). Both forms
of professionalism hinge on autonomy as a centerpiece of teacher professionalism – autonomy
as a professional to make decisions based on experience and expertise, and autonomy of a
profession to make decisions for itself regarding what counts as professional.

Engel (1970, p. 12) defines personal autonomy as "freedom to conduct tangential work
activities in a normative manner in accordance with one's own discretion." Work-related
autonomy is defined as "freedom to practice his profession in accordance with his training."
Educational trends such as standardization which appear to remove control over basic
functions of teachers' work can be seen to undermine teacher autonomy (Day and Smethem,
2009; Wills and Sandholtz, 2009). Both personal and work autonomy are threatened; teachers
may feel that they cannot make individual professional decisions regarding what they do in the
classroom, and teachers as a class may feel that others outside the school, chiefly policymakers,
strip them of their professional decision-making capacities. However, a growing body of
research suggests that not all teachers feel the same way about the impact of standardization
on their autonomy. Indeed, there appears to be a generational difference. While teachers from
the Baby Boomer generation (born 1943-1960) have become "antagonistic toward and embittered
about internal and external changes that, in their eyes, threaten to destroy all they believe in and
have committed themselves to achieving for their students and their schools" (Hargreaves and
Goodson, 2006, p. 25), Generation X teachers (born 1961-1980) are surprisingly "able to hold on to
their sense of autonomy whilst accepting (and generally welcoming) an intensive regime of
accountability to both internal and external managerialism" (Wilkins, 2011, p. 404).

If it is true that generation impacts teachers' perceptions of professionalism, and in
particular their views regarding autonomy, then efforts to improve the conditions of
teachers' work, including building professional capital, must be sensitive to these
differences. Professional capital is "the systematic development and integration of three
kinds of capital – human, social, and decisional – into the teaching profession" (Hargreaves
and Fullan, 2012, p. xv). In short, human capital includes the skills needed to perform a job,
social capital describes how these skills are used and valued (or not) by others in the same
context, and decisional capital is the capacity of people in similar circumstances to use the
prior forms of capital to make decisions.

In this paper, I examine how professional capital might draw upon what is known about
generational differences as they relate to teachers' notions of autonomy and professionalism
to maximize its potential for transformative teacher improvement and engagement. The
paper draws on a multi-year mixed methods study that addressed the question: what is the
impact of mandated change on teachers in mid-career? I extend the theory of generational
interpretative frameworks (Stone-Johnson, 2016) to the model of professional capital,
focusing on generational differences in teachers' views of professionalism and autonomy.
Applying the literature on the teaching career, professionalism, and generations, as well as
qualitative data gathered from interviews with Generation X teachers, I argue that paying
close attention to the myriad ways in which different generations of teachers experience
their work and their careers in the classroom is an important foundational step in realizing
strong and sustainable professional community.

Professional capital

As described briefly above, professional capital comprises three forms of capital: human, social, and decisional. Human capital, as defined by Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), includes "the economically valuable knowledge and skills that could be developed in people – especially through education and training (p. 89). Social capital is "how the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to the same norms or codes of behavior" (p. 90). Finally, decisional capital is "the capital that professionals acquire and accumulate through structured and unstructured experience, practice, and reflection – capital that enables them to make wise judgments in circumstances where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence to guide them" (pp. 93-94).

Hargreaves's and Fullan's work argues that professional capital can help teachers realize their fullest capacity to achieve in classrooms. This shift necessitates thinking beyond individualistic forms of autonomy to more collaborative forms. For the teaching profession to improve, capital has to be, in their words, spread around, not hoarded. It is not valuable if it is not used. But professional capital is not meant to be a simplistic or quick prescription for change or a one-size-fits-all strategy intended to be applied uniformly, unilaterally, or unquestioningly. First, it cannot be used alone. Rather, developing professional capital occurs alongside other change strategies in schools, such as instructional improvement. Second, it must be context specific. Indeed, "professional capital will not, and probably should not, manifest itself in exactly the same way across all systems and cultures in every part of the world (Shirley, 2016). Finally, and perhaps most vexing, is that at present there is not a shared definition of what it means to truly be a professional in the field of education. Without agreement about what it means to be a professional, it is difficult to fully realize professional capital. As described earlier, generational differences may play an important role in how professionalism is both understood and operationalized in classrooms by teachers.

Professionalism

Years of research in the field have shown that views about professionalism have changed over time, from fairly rudimentary to highly complex (Hargreaves, 2000; Stone-Johnson, 2014b; Troman, 1996). Hargreaves (2000) theorizes this development across four "ages" of professionalism: pre-professional, autonomous, collegial, and post-professional. Over time, professionalism moved from "managerially demanding but technically simple" (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 156), relatively autonomous but perhaps less innovative, to more collegial and collaborative but also more time and even labor intensive. Similarly, Troman (1996) argues that there are two types of professionalism: old and new. Old professionalism was defined by isolation and acceptance and a general lack of curriculum leadership (Troman, 1996) whereas new professionalism (Evans, 2008; Pollard *et al.*, 1994; Troman, 1996) was defined by higher levels of collaboration and responsibility and shared leadership but also expanded to include work beyond the classroom as part of the responsibilities of teaching. Incorporated into the concept of new professionalism is the paradox that in exchange for greater voice in the work of teaching (professionalism), teachers are subject to both increased monitoring of their work through standardization and expanded work roles that go beyond their classroom work. Using either view, professionalism is seen not as static but as changing over time.

Not only has the concept of teacher professionalism changed over time, it is also understood to vary generationally, most noticeably in relation to generational views on standardization's impact on teachers' work (Stone-Johnson, 2011, 2014a, b, 2016). While some research indicates that standardization "reduces teachers' autonomy and control over their classroom practice" (Wills and Sandholtz, 2009, p. 1065), some teachers, particularly

those from Generation X, are more open to the types of changes brought about by standardization (Feistritzer *et al.*, 2011; Wilkins, 2011) and indeed many of these actually teachers find some benefit in particular aspects of standardization. Some research indicates that teachers from Generation X appreciate the sense of checks and balances that standardization brings to their work, as well as the clearer expectations that such standardized work brings (Stone-Johnson, 2011). Understanding these generational differences in teachers' views of professionalism necessitates deeper exploration of generational differences.

Generations

Although there is currently a limited body of research that examines the relationship between a teacher's generational identity and his or her experience in the teaching career, work in this area continues to grow. A generation is "a special cohort-group whose length approximately matches that of a basic phase of life" (Strauss and Howe, 1991, p. 34). These cohorts are shaped, held together by, and ultimately determined by common events that form their worldview (Mannheim, 1970). Frequently, cohorts are bounded by birth years. For example, the Boomer generation was born between 1943 and 1960, Generation X was born between 1961 and 1980, and the Millennial generation was born between 1981 and 2000 (Strauss and Howe, 1991) (although there is some disagreement of the exact boundary years, these generally represent the idea of generational cohorts).

The earliest conceptions of generational cohorts assumed that each generation experienced life course events such as the birth of children or the process of aging in fundamentally the same way. More recent generational work, however, argues not only that these previously assumed similar life course events are actually quite different for each generation but that generations themselves are also quite different from one another (Strauss and Howe, 1991; Twenge, 2006).

Generational differences occur in many facets of life. In this paper, I focus only on generational differences regarding work. Research about different generations in the workplace focuses on work attitudes, values, and ethics and sheds light on areas of difference regarding views of professionalism. Considering the relationship between generations and the teaching career may help foster "a better understanding of both the individual cohorts and the outcomes of the generational mix will support both individual and organizational efforts to recruit, develop and retain each generation of workers" (Edge, 2014, p. 137). Such a focus is important when looking at different understandings of professionalism, especially the idea of professional autonomy.

On the job, research indicates that Boomers have a strong need to prove themselves to others, tend to be more deferential to authority, focus on product outcomes, and are willing to go the extra mile and enjoy (Stone-Johnson, 2016). They expect people to put in their time and are less flexible with change (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Lovely and Buffum, 2007; Raines, 2003; Zemke *et al.*, 2000). Members of the Boomer generation "live to work" (Gursoy *et al.*, 2008, p. 451) and frequently put in their own resources to their classrooms, even at the risk of family sacrifice (Carlson, 2004). Professional autonomy, in this sense, is earned by time and effort put in.

In contrast, Generation X has a different set of work values and ethics (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Lovely and Buffum, 2007; Raines, 2003; Zemke *et al.*, 2000). They strive for balance, freedom and flexibility and prefer informal roles and freedom to complete tasks their own way. In practice, Generation Xers are able to create and support alternative workplace structures. Importantly, teachers and school leaders from this generation appears to prioritize what is termed work-life balance (Edge *et al.*, 2016; Gursoy *et al.*, 2008). Autonomy, for this generation, appears to be defined by freedom to complete work on one's own schedule and in a place of one's choosing rather than traditional workplaces.

Generational interpretative framework

These generational differences in attitudes toward work and in particular toward autonomy demonstrate a need to understand how teachers' career experiences and professional identities are shaped by their generational identity. A growing body of work has begun to explore this topic (Edge, 2014; Edge *et al.*, 2016; Stone-Johnson, 2011, 2014a, b, 2016; Wilkins, 2011). Recent research describes how the combination of experience and identity shape teachers' "generational interpretative frameworks", which are "the generational set of understandings about teaching that provide a way for teachers to view their job and conduct the duties expected of them" (Stone-Johnson, 2016). Generational interpretative frameworks include a unique self-image, self-esteem, task perception, job motivation, and future orientation, and influence every generation of teachers' entry into, experience in, and ultimately move from the teaching career.

The concept of interpretative frameworks is drawn from Kelchtermans (2009), who looks at the ways in which individual teachers' work is framed by a combination of experiences, beliefs, and orientations which he describes as their personal interpretative frameworks. These frameworks include:

> A set of cognitions, of mental representations that operates as a lens though which teachers look at their job, give meaning to it and act in it. This framework thus guides their interpretations and actions in particular situations (context), but at the same time is also modified by and resulting from these meaningful interactions (sense-making) with that context. As such it is both a condition for and a result of the interaction, and represents the – always preliminary – "mental sediment" of teachers' learning and developing over time (Kelchtermans, 2009, pp. 260-261).

A teacher's personal interpretative framework, according to Kelchtermans (2009) includes both his or her professional self-understanding and his or her subjective educational theory. Professional self-understanding includes a teacher's self-esteem, self-image, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective. This self-understanding forms their worldview of teaching, in much the same fashion as a generation's worldview forms their orientation to aspects of life including career and marriage. Professional self-understanding interacts with subjective educational theory, or the system of knowledge and beliefs upon which a teacher relies to undertake functions of the job.

Teachers' generational interpretative frameworks influence many aspects of their work in classrooms, including their reasons for becoming teachers, their views about standardization, and their intention to remain in and advance in the teaching career. Importantly, these frameworks also influence their views about what it means to be a professional. In the remainder of this paper, I explore how Generation X teachers view their career, how these views are different from the prior generation, and how recognizing these differences is necessary to fully develop professional capital in the teaching career.

Describing the research

The data on Generation X teachers used in this paper come from a multi-year, mixed methods study on the teaching careers of Generation X teachers in the state of Massachusetts. Quantitative data were collected from the Schools and Staffing Survey administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (2005). Three data sets were used in this study: 1999-2000, 2003-2004, and 2007-2008. These data explore teachers' feelings of efficacy, control, satisfaction, and commitment. Qualitative data were gathered from semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) with 12 teachers at various points in mid-career in the state of Massachusetts, all with between 7 and 20 years in the classroom. All participating teachers were members of Generation X, born between 1961 and 1980. Participants were obtained using snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961).

Study participants were from major subject areas in secondary public schools: English Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, and History/Social Studies. Special Education was

also included, although teachers with this classification worked within the major subject areas. As the study design to gather participants was snowball, variables such as gender and race were not prioritized, although the resulting sample included both male and female teachers and one non-white teacher (Table I).

Each teacher was interviewed one time for approximately one hour. All interviews took place outside of school. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded line-by-line using open and axial coding techniques (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Themes were recorded and patterns and trends identified using constant memoing (Charmaz, 2006).

Findings
The concept of generational interpretative frameworks extends the idea that teachers' experiences are shaped by a combination of experiences, beliefs, and orientations by connecting teachers' work experiences in classrooms to their generational cohorts. This theory builds upon Strauss and Howe's (1991) work which argues that each generation experiences phases of life (or here, the teaching career) in generationally unique ways. Below, I briefly detail how Generation X teachers' self-esteem, self-image, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective – the key elements of their generational interpretative framework – reflect their experiences as students and teachers and how these, in turn, ultimately shape the ways in which they understand and view professionalism. I then highlight the particular aspects of Generation X teachers' generational interpretative frameworks that show generational differences in views regarding autonomy. Finally, I connect these differences to the professional capital model, suggesting that school leaders must not only acknowledge these generational differences but also find ways to ensure that teachers' professional identities are connected with their work in ways that enhance and support their careers.

Self-image
Kelchtermans defines self-image, as it relates to one's personal interpretative framework, as the way teachers typify themselves as teachers. It is strongly influenced by the way one is perceived by others (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 261). Self-image is individual in that teachers form their teaching identity through a series of unique incidences and encounters. However, self-image can be also generational. Every generation has its own peer personality that is defined by its common age location, common beliefs and behaviors, and perceived membership in a generation (Strauss and Howe, 1991). Thus, each generation shares a

Name	Subject	Years teaching	Type of school
Harrison	Math	15	Urban Middle School
Jim	English	15	Suburban High School
Doug	History	13	Suburban High School
Mike	Math	11	Urban High School
Alice	English	10	Suburban High School
Andrew	Science	9	Urban High School
Max	Math/Sci	9	Urban High School
Bill	History	8	Suburban High School
Julie	History	8	Suburban High School
Michelle	SPEd	8	Suburban Middle School
Samantha	SPEd/English	8	Urban Middle School
Sarah	English	7	Urban High School

Table I.
Participants

generational self-image. These shared characteristics are reflected in how they act in the workplace (Stone-Johnson, 2016).

Generational differences in self-image can be seen in the reasons teachers state for choosing teaching as a career. Research by Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) indicates that Boomer generation teachers went into teaching with a purpose and clear mission steeped in public service and social justice (Johnson, 2004). In contrast, none of the twelve teachers who spoke with me about their teaching careers clearly identified service or social justice as motivators for their career choice. When asked about what drew them to teaching, only two of the participants identified that for them, teaching was a calling. Doug, a suburban high school history teacher, recalls that he knew he wanted to become a teacher, "To whatever extent a little kid can know I knew." Similarly, Jim, a suburban English teacher, recalls that he knew he wanted to be a teacher "for as long as I can remember."

Others, though, were less certain about becoming teachers. Some, like Sarah, a middle school teacher in an urban school, were inspired by teachers in high school. This experience made Sarah decide teaching "would be great." Others found inspiration during college. Max, who has been teaching high school math and science in an urban school for nine years, considered teaching as a high school student but dropped the idea for many years until he worked in test prep after college, after which he said to himself, "Wait, I like teaching." Mike, who works in the same school as Max and has been teaching math for 11 years, also struggled with the idea of becoming a teacher beginning in high school. After teaching in Japan after college, he realized that teaching "was what really held me captive." Alice, a suburban middle school teacher, came to teaching after volunteering with children in college and realizing that such work "fulfilled me in a way I didn't realize I'd been lacking."

For most of the participants, their desire to become educators had less to do with a particular commitment to children and more to do with certain aspects of their personality, such as being a good leader or being compassionate, that drew them into the field. This approach to career entry that is defined less by mission than by pragmatism sets Generation X teachers apart from the prior generation of teachers. Rather than feeling compelled to teach to engage in social change, these teachers by and large view teaching as a logical career choice given their skills and interests. In this fashion, this generation may indeed lack the generational mission expressed by Hargreaves and Goodson (2006). However, it is also generationally consistent. As a generation, this group of teachers appears to be driven less by a passionate desire to effect change and rather by a sense that teaching provides a steady income, decent career options and a change to use one's skills in a satisfying way.

Self-esteem and task perception
Kelchtermans (2009) defines self-esteem as one's "appreciation of his/her actual job performance." Task perception is the teacher's "idea of what constitutes his/her professional programme, his/her tasks and duties in order to do a good job" (p. 262). These domains, self-esteem and task perception, are intertwined. They describe how teachers understand what they are supposed to do and how well they are doing it.

Self-esteem and task perception play a large role in teachers' views of professionalism and in particular in experiences with standardization. Unlike the Boomers, who, as described earlier, find standardization to threaten their professional identities, many Generation X teachers see the standards as expedient to their work, and their responses to standardization are generally more positive and pragmatic. This difference is informed by their experiences in the classroom. Today's Generation X teachers were themselves students in the 1970s and 1980s, when educational reforms reflected performance concerns after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report urged that in order to narrow the widening gap between academic performance of American and other students in countries such as Japan and South Korea, schools would

have to tighten their focus on key subjects. Schools, states and districts responded with a focus on accountability and standards-based reforms (Bell, 1993; Berends, 2004).

When Generation X students became Generation X teachers, they entered into classrooms that also differed from classrooms of earlier generations. Earlier generations of teachers were granted relatively high levels of autonomy in exchange for fulfilling state and district expectations, whereas Generation X teachers began in an era associated with perceptions of limited teacher autonomy and high levels of standardization and scrutiny (Hargreaves, 2000).

Experiential differences in self-esteem and task perception are revealed in Generation X teachers' responses to standardization. In particular, participants talked about the test that would measure their students' achievement, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Surprisingly, most teachers felt neutral to positive about the test itself, and to some degree about testing in general. These teachers believed the MCAS had three key encouraging aspects (Stone-Johnson, 2011). First, these teachers described how standards helped them to sharpen their curriculum and provided guidance where previously they felt unsure, indicating that the standards acted as a "boost" to their teaching practice. Second, they noted that standards and the testing associated with them served as a "checks and balances" system to see if their teaching was in fact helping students. Thus, their task perception (goal of helping students do well) was one criterion of their professional self-esteem (the extent to which they are completed the tasks expected of them).

Third, and perhaps most interestingly and most relevant for this paper, this group of teachers spoke about how helping students meet the standards and do well on tests enhanced their professional self-esteem. Mike balanced test preparation with his own views about testing, saying he did just enough that "if I just start to do any more MCAS prep I would feel it would hurt me but I also feel like if I did any less it would hurt the students." Alice, who as a new teacher was "very intimidated by the test, very frightened that somehow this test reflects directly upon [my] teaching," came to feel an intensified sense of control over her work and how best to help her students. Her self-esteem grew as her task perception became clearer.

Thus, most of the Generation X teachers felt that the standards and to some degree the test offered a positive sense of checks-and-balances, helping to ensure that students are held accountable for what they are being taught and are able to demonstrate said learning as well as providing teachers with a clear set of guidelines about what their students are expected to learn. They did not feel that their professional capacity as teachers was challenged by the standards, and some even said their capacity was enhanced. In a sense, using standards as an objective measure of performance – thus clarifying the task for them – enhanced this group of Generation X teachers' self-esteem; they were able to discuss their performance in light of both the standards they held themselves to as well as the external standards to which others held them. Their concerns, generally summarized, focused on apprehension regarding the motivation behind increased testing and the nature of the test itself, as well as the time that testing took away from more creative work in the school. Even though these teachers evidenced concerns about these two areas, they did not report that the standards were damaging to their self-esteem or their task perception.

Job motivation
Job motivation is defined as the "motives or drives that make people choose to become a teacher, to stay teaching or to give it up for another career" (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 262). In looking at what keeps Generation X teachers in their job, the data indicate that these teachers identify as highly committed to their work. Even so, many are considering leaving their current jobs for other teaching jobs, or even leaving teaching altogether. This trend is generationally consistent; Generation Xers, unlike the Boomer generation, do not intend to

stay in one career for their entire working lives. Their job motivation comes not from committing to one job over time but from largely from success with their students. This sense of job motivation is complicated by evidence of early disengagement from their work life and the desire to work less and spend more time in personal areas of their lives. Research indicates that Generation X has a prioritizes leisure over work and may be less willing to put in the hours required to get the job done, but that they also tend to refrain from valuing work simply for work's sake (Twenge, 2010), whereas older generations are more likely to doing so. The Generation X teachers in this study embody this trend – not only do they say they prefer spending more time at home than at work, they also are less interested in moving into jobs, specifically formal leadership roles, that would upset this balance. They also describe an ability to be flexible regarding work spaces, and do much of their work outside of school rather than staying late in the building.

As I have previously shown, Generation X teachers view themselves as highly committed (Stone-Johnson, 2011). This commitment was connected to their task perception and their self-esteem. That is to say, their commitment as seen through their expressed desire to stay on the job (job motivation) is tied to a strong belief that they have a specific role to accomplish (helping their students succeed), and their sense of efficacy in their work (their self-esteem) is tightly coupled with the extent to which they believe they are accomplishing this role (Stone-Johnson, 2016). For example, Bill's job motivation was related the progress of his students. He noted that, "I feel very disappointed in myself when I don't feel I've done a good job. I feel very disappointed when kids feel that they're not in a useful space or in a space where they're actually learning something useful." Max also tied motivation to helping his students succeed, even noting that he would engage in work that otherwise he would not support if it would ultimately benefit his students. He remembered that the year before he "would catch myself literally saying things to kids that I never, ever would've said to them before like, you know, what are you going to do when the MCAS comes, you know, that kind of thing, which, to me is detrimental to the relationship side of teaching." While he "definitely felt the pressure of it," he also felt that "what these kids do is going to reflect on me."

Regarding balance, teachers spoke about the time and effort necessary to do their jobs well. Doug said even though he is "no longer spending entire weekends reinventing the wheel in terms of curriculum and that kind of thing" he is "extremely committed." Mike talked about his time in relation to how it has changed after becoming a parent. He noted that, "Now that I have the perspective of being a parent and that balances out the fact that I don't spend four extra hours or five extra hours a day doing the job. If that's taken into account I feel like I'm very committed." This is an important generational distinction regarding Generation X teachers' professionalism. Rather than being "slackers," a generally negative term frequently used to describe members of this generation (Ortner, 1998), these teachers appear to have a completely different set of priorities when it comes to how and when they will do their work, and these priorities are oriented largely toward more of a balance of work and family or personal time.

Future perspective

Finally, Generation X teachers spoke about their intention to stay in teaching and to continue along a path toward leadership. A teacher's future perspective includes their "expectations about his/her future in the job" (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 263). This perspective is informed by ongoing reflection and sense-making about their professional work, bringing together the other domains of professional self-identity. As with each of the other four areas, Generation X's future perspective appears to be different from that of prior generations. Two interesting patterns can be seen in this demographic's future perspective. The first is that while they greatly enjoy teaching, they are not certain that they want to progress to becoming formal school leaders, often a

traditional career path for many teachers. The second is that they disengaging from their work earlier in their career than the prior generation, on whom our understanding of the teaching career cycle is formed.

In spite of a generally strong sense of job motivation, many, most of the teachers struggled to describe a future that was linked to continuing to teach. Almost every teacher was considering leaving his or her job. At the time of the interviews, only three teachers said they planned to stay where they were. Four were actively looking for new job, and three planned to leave in the future. Two were technically already out of the classroom, although both still identified as teachers and planned to return at some point.

Not only were they not certain about their role as teachers, they were even less certain about becoming principals, once a traditional next step for teachers. Two generational workplace preferences may influence these trends. First, as described earlier, Generation Xers as a demographic favor balance, freedom, flexibility and independence, in contrast to the prior generation, which valued long hours and deference to authority. These preferences influenced their consideration of a change of job that would necessitate not only more time at the office but a shift away from the students, teaching and the classroom, aspects of their career that they treasured. This generation also tends to pursue careers for passion; they will not apply for the next logical step along a career path simply because they are expected to. Becoming a principal, to these participants, meant giving up some of their professional freedoms and sacrificing generational preferences for work that allows them to keep the balance between their work and professional lives.

Regarding loss of time with students, Julie said, "I'm not interested in organizing within schools. I'm interested in being part of the organization and part of making change but not administering it or working really primarily with adults in the building. My focus is really on kids." Likewise, Sarah said, "My interests still remains first and foremost English and second children." Regarding loss of time with their families, Doug, who had done a principal internship, said the experience showed him that principals "virtually sacrificed their lives for the job." These responses encapsulate a generation's preference for work they enjoy, not work they feel obligated to do based on others' expectations of them. These preferences are measured not only against ideal work but also against the impact of work on their family lives. As a generation, these teachers are not willing to do work that they both dislike and that takes them away from their personal lives outside of the school.

Interestingly, these teachers were willing to consider semi-administrative positions that would give them the flexibility and balance they craved. Samantha felt that if her principal asked her to be something like the head of the humanities department, she "could do that. I could work with teachers and I think I would find that satisfying." Max, who had spent two years in a "sort of semi-administrative role," said "It was a lot of logistics and operational sort of stuff that I'm pretty good at and I think in a different setting with a different set of leaders or bosses I might've enjoyed it. I did enjoy it on some level." Mike said:

> Right now I have, I think what I consider the ideal role, which is half time administrative, half time teaching. I don't, I'm not yet ready to lose the classroom part of it, the immediate connection with kids but I really am enjoying the new level of challenge of working with adults and working with something larger than just my own group of students.

Jim and Alice believed the role of department head would be appealing. Jim felt he "would have more of a say at the table without giving up the classroom entirely." Alice said, "I would always want to keep several classes. If I ever pursued a department head position I would only take it if I were teaching three classes and then the other classes would be devoted to administrative work."

Rather than taking a role that did not meet their needs, this group of teachers would consider roles to better suit their desires.

Many of the above reasons reflect the extant literature on lack of attraction to the role of principal, such as undesirable duties and less time with students (Donaldson, 2007; Gilman and Lanman-Givens, 2001). But looking deeper, it is also clear that a significant part of why they are not attracted to the job is generational in nature; as a generation with parents who worked full time, they want to prioritize personal and home time. Unlike the prior generation who felt compelled to move along a predictable career path, Generation Xers want to create jobs that fit their needs and goals.

Discussion

In looking at Generation X teachers' generational interpretative frameworks, it becomes clear that this generation of teachers has a unique view of teaching and the teaching career that warrants discussion. Briefly summarizing, their self-image is formed by a pragmatic career entry that is defined not by a desire to change the world but to find work that keeps them engaged and employed. Their self-esteem and task perception once on the job are intertwined with their students' success – even in light of increased standardization. In fact, many of these teachers actually value the role that standards play in their work, mostly that they are clear about how they will be measured so that they can align their teaching with what is expected of them. They are not naïve; they understand that standards and standardization come with less desirable effects to certain elements of creativity, but they appear willing to accept these costs in light of the aforementioned benefits. Their job motivation, what keeps them on the job, is closely tied to their professional self-esteem and task perception. Again, they are motivated by their student success, and anything that they perceive to help them reach this goal keeps them committed to their work. However, they struggle with seeing a future in teaching. Their future perspective is less clear. Many are making moves to leave the career. Further, those who express a desire to stay in teaching do not want to become principals. They are willing to consider semi-administrative roles that balance leadership with classroom teaching, but they are not willing to compromise what keeps them happy – actually working with students.

These views about teaching and the teaching career are tightly coupled with their views of professionalism. Returning to the definitions described at the beginning of this paper, professionalism includes both the "permission" (Darling-Hammond, 1990, p. 25) to make decisions that are in the best interest of students and are based on knowledge and the power of a profession, here teaching, to decide for itself what constitutes best practice. While most research suggests that teachers generally feel that the current trend toward standardization in teaching strips them of both forms of professionalism, the teachers in this study actually find elements of their professionalism enhanced by aspects of standardization. Organizationally, while Generation X teachers do not accept standards without question – indeed, they are troubled by the loss of creativity in teaching and by time lost through testing that often accompanies standardization – they appear more willing than prior generations to weigh these costs in light of what they see as benefits, chiefly clearer expectations of what is expected of them and a more accessible way of linking what they are doing to student achievement. This cost-benefit analysis is generationally consistent; Generation Xers are nothing if not pragmatic. Occupationally, because they have always known standards and federal involvement to be part of their educational experience, they may be less troubled by what older generations' views as encroaching federal involvement.

In this analysis, one important generational difference in how teachers view their work is autonomy and the extent to which teachers associate autonomy with professionalism. Older generations of teachers view autonomy over their work in classrooms as one of the most important aspects of their teaching work, and when they perceive this autonomy as being undermined, they express dismay and even the desire to exit teaching (Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006). Newer generations of teachers, or at least Generation X teachers,

appear to value autonomy over classroom decision making alongside other pieces of the job that must also be evaluated. Their job satisfaction – which comprises many of the same elements of their generational interpretative framework – includes autonomy but values it differently. The autonomy they appear to value has more to do with how they spend their time than it does what decisions they feel they can make in the classroom as professionals. The data from this study point to the idea that this generation of teachers never felt that they should be free to make all classroom decisions because they never actually had the chance to do so. Their work has always involved some level of standardization. However, what they want more than decision-making power in the classroom is flexibility regarding teaching schedules and career options. They want to be able to get their work done at school as quickly as possible so that they can spend more time with their families – again, generationally consistent. They want to move up the ranks in ways that also allow them to preserve this work-life balance. As they view the role of principal to be all-consuming, they are less willing to assume the job. Rather, they want flexible leadership positions such as department head that allow them to take on some additional responsibility while also having adequate time for their family and still the option to work with students, the aspect of the job from which they derive the greatest pleasure.

These differences in autonomy have important implications for thinking about the model of professional capital to improve teaching. Professional capital, as defined above, includes three forms of capital: human, social, and decisional. Human capital includes the skills and knowledge that can be developed in teachers. There may be generational differences in human capital, but by and large human capital factors include professional teacher preparation and ongoing professional development. The generational differences might be in the types of human capital each generation brings to the job. For example, older generations of teachers did not have alternate teacher certification routes available to them. These human capital conversations are not without controversy, specifically teacher preparation, but that topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

Social capital includes the relationships between teachers in schools. Shirley (2016) defines social capital as relational trust. Relational trust includes "the interrelated set of mutual dependencies that are embedded within the social exchanges in any school community" (Bryk and Schneider, 2003, p. 41). As Shirley points out, social capital has a proven benefit in schools. As with human capital, there may be a generational aspect to social capital as well. Generational conflict is an expected byproduct of relations between members of different generations (Edmunds and Turner, 2002), so concerns regarding, for example, generationally different orientations to reform might impact these trusting relationships in schools. As seen by Hargreaves and Goodson (2006), teachers from the Boomer generation have indicated that they have doubts about Generation X teachers' commitments. Undoubtedly, this impacts relational trust. Again, however, this topic is beyond the scope of this particular paper.

What is within the scope of this paper – and what becomes the central argument – is that perceptions of decisional capital are heavily influenced by generation, and by each generation's views on professionalism and autonomy. To quote again, decisional capital is "the capital that professionals acquire and accumulate through structured and unstructured experience, practice, and reflection – capital that enables them to make wise judgments in circumstances where there is no fixed rule or piece of incontrovertible evidence to guide them" (pp. 93-94). In many ways, decisional capital is equal to professionalism – like professionalism, its power revolves around what counts as "wise" and who gets to make this determination. In thinking about professional capital, the crux of decisional capital is the circumstances under which it is exercised. As described by Hargreaves and Fullan, these are circumstances where there is no formal guidance in place. Teachers exert decisional capital when they are able to draw upon their experiential wisdom to make decisions about practice. However, I would like

to argue that an equally vital piece of decisional capital has to do with the "wisdom" aspect itself. In looking at generational differences, and even in the social capital aspect of professional capital, it becomes clear that there is not agreement on what counts as "wise." The prior generation of teachers, those from the Boomer generation, consider wise those decisions which allow them to exert the highest levels of professional autonomy. Wise, here, is closely related to autonomous. Standardization, then, does not allow for wise decision making because the agency for making decisions is perceived to be missing.

The data presented in this paper show that Generation X teachers may have a different view regarding the importance of such autonomous decision making. It appears that this generation finds standardization to either not really influence their view of themselves as teachers at all, or perhaps even finds it helpful in terms of clarifying their task perception. From this, it could be said that they value professional autonomy differently than the prior generation. This difference, I have argued, comes from their job expectation – which itself is a combination of their self-image, their self-esteem, and their task perception. They do not expect to be autonomous in their decision making because for their whole teaching careers, they never have been.

However, to say that they do not value autonomy may not entirely capture the reality of teaching for this generation. What the data indicate is that they consider different areas of their work to be more open for autonomous decision making. These teachers want autonomy to work in their own way, including work schedules and increased work duties. Earlier views regarding "new" vs "old" professionalism suggested that new professional were willing to accept the new forms of work such as standardization in exchange for more responsibility and decision making teachers would have to submit to increased standardization (Evans, 2008; Pollard *et al.*, 1994; Troman, 1996). A revised version of this view of professionalism, though, points not to the idea that teachers have to "submit" to more stringent forms of standardization, because to them doing so is less of a burden, but rather to the idea that the reward for hard work is the freedom to define what counts as work. Whereas the previous generation valued face-time in school as well as actual number of years put in, this newer generation of teachers feels that if they are succeeding with their students, they should be able to determine the parameters of their work. This is the autonomy they want. They want to spend more time with their families, if they have them, or on hobbies or other personal endeavors.

If this difference is autonomy is true, then a closer examination of professional capital is required, as decisional capital, or the autonomy to make decisions, is a capstone of the model. In the remainder of the paper, I discuss the implications of this examination for deepening the potential of professional capital to improve the work of teachers. I also offer suggestions for how school leaders might begin to engage in this endeavor.

Implications

Professional capital is a powerful model for transforming the work of teachers. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) write:

> A big difference between successful systems and unsuccessful ones is that the former have a clear sense of direction and a high degree of coherence, and an interconnected set of policies and strategies as well as an embedded culture of improvement that provides that direction and coherence (p. 175).

This culture of improvement relies upon a sense of collective action in teaching. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to such action as collective empowerment (p. 169) and collective autonomy (p. 175). It is difficult, however, to make change that requires a shared, collective vision without first acknowledging the very different ways teachers view their work. Thus, I argue that looking more deeply at different views regarding autonomy, and then finding

ways to help support the development of these multiple views, is a beginning step for school and district leaders in realizing the full potential of professional capital.

It is important to first clarify that Generation X teachers' views of autonomy and what appears to be their lower levels of concern regarding standardization in no way means that they are fully supportive of what his happening in the current educational context. While the data are not included in this paper, many, if not all of the teachers with whom I spoke expressed concern about the excessive testing involved with standardization, and with the loss of creativity and special teaching units that were associated with additional testing time. These teachers are not apologists for the testing movement. Rather, what can be seen in the data is a difference in priorities regarding how standardization impacts their work. These teachers do care about standardization, but it is one among many of the areas of their work about which they are concerned. For the Boomer generation, it appears to be more of a top priority. This difference matters when thinking about professional capital.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, pp. 163-164) describe a series of action steps that can be taken at all levels. Here, I will focus on their suggestions for school leaders. Many of these suggestions actually echo what I have tried to argue in this paper: that knowing who your teachers are is a critical step in motivating them to engage in change and improvement. My suggestions focus on generational differences, but these suggestions are not limited. The six suggested actions are:

(1) promote professional capital vigorously and courageously;

(2) know your people: understand their culture;

(3) secure leadership stability and sustainability;

(4) be aware of contrived collegiality (and other irritating associates);

(5) reach out beyond your borders; and

(6) be evidence-informed, not data-driven.

In thinking about generational differences in teaching, the first three are most relevant.

First, in thinking about promoting professional capital, the data presented in this paper indicate that while promoting professional capital is important, it should not done without first deeply considering what it is that drives teachers to make changes in their practice, or even actually to remain in the classroom. Promoting professional capital is not what is important; improving teacher practice is. Improving teacher practice is tied in with the second suggestion, to know your people. Generation X teachers are very different teachers from the generation that came before them, and simply assuming that they are motivated by a desire to regain or recapture a sense of autonomy over their classroom practice may result in not helping them to improve their practice or feel sustained in or connected to their work. This generation of teachers values autonomy, but sees it differently. Because they have never really been free to make curricular choices, simply assuming that giving them more freedom to make choices will motivate them to improve ignores what might actually make them do so. These Generation X teachers want flexibility and freedom to define their teaching as much as prior generations want control over their classroom teaching. Thus, promoting professional capital means first finding out what teachers feel they need to utilize their decisional capital in more meaningful ways. Some teachers may feel that they want more control to make decisions over what happens in their classroom, and knowing that is goal can help school leaders find ways to give teachers opportunities to exercise such control. Others may prefer growth opportunities that let them expand their leadership, such as teacher leadership or coordinator roles. Still others may want to learn new technologies that streamline their teaching skills in ways that let them work productively outside the classroom.

Taking these differences into consideration may mean targeting professional development in ways that develop teachers' expertise while helping them improve in ways that match their desired areas for growth, focusing on efforts that support adaptive expertise rather than routine. Adaptive experts improve their craft through experimentation while routine experts preserve a status quo in their professional practice (Hatano and Inagaki, 1986). Routine experts focus on efficiency and automaticity in their practice, whereas the adaptive experts are more willing to modify their core competencies, and possess greater flexibility in changing their beliefs (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Hatano and Inagaki, 1986). This finding reflects Huberman's (1989) highly influential work on the teaching career, which suggests that the most satisfied teachers are those who tinker in their own classrooms. Not only might such experimentation keep teachers satisfied in their careers long, the research also reflects that, adaptive experts gain a better understanding of the knowledge and skills expected of an experienced expert compared to routine experts (Bransford *et al.*, 1999; Hatano and Inagaki, 1986; Hatano and Oura, 2003; Lin *et al.*, 2007).

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) also recommend securing leadership stability and sustainability. Again, a generationally focused lens on teachers' job motivation and future perspective may help leaders strategically ensure that teachers are developed to become school leaders. Generation X teachers appear to be hesitant to assume full-time leadership roles that take them away both from working with students, a cherished part of their teaching work, and from their families and personal lives. Research on generations both in work generally and in teaching specifically points to Generation X's desire to achieve work-life balance. Creating leadership stability and sustainability as different generations move through the teaching career means remaining mindful of what will both motivate teachers into become leaders and what will support them in their leadership roles when they do. For Generation X teachers, such efforts might include distributed leadership models that empower teachers to lead while still working directly with students (Harris and Muijs, 2004), or roles such as co-principalship (Grubb and Flessa, 2006; Stone-Johnson, 2014a) can enable teachers to share in the administration of school while remaining part-time in their classrooms. Finally, Generation X teachers may want to become formal leaders for a short time and then return to the classroom; thinking about leadership as a temporary rather than a permanent role may encourage them to take on a formal leadership position (Stone-Johnson, 2014a).

These suggestions offer a different way of thinking about professional capital, one that engages head-on with generationally different understandings of professionalism and autonomy yet remains true to the fundamental goal of the professional capital model – improving teaching and ultimately student learning. The greatest power of professional capital is that at its core it respects teachers and values their professionalism. What I argue here is that this respect is deepest when it embraces teachers' individual and collective identities, and importantly, their generational identities, learning what makes individual and groups of teachers strongest and then capitalizing upon these findings to bolster teachers' work.

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