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## Rethinking Teacher Quality: Narrow Versus Broad Conceptions of Capability

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

RETHINKING TEACHER QUALITY:  
NARROW VERSUS BROAD CONCEPTIONS OF CAPABILITY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
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BY

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The characteristic activity of the lyre-player is to play the lyre,  
that of the good lyre player to play it well.

Aristotle

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In this paper I take up the question of how we might rethink teacher quality. In particular, how might we assess education reform policies that aim to improve teaching. It is commonly accepted that teachers are the primary factor in schools determining student achievement. However, there is clear division on what attributes constitute a high-quality teacher. I claim that getting right the question of how we should proceed in achieving the aim of improving teaching depends on our conceptualization of capability. If teacher quality consists of a set of particular abilities that allow teachers to excel in their work, then identifying these abilities is indeed necessary. Moreover, understanding how the abilities of high quality teachers are acquired, maintained and expanded—or, conversely, how these abilities are unrealized, arrested and diminished, —is equally necessary. I maintain that the conception of capability underlying the standard approach advocated by education reformers is highly problematic. We can see the standard approach quite clearly in the Strategic Management of Human Capital (SMHC) project, which comes out of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Wisconsin. SMHC is significant because it is an attempt to bring together a number of education reform initiatives into a single, integrated approach meant to address the issue of teacher quality. As an approach, SMHC is strongly promoted by major foundations and leading policymakers as the path toward improving America's schools.

However, I argue that underlying SMHC's approach is a deeply flawed conception of capability that results in education policy prescriptions that undermine teacher quality.

In the following, I use the capability approach (CA) as a theoretical framework for examining SMHC. CA represents a new paradigm in economics that has increasingly influenced on how major international institutions measure development. Co-developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, CA is a school of thought to which a growing number of scholars from a diverse range of disciplines continue to make contributions.

My analysis begins by looking at SMHC's evaluative system. As an approach, how does the SMHC measure success? When examining an evaluative system, CA requires that the chosen metrics provide adequate information. The capabilities approach also requires that we closely scrutinize the reasoning that guides the choice of information included in an evaluation system and just as importantly the reasoning that determines the information to be excluded. In this regard, we can ask whether these measures provide the kind of information teachers need to excel, or do these measures neglect salient aspects of teachers' work? If these measures disregard the needs of teachers, we should ask why? I hold that SMHC's evaluation system fails to provide adequate information, because its key metrics strictly limit teacher quality to the ability of individuals to deliver effective classroom instruction. SMHC's metrics exclude essential contextual information related to teachers' work, and this exclusion of information in itself acts a subtle yet powerful obstruction to teachers' efforts to succeed.

The next part of my analysis focuses on SMHC's management approach to developing teacher quality. SMHC aims to promote teacher quality by tightening



institutional control over teacher's work. I argue that SMHC's management approach is antithetical to the development of capabilities essential to teacher quality. SMHC misunderstands teachers' work and misdiagnoses what ails schools. Consequently, it prescribes solutions that do more harm than good. I argue further that SMHC represents an approach to teachers' work that is a product of long-standing institutional norms in education. These norms have tended to discount teacher voice and undermine teacher participation in policymaking, and, as a result, SMHC maintains a cycle of poorly informed and unsuccessful reforms in education.

The final part of my analysis examines the conception of capability underlying SMHC. I maintain that SMHC's understanding of capability is confined to a narrow idea of human capital. The human capital model of capability is limited to skills and knowledge that promote economic growth. While human capital is an important idea, it represents only a single dimension of capability. SMHC holds a narrow view of capability. In comparison, CA offers a broad view of capability by incorporating human capital into a multi-dimensional conception of capability. CA is ultimately concerned with constructing institutional arrangements that broaden the information base on which rational social decision-making depends. It is this concern that underlies CA's insistence on the development of capabilities that make public participation in public policy possible. The capabilities that are required in order to deliberate on the ends and means of development are essential. CA is helpful here in explaining the persistence of failed policies that have aimed to improve schools while excluding teachers from any meaningful participation in the policy process. I argue that CA's account of capability

allows us to better understand how the role of teacher should be seen as an indispensable resource for making informed education policy. I also maintain that teachers' meaningful participation in policymaking cannot be realized until certain requisite capabilities are more fully developed among teachers. Here CA helps us not only understand how the professionalization of teaching is necessary to teacher quality, but also how a broader account of teacher quality can remedy a broken policy process in education.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN CAPITAL

SMHC is an education policy project aimed at improving K-12 education that comes out of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Wisconsin. SMHC has actively “pressed for a comprehensive and substantive national policy agenda on human capital reform in education” (Consortium for Policy Research in Education [CPRE], 2009). The project is significant because its policy prescriptions have come to define the dominant approach to education reform. Major foundations and leading policymakers promote the notion of human capital management as essential to reforming America’s schools. SMHC is at the heart of President Obama and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan’s Race To The Top (RTTT). SMHC provides “a blueprint for the human capital agenda,” which its advocates claim “needs to be addressed by districts, states, and the nation” (Odden, 2010).

SMHC’s co-directors, Allan Odden and James A. Kelly, maintain that there is widespread and urgent need for improved student achievement in all schools. The need for SMHC is premised on two main fears: The first of these fears is that the United States will lose its competitive edge in the global market due to an underperforming public education system. The second fear is the persistent academic achievement gap in America’s public schools. According to Odden and Kelly (2008), there is urgent need to press for higher levels of student performance in all schools, but SMHC’s central aim is

“to dramatically improve student achievement in the country’s largest 100 urban districts” (p.1). SMHC is designed in particular for schools with high concentrations of students from low-income and minority households.

Today there is widespread agreement among education policymakers that of all the factors inside schools that affect student learning and achievement, the most important is the quality of the teacher. Odden welcomes this policy convergence on human capital as the centerpiece of education reform. He argues that for the past two decades, policy reforms have “focused on standards, curriculums, and assessments, while neglecting to give high priority to the central role of human capital” (CPRE, p. 2). Standards, curriculums, and assessments are necessary components of education reform, but teacher quality is the key to education reform (CPRE, p. 2). Because instruction is delivered by the classroom teacher, and it is effective instruction that produces student achievement, education reform should focus on teacher quality. Odden maintains that the lowest performing schools—those with the largest percentage of high-needs students—face chronic teacher quality problems. These districts suffer from shortages of teacher quality and are most in need of SMHC. Therefore it is imperative to identify how the highest quality human capital—talent—can be recruited and retained as teachers, principals, and human capital management leaders in the nation’s large, urban, school districts” (Odden and Kelley, 2008, p.1). Odden says that until there is a high quality teacher in every classroom, the quantum leaps needed in the organizational performance of public education systems will not be realized.

Odden and Kelly (2008) recognize that a series of new efforts have been initiated since NCLB began to be implemented by education reformers in order to address the “unproductive and dysfunctional human capital management systems” that plague urban districts (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?*, p.6). They cite Teach for America, The New Teacher Project, the Broad Foundation, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as organizations that have been active in promoting teacher quality. But these various initiatives have not been well coordinated and consequently their impact has been limited (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *Strategic management*, p.6). Because no organization has taken the lead on addressing this problem, the SMHC project was designed to organize the promising efforts of these different organizations into a single unified approach for strategically managing human capital in public education. However, the amount of high quality teachers in high-needs schools is only part of the solution. High performing organizations do not only recruit and retain talented individuals, they also manage human capital in ways that support the organization’s strategic direction (Odden, 2011). Drawing directly from talent management and development in the private sector, SMHC addresses what the strategic management of human capital should look like in public education (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?* p.3).

SMHC’s approach consists of six core components, each strictly aligned with the other. Strategic management begins with the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement. Districts achieve their ultimate goal by adopting a clear education improvement strategy for increasing student achievement. To achieve the singular goal of student achievement districts must strategically align curriculum, performance

assessments, and the instructional practice of teachers. Central to the improvement strategy is an explicit and well articulated vision of effective instructional practice. (Odden, 2011). Odden says, “Effective instruction is not left to individual preference; it is not voluntary. It is systematic to the organization” (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC? p. 11*). The third component focuses on who will carry out the district’s improvement strategy. At the school level there are three key roles: teachers, teacher leaders, and school principals. Each role must possess the competencies appropriate to that role in order to ensure that high quality instruction is delivered in the classroom. The core competency of the classroom teacher is the ability to deliver effective instruction (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC? p. 13*). The fourth component requires all management decisions be data-driven. SMHC’s evaluation system is based on two main metrics: teacher instructional practice and student achievement. These two metrics act as the measure of teacher quality. The fifth component addresses the compensation and retention of high quality teachers. The evaluation system allows districts to differentiate among higher and lower performing teachers (CPRE). It also allows districts to implement performance-based compensation systems that, Odden argues, strategically align teacher motivation with and the goal of raising student achievement. SMHC’s final component requires greater involvement of human resource departments in human capital management. Human resource departments are vital component of the district’s effort to improve teacher quality through recruitment, retention or termination.

Odden maintains that the goal of educated all children to world-class performance standards, especially low-income and minority children, demands that districts realize the

need to drastically improve student performance (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *Strategic Management*, p.10). He cites “tougher accountability measures, more comprehensive incentives, changes to governance (e.g., mayoral control, decentralized school management, charter schools and vouchers), “and business sector pressure as ways to bring districts to this realization and move them to fix the broken human capital management systems that result in the talent shortages plaguing large urban districts” (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *Strategic Management*, p.10). Odden claims that SMHC will enable districts to increase the quantity and quality of teachers, improve instructional practice, increase student achievement, and ultimately reduce the large achievement gaps linked to poverty and race that exist across America’s schools (Odden, 2011, p. 6).

## CHAPTER THREE

### MEASURING TEACHER QUALITY

The capabilities approach (CA) holds that evaluative systems are essential to effective development policy. The purpose of an evaluation system is to aid people in their attempts to succeed and address their most urgent problems by not only promoting an adequate analysis of their situation but also providing adequate information for action (Nussbaum, 2011, p.12). According to Sen (1999):

Each evaluative approach can, to a great extent, be characterized by its informational basis: the information that is needed for making judgments using that approach and—no less important—the information that is excluded from a direct evaluative role in that approach. Informational exclusions are important constituents of an evaluative approach. The excluded information is not permitted to have any direct influence on evaluative judgments, and while this is usually done in an implicit way, the character of the approach may be strongly influenced by insensitivity to the excluded information. (p. 56)

An evaluation system aids us in pursuing our goals by letting us know how we are doing in relation to our objectives and by giving us the information we need to better understand what is facilitating or impeding our efforts. We assess the adequacy of evaluation systems by the information they include as well as exclude. Evaluation systems that exclude pertinent information can themselves act as powerful impediments to people's efforts to achieve their goals.

CA emerged out of the field of development economics as a way of measuring the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving people's quality of life in developing nations. Sen has long criticized the standard approach in development economics, which



uses GDP (Gross Domestic Product) as the key indicator of social progress. The standard approach has assumed that the quality of life in a nation will improve through economic growth as measured by GDP. However, Sen has shown that increases in GDP can occur without improvements in health, education or political liberty (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 47). In fact, extreme poverty, high mortality rates and intense gender inequality can coexist quite easily along with economic growth. So GDP overlooks vital features of people's lives and neglects areas of considerable capability deprivation in a society as a result of its exclusive focus on economic activity (Nussbaum, 2011). As a measure, GDP reduces multiple aspects of people's into single number that is meant to convey the information that is needed to know how everyone is doing. By assuming that a single number can provide adequate information, government officials can easily draw positive conclusions about public policies that may starkly contradict the negative experiences of large segments of people in a society. Economic activity should be seen as one indicator of social progress, rather than being confused for the aim of social progress itself. But even as an economic measure, GDP has clearly failed to provide reliable information. Focusing on GDP caused many governments to misjudge the soundness of their national economies prior to the global economic crisis of 2008, which occurred in part because GDP misled policymakers (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi, 2009, p. 5). Only after the crisis did it become clear how the narrow focus of GDP resulted in bad inferences and misguided policies (Stiglitz et al., p. 12).

Sen's thinking has become increasingly influential in regard to how development is understood and measured. The influence of his work is best seen in the United

Nation's Human Development Reports (HDRs), which provides an alternative to GDP for measuring development. Sen conceives of human development in terms of the expansion of

the range of things the people can be and do, such as be healthy and well nourished, to be knowledgeable, and to participate in community life. Seen from this viewpoint, development is about removing the obstacles to what person can do in life, obstacles such as illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to resources, or lack of civil or political freedoms. (Fukuda-Parr, 2003, p. 303)

Human development consists of an *evaluative aspect* and an *agency aspect*. The first of these is concerned with evaluating improvements in people's lives. Improvements are achieved by removing restrictions from and increasing access to social and economic resources, and are measured by indicators such as levels of literacy and schooling, life expectancy, and adjusted income. The evaluative aspect is about monitoring economic and social progress. The agency aspect extends the idea human development much further by viewing people's ability to actively participate in policymaking as an essential motor behind progress. People's agency is measured by indicators like access decision-making via democratic institutions and protection of political rights. The evaluative aspect is about monitoring, while the agency aspect is about decision-making. HDRs rely on a broader set of metrics for measuring development in comparison to the narrower standard approach that uses GDP almost exclusively. In his work, Sen consistently presses for broad measures instead of narrow measures, because the complexity of capability development demands more comprehensive approaches.

Does the SMHC approach provide an appropriate evaluative system for promoting the capabilities of teachers? Or does SMHC's evaluative system exclude information that might be critical to the capability of teachers? To answer these questions, we must take a closer look at SMHC's measures. SMHC aims to maximize teacher quality in high-needs schools, and to achieve this aim SMHC seeks to promote valid ways of measuring teacher quality. SMHC's evaluative system focuses on teacher performance by providing information on the core competencies required of individual teachers to deliver effective instruction in the classroom. According to Odden, "instruction is the most powerful tool schools have to influence student learning," and teachers "must possess the explicit competencies that drive student performance" (CPRE, p. 5). Teacher quality consists of the core competencies that enable a teacher to deliver effective instruction (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?* p. 13). This ability to deliver effective instruction is the basis of human capital management because it produces the ultimate goal of student achievement (CPRE, p. 5).

SMHC measures teacher quality with two major metrics: instructional practice and student achievement (CPRE, p. 3). Student achievement is measured via student performance on standardized tests. Test results provide essential information for constructing value-added data. This information allows districts to measure teacher effectiveness by quantifying the degree of impact made by individual teachers on student achievement (CPRE, p. 22). Instructional practice is a measure of how teachers deliver classroom instruction. Instructional practice, says Odden, consists of the "continual use of student performance data, including formative and benchmark assessments, state

accountability test scores, common assessments for curriculum units or common end-of-course exams” (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *Strategic management*, p. 11). Instructional practice is a type of input that can be measured by the degree to which individual teachers deliver instruction in accordance with district mandates that are based on student achievement data.

According to Odden, a data system that focuses on instructional practice and student achievement can reliably measure the quality of individual teachers, and this information enables districts to improve student achievement. These two metrics are supposed to tell districts how they are doing in regard to student achievement. This information also allows districts to differentiate among higher and lower performing teachers. Making this distinction enables districts to strategically improve the quality of their teacher stock in several ways. First, by identifying teachers’ instructional strengths and weaknesses district’s can identify the type of professional development that teachers need. Second, this information allows districts to implement performance-based pay. Performance pay aligns teacher motivation with the district’s goal of raising student achievement. Lastly, the information provided by these two key metrics gives high-needs districts the ability to identify and remove consistently low-performing teachers. SMHC’s evaluation system promises to give districts the ability to develop teacher quality by better aligning professional development with teacher needs, by more tightly tying teacher compensation to student achievement, and by allowing districts to identify and remove low-performing teachers.

Are SMHC's metrics broad enough to provide the kind of information teachers need to excel, or do these measures exclude salient aspects of teachers' work as a result of their narrowness? Teachers work in multi-layered contexts. While the classroom is primary space within which teachers work, classrooms are embedded in particular schools within particular districts that serve different communities, which are affected by broader political and policy environments at state and federal levels (Berry, Smylie, and Fuller, 2008, p. 30). Working conditions act as multi-level, interactive systems of influence within which teaching occurs (Berry et al., p. 31). In particular, high-needs schools possess certain characteristics that affect teachers' work, and these characteristics must be taken into account. High poverty and extreme segregation present challenges that some schools are inadequately resourced to meet. Teachers are regularly challenged with inadequate supplies and facilities (Rousmaniere, 1997, p. 2). High-needs schools are often organizationally weak due to chronic staff turnover and a revolving door of inexperienced and underprepared staff that must cope with a complex array of demanding and dysfunctional working conditions (Berry et al., p. 3). In these schools teachers are frequently challenged by excessive responsibilities, inconsistent and poorly coordinated school policies that are often punitive, as well as inadequate support for accomplishing their daily obligations (Rousmaniere, p. 2). In trying to explain the failure of decades of school reforms in Chicago, Charles Payne says that reformers have not understood the extent to which "the problems of urban schools are multidimensional, intertwined, irrational, and overdetermined" (Payne, p. 153). Therefore, we can expect an evaluative system that is designed to maximize teacher quality in high-needs schools, but which

does not adequately consider the organizational features of high-needs schools nor the conditions in which teachers in these schools work, to provide inadequate information.

What is needed is a broader information base in order to assess what is going on and what is being neglected. But SMHC neglects the complex causal relationships of independent, mediating, and dependent variables involved in teachers' work. It does this by reducing school improvement to the performance of individual teachers. As SMHC's metrics turn our attention toward the competency of individual teachers to improve test scores, they also turn our attention away from the conditions in which teachers work. Consequently, SMHC's evaluative approach fails to aid teachers in their attempts to succeed and address their most urgent problems, because it neither promotes an adequate analysis of the teacher's situation nor functions to make pertinent recommendations for action (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 12). Susan Moore Johnson contends that:

this sharpened focus on the individual teacher has eclipsed the role that the school as an organization can and must play in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of teachers and teaching. As a result, teachers are getting less support than they should and schools are less successful than they might be (p. 1).

Exclusive focus on the individual attributes of teachers decontextualizes teachers' work from the broader organizational features of schools. SMHC expects teachers to succeed largely through their own personal knowledge and dedication to students. Its exclusion of working conditions in effect asks teachers to overcome the obstacles in the schools where they work, instead of relying on those schools to support their work. Johnson finds that "remarkably few schools — particularly among those serving low-income students — provide all or even most of the workplace conditions that teachers need to do their jobs

well and stay in teaching” (Berry et al., p. 8) SMHC’s decontextualized approach carries with it another problem in that it promotes a notion of professionalism that keeps teachers focused on their own personal performance and inhibits serious examination of schools as organizations. As a result, the role working conditions play in supporting or undermining teacher quality is excluded from serious public discussion by an evaluative system that monitors only the performance of individual teachers and disregards the rest.

Getting education policy right requires evaluative systems that provide more information on the interplay between working conditions and teacher quality. SMHC’s measures are too narrow to draw attention to significant situational features of teachers’ work in high-needs schools. Its metrics do not read the situation as teachers read it. Its evaluative system excludes too much information about the diverse contextual factors that affect the quality of teaching in schools. If teachers in high-needs schools are to have working conditions that facilitate instead of impede the development of their ability to deliver effective instruction, then they need evaluation systems that include metrics that will provide information about the organizational aspects of their work. For this to happen, a rethinking of what is meant when we discuss working conditions is needed. But serious discussions about working conditions are often obstructed because they are typically associated with the content of contractual arrangements between local school boards and teacher unions. Therefore, developing a framework for reconceptualizing teacher working conditions is essential for better understanding links between the organizational features of schools, teacher quality, and student learning. The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) suggests that such a framework include factors like time,

professional development, school leadership, teacher empowerment, and facilities and resources. How do these factors promote or impede teacher quality? A more comprehensive evaluative system would include factors such as these and thereby aim “to better understand the experiences of individuals within schools and the potential of those schools to support and enhance the work of the teachers who staff them” (Johnson, p. 5). SMHC’s singular focus on the performance of individual teachers suggests that the perspectives of teachers have not been heard or taken seriously in the deliberations that shape education policy.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE STANDARD APPROACH TO TEACHER MANAGEMENT

According to Sen, the purpose of public institutions is to be understood in terms of capability development. In other words, we should judge institutions by considering how they affect people's ability to function in the ways they desire and have reason to value. Sen (1999) says:

Individuals live and operate in a world of institutions. Our opportunities and prospects depend crucially on what institutions exist and how they function. Not only do institutions contribute to our freedoms, their roles can be sensibly evaluated in the light of their contributions to our freedom. To see development as a freedom provides a perspective in which institutional assessment can systematically occur. (p. 142).

We can evaluate the institutions in which teachers' work by determining whether they promote or impede the development of teachers' abilities. I have so far argued that SMHC's measures are far too narrow to adequately inform our understanding of teacher quality. I have also suggested that this should be taken as evidence that teachers' perspectives have been ignored by education policymakers. In the following, I argue that SMHC's overall approach to teacher management is antithetical to the development of capabilities essential to teacher quality. It misunderstands and misdiagnoses what ails schools, and consequently prescribes solutions that do more harm than good. I further argue that SMHC is a predictable product of long-standing institutional norms in education, and that these norms have tended to undermine teacher voice and participation

in policymaking. As a result, SMHC maintains a cycle of ill-informed and unsuccessful reforms in education reforms.

The strategic management part of SMHC requires that all aspects of schooling be strictly aligned to the ultimate goal of student achievement. High performing organizations manage talent in ways that support the organization's strategic direction (Odden, 2011, p. 2). If all the parts of a school district are tightly aligned to its goal, then improved students achievement will result. The goal of substantially increasing student achievement begins with districts adopting a clear improvement strategy and centering all activities around it. The key element of an education improvement strategy is single and "explicit instructional vision, that is, a finely articulated understanding of effective instructional practice" (Odden & Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?*, p. 10). Effective instructional practice is a ongoing response to student performance data (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?*, p.11). What effective instruction consists of "is not left to individual preference; it is not voluntary. It is systematic to the organization" (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?*, p. 11) Student achievement data determines which instructional strategies are the most and least effective, and allows for ongoing modification of best practices for teachers in order to continually improve student performance (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *What is SMHC?*, p. 11). The core competency of the teacher is the ability to deliver instruction in accordance with the district's explicit vision of effective instructional practice. It is this core ability around which all parts of the SMHC approach revolve.

The strategic management of teachers' work consists of three main components. The first of these is an evaluation system that assesses teacher instructional practice and student achievement in order to provide districts the information needed to direct the pathway of each individual teacher's ongoing professional development (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *Strategic management*, p. 21). Teacher professional development is a result of student achievement results, not teacher choice. Second, the data flowing out of the evaluation system gives districts the ability to differentiate among higher and lower performing teachers. This then enables districts to move to performance-based pay for teachers. Traditional salary schedules are viewed as broken compensation systems, because they fail to tie together student achievement, teacher motivation and teacher pay. Odden argues that performance-based pay is preferred because it strategically utilizes the "two primary factors that motivate teachers: seeing their students improve their academic achievement and knowing their professional practice, i.e., their instructional performance is getting better." (Odden and Kelly, 2008, *Strategic management*, p. 23). The third component of strategic management involves district leaders effectively utilizing the key roles of teacher, teacher leader, and principal to implement the district's instructional vision (Odden and Kelly 2008, *What is SMHC?*) A specific set of competencies must be possessed by the people who fill each of these key roles. While the core competency of the teacher is the ability to deliver effective instruction, other key role holders must possess the competencies required to ensure the quality of teachers' instructional practice. Layers of management ensure that at each level role holders are accountable to their

supervisors. With these three components in place—teacher quality and student achievement are assured.

One of the main concerns driving the SMHC approach to school reform is fear that the U.S. will lose its competitive edge in the global economy as a result of its poorly performing education system. SMHC is meant to address this perceived problem. However, according to a comprehensive study by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), “the strategies driving the best performing systems are rarely found in the United States, and, conversely, that the education strategies now most popular in the United States are conspicuous by their absence in the countries with the most successful education systems” (Tucker, 2011, p. 2). While each country included in the study prioritizes the development of high quality teachers, the U.S. stands apart from the others in its approach to promoting teacher quality.

The NCEE finds that leading nations have adopted a professional model for teaching, whereas an industrial model has been embraced by policy elites in the U.S. The professional model consists of raising the status of teaching by making teacher education programs more selective, increases teacher autonomy to levels similar to leading professions, requiring accountability to colleagues instead of a supervisor, promotes excellence in practice through collaboration, and views teacher unions as partners in education policy making. In stark contrast, the industrial model relies on strict centralization of management, increased accountability, merit pay rewards, elimination of tenure, standardized tests as the key measure of performance, and the disempowerment of teacher unions. The report concludes that the standard approach to school reform in

United States is a costly and risky “detour from the route we must follow if we are to match the performance of the best” (Tucker, p. 3).

Though the success of other country’s education systems helps drive the SMHC model of reform, education reformers have nonetheless failed to adopt the strategies that have made these best countries successful. How are we to explain this apparent inconsistency? The NCEE argues that the U.S. education system was designed during the height of industrialization, and consequently that the organization of work in American education is still based on a management paradigm established by Fredrick Taylor (Tucker, p. 29). Similar to SMHC, Taylor’s scientific management method included close observation of low-skill workers in order to determine the most efficient way of completing specific tasks. After identifying the most efficient way of completing a task, management’s role was to ensure that workers complete tasks according to prescribed routines. The NCEE concludes:

Taylor’s paradigm is alive and well in America’s schools. It still influences our conception of teachers’ work, the way we organize our schools, the way we talk about accountability, the way management in our schools relates to our unions, the way we respond to teachers shortages, the status of teachers’ colleges in our education system, and much, much more. (Tucker, p. 30)

While countries with the most successful education systems has moved away from Taylor’s mass production method toward a professional organization of work, the prominence of SMHC in the U.S. demonstrates a commitment to Taylor’s approach (Tucker, p. 32). In contrast, the trend among high-performing school systems has involved “exercising progressively less control and providing progressively more

support, and getting better results” (Tucker, p. 30). NCEE warns that until Taylor’s management paradigm is replaced, present efforts to improve teacher quality act as a detour from the route that must be followed if the U.S. is to match the performance of the best education systems (Tucker, p. 3).

Richard Ingersoll’s research on teachers’ work sheds additional light on the logic behind SMHC. His approach consists of “theory and methods drawn from the field of organization theory and from the larger sociological study of organizations, occupations, and work” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 9). His organizational analysis aims at determining who in fact controls the work of teachers.

According to Ingersoll (2003), two opposing views dominate education policy on teachers’ work. Both views agree that the quality of teachers’ work is at the heart of efforts to reform education, but they are at odds as to whether control of this essential work should conform to a professional or industrial model. The industrial model “holds that schools are loosely organized, lack appropriate control, and are consequently disorganized, “especially in regard to their primary activity—the work of teachers” (Ingersoll, p. 5). The result is poor performance by teachers and low student achievement. Lack of adequate accountability makes it difficult to distinguish effective teachers from ineffective ones and blocks efforts to improve instruction. The solution is clear for proponents of this view. The dysfunctional state of loosely organized schools is remedied by increasing accountability, raising standards, and improving top-down controls (Ingersoll, p. 191). Tightening the organizational control of over teachers’ work becomes

an imperative. The prominence and popularity of the industrial model among different reform groups has allowed approaches like SMHC to dominate the education policy.

Supporters of the professional model make the opposite argument. They insist that schools systems exert excessive control over the work of teachers. This view holds that “too much organizational control, standardization, and accountability result in factory like, overly bureaucratized school systems.” (Ingersoll, p. 191). The predictable result is an ineffective school. Systematic denial of authority and autonomy foster frustration, alienation, loss of motivation and commitment among teachers, which adversely affects student achievement in multiple ways. Job dissatisfaction drives teacher turnover, especially in high-needs schools, and high employee turnover rates adversely affect an organization’s ability to function effectively. Advocates of the professional model argue that if teachers are provided greater authority and autonomy over their work, the quality of teachers’ work will be enhanced and student achievement will increase. This is the model used by nations with the best performing school systems.

Ingersoll contends that the industrial model held in approaches like SMHC are based on assumptions found in an idealized notion of the bureaucratic organization. This ideal-type of bureaucracy reflects “the most effective and efficient means of attaining particular ends (Volti, p. 81). The ideal-type utilizes resources, procedures and structure to organize the work of individuals to achieve objectives in the most rational manner possible. “Underlying this view is an economic, production-oriented model of schools,” which draws on “research in industrial settings” says Ingersoll (Ingersoll, p. 51). Moreover, “[in] this framework, the objective of schools, like industrial and business

organizations, is to produce outputs from inputs” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 51). Consequently, from the perspective of the ideal-type schools appear “like other large, complex organizations, such as banks, agencies, corporations, and plants,” but unlike these kinds of organizations they “exert very little control over their employees and work processes” (Ingersoll, p. 6). Ingersoll argues that many education reformers tend to see schools as “loosely coupled systems,” that is, systems that allow members larger degrees of autonomy, in comparison to the ideal-type of organization (Ingersoll, p. 6). Looking at schools from this perspective makes SMHC a compelling policy choice.

However, Ingersoll disputes this view of schools. He finds that despite appearances, teachers in fact have very little control over their work. In schools “there are numerous rules, policies, regulations, employee job descriptions, and standard operating systems that are designed to direct and control the work of teachers” (Ingersoll, p. 221). Administrators also have numerous ways, formal and informal, of assuring compliance. Moreover, less visible controls are embedded in the workplace culture of schools and in the role of teachers, which is comprised of much responsibility but little power. Ingersoll argues that schools are in fact tightly controlled organizations, even within the classroom, despite the appearance of loose control, and overly tight control is especially prevalent in urban school districts, where the issue of teacher quality is most pressing. In fact, much of Ingersoll’s work finds that the imposition of the industrial model undermines efforts to promote teacher quality by causing levels of teacher turnover that make these schools organizationally weak. If Ingersoll’s findings are correct, then SMHC takes schools in a direction that leads them away from teacher quality.



David Tyack, Larry Cuban, and Kate Rousmaniere's historical perspectives provide further insight into the logic that governs the institutions in which teachers work. Tyack and Cuban assert that schools must be understood as institutions if education reform is to be successful. The dominant features that have come to define schools today constitute what Cuban refers to as the grammar of schooling. This grammar is a product of history. The grammar of schooling exists not only within the conventional structure, rules, and practices that organize the work of teachers, but also within the law and widespread public beliefs about schools (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p.108). This grammar consists of unexamined institutional habits and popular beliefs about the necessary features that constitute a real school (Tyack and Cuban, p. 88). Cuban argues that the norms that constitute the grammar of schooling have a powerful socializing affect on anyone who has attended or worked in schools.

The grammar of schooling is the result of ideas taken from the emerging industrial method of mass production of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Business and professional elites believed that social progress depended on the modernization of schooling. These elites aimed to construct a rational system of education based on expertise, scientific management and the new model of organization, the business corporation. Consequently, centralization became a key feature of the grammar of schooling. Like the new business corporation, decision-making in the modern school system was designed to emanate from a board of directors composed of "successful men," in the manner of the new business corporation, (Tyack, 1974, p. 126). Under this model of school governance, complete authority was delegated to the superintendent (Tyack, p. 226). "Directives flowed from

top down, and reports emanated from the bottom, and each step of the educational process was carefully prescribed by professional educators” (Tyack, p. 40). The quest for the perfect method of school management determined many of the structural and procedural characteristics of the modern school, including the placement of students by grade level, core subject matters, standard examinations, comprehensive record keeping, the egg-crate design of schools, and the hierarchical command structure of schools (Tyack, p. 138). The teachers’ role within the modern school system was also firmly set during this time. Even though schools were never factories, the industrial model nonetheless prevailed.

We can also see the process of education policymaking as a significant part of the grammar of schooling. According to Tyack and Cuban, the history of school reform is a recurring cycle of raised alarm about social and economic problems accompanied by calls for a transformation of America’s schools to address these problems (Tyack and Cuban, p. 43). Moreover, school reform has typically been dictated by policy elites—technocrats, university professors, politicians, business leaders and heads of foundations. Reformers have repeatedly diagnosed school systems as inefficient, poor performing, and badly in need of upgrading. Regularly adopting the latest language, concepts and practices of business management and economics, education reformers have repeatedly promised to create sleeker, “more efficient school machines ‘light years’ ahead of the fusty schools of their time” (Tyack and Cuban, p. 111). As can be seen in Odden’s promotion of SMHC, the repeated message of reformers has been that “business methods of planning and budgeting, competition and incentives, aided by new technologies” can “transform

antiquated public schools into centers of efficient learning” (Tyack and Cuban, p. 110). Attempts to reform schools have often consisted of templates for improvement being imposed on schools by outsiders. Aimed primarily at improving classroom instruction, reforms have usually offered similar top-down approaches that intensified teachers’ workload while reducing teachers’ control over their work, says Rousmaniere (Rousmaniere, p. 3). But the history of school reform is replete with unfulfilled promises to bring improvement. Tyack and Cuban argue that chronic reform failure has cost a great deal of time and money, created new layers of bureaucracy, steadily increased demands on teachers’ time and energy, and often made teachers the scapegoat of policy failure (Tyack and Cuban, p. 116).

Tyack and Cuban argue that in the past and in the present, teachers have rarely been consulted about such reforms. “Outsiders who tried to reinvent schooling rarely understood the everyday lives of teachers, their practices, beliefs, and sources of frustration and satisfaction” (Tyack and Cuban, p. 114). Policy elites have tended to discount teacher’s knowledge of schools and exclude them from meaningful participation in education policymaking (Tyack and Cuban, p. 135). According to Rousmaniere, urban teachers and school reformers have viewed schools in very different ways. The tight and efficient systems described by policy leaders have often been experienced by urban school teachers as chaotic and irrational workplaces. She argues that though urban teachers have discussed their problems and “visions of how to create better-functioning schools,” they “talked into an echoing silence, the validity of their perspective ignored by those who controlled their working conditions” (Rousmaniere, p. 2).

A historical perspective suggests that the institutions in which teachers work have failed to read the teachers' situation in the way that teachers understand it or in a way that makes sense to them. The historical pattern of unsuccessful attempts to accurately diagnose the problems facing schools and prescribe effective solutions also suggests institutional irrationality (Tyack and Cuban, p. 41). Tyack, Cuban and Rousmaniere reach similar conclusions that successful school improvement will require a far different approach to education policymaking. Cuban and Tyack maintain that internal changes derived from the knowledge and motivation of teachers are more likely to produce improvements than the decisions and impositions of external policy makers. They argue that what is needed are attempts to advance student learning by working from the inside out rather than from the top down, "especially by enlisting the support and skills of teachers as key actors in reform" (Tyack and Cuban, p. 10). Rousmaniere also maintains that new ways of designing school reform initiatives that accommodate teachers' experiences are needed (Rousmaniere, p. 133). But teachers face serious obstacles to improving instruction from the inside out, and many of these obstacles are posed by the grammar of schooling itself.

SMHC functions in a way that maintains institutional norms that keep the teacher a docile recipient of education policy instead of active participant in its making. SMHC conserves a tradition that has limited the status, autonomy and authority of the role of teacher. Each of these are forms of capability that teachers are deprived of by the institutions in which they work. Consequently, the experience of teachers is likely to remain an untapped source of valuable information. Teachers' comprehension of schools

will continue to be excluded from defining the problems schools face and devising solutions. The cycle of unsuccessful education reform will continue until the limited perspectives of outsiders no longer dominate education policymaking.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COMPETING NOTIONS OF TEACHER QUALITY

According to SMHC, teacher quality consists of the ability to deliver instruction in a way that leads to gains in student achievement. This severely confined understanding of capability results in SMHC's inadequate evaluation system, its overly tight management of teachers' work, and ultimately helps maintain a broken education policy process. SMHC's narrow conception of teacher quality is based on an idea of human capital taken from industrial settings. While the ability to deliver instruction is central to teaching, it is only one ability among others that teachers need in order to excel at their work. CA provides a multi-dimensional conception of capability. CA insists that policies are more likely to be effective if they are adequately informed by the people who will be subject to policy. I argue that CA's account of capability allows us to better understand how the role of teacher is an indispensable resource for making adequately informed education policy. But I also maintain that teachers' meaningful participation in policymaking cannot be realized until certain requisite capabilities are first more fully developed within the teacher core. Here the capability approach helps us better understand how the link between teacher practice and professionalization of the occupation is critical to the promotion of teacher quality. CA helps us understand how teacher quality—which is both constitutive of, and instrumental to, enhanced status, autonomy, and authority—is necessary for fixing a broken policy process in education.

### **SMHC's Narrow Conception of Teacher Quality**

In the field of development economics the idea of human capital is understood in terms of education, knowledge and skill formation. As people become better educated they also become more productive, and this contributes greatly to the process of national economic development. Sen (1999) maintains that the ascendancy of human capital in contemporary economic analysis is quite significant and represents a positive development (Sen, p. 293). However, human capital is typically defined by convention in terms of capabilities that are instrumental to augmenting economic growth (Sen, p. 293). The knowledge and skills that constitute human capital are an essential part of social progress, says Sen, but they do not represent the full range of capabilities that constitute human agency (Sen, p. 294). The idea of human capital is mostly about skills and knowledge that enable individual agency (Fukuda-Parr, p. 309). For example, an educated person is more likely to gain employment and have healthy children. But the idea of human agency also extends to collective abilities that entail demanding rights and participation in decision-making in public matters. While the idea of human capital is essential to human development, people's capabilities cannot be reduced to simply commodity production, because doing so promotes policymaking that overlooks the development of other capabilities that are essential for people to live the kinds of lives they have reason to value.

The idea of human capital is further narrowed in the area of human resource management to fit the needs of mass-production systems. Mass-production systems are simple in that objectives are easy to define, performance is easy to quantify, and decision-

making is easily centralized. In this context, human capital is defined in terms of the discreet knowledge and skills individuals possess which are employed to complete specific tasks in the production process. Employees' skills and knowledge are used for very specific tasks within large hierarchies and atomistic divisions of labor. These competencies have an instrumental value; knowledge and skills are inputs used to produce outputs. Human capital understood in this way is complemented by Taylor's scientific management. Organizational performance is increased through vigorous monitoring of the various roles within a division of labor. Efficiencies are achieved by intensive observation of employee's work in order to identify the most efficient ways for completing specific tasks. Managerial control of the entire production process then ensures the faithful implementation and standardization of best practices. In industrial settings, the human capital perspective favors management strategies that focus on setting quantitative goals and incentives and external pressures to increase accountability (Morgan, 2006, p. 11). While this limited conceptualization of capability is suitable to large industrial production-oriented organizations, it can be detrimental to the performance of different kinds of organizations.

SMHC's underlying conception of capability is based on the idea of human capital found in industrial settings. But organizational theorists and sociologists of work warn that the nature of schooling exemplifies the misapplication of management approaches taken from mass-production settings. When policymakers take schools to be like all other large organizations, they assume that employees be managed in a manner suitable to mass-production systems by exerting control over employees and the work



process. When policymakers take this view of schools, approaches like SMHC are predictable. However, this may not be the right way of viewing schools. To begin, children cannot be compared to costumers in other industries, nor are other industries as susceptible to the varied demands that different communities make on schools.

Additionally, schooling does possess straightforward standards of success or failure, as the aims of education are often contested (Volti, 2008, p. 87). Nor does it neatly fit the linear production-oriented function of other industries, as the process of learning is itself complex and still being understood. Finally, the core task of schools cannot be easily reduced to routines. Teachers' work is complex. Moreover, it has grown increasingly complex as more expectations have been placed on teachers. Organizational theory maintains that effective organization of work depends on the nature of the work. When the tasks of workers in an organization can be reduced to routines, the industrial model has a real strength (Volti, p. 85). However, when the nature of the work demands "creativity, innovation, or the ability to solve unique problems," the strength of the industrial model becomes a vice (Volti, p. 85). By treating schools as other large mass-production systems, SMHC ends up promoting a notion of teacher quality that deprives teachers of capabilities that are necessary to the nature of their work.

According SMHC's approach, the role of teacher serves a single purpose, that is, the production of quantitative gains in student achievement. The particular capabilities that constitute teacher quality follow from this singular purpose. Quality teaching is identified by the (1) ability to deliver effective instruction and (2) the ability to perform the various routines that are included in the district's vision of effective instructional

practice. The industrial model requires specific abilities for specific tasks within large divisions of labor. SMHC's evaluation system only measures specific, quantifiable capabilities but ignores other forms of capability necessary to teachers' work. SMHC's industrial approach further miniaturizes its notion of teacher quality. All decision-making is based on information provided by SMHC's evaluation system. The evaluation system is used to direct teacher's work instead of inform their work. Student achievement data dictates the district's vision of instructional practice, and teachers must comply with the district's vision of instructional practice in order to be viewed as quality teachers. Student achievement data also determines the type of professional development teachers receive. The content of teachers' professional development is not left to individual choice; it is mandated by the district. Oversight of teachers' work is guided by student achievement data and conducted by lead teachers and school principals at the school level. Expertise must ultimately reside in the supervisors to which teachers are accountable. SMHC's reliance on the industrial model necessitates a narrow conception of capability and external management of that capability. As a result, the status, autonomy and authority of teachers becomes so miniaturized as to be unsuitable for the nature of their work.

### **CA's Broad Account of Capability**

According to SMHC, teacher quality consists of a limited set of capabilities. This severely confined understanding of teacher quality results in SMHC's inadequate evaluation system, its overly tight management of teachers' work, and ultimately helps maintain a broken education policy process. To excel in their work teachers need a far broader set of capabilities than SMHC allows. CA holds a broader view of capability, and

this broad conception of capability is critical to rethinking teacher quality. This rethinking of teacher quality includes a very different understanding of capability, an alternative approach to evaluation systems, and restructured processes of policymaking in education. In the following, I provide a rough sketch of CA's account of capability and how it provides a more suitable framework for understanding teacher quality.

CA holds that human capability consists of multiple, interactive and dynamic abilities. Nussbaum categorizes human capability into two basic types. Internal capabilities are trained or developed abilities. Internal capabilities are abilities that are possessed by an individual, the development of which is mostly a result of interaction with one's social, political and economic environment. The character of one's environment, whether it promotes or impedes development, is marked by its material and institutional conditions. Combined capabilities represent the ultimate level of capability development. Combined capabilities are the combination of internal abilities exercised through resources and opportunities within one's environment. Combined capabilities enable persons to assess and determine the character of the environments in which they live their lives. Capabilities combine to create various other opportunities, abilities and freedoms that allow people to apprehend the real possibilities that exist, intelligently prioritize among choices, devise and revise plans, and to ultimately achieve aims. Policymaking at its best attempts to understand what human beings require in order to develop capabilities, and then choose policies that will establish the required conditions for ongoing capability development (Nussbaum, 2011).

According to Nussbaum, two capabilities “play a distinctive architectonic role: they organize and pervade the others. These two are affiliation and practical reason” (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 39). Practical reason is the ability to critically reflect on and execute a plan for one’s own life in accordance with a sense of the good. Affiliation is the ability to deliberate with others on a shared plan for achieving the good within various sizes and types of social groupings, from the family to the state. In this way, capabilities are not just abilities residing inside a person; they are relationally dependent (Nussbaum, 1987, p. 31). Most capabilities are developed through interaction with our environment. Therefore, we must be sensitive to the institutional arrangements that shape the nature of our environment. We need institutional arrangements that facilitate the exercise of practical reason and affiliation. Institutions can work to expand individual capabilities, and individual capabilities can, in turn, be used to create institutional environments that are conducive to identifying and promoting a better life (Sen, 1999, p. 18). But institutional environments can also work against people by fostering conditions that obstruct the exercise of practical reason and affiliation. It is my contention that the institutional environment in which teachers work impedes the development of these essential capabilities.

The idea of using reason to identify and promote better and more acceptable policies is at the heart of CA. Sen argues that effective policymaking not only requires evaluative systems that provide adequate information, it also demands active public participation in their construction. He maintains that rationality is the discipline of subjecting our values, priorities, objectives and choices of action to critical scrutiny.

Critical scrutiny demands that we not only investigate the reasons underlying our choices but also consider whether the reasons survive critical examination. Sen (2002) states:

The necessity of scrutiny and critical assessments is not just a demand for self-centered evaluation by secluded individuals, but a pointer to the fruitfulness of public discussion and of interactive public reasoning: social evaluations may be starved of useful information and good arguments if they are entirely based on separated and sequestered cogitation (p. 24).

Active public participation makes the rational basis for social decisions possible by broadening the information included in public decisions and by promoting critical scrutiny of the reasons, aims and values that go into making social choices. Public participation addresses the problem of parochial thinking in policymaking. By subjecting overly confident beliefs to the scrutiny of multiple viewpoints shared social problems can be more accurately assessed and more appropriate solutions devised. However, if reason is to play its central role in choosing wisely the ends and means of public policy, appropriate institutional environments are required that facilitate meaningful public participation, dialogue, and deliberation in the policy process. Instead of institutional conditions that foster limited perspectives, dogmatism and self-ignorance, we need institutions that can intelligently utilize information to solve our shared problems (Anderson, 2003, p. 248).

Sen's idea of positional objectivity is helpful for understanding how institutional structures can work for or against certain groups of people. In particular, positional objectivity is helpful in understanding how teachers can be praised and recognized for their central role in schooling and yet have their perspectives excluded from education policymaking. According to Sen (2002), all observations are unavoidably position-based

(Sen, p. 467). People evaluate things from the positions they occupy, and the occupied position forms the viewpoint from which we make our evaluations. A viewpoint consists of many parameters, such as one's experiences, beliefs, training, dispositions, commitments, and personal relations. These parameters define a position and affect a person's evaluations. A perspective is considered local (or parochial) "if it held by one or few people, more global if it is shared by larger groups, and global (without qualification)" if it is shared by everyone (Anderson, p. 239). In order to explain persistent policy failure, Sen points to the role of objective positionality in creating "systematic and persistent illusions that significantly influence—and distort—social understanding (Anderson, p. 241). We deem judgments to be objective if and only if anyone occupying the same position would make the same judgment. The key idea here is interpersonal invariance. A position is considered objective if drawing from the same information, affected by the same parameters of a position, there is no variation in judgment. In this way, objective positionality can bring people together through agreement, but it can also divide people by way of entrenched disagreement. The sense of certainty resulting from positional objectivity can make it hard for people to transcend the limited information of their shared position, even when it misleads and misinforms them (Sen, 2009, p. 156). The limited perspective occupied by a group (in particular its shared ignorance of relevant concepts and related information) can create objective illusions (Sen, 2009, p. 156). "An objective illusion is a positionally objective belief that is, in fact, mistaken," says Sen (Sen, 2002, p. 470). Dogmatic institutional structures often work to reinforce the objective illusions and the interests of small groups. Elizabeth Anderson

maintains that “persistent capability deprivations in a substantial subset of population is evidence that the perspective of certain groups has not been heard or not taken seriously in the deliberations that shape public policies” (Anderson, p. 252). Moreover, the guardians of the institution often mistake the deprivations of the disadvantaged as evidence that these people are not worth listening to (Anderson, p. 255). It is my position that the objective illusions of policy elites in education maintain a dogmatic institutional environment by excluding teachers from policymaking.

How can institutions be enabled to effectively draw upon available information resources in order to gather the necessary information for solving problems? Because people are situated in different positions (comprised of the norms, understandings and values of an individual or a small group), positions can be utilized as an epistemological resource. To begin, institutions that aim to promote public reason must attempt to broaden the information base upon which social decisions are made. To accomplish this an institution must work to facilitate the development of the appropriate capabilities—skills, knowledge, and dispositions—people need to effectively participate in public deliberation. Next, intelligent institutional design aims to mobilize points of view to address different problems. “Problems can be specified in terms of the information needed to identify, evaluate, and solve them” (Anderson, p. 247). Solutions to different problems require different perspectives. To solve some problems, we must take a local perspective. To solve other problems, we need to construct more global perspectives (Anderson, p. 240). Additionally, institutions must value the discipline of rationality by always subjecting points of view to critical scrutiny. Lastly, institutions can enable public

reason by constructing feedback mechanisms that provide information about the performance of policies as judged the people most impacted by these policies and provide ways of changing policy in light of feedback (Anderson, p. 250). By learning to move from less to more adequate perspectives information is more effectively utilized. Also, by anticipating policy changes in light of updated information an institution takes more of an experimentalist approach rather than a dogmatic one.

The basic proposition of Sen's *Development as Freedom* is that we should evaluate development in terms of the expansion of people's capabilities to lead the kind of live they value and have reason to value (Evans, 2002, p. 55). Seeing development as the expansion of abilities requires both the elimination of forms of capability deprivation and as well as the promotion institutional structures that develop capabilities. Applying CA to teaching requires a broadening of the definition of teacher quality. SMHC's thin definition of teacher quality is confined to the delivery of classroom instruction. While the delivery of effective instruction is the defining ability of teachers' work, the exercise of this defining ability, especially in high-districts schools, depends on the development, exercise, and enhancement of many other capabilities. Teachers need evaluation systems that aid them in their attempts to succeed, that address their most urgent problems by promoting a sufficient analysis of their situation, and that provide adequate information for action. Therefore, teachers also need institutional environments that facilitate their meaningful participation in the making of policies that impact their work. To make educational institutions function in a way that promotes teacher quality, teachers need purposive associations that not only enable them to develop an identity, values and goals



of their own, but also enable them to collectively act in order to achieve their goals (Evans, p. 57).

The development of individual capabilities is very much dependent on institutional conditions, but, according to Peter Evans, organizations act as a necessary link between the two (Evans, p. 56). “Organized collectivities—unions, political parties, village councils, women’s groups, etc.—are fundamental to ‘people’s capabilities to choose the lives they have reason to value,’” says Evans (Evans, p. 56). They facilitate the key capabilities of affiliation and practical reason. Organized collectivities make deliberation with others on a shared plan for achieving the good possible. Organizations can act as vehicle in which individuals can construct shared identities, values and preferences, and devise means for achieving their ends, “even in the face of powerful opposition” (Evans, p. 56). The process of preference formation is critical to CA. Group preferences should be developed internally from member’s experiences and deliberations. Their preferences should reflect their needs and aspirations, not the interests of outsiders. For these reasons, the promotion of associational activity is critical to the development of teachers’ own distinctive understanding of teacher quality. It allows a definition of teacher quality that comes from the inside instead of being imposed from the outside. Therefore, teachers’ associations play a vital role in forming the identity, values and goals of teachers, and they function as the natural vehicle for promoting the ends and means of teaching.

## **Rethinking Teacher Quality**

An appropriate account of teacher quality must recognize the key features of the nature of teachers' work. In its highest form teaching is a practice. Teachers are practitioners who must exercise certain virtues or capabilities in order to excel in the role of teacher. According to Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), a practice is:

a coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended (p. 187).

A practice is the arena in which capabilities are developed, exhibited and honored. The distinctive capabilities of a practice are a means to an end; the end is the ongoing enhancement of the excellences of that define a practice.

Motivational structure is inherent to any practice. Practices possess internal goods, as well as standards. Standards mark what is excellent in a practice. Internal goods are obtained when standards are met, and carry with them psychic rewards. Standards and internal goods work together to promote the development of those capabilities that facilitate success. MacIntyre (2007) says:

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to those standards which currently and partially define the practice. (p. 190)

Both standards and, especially, internal goods are only really known by those participating in the practice, and therefore outsiders are incompetent as judges of a

practice (MacIntyre, p. 189). By entering into a practice one comes to know its standards, but also participates in advancing the continued evolution of its standards.

Practices are also fundamentally relational, since we enter into a relationship with other practitioners. The relational aspect of practice is both cognitive and moral. The advancement of the practice depends upon learning, and this learning is constructed by ongoing interaction with others, which not only seeks what is best for the individual, but what it is best for the practice to which one belongs (Halliday and Johnsson, 2009, p. 43). MacIntyre maintains that in order for learning to occur, capabilities such as justice, courage, honesty, and trust must exist among practitioners. These abilities are developed capabilities that promote the expansion of additional capabilities and advance the practice itself.

Communities of practice are marked by experimentation, critical reflection, greater degrees of commitment to student learning, and most importantly a collective effort in which work and responsibilities are shared (McLaughlin, p. 63). This collective inquiry generates knowledge *of* practice (McLaughlin, p. 63). “In such communities,” says McLaughlin, “teachers together address the challenges of their student body and explore ways of improving practice to advance learning” (McLaughlin, p. 63). According to James Spillane’s cognitive account, capability development requires a support of teacher autonomy, trust, social interaction, and teacher participation. Success requires opportunities for sense-making, and this depends fundamentally on district support of adequate opportunities for public deliberation, development of trust, ongoing inquiry, and social networking that cognitively and motivationally advance a practice. Success for

teachers becomes a social endeavor. Though the classroom is the central domain of teachers' practice, the practice of teaching brings awareness that excellence in the classroom is not independent of the larger domains that the classroom is situated within, such as the school, district and overall policy climate.

To enter into what Judith Little (1990) calls *joint work* is to enter into the domain of practice, to experience practice, it is a distinct form of being. In this domain there is a shared responsibility of teaching as practice (Little, p. 519). Practitioners are “enabled to engage in direct commentary on the moral, intellectual, and technical merit of classroom practices and school-level programs or policies. They both accept and expect initiatives on matters of professional principle and craft (Little, p. 522). In addition, the main motivation and reward for involvement with one another are found in the essential work of teaching, in both its depth and breadth, the social and emotional, from classroom decision-making to school-wide operational influence (Little, p. 523). The internal goods of the practice become fully accessible. Furthermore, the demands of individual autonomy in a practice shift from the private to the public, from individual to collective. Personal prerogative is made subject to collectively developed values, standards, and agreements, but also spurs personal initiative (Little, p. 521). One becomes responsible to one's peer and the standards that define the practice. In this way the community of practice depends on developed values of trust. Also the advantages of group dialogue expand the information base upon which the community of practice makes choices and takes actions. In teaching, the practitioner's sense of identity, as one working in and

fulfilling the role of teacher, begins to transcend the walls of the classroom toward the larger purposes of education.

According to MacIntyre, practices share an intimate relationship with institutions. Practices cannot be sustained without institutions, yet they are always vulnerable to the corrupting power of institutions. One reason for this is that institutions tend to focus on technical skills, which are employed for institutional purposes, and which can be at odds with purposes of a practice. Institutions also tend to corrupt because they are necessarily concerned with external goods, which they distribute in the form of rewards such as money, power and status. If preoccupation within a practice tilts toward these external goods and away from a practice's internal goods, the capabilities that make innovation possible within the practice will be endangered. MacIntyre (2007) argues that "the ability of the practice to retain its integrity depends on the way in which the capabilities are exercised, sustained and developed within the institutional forms which are the social bearers of the practice" (p. 195).

Little warns that collective autonomy is vulnerable to external manipulations (Little, p. 519). It is not only the traditional organization of space, time and tasks of teaching that limit collective autonomy and foster individualism and conservatism; teachers' ability to make sense of teaching can be impeded by administrative attempts to force improvement. According to Little (1989), authentic collaboration arises out of the problems and circumstances that teachers experience in common, so often forced improvements do not cohere with teachers' experience. For this reason "outside initiatives seem contrived, inauthentic, grafted on, perched precariously (and often

temporarily) on the margins of real work” (Little, p. 510). As a result, the well-intentioned interventions of outsiders that aim to improve teaching can inadvertently impede the ability teachers to make sense of teaching as a practice and to improve it. If teachers are to excel in their role, certain working conditions and institutional environments must exist.

Working conditions are essential to teacher quality. Teacher quality requires supportive work environments. Success in the classroom is difficult to achieve if working conditions undermine teachers’ work. Supportive working conditions consist of five key factors: sufficient time, constructive school leadership, teacher empowerment, high quality professional development, and sufficient facilities and resources. Lack of sufficient time to plan, teach and assess not only creates stressful work conditions, it diminishes the quality of instruction. Constructive school leadership consists of trust between administrators and teachers. Consistent administrative support for teachers is often cited as significantly predictive of teacher retention. Teacher empowerment fosters a sense of collective responsibility. Teachers derive greater satisfaction from their work when they are included in school level decision-making and problem solving. Teachers require opportunities to continue to develop their instructional skills, but they need to be involved in determining the structure and content of professional development. School facilities and resources are a basic necessity. Teachers should not be hampered by shortages of basic materials or inoperative equipment. Poor working conditions diminish teacher morale, success, and ultimately commitment. A working environment that supports excellence in teaching is one in which the status, autonomy and authority of

teachers is raised so that they can control the conditions in which teaching is practiced. A professional work environment is an essential form of combined capability in that it promotes teachers' success in the classroom, but the professional status of teaching is in question. Professional working conditions—status, autonomy, and authority—often elude teachers in high needs schools.

The structural features that constitute a profession are in themselves forms of capability that support the development, exercise and enhancement of the capabilities that are instrumental to and constitutive of teaching as a practice. An occupation that is professionally organized typically consists of six structural features that distinguish in from other occupations. These features include a form of specialized knowledge, obtained through a rigorous university-based training program, the completion of which is evidenced by certification or license, allowing entry into the profession. Second, a profession carries prestige. The profession is held in high regard by society as a whole and by the individuals who use the professional service. Third, professionals are conferred considerable authority in the workplace as a result of their expertise, which is typically regulated by a set of professional standards. Fourth, professions are distinguished from other occupations by their ability to do their work with a high degree of autonomy. This autonomy stems from their expertise and commitment to professional standards, and these professional standards typically include a form of social service. Fifth, professionals are typically well compensated. Finally, a profession is marked by an active professional organization or association, allowing members control over their profession (Ingersoll and Perda, 2008, p. 3). These structural features allow professionals

to shape their practice by granting practitioners the status, autonomy and authority required in order for them to excel in their role. The organization of work forms the expectations of the workers and is legitimized by institutional and organizational rules.

Whereas professionalization consists of how the work of an occupation is formally organized, professionalism consists of the attitudinal attributes and beliefs of individual workers (Ingersoll and Perda, p. 3). The SMHC approach promotes a vision of teaching as a profession that has nothing to do with professionalization and everything to do with professionalism. It emphasizes the performance of individual teachers and remains silent about their working conditions. SMHC expects teachers to succeed largely through dedication to students and compliance with district mandates. It asks teachers to overcome the obstacles in the schools where they work, instead of relying on those schools to support their work. Finally, it makes teachers solely responsible for student achievement but gives them no control over their work.

In these ways SMHC reinforces a pattern in the history of education administration, especially in large urban districts, by which the occupation of teaching has been defined not by teachers but outsiders who have sought to control their work. As a result, approaches like SMHC reinforce a tradition in education that defines the truly professional teacher as someone who delivers instruction effectively, is responsive to school leadership, voluntarily takes on new and uncompensated burdens, and exudes commitment to children (Rousmaniere, p 25). According to Rousmaniere, an ideology of professionalism promoted by administrators has been instrumental to teachers' acceptance of mounting role responsibilities, persistent isolation within schools, and the



formation of adaptive strategies that have allowed them to cope with policies that promise improvement but that teachers often experience as irrational. Teachers' internalization of professionalism has so shaped their occupational identity that they have tended to accommodate themselves to dysfunction rather than collectively oppose it. In this way, the ideology of professionalism acts as a serious form of capability deprivation (Rousmaniere, p. 27), which alienates teachers from their own practice. Therefore, a rethinking of teacher quality requires a rejection of professionalism in favor of the professionalization of teachers' work. Professionalization can give teachers the status, autonomy and authority they need to claim a right to actively participate in decision-making at all levels of decision-making, and it makes it more likely that their demands will be taken seriously. Since SMHC represents the dominate approach to education reform, teachers cannot expect their occupation to be professionalized from the outside. If teaching is be organized in a professional manner, it is likely that this will only occur through teacher advocacy for professionalization.

As teachers' primary associations, teacher unions play a key role in the development of the capabilities that comprise teacher quality. The idea of preference formation is critical here, because our expressed preferences might not be genuine. Teacher unions can function as an association for forming genuine preferences among teachers. For example, it is important that teachers not accept "reform measures" as indeed "reform." Teachers cannot allow outsiders to dominate the shaping of their occupation, nor can they allow others to dominate the policymaking process in education.

But in order for teacher unions to function in a way that promotes teacher quality unions need to change.

Teacher unions are part of the grammar of schooling that has reinforced an industrial work paradigm that has impeded teacher participation in education policymaking. The majority of teachers in the United States unionized in the 1960s and 1970s, at time in which unionism meant industrial unionism (Kerchner and Cooper, 2003, p. 223). This form of unionism was designed to function within large industrial style organizations. Because school systems have attempted to emulate the hierarchies, divisions of labor, and centralized management of large production-oriented organizations, industrial unionism appealed to labor in public education (Kerchner and Cooper, p. 224). Charles Kerchner and Bruce Cooper state:

The logic of industrial organization created a clear division between work design and control and task execution. Under industrial bureaucracy, codified into industrial labor relations, managers asserted control over the content and design of teaching.

In labor relations terms, these were management's reserved rights and not mandatory subjects of bargaining, and frequently law and custom excluded the content of teaching from the bargaining process (p. 224).

Legally, teacher unions are typically denied any right to participate in education decisions. Their participation in education matters is usually at the discretion of boards of education. Consequently, "teacher unions are largely reduced to resisting reforms supported by others, rather than advocating for and organizing around a new set of educational ideas of their own" (Kerchner and Cooper, p. 221). This facilitates the view of policy elites that unions can only promote the interests of the members at the expense of students and stand in the way of school reforms (Kerchner and Cooper, p. 232).

Therefore, moving from an industrial-style unionism to an organization of labor around the practice and profession of teaching is essential to the promotion of teacher quality. Teachers should be organized around the ends and means of teaching, and teachers should be setting and controlling the standards of their practice.

According to Nina Bascia (2008), teachers increasingly want their unions to advocate for them by articulating and promoting a positive professional identity. Today the teacher's position—subordinate to administrators and policymakers—makes their credibility easily challenged. Teachers want their unions to address the widening gap between what teachers say they need and what policy makers believe is best. "Teachers want their perspectives taken into account when educational decisions are made because it can make a profound difference in their ability to teach well," says Bascia (p. 100). The desire to participate in policy is evidence of a commitment to children that extends beyond the walls of the classroom. It is also evidence of a desire to increase their ability to promote their own success, which is dependent upon the link between quality working conditions and quality learning conditions.

By applying CA to teachers' work we are able incorporate SMHC's narrow notion of human capital into a multi-dimensional conception of capability. This broad conception of capability is essential for pushing for institutional arrangements that promote teacher participation in the education policy process. CA insists that policies are more likely to be effective if they are adequately informed by the people who will be subject to policy. I argue that CA's account of capability allows us to better understand how the role of teacher is an indispensable resource for making adequately informed

education policy. But I also maintain that teachers' meaningful participation in policymaking cannot be realized until certain requisite capabilities are first more fully developed within the teacher core. Here CA helps us better understand how the link between teacher practice and professionalization of the occupation is critical to the promotion of teacher quality. CA helps us understand how teacher quality—which is both constitutive of, and instrumental to, greater authority, autonomy, and power—is necessary for fixing a broken policy process in education.

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUDING STATEMENT

In this paper I have taken up the question of how we might rethink teacher quality. If teacher quality consists of a set of particular abilities that allow teachers to excel in their work, then identifying these abilities is indeed necessary. Understanding how the abilities of high quality teachers are acquired, maintained and expanded—or, conversely, how these abilities are unrealized, arrested and diminished, —is equally necessary. I have argued that the conception of capability underlying the standard approach for promoting teacher quality is highly problematic. We can see the standard approach quite clearly in SMHC. SMHC is significant because it is an attempt to bring together a number of education reform initiatives into a single, integrated approach meant to address the issue of teacher quality. SMHC’s approach is has been strongly promoted by major foundations, leading policymakers, and in President Obama’s RTT as the way to improve America’s public schools. I, however, have argued that underlying SMHC’s understanding of teacher quality is a deeply flawed conception of capability that results in education policy prescriptions that continue to impede our efforts to promote teacher quality.

To make my argument, I have I used CA as a counter approach for understanding capability development. CA is significant because it represents a new paradigm in economics that has increasingly influenced how major international institutions measure

development. CA is an emerging school of thought that is becoming increasingly influential in public policy matters. I have relied primarily on Sen and Nussbaum's work to make my argument, but I have also used the insights of other scholars' work on CA.

The first part of my overall argument examined SMHC's measure of teacher quality. SMHC calls for comprehensive data systems, but the metrics it employs to measure teacher quality are hardly comprehensive. Using CA as a counter approach, I contended that its evaluation system is far too narrow to adequately inform decision-making on teacher quality, because its key metrics strictly limit teacher quality to the ability to deliver effective classroom instruction. Its metrics exclude essential contextual information related to the environments in which teachers work.

Understanding how workplace conditions promote or obstruct quality teaching is essential to teachers' attempts to succeed, but SMHC's evaluative system is blind to the spaces in which teaching and learning occur. This exclusion of information itself acts a subtle yet significant obstruction to the efforts of teachers to excel in their role. By impeding an adequate analysis of the teacher's situation, SMHC's metrics draw attention away from teachers' struggles and thereby stifle discussion and criticism that might lead to policies that address the problems teachers face, and this is especially significant in high needs schools.

The second part of my larger argument focused on SMHC's management of teachers' work. According to CA, institutional environments play a central role in the development of capabilities. For this reason, it was important to include an analysis of the institutional conditions in which teachers have worked. I concluded that SMHC aims to

promote teacher quality by tightening institutional control over teacher's work. I reasoned that SMHC's management approach is antithetical to the development of capabilities essential to teacher quality. SMHC misunderstands teachers' work and misdiagnoses what ails schools. Consequently, it prescribes solutions that do more harm than good. I argued further that SMHC represents an approach to teachers' work that is a product of long-standing institutional norms in education. These norms have largely discounted teacher voice and impeded teacher participation in policymaking. Consequently, SMHC should be viewed as an approach that maintains a cycle of poorly informed and unsuccessful reforms in education.

The third part of my argument examines the conception of capability underlying SMHC. I maintain that SMHC's understanding of capability is confined by a narrow idea of human capital derived from industrial settings. CA holds that capabilities are dynamic, interactive, and multi-dimensional. According to Sen, human capital is an important idea, and an important form of capability, but it represents only a single dimension of capability. I concluded that SMHC holds a narrow view of capability, too narrow to guide education policy in the right direction toward promoting teacher quality. By contrast, CA offers a broad view of capability by incorporating human capital into a multi-dimensional conception of capability. CA is ultimately concerned with constructing institutional arrangements that broaden the information base on which adequately informed public policy making depends. It is this concern that underlies CA's insistence on the development of capabilities that make public participation in public policy possible. This is the key role played by working conditions and institutional environments. The

development of the capabilities that are required for deliberation on the ends and means of policy depend on working conditions and institutional environments. Teachers need conditions that facilitate their ability to control the environments in which they work. In this way CA is helpful for explaining the persistence of failed education policies that have aimed to improve schools while excluding teachers from any meaningful participation in the policy process. I have argued that CA allows us to better understand how the role of teacher should be seen as an indispensable resource for making informed education policy. I have also explored how teachers' meaningful participation in policymaking cannot be realized until certain requisite capabilities are more fully developed among teachers. In using CA as an approach to education policy, I have weighed in in favor of teacher professionalization, and I have made a brief case that teacher unions are central to teacher professionalization. By applying CA to the issue of teacher quality, we can see that the status, autonomy and authority of teachers must be enhanced. These are forms of capability that allow teachers to control the larger environments in which they work, and these capabilities are essential for allowing teachers to excel in promoting student learning, which is the purpose of their practice.



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## VITA

Anthony Costa grew up in the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in History and Philosophy from Oakland University, graduating Magna Cum Laude and with Honors in Philosophy. After teaching English as a second language in Istanbul Turkey, he returned to Detroit, attended Wayne State University, and received a Masters of Arts in Teaching.

He then moved to Chicago and taught social studies in Chicago Public Schools for 13 years. He taught at three different neighborhood schools: Roberto Clemente High School, the Multicultural Arts School and Social Justice High School. While at Roberto Clemente High School, he played an active role in its small schools initiative by contributing to the design, implementation and leadership of Clemente's Fine & Performing Arts Academy. He was instrumental in establishing and overseeing partnerships with local art organizations, like CAPE, Intuitive Arts, and the Museum of Contemporary Arts. After achieving National Board Certification, he began teaching at the Multicultural Art School, where he continued his interest in arts integration in the social studies by working closely with faculty from the Art Institute of Chicago. After entering the Masters of Arts in Cultural and Educational Policy Studies program at Loyola University Chicago, he was invited to teach at Social Justice High School. By this time, teachers in Chicago were experiencing the negative effects of Mayor Rahm

Emanuel and Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's education reforms. In 2012 Chicago public school teachers voted to go on strike for the first time since 1987.

This paper is the result of Costa's experiences as classroom teacher in Chicago Public Schools for well over a decade. These experiences have informed and guided his research in education policy at Loyola University. In this work he explores the marginalization of teachers in the education policymaking process, and how education policy could be more effective if it was adequately informed by teachers' knowledge. His work shows a growing interest in understanding the relationship between different approaches to education management and teacher quality outcomes. He is particularly interested in organizational learning and distributive leadership in schools.

Costa currently teaches social studies at the American International School of Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City.

