16-03 Social Capital in Teacher Communities

A synopsis by David M. Irby, PhD

Med Ed Table of Contents review meetings are held on 4th Thursdays from noon-1pm at 533 Parnassus, Suite U-80, Huddle B.

Contact Bridget O’Brien for information about joining.

Return to TickToc Home Page: http://tiny.cc/ticktoc

Social Capital in Teacher Communities

A synopsis of the article The Ties that Bind: How social capital is forged and forfeited in teacher communities, by Bridwell-Mitchell EN, Cooc N, in the journal Educational Researcher.

What did I learn from this article?

Teachers’ relationships in collegial communities are important sources of social capital, which is defined as a set of cognitive, social and material resources made available through direct and indirect relationships with others. The article describes how teachers develop, maintain and sometimes forfeit the relationships within which social capital resides. Research suggests that social capital is associated with informal social contexts, aspects of the formal organization (grade taught, leadership position) and individual teacher traits that can result in lasting ties to a collegial community. The degree of cohesion in teachers’ communities appears to matter more than individual agency or formal organizational factors for whether teachers maintain community ties. While community ties have positive social capital benefits, such cohesion may also undermine instructional innovation and produce status quo groupthink. One way to encourage community cohesion might be to design professional tasks so that community members have an opportunity to work with and interact with many colleagues.

What is novel or noteworthy?

Group cohesion or the informal culture of relationships is the strongest source of social capital and has the greatest impact on maintaining community. This was more powerful than individual traits and the formal organizational structure.

How does it relate to what we’re doing at UCSF?

UCSF is a collegial community, or set of communities, that is bounded by organizational structure within which individuals work. Sometimes the three primary missions and communities overlap and sometimes they diverge: education, clinical practice and research. These three enterprises are each affected by the relationships of the people working within them. It would appear that social capital is enhanced when there is strong social cohesion. Within medical education, the formal organizational structures (such as the Academy, the Center for Faculty Educators, curriculum committees, faculty development programs, etc.) can enhance cohesion of educators. In addition, faculty members can be encouraged to work collaboratively with those outside of their departments and schools to increase their networks and connections. A trusting, welcoming and inclusive community has the greatest chance of increasing social capital – and by extension engagement and motivation.