

School Social Capital and School Effectiveness

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This article argues that school social capital is crucial for school effectiveness, but it has been disregarded in the traditional school administrative theory. Therefore, this article tries to illustrate the significance of school social capital to school effectiveness. School social capital is defined as the social resources embedded in internal and external school social networks. According to the existing literature, if schools possess more socially embedded resources, the overall school performance will be better. Thus, managing school social capital is important for school to strive for effectiveness. It is suggested that schools can manage school social capital through (a) maintaining the possessed social resources by expressive action and cultural intervention, and (b) acquiring additional social resources by instrumental action and the balance of loosely coupled system and tightly coupled system of school social networks. However, there is no specific theory explaining school social capital and its relationship to school effectiveness. Therefore, it will be contributive to the development of a theory of school social capital.

School effectiveness has been a critical and attractive topic to scholars, researchers, educators, and policymakers. This is because education is an important system to support the development and transformation of societies (Creemers, 1999; A. Hargreaves, 2003). Traditionally,

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bureaucratic approach, social system approach, and cultural approach are used to achieve school effectiveness (Tam & Cheng, 2001). The bureaucratic approach emphasizes the establishment of proper resources, structures, and control mechanism for teachers to increase their efficiency to achieve specific goals; the social system approach stresses the importance of school flexibility, internal process, and awareness of the external environment that may affect school performance and survival; the cultural approach underlines that developing school mission and ethos are essential to school effectiveness (Tam & Cheng, 2001). However, most of the educational initiatives that are based on these approaches across the globe are disappointing (Tam & Cheng, 2001). To some extent, this is because these approaches do not value the significance of social resources. Even though the bureaucratic approach emphasizes resources for school operation, resources are narrowly understood as financial capital (e.g., money) and human capital (e.g., teachers and students). From the sociological point of view, financial capital and human capital are limited to the explanations of goal attainment; hence sociologists propose the concept of social capital to supplement the limitations. Therefore, social capital should also have significant impacts on educational outcome (Halpern, 2005). In this sense, it is necessary to consider how to maintain, acquire, and manage school social capital, in addition to financial and human capital, to improve school effectiveness.

School Effectiveness

School effectiveness is about the non-monetary nature of schools (Cheng, 1990). According to Cheng (1996, 2005), there are eight common models or perspectives of school effectiveness as follows:

1. *Goal model* — School effectiveness is defined as the achievement of the stated goals that are clear, consensual, time-bound, and measurable.
2. *Process model* — School effectiveness is viewed as the healthy internal process and smooth operation that determine the quality of output and the degree to which the stated goals can be achieved.
3. *Ineffectiveness (absence of problems) model* — It assumes that a school is effective because there are no problems and troubles identified inside the school.

4. *Resource-input model* — School effectiveness is considered as the school's capacity to acquire the strategic inputs, such as teachers and students, and the scarce resources that are facilitative to the achievement of the school's diverse objectives and to the provision of quality educational services.
5. *Satisfaction model* — School effectiveness refers to the degree of the school ability to satisfy the needs and expectations of its powerful stakeholders.
6. *Legitimacy model* — This model concerns school effectiveness as the gain of social support from the community in order to win the legitimacy for survival.
7. *Organizational learning model* — It emphasizes that organizational learning behaviors are the critical elements of school effectiveness, because organizational learning helps schools successfully respond to the rapidly changing environment.
8. *Total quality management model* — It defines school effectiveness as a set of elements in the input, process, and output of schools that provide services to satisfy the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.

Although the perspectives of these eight models are different, they are not mutually excluded. All of them generate significant criteria for school improvement and school evaluation (Cheng, 1990, 2005). As a result, when evaluating school effectiveness, it is better to adopt multi-models.

Coleman's Theory of Social Capital in Education

In fact, applying the concept of social capital to understand school effectiveness is not new. There are a number of studies discussing the impacts of social capital on students' academic outcomes and successes (e.g., Bankston, 2004; Haghigat, 2005; Lopez, 1996; Morgan & Sørensen, 1999; Willms, 1985). Generally, all these studies are influenced by Coleman's theory of social capital in education

According to Coleman (1988), social capital is defined by its functions. He views social capital as "not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors — whether persons or corporate actors — within the structure" (Coleman,

1988, p. S98). In the series of studies conducted by Coleman and his colleagues (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c), Coleman discovered that those students in Catholic schools had better learning outcomes and less dropout rates than the students in public schools. Coleman and Hoffer (1987) explained that the Catholic schools were placed in functional communities and cohesive supporting social systems in which there was a closeness of social structure between students, families, schools, and communities, so the students enjoyed social capital that enriched the resources of information and overseeing was available to them. Coleman (1990) pointed out that social capital in family relations and in community social organizations were useful for the cognitive and social developments of children and youths. In other words, social capital is useful for creating human capital of students (Coleman, 1988).

Nevertheless, there are at least two limitations of using Coleman's theory of social capital in explaining school effectiveness. The first limitation is the confounding use of the concept of social capital. Defining social capital as certain aspects of social structures by their functions is not concrete enough. Thus, social capital can be referred to the trustworthiness of social environment, social obligation, information channels, and effective norms and sanctions. This confounding use is dangerous, because it will make social capital become a chaotic concept (Warde & Tampubolon, 2002), an umbrella concept (Adler & Kwon, 2002), or a cure-all concept (Portes, 1998). Moreover, it is difficult to identify the cause and effect of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002). The reliability and validity of social capital theory will also be weakened (Lin & Erickson, 2008).

Secondly, the studies conducted by Coleman and his colleagues only focus on students' academic outcomes. According to Cheng (2005), only considering students' academic outcomes for assessing school effectiveness is not suitable for the time. As mentioned before, it is better to evaluate school effectiveness with multi-models. It is questionable whether Coleman's theory can be applied to promote school effectiveness using multi-models.

Therefore, it is time to rethink the concept of social capital in education and schooling. Actually, there are other theories of social capital. However, the use of the concept of social capital is inconsistent and confusing (e.g., Bankston & Zhou, 2002; Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 1992; Cheung & Chan, 2008; Fukuyama, 1999; Grootaert, Narayan,

Jones, & Woolcock, 2004; Krishna, 2000; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 1993; Uphoff, 2000; Woolcock, 2000; World Bank, 2000). Consequently, a convergent viewpoint is required (Forsyth & Adams, 2004). Social capital is a relational construct (Field, 2003). Therefore, it is suitable to understand social capital with the perspective of social network theory or analysis (Emirbayer, 1997; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Lin, 2001b).

Social Network Theory of Social Capital

Lin (2001a, 2001b) builds a social network theory of social capital. This theory defines social capital as the social resources embedded in social networks that can enhance the outcomes of actions (Lin, 2001a, 2001b). Therefore, social capital is not equal to social networks, trust and norms (Lin, 2005). However, different groups of people may possess different quality and quantity of social capital because of the variations in collective assists and structural positions (Lin, 2001a, 2001b). In other words, the position of actors in social structure, the nature of social ties between actors, and the location of the social ties in the social networks will determine the possession of social capital (Lin, 2001b). As a result, inequality of social capital is possible (Lin, 2000). According to Lin (1999, 2001b), actors will strive for minimizing the loss and maximizing the gain through assessing and mobilizing more socially embedded resources through purposive actions, including expressive action (to maintain the existing resources) and instrumental actions (to obtain additional or new resources).

This theory of social capital not only solves the problem of its confounding use, but also shows the process and mechanism whereby it works. Moreover, it allows a parallel analysis between social capital and other forms of capital like financial and human capital (Lin, 2001b). Because actors can refer to collectivities in the theory, social capital can also be used to understand the survival and preservation of organizations. In this sense, it is useful to conceptualize school social capital and understand its relationship with school effectiveness.

Conceptualizing School Social Capital

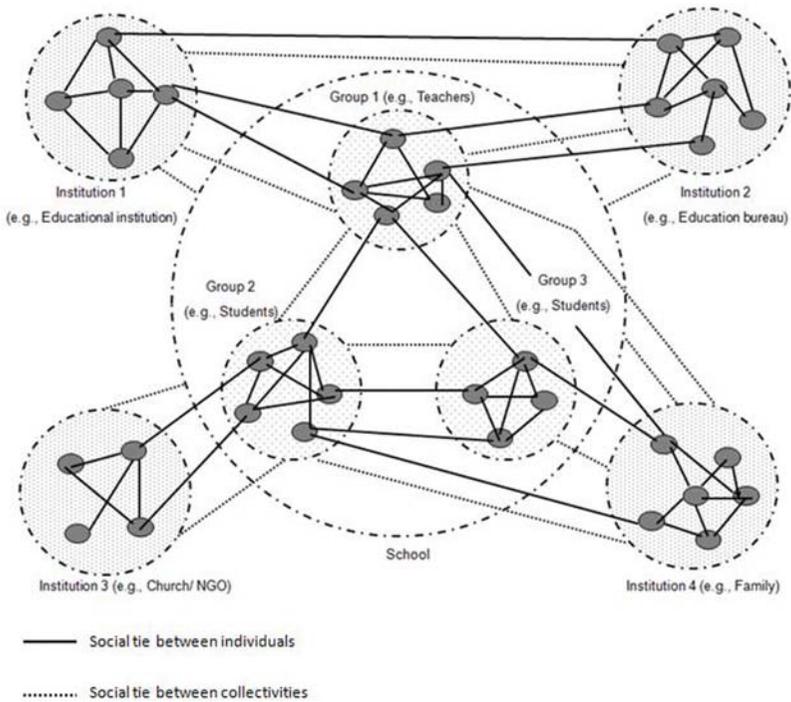
Based on the perspective of social network theory, school social capital

is the social resources embedded in the social networks of a school used for the survival and development of the school (Zhang, 2004). Consequently, school social network is a key component to conceptualizing school social capital.

School social networks include internal and external forms. According to Zhang (2008), internal school social networks are hierarchical. This form of social networks can be classified into the individual level, department/group level, and school organizational level. In each level, there are many equivalent relationships (e.g., student-student and teacher-teacher relationships). Moreover, the three levels of social networks can link one another through non-equivalent relationships (e.g., student-teacher and teacher-principal relationships). As a result, each level of internal school social networks can develop its own form of social capital, and the lower level (i.e., individual level) of school social capital can influence the higher level (i.e., school organizational level) of school social capital (Zhang, 2008). On the other hand, Zhang (2004) distinguishes three kinds of external school social networks. The first is vertical network, such as the school-state relationship. The second is horizontal network — i.e., the relationship between schools and other institutions, such as the school-church relationship and the school-family relationship. The third is social network based on the connections between school members and non-school members, such as the teacher-parent relationship.

Figure 1 illustrates the simplified, but complex, school social networks. In the figure, a white big circle in the middle represents a school. The four shadowed circles surrounding the white big circle represent four different kinds of institutions, including family, educational institution, education bureau, and church/NGO. It is assumed that these four kinds of institutions frequently interact with the school in the educational system. However, it does not mean that other kinds of institutions are not important. In addition, there are three shadowed circles inside the white big circle. They represent two social groups of students and one social group of teachers. The line of each circle is dotted. This implies that the school, institutions, and social groups all are open systems. Therefore, individuals (represented by the grey dots) can have social ties within and between social groups and institutions. It is also assumed that the individual-individual connections will help develop social ties between social groups and institutions. The collective actor connections are represented by the dotted line in the figure.

Figure 1: School Social Networks



Based on this categorization of school social networks, school social capital can be classified into internal school social capital and external school social capital. The two forms of school social capital respectively refer to the embedded social resources in the internal and external school social networks for the survival and development of schools.

School Social Capital and School Effectiveness

Schools can access and use different socially embedded resources through their internal and external social networks. The accessibility and mobilization of the social resources will be advantageous to school functioning and effectiveness.

Internal School Social Capital

There are obvious impacts of internal school social capital, especially the social capital embedded in teacher-teacher networks and teacher-student networks, on school effectiveness.

The existing literature has already indicated that social ties, trust and collaboration among teachers will enhance teaching effectiveness, teaching outcomes, self-efficacy of teachers, teacher professionalism, continuous learning capacity of teachers, and learning performance of students (Cavanagh & Dellar, 2003; Cheng, 2005; Forsyth & Adams, 2004; Graham, 2007; A. Hargreaves, 1999, 2003; Hoy & Tarter, 2007; Kochan & Teddlie, 2005; Puchner & Taylor, 2006; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Tsang, 2009a; Warren & Payne, 1997). One explanation is that social ties, trust and collaboration among teachers will develop a kind of internal school social networks which in turn generates internal school social capital (D. H. Hargreaves, 2001). Halpern (2005) comments: "In short, teachers actively and routinely collaborate collectively to innovate and share knowledge — social capital becomes a lubricant of knowledge transfer and development, and it pays considerable educational dividends" (p. 159).

In the school context, social networks between teachers and students are common. Therefore, it is not surprising that this kind of social networks will render an important form of social capital to school effectiveness. Pianta, Steinberg, and Rollins (1995) points out that positive relationship between students and teachers will carry out a wide range of cognitive and academic achievement to students. This is because students can gain the social resources like higher expectations, considerations, attachments and social support from teachers. Therefore, it facilitates students' classroom adjustment, performances, progress and personal development (Pianta, 1994, 1999; Pianta & Nimetz, 1989).

External School Social Capital

Compared with internal school social capital, there is much literature discussing the relation of external school social capital to school effectiveness. First of all, the studies conducted by Coleman (Coleman, 1988; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman et al., 1982a, 1982b, 1982c) and the followers (e.g., Bankston, 2004; Haghghat, 2005; Lopez, 1996; Morgan & Sørensen, 1999; Willms, 1985) indicate that students'

academic performance can be encouraged when schools possess social capital through the strong ties and networks with communities.

The teacher-parent or school-family networks are the important means of building external school social capital (McGonigal et al., 2007). This form of school social capital not only enhances positive development of students, but also makes contribution to school effectiveness for a long run (Golby, 1993; Hornby, 1995; Munn, 1993). A number of studies have shown that parental involvement is positively related to higher learning grades and lower rates of behavioral problems of students (Ho, 1999; Lee, 1993; Muller, 1993, 1995; Zick, Bryant, & Osterbacka, 2001). This is because the teacher-parent or school-family networks allow schools to share the human and social resources of parents and families. For example, parents can become volunteers to help teachers organize school activities; teachers can alleviate students' problems more easily by getting more information and supports from the parents; parents may help instruct students' homework at home based on teachers' plans and instructions.

In addition, external school social capital is beneficial to school functioning. Social capital can be transformed into other forms of capital like financial capital, human capital, and intellectual capital (Lin, 2001b). Therefore, if schools obtain much external school social capital, they will have more resources (Zhang, 2004, 2008). For example, schools may receive donations from the business sector or corporate organizations; teachers may learn effective teaching and classroom management skills through sharing with other teachers from other schools; churches and NGOs can provide services for students, teachers, and schools; schools may recruit good teachers through its staff's social networks; schools may get updated information more quickly through the networks with the educational department of the government. That is why Reezigt and Creemers (2005) argue that resources outside schools are important to school improvement. Cheng (1992) also proposes that a comprehensive teacher education network system is contributive to teacher professional development.

To sum up, both internal and external school social capital are related to binding, bonding, and bridging forces of social resources. Therefore, school social capital is able to empower schools to strive for effectiveness, especially the effectiveness defined by the goal model, resource-input model, process model, and organizational learning model.

Managing School Social Capital

School social capital is so beneficial to school effectiveness that maintaining and acquiring school social capital are essential. Like other forms of capital, social capital also needs to be invested in. Similarly, it also needs to manage the maintenance and acquisition of school social capital.

Maintenance of School Social Capital

Maintaining school social capital implies the avoidance of losing the possessed social resources embedded in the existing school social networks. Therefore, maintaining school social networks is the key to school social capital maintenance. According to Lin (2001a, 2001b, 2005), actors can maintain social capital with expressive action. At the school level, expressive action can mean the enhancement of mutual recognition and sentiment among individuals within and between networks. To do so, school administrators need to consider trust, norms, and values within and between school social networks (Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999; Forsyth & Adams, 2004). Igarashi et al. (2008) indicates that generalized trust can encourage actors to form social ties with others. Once social ties are formed, social interaction and emotional connection occur and particularistic trust among actors is fostered. Hence, the secured and committed social ties can be maintained (Igarashi et al., 2008). In addition, values and norms are also interrelated with social networks. Blau (1964) identifies that values and norms are the mechanisms mediating the complex social structure. He comments that values and norms not only make direct and indirect social exchanges possible, but also govern the process of social integration, social structure, social organization and reorganization (Blau, 1964). As a result, when social ties are established, and values and norms are also commonly shared by actors, social exchange will occur over time (Turner, 2003). Because of these, school social capital can be maintained.

However, school is a loosely coupled system (Weick, 1976). As depicted in Figure 1, there are different social groups and networks in a school community. Different groups of people may have different or conflicting norms and values. This may make school social networks differentiated and fragmented. Mistrust and conflict may appear in the

school. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to maintain school social capital. Therefore, both Cavanagh and Dellar (1997, 1998, 2003) and Tsang (2009b) suggest that school administrators bond school members and groups together by cultural interventions. Sergiovanni (1984) emphasizes that strong school culture can create a tightly coupled system of school. According to Cavanagh and Dellar (1997, 1998, 2003), school administrators can develop a strong school culture through building the cultural elements of professional values, emphasizing learning, collegiality, collaboration, shared planning, shared vision, and transformational leadership.

Acquisition of School Social Capital

Nevertheless, it is noted that strong ties within schools may not be necessarily good for schools to acquire additional resources (see the weak tie arguments by Granovetter, 1973, 1982; see also Burt, 1992). Therefore, balancing loosely coupled system and tightly coupled system of school social networks is critical for school administration. Such balance should be facilitative to the flow and transformation of social capital from one level of (or internal/external) school social networks to another level of (or external/internal) school social networks. This is favorable to structural holes. Structural holes, according to Burt (1992), are the gap between actors among a group, providing opportunities for actors to build external linkages and broker information (or other resources) with others. Therefore, structural holes let actors access and use not only the resources embedded in their own social networks, but also the resources embedded in other social networks.

In addition to the balance of the loosely coupled and tightly coupled systems of school social networks, it is also necessary for schools to evoke instrumental action. According to Lin (2001b), the purpose of instrumental action is to “trigger actions and reactions from others leading to more allocation of resources to ego” (p. 46). Accordingly, schools can use the outreach strategy to acquire social capital, especially by making effort to contact parents about volunteer works and their child’s performance (Haghighat, 2005). School outreach is a powerful predictor of parent involvement. According to Dauber and Epstein (1993) and Eccles and Harold (1993), when parents get requests from teachers to involve in their child’s school programs and activities, most of the parents report higher involvement at home and school. Recently,

Haghighat (2005) indicates that if schools have more outreach efforts, the overall school achievement will be higher.

Besides, institutionalizing external school social networks is another significant instrumental action to acquire external school social capital. To do so, Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) recommend schools to build a site-based management council. This council allows not only school members (like principal and teachers) to participate into the school's governance system, but also stakeholders (like parents and other community members) to involve into the school's events. As pointed out by Driscoll and Kerchner, this council will nourish the school-community relationship in which trust, knowledge, and mutual support can reside. In other words, this approach is facilitative to accessing more external school social capital. However, if school administrators do not consider the background of stakeholders or community members, some of the stakeholders or community members may be excluded from the council. Ho's (1999, 2002, 2006) studies about parent involvement provide good examples of this.

Conclusion

Based on social network theory, school social capital is regarded as social resources embedded in internal and external school social networks. As a form of capital, school social capital can be transformed into other forms of capital such as human capital and financial capital. Consequently, school social capital can bind, bond, and bridge resources for schools. In this sense, the possession, accessibility, and mobilization of school social capital will contribute to school effectiveness.

Nevertheless, it is necessary for schools to manage school social capital. Two approaches are suggested for its management. One approach is to maintain the possessed social resources through expressive action and cultural intervention. That means school administrators not only need to promote trust, norms, and values shared by actors within and between networks, but also need to develop a school culture to bind all groups of people together. The other approach is to acquire additional social resources through instrumental action and the balance between loosely coupled and tightly coupled systems of school social networks. For this, school administrators need to balance the strength of social ties within and between networks because too strong and too weak the ties are negative for the flow of resources. Moreover, schools should make

efforts to reach out in order to access other resources in other social networks.

The major contribution of connecting the concept of school social capital to school effectiveness is to allow us to realize how to improve school functioning through getting more resources through social relations and social networks. However, there is a lack of relevant theory to illustrate the mechanism of school social capital. A theory of school social capital needs to be developed. More investigations about the relationship between school social capital and school effectiveness are also needed.

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