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Curtis, Rachel E. & Wurtzel, Michael (Eds.) (2010). *Teaching Talent: A Visionary Framework for Human Capital in Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

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Teaching Talent: A Visionary Framework for Human Capital in Education is an edited volume that grew from participants' work at the Aspen Institute's Urban Superintendent Network Meeting in 2007. A comprehensive framework is presented for managing human capital, primarily teachers, in K-12 education. The framework includes pathways for teacher preparation, induction into teaching, how teachers earn tenure, and leadership development. The framework is situated within the context of managing performance through compensation and rewards for teachers. The central premise of this text is that our teachers are the critical element in increasing student achievement. Furthermore, school districts can systemically and systematically manage human capital in ways that create

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more effective teachers for our children. Collecting, interpreting, and analyzing data is a crucial element of this reform.

In the first chapter, Curtis asks several essential questions that all districts should be asking:

Who manages human capital in a school system?
What are the most powerful levers districts can pull to influence teaching quality? How do districts decide where to focus their human capital efforts?
What infrastructure is required to support this work? What is the role of principals as key players in human capital management? What is the role of data in guiding these efforts? (p. 17-18).

It is through thoughtful conversation that these questions can begin to be answered specific to the context of individual school districts.

Drawing on case studies from business, components of this framework are situated in real-life examples. The authors acknowledge that no school district has yet tried to implement the entire framework. However, the authors provide a starting point for thinking about systemic reform.

No group in education is free from criticism in this text from teachers to principals to superintendents. Curtis writes:

Pointing fingers at districts, unions, or higher education will not solve the human capital problem. Each had a significant role to play in creating current conditions, and each too can play an important role in improving them. This requires redefining priorities, building new capacity, and being driven, first and foremost, by a commitment to student achievement and a belief that the quality of teaching is the most important contributor to that achievement (p. 194).

This book really is a call to action to change current policies, procedures, and practices for managing teachers and principals within school systems.

After laying down a foundation for the need of developing human capital, using data to support human capital development is discussed. The authors emphasize the need for accurate, purposeful data collection with a “limited number of metrics.” They propose using human capital data to simply tell the story of achievement within the district. The principal’s role is central in the author’s thinking. Principals must manage and lead the change in order for change to effectively take place and make a difference in student achievement. Principals must “present opportunities and challenges that require teacher to build their knowledge and skills together,” (p. 94).

Part two of the book, entitled “Recruiting, Retraining, and Leveraging Talent,” places the teacher in the center of the discussion. Here again, change is called for, as too many talented teachers are being lost and too many middling teachers are retained. A hybrid system for retaining teachers and developing capacity is proposed. “The emphasis would be on leveraging teachers’ talents while they continue to teach children” (p. 167).

Somewhat unusual for an edited text, the chapters pull together to create a single, comprehensive framework. It is clear the authors spent much time together developing their ideas. In Chapter 8, “Weaving the Pieces Together,” Curtis pulls together each piece of the framework. This chapter includes a helpful graphic providing cohesion for the collection of chapters. For each component, Curtis writes two sections—“What’s Broken?” and “How Can We Fix It?” These sections provide a summary and recommendations taken from previous chapters. One example is leadership development. In the past, advancement in teaching usually required going into administration. Now, there are more opportunities for teachers who would like to advance their careers and maintain a connection to the classroom such as instructional coaching, mentoring new teachers, etc. Curtis recommends leveraging talent; that is identifying highly talented teachers early and providing them with training and leadership opportunities early in their careers. Another important aspect in creating leadership is defining clear criteria. What skills and knowledge does a strong leader

need? The criteria can then be connected to training and, eventually, to evaluation. Furthermore, leadership opportunities need to be designed in a strategic, systematic and systemic way so that there is a sense of progression over a teacher's career. In the past, a teacher's first year looked very similar to her tenth year and her twentieth year. Curtis recommends that teachers and leaders need ongoing opportunities for professional development and training specifically aligned with district goals. This not only supports the growth of teachers and leaders, it helps to create a culture of learners at a systems level.

The one aspect of the text that was misleading is that throughout the text the authors use examples of districts, schools, principals, and superintendents. In some cases, these refer to specific people in specific situations. For instance, we learn about specific examples in school districts such as Denver Public Schools. In other cases, the examples appear to be either created vignettes or pseudonyms for actual situations. These are typically presented in italicized print. But, as readers we were unclear of whether the authors created these scenarios or whether they were actual situations. Our recommendation is that the authors state clearly whether examples are real-life, created vignettes, and/or use pseudonyms.

This book describes an important and necessary evolution in how school districts should manage their human capital, specifically teachers in order to improve student outcomes. This change needs to be intentional, targeting resources to support student learning.

Overall, this book presents an interesting, cohesive framework for imagining how systems can and should work together to create more effective teachers. By focusing on student achievement—and, ultimately, the teacher's role in helping students achieve—districts can have an enormous impact on our students. This text is an excellent resource for superintendents, human resource directors, and central administrators who are interested in examining the possibilities for managing human capital. This text would also be an excellent book study for groups of people

interested in school leadership from principals to union leaders, from teacher-leaders to non-profit organizations.

About the Reviewers

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