National Summit on Catholic Schools and Hispanic Families.
Systemic Approaches to Animate Change: Practitioners from the Field

I'm grateful for the opportunity to join my distinguished colleagues – Gena McGowan and Tim McNiff – to discuss systemic approaches to animate change. To set the context for my remarks, I want to say a few words about my position as a "practitioner from the field." For the past twenty-five years I have worked in schools and community-based organizations focused on expanding children's opportunities to learn. I began in college, as a tutor, living and working with children in the Adams Morgan neighborhood of Washington, D.C. I continued after college as a teacher and administrator in the dioceses of Washington, D.C., Oakland, CA, and Madison, WI. Since 2006 as a faculty member in higher education at Marquette University in Milwaukee, WI and now at Boston College, I have researched, taught about, and worked with practitioners serving traditionally marginalized children. I have also continued to serve as a board member and catechism teacher in various Catholic communities. Across these 25 years, I have continually struggled against ineptitude – my own and that of the institutions in which I worked - to ameliorate educational inequities. These social injustices are protean, taking form, for instance, in racism, classism, xenophobia, and systemic discrimination against people with disabilities and exceptionalities. At their core, they reflect the structural sin of violating the sanctity of all life.

It is from this practitioner vantage point that I approach the theme of "Systemic Approaches to Animate Change." I present a schema that is rooted in my work with Catholic schools striving to effectively serving traditionally marginalized children. In short, this schema – or "mental map" – holds that investing in human capital by scaffolding communities of practice can catalyze improvement science.

I submit that three components can create a schema for thinking about how to systemically animate change in our school communities. And for our purposes, this schema suggests how we can think about animating change in Catholic schools serving Hispanic families. The three components are:

1. Investing in human capital.
2. Scaffolding communities of practice.
3. Catalyzing improvement science.

After briefly describing each, I will draw upon the example of TWIN-CS – the Two-Way Immersion Network of Catholic Schools – to illustrate this schema. I want to note, however, that I could just as easily use other examples, such as my research into how Catholic schools are transforming their capacity to serve students with disabilities and exceptionalities. (In fact, I have an article that will be published next March in the journal *International Studies in Catholic Education* on this very topic, which I'd be happy to discuss with any of you later!)

I. Investing in Human Capital

For those of us in the field of education, phrases like human capital don't slide easily off our tongues. They kind of get caught in our throats, bringing up distant (and maybe uncomfortable) memories of an economics class from years ago. When the phrase is used in education, it's often used to describe – and critique – how education's civic and moral purposes can be overshadowed by economic ones (Kantor & Lowe, 2011).

But by human capital I refer to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of educators. I'm talking about investing in teachers, expanding what they know and can do, broadening how they conceptualize their roles and engage in these roles. Experts widely agree that effective educators' have multifaceted human capital – including content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Shulman, 1987). Such capital is a central enabler to classroom practices that advance students' opportunities to learn (Resnick, 2010).

So investing in human capital means investing in the educators. It's well known in school finance that the largest expenditure – by far – is to salaries and benefits, which typically take 80 cents of every dollar spent. Of course, a vital opportunity to invest in human capital comes when we have the occasion to hire a new superintendent, principal, teacher, or aide. But these are occasional opportunities. The ordinary, ongoing opportunities are to invest in the educators who are already part of our school communities. A key route to this is our second component for systemically animating change in school communities, scaffolding communities of practice.

II. Scaffolding Communities of Practice

Sociocultural learning theory holds that a central way that we develop our knowledge, skills, and dispositions is working with others (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Simply put, much of what we learn is not as isolated individuals, but as members of communities of practice. Whether becoming a soccer player, a fifth grade teacher, or a newspaper editor, we become who we are in communities of practice. Communities of practice comprise three components: (a) mutual engagement in relationships, (b) a common pursuit that drives these relationships, and (c) a shared repertoire of skills and knowledge that members of the community of practice develop.

The fuel that drives communities of practice is social capital. Social capital refers to the relationships we have with others, the trust we have in these relationships, and how we share what we know. Thus, social capital and human capital are inextricably tied. Or to be more direct – a core way that we *invest in human capital in schools* (point number one) is by *scaffolding communities of practice* (point number two). Put differently, investing in human capital focuses on the individual - namely building knowledge, skills, and dispositions of each educator, and scaffolding communities of practice focuses on the group – the communities of practice that shape these individuals. Social capital helps build human capital, and in combination, these promote the most robust and ambitious teaching and learning environments (Pil & Leana, 2009).

III. Catalyzing Improvement Science

The third component of our schema for systemically animating change in school communities is catalyzing improvement science. Improvement science is the discipline of sifting and winnowing through evidentiary chains to systematically improve organizations (Lewis, 2015). Building from the evolution of evidence-based medicine over the past six decades, the discipline of improvement science is beginning to seed fundamental changes in the field of education (Scanlan, 2015).

The fundamental shift that improvement science heralds is toward developing what Tony Bryk – a longtime friend of Catholic education and one of the most widely respected educators in the country who currently serves as the president of the Carnegie Foundation for Education – calls "practice-based evidence" (Bryk, 2015). Bryk explains that practice-based evidence emerges when educators engage in cycles of quick experimentation.

One of the most promising strategies for building this practice-based evidence is via networked improvement communities (NICs). NICs are narrowly tailored communities of practice striving to solve discrete problems through cycles of disciplined inquiry (see further Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). NICs engage in rapid, iterative cycles of change, initiating small innovations, prototyping, failing, reporting, and adjusting based on the failures. NIC participants continually ask themselves: (a) What specifically are we trying to accomplish? (b) What change might we introduce and why? (c) How will we know that a change is actually an improvement?

Together, these three components serve as a schema for animating change. We change when our dispositions broaden, our knowledge expands, and our skills develop – which is to say we change when our own human capital grows. We are *animated* to change not as isolated individuals, but via robust communities of practice. The discipline of improvement science builds directly from the first two components. It deliberately builds human capital and strategically coordinates the social capital of communities of practice.

TWIN-CS

What does this tripartite schema of investing in human capital, scaffolding communities of practice, and catalyzing improvement science look like? One prime example – and one that speaks directly to the goals of this Summit – is the Two-Way Immersion Network of Catholic Schools – or TWIN-CS. To get the gist of what TWIN-CS is, break the title into three parts: TWI, N, and CS. First, take TWI. This stands for two-way immersion. Two-way immersion is a model of education that combines relatively equal numbers of students from two language backgrounds – typically Spanish and English or Mandarin and English – and puts them together in the same classroom to learn together. Two-way immersion schools strive to foster bilingualism and biliteracy, academic excellence, and cross-cultural appreciation. Research for

several decades shows that well run two-way immersion schools are educationally effective (Collier & Thomas, 2012).

As an important aside, two-way immersion is a panacea. It does not apply to all settings. For instance, in a high school with 14 different languages spoken by 24% of the student body, a two-way immersion model is not feasible. Nor is two-way immersion the answer for all Catholic school communities to improve their capacity to serve Hispanic families. However, it is *an* effective answer for *many*. There are settings in which a two-way immersion model is ideal. These are settings in which a large percent of the population (such as 50%) speaks of mother tongue that is not English, and this language is one that many native English speakers would like to learn (such as Spanish).

Next, take "N." TWIN-CS is a *network* of 18 bilingual Catholic elementary schools. It was founded at Boston College in 2013 with an initial cohort of 12 member schools across 11 states; 10 were building Spanish-English programs, one Mandarin-English, and one both Spanish-English and Mandarin-English.

Finally, take "CS." TWIN-CS comprises *Catholic* elementary schools. These schools are embracing the two-way immersion model and are engaging in the networking to enhance their Catholic identity and mission. These schools are striving to more effectively educate culturally and linguistically diverse students because they recognize that this is central to their Catholicity. The history of Catholic schools in the United States is one of embracing and affirming immigrant communities. Yet in the last five decades, as Catholic schools have undergone fundamental shifts in financing and governance, they have slipped in their accessibility and affordability for these culturally and linguistically diverse students. TWIN-CS schools point toward an important course correction, serving as exemplars in how Catholic communities expand opportunities for Catholic education for culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

TWIN-CS as a Systemic Approach to Animating Change

TWIN-CS member schools have animated change in dramatic manners over the past few years. Before TWIN-CS these were monolingual English environments with – at best – polite nods to the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of their school communities. They are transformed into bilingual Spanish-English and Mandarin-English schools with bilingualism and biliteracy, ambitious academic learning, and cross-cultural community. These changes have been systematic, and can be largely understood through the lens of this schema of
1. Investing in human capital.
2. Scaffolding communities of practice.
3. Catalyzing improvement science.

TWIN-CS Invests in Human Capital
To animate change from monolingualism into bilingualism and biliteracy, TWIN-CS member schools strategically invest in their human capital. They build the knowledge, skills, and

dispositions of educators to create culturally and linguistically responsive schools. Creating an effective school for culturally and linguistically diverse students is not a nebulous idea in the field, but instead is something we know quite a bit about. It is not easy or simple. Yet a robust body of research details effective strategies for educating culturally and linguistically diverse students (Brisk, 2006; de Jong, 2011; Miramontes, Nadeau, & Commins, 2011).

TWIN-CS member schools invest in human capital through both hiring new bilingual and bicultural teachers and supporting the professional development of existing faculty. This takes various forms, some virtual – such as network-wide webinars with presentations by **professions** from outside TWIN-CS – and others in-person, such as trainings led at the summer institute in which teams from schools share strategies with their colleagues from across the network.

This professional development is guided by the two-way immersion model. For instance, it focuses on supporting children's language and literacy development in both their first and second language, building content knowledge in bilingual settings, conducting formative and summative assessments of second language development, and cultivating cross-cultural relationships amongst children and families. As a result of this directed, strategic investment in human capital, educators in TWIN-CS member schools have deeper knowledge, broader skills, and clearer dispositions to effectively educate culturally and linguistically diverse students. This investment yields stronger opportunities to learn for students.

TWIN-CS Scaffolds Communities of Practice

TWIN-CS has invested in human capital by explicitly cultivating social capital within and across the network by scaffolding communities of practice. This is a critical aspect for all of us here at this Summit. While we come from different roles and dioceses, we are united by a shared commitment to building the vibrancy and vitality of Catholic schools to serve Hispanic families. In this sense, we are – in this room – scaffolding a community of practice.

I call your attention to two types of communities of practice in TWIN-CS. One is the local hub within each school. A core group of teachers and administrators in each school discerns and ultimately leads the adoption of the two-way immersion model, focusing on matters of implementation, such as selecting curriculum and assessments, creating the schedule, focusing on outreach and recruitment. Each school has a mentor – someone from outside the school community with knowledge of bilingual education – who serves as a critical friend in this local community of practice.

A second community of practice the network as a whole. TWIN-CS serves as a broader community of practice for member schools across the nation. Through regular webinars and an annual week-long Academy, educators from across the country have gathered to learn together, with and from one another. These occasions create the social capital that allow individuals across the network the opportunity to share lessons and resources, commiserate over mistakes, and celebrate achievements.

It is precisely through such communities of practice that educators in TWIN-CS members schools have developed their knowledge and skills in practical manners – such as the practice of

engaging in courageous conversations about confronting inequities in their schools and conducting formative assessments to improve teaching practices (Scanlan & Zisselsberger, 2015).

TWIN-CS Catalyzes Improvement Science

Finally, TWIN-CS animates change systemically by catalyzing improvement science. Over the past year and a half, the TWIN-CS Design Team at the Roche Center has begun directing the communities of practice within TWIN-CS to employ the discipline of improvement science. The purpose of this is to work alongside member schools at *getting better at getting better*. Importantly, the investment in human capital and the establishment of the communities of practice across TWIN-CS provided the foundation for these schools to begin engaging in the discipline of improvement science.

This work began at the Summer Academy of 2015, which introduced TWIN-CS member schools to the discipline of improvement science and the work of networked improvement communities. Participants left the Academy with copies of the seminal text *Learning to Improve* (Bryk et al., 2015). During the 2015- 2016 school year educators in TWIN-CS schools engaged in book studies on *Learning to Improve* and then began to identify specific problems of practice to tackle via improvement science. They then began initiating innovations to address these problems, such as changing their approach to teaching writing (All Souls, Los Angeles, CA and Archbishop Borders, Baltimore, MD), developing family story backpacks (Santa Clara, in Dallas, Texas), and mapping a new bilingual curriculum (Juan Diego, Tacoma, WA). Educators strove to work as networked improvement communities and embark on cycles of disciplined inquiry: piloting changes, looking at initial data about these changes, and then adjusting strategies based on these data. The result is practice-based evidence to address problems of practice that educators in TWIN-CS are confronting. The focus on the discipline of improvement science continued in workshops and school planning sessions at the Summer Academy in 2016. Supporting TWIN-CS member schools in learning about, and beginning to attempt the discipline of improvement science has become a core focus of Roche Center professional development.

In conclusion, I want to return to where I began. In our schools in general, and our Catholic schools in particular, educational inequities abound. We are committed to fighting and eliminating these inequities. Our best efforts to *animate change* are not random, but reflect strategic thinking grounded in a solid theory of action. This holds whether we are striving to transform Catholic schools to more effectively serve culturally and linguistically diverse students – as in the case of TWIN-CS – or we are pursuing other goals. I submit that investing in human capital, scaffolding communities of practice, and catalyzing improvement science provides a valuable schema to guide these efforts.

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