

Distributed Leadership: Re-thinking Instructional Improvement *Practice*

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The Distributed Leadership Studies
<http://www.distributedleadership.org>

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Key Ideas

- Engaging with the *practice* of leading and managing instruction is what matters.
- Going beyond an ‘implementation mindset’ to engage the twin processes of *diagnosis* and *design*.
- To do diagnosis and design well a framework is necessary; such as a distributed framework.
- Attention to the formal (designed) organization and the informal (lived) organization is essential.

Teacher Performance/Productivity

Motivation X Knowledge X Situation

=

Teacher Performance/Productivity

Anchoring Instructional Improvement Work

Improving Students' Opportunities To Learn



Classroom Teaching

What gets taught?



How is it taught?

School Leading & Managing



Organization & System
Infrastructure



What Matters?

Setting Direction

Human Development

Organizational Development



**“We have one hunter and one gatherer ...
everyone else is a consultant”**



Diagnosis and Design

Diagnosis = identify nature or cause of something

Design = shaping things/objects/positions to purposes

Diagnosis

- **Sense-making** - noticing, framing, & interpreting things in our environment
- **Gathering** and **marshalling** data and information
- Constructing **evidence** for a problem definition
- Developing a **prognosis**

Overview

a) Exploring the Entailments of Taking *A Distributed Perspective*.

b) Diagnose and Design from a Distributed Perspective.

- **Formal Organization: Positions & Organizational Routines**
- **Informal Organization: Getting to Practice**

c) Challenges in taking a Distributed Perspective.

A Distributed Perspective: Elements and Entailments

Leading

[Leadership refers] to the interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competence of the whole group to solve problems or attain goals. (Bass, 1990)

[Leadership refers] to people who bend the motivations and actions of others to achieve certain goals; it implies taking initiatives and risks. (Cuban, 1988)

[Leadership refers to] the process by which an agent induces a subordinate to behave in a desired manner. (Bennis, 1959, in Bass, 1990).



Managing

Management is about maintenance; maintaining current organizational arrangements and ways of doing work . (Burns, 1978; Cuban, 1988)



Task One

- What does 'distributed leadership' mean to you?
- Write a one sentence definition that captures your understanding of distributed leadership.



A Distributed Perspective

- A diagnostic framework that draws attention to particular dimensions of leadership & management work
- A design framework for guiding leadership and management improvement efforts.



The Leader-Plus Aspect

The **Leader-Plus** aspect:

- The principal often works with others when performing leadership and management tasks.
- At times other formally designated leaders take responsibility for leadership and management tasks.
- And, individuals with no formal leadership designations often have a hand in leading and managing instruction.



Embracing the Realities

“Initially I tried to do it all. I was trying to do it all and that was impossible. You cannot be all things to all people... I don't know everything about everything.”

Dr. Johnson

“Being a good principal is like dancing that wonderful tango, blindfolded, yet serving lunch, breakfast and dinner on skates to 500 people,” [each of whom has] ordered something different” [and each of whom] “brings...their own set of dynamics, personalities, that you have to be acutely aware of in order to serve them.”

Adriana

The Practice Aspect

Leaders

Administrators, Specialists, Teachers

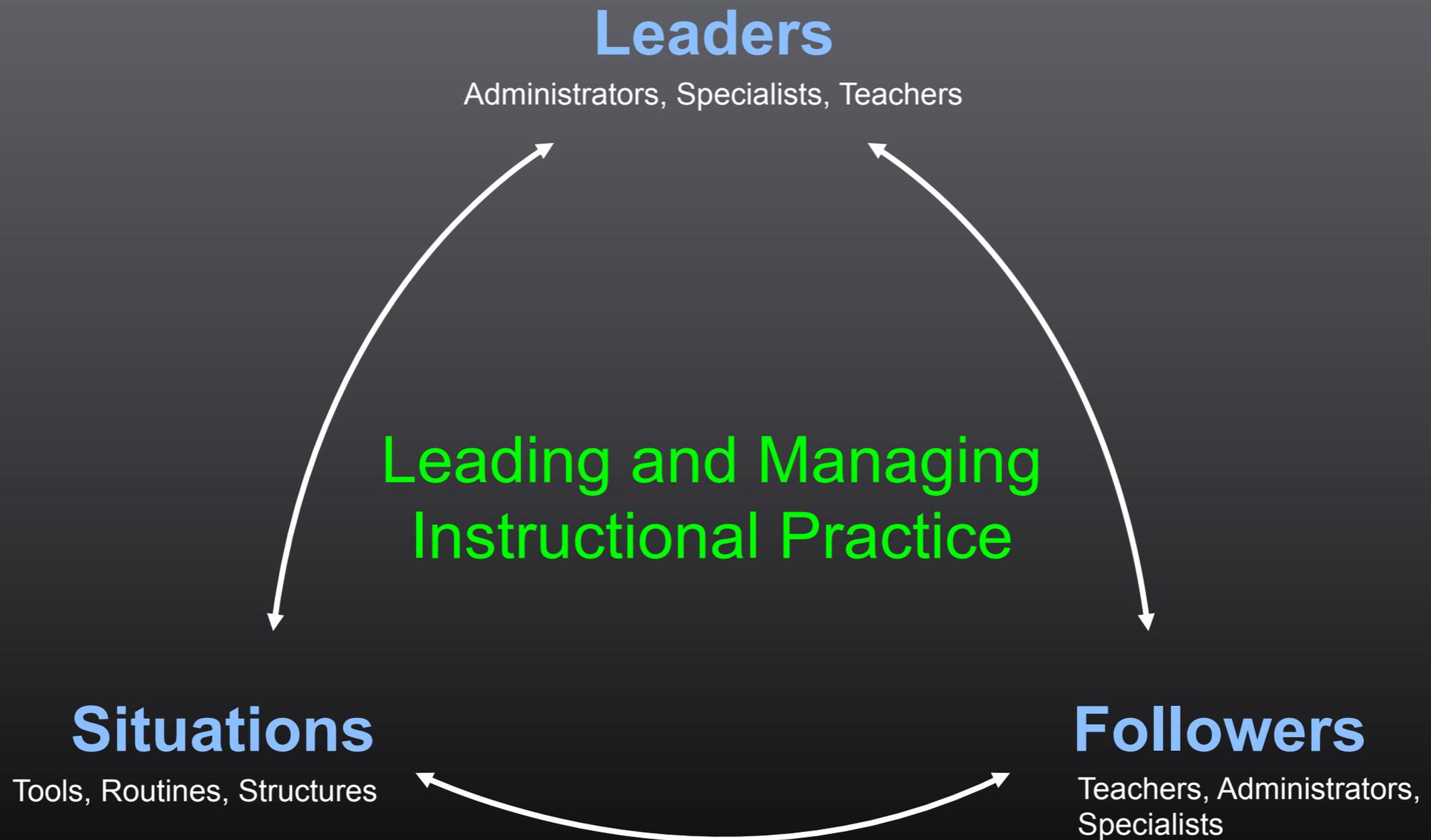
Leading and Managing
Instructional Practice

Situations

Tools, Routines, Structures

Followers

Teachers, Administrators,
Specialists



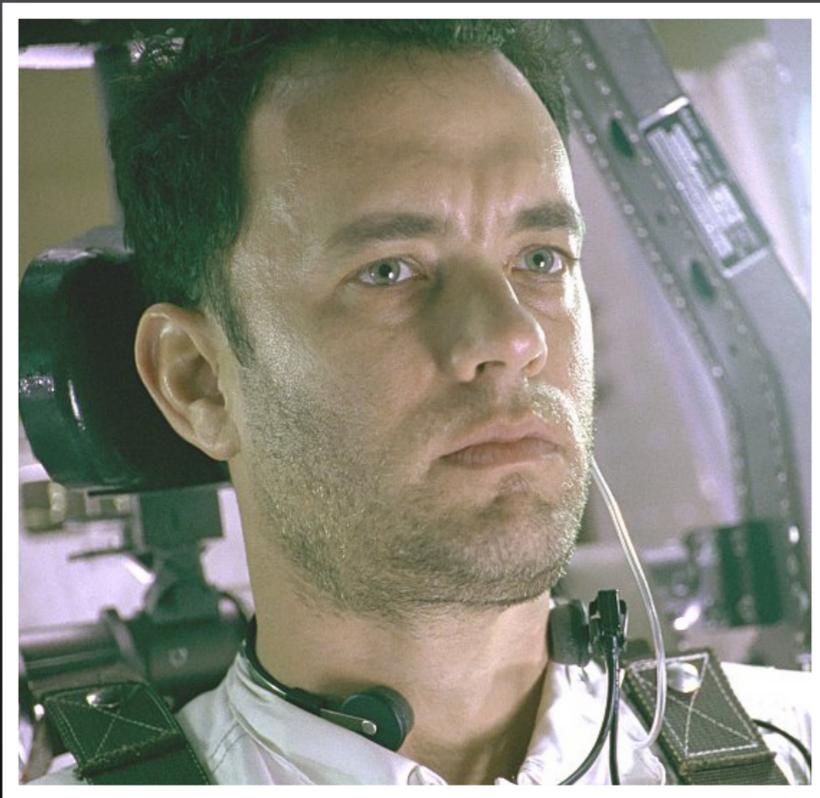


"Houston, we have
a problem."

Task Two: Examining Leadership in Practice

Mission Control and Beyond

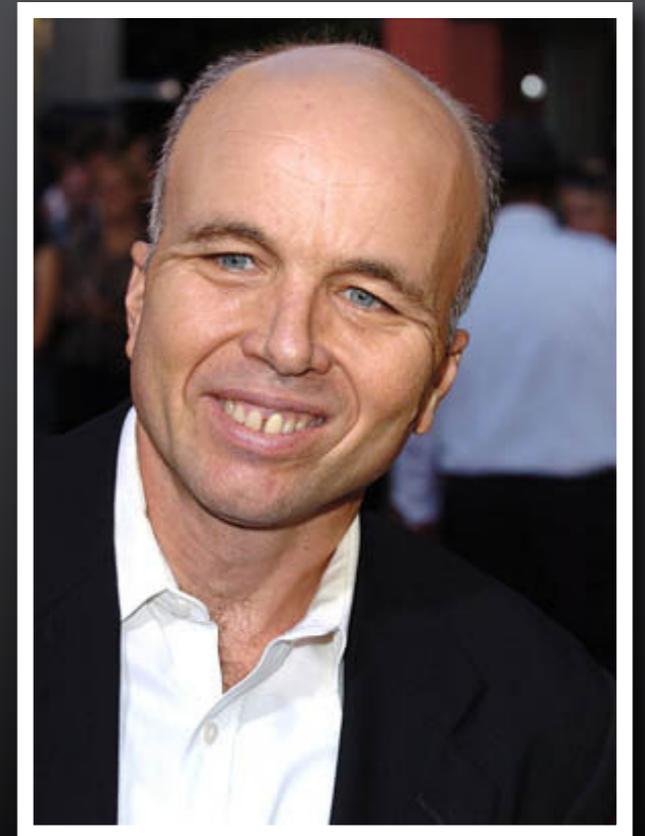
- Watch the scene keeping in mind the distributed perspective. Take notes about who is leading and in what capacity. Where is leadership practice?
- While noting what happens in the scene, keep in mind the characters below.



Jim Lovell



Gene Kranz



EECom (Cy)

From a Distributed Perspective ...

Practice is the central and anchoring concern.

Practice is generated in the *interactions* of leaders, followers, and their situation; *each element* is essential.

Practice and practices are not one and the same as practice is emergent ... it involves improvisation

Aspects of the situation both define practice and are defined through practice.

Need to attend to the formal and informal organization

The “Heroics of Leadership” Genre

- The lure of leaders and their gallant acts
- The leader is center stage, while others play supporting roles
- This is a leader-centric model



Dispelling Some Myths

- School Principal is less relevant or irrelevant?
- Formal Organization is less relevant?
- Everyone is a Leader?
- The More (Leaders), the Merrier?

Task Three

- Watch the brief video clip.
- How many times does the white team touch the ball?

Doing Diagnosis and Design from a Distributed Perspective

Formal positions, organizational routines as represented in formal documents and accounts

Designed vs. Lived Organization

Organization as experienced in day-to-day life of organizational members

What Matters?

Setting Direction

Human Development

Organizational Development

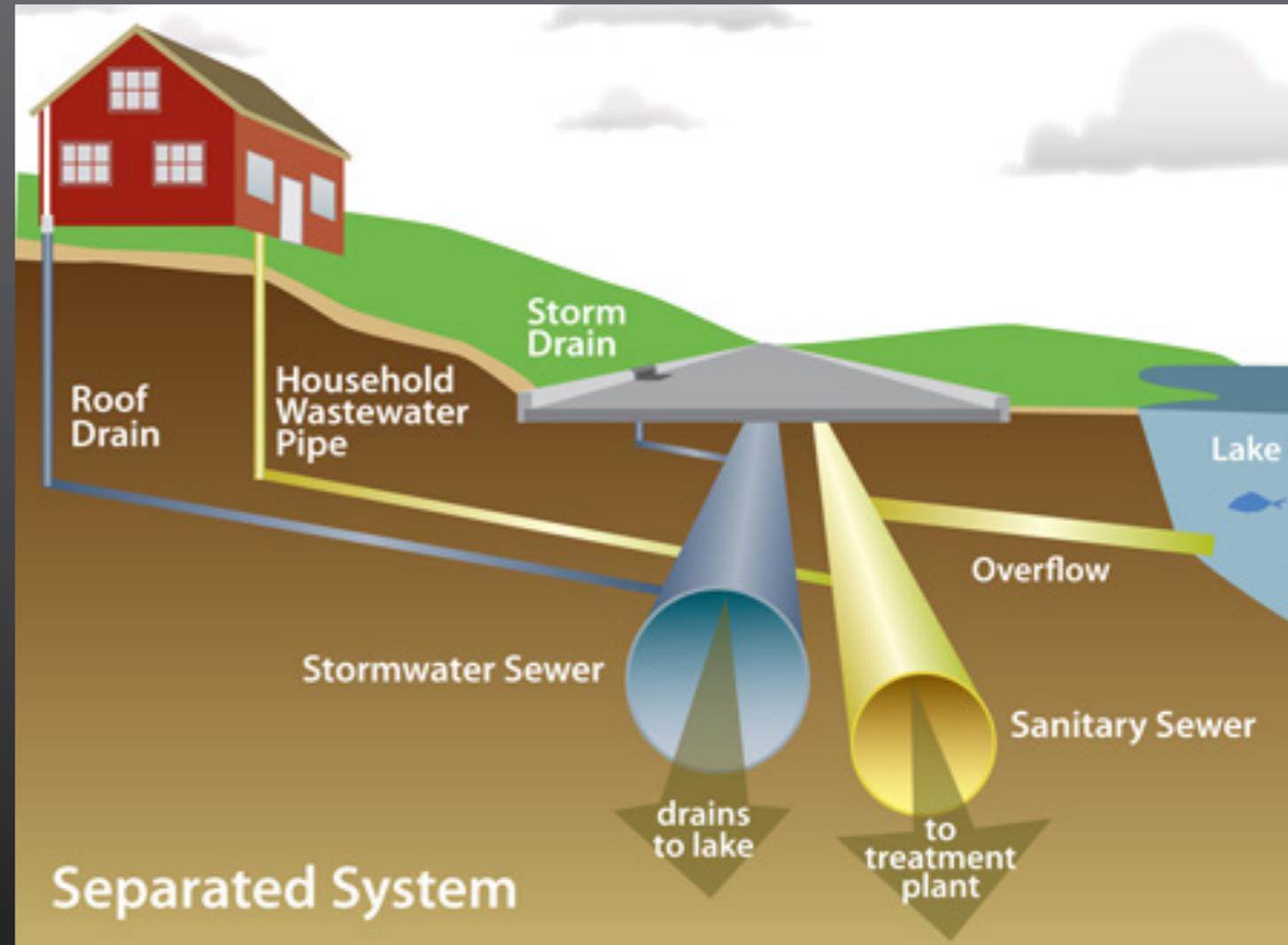
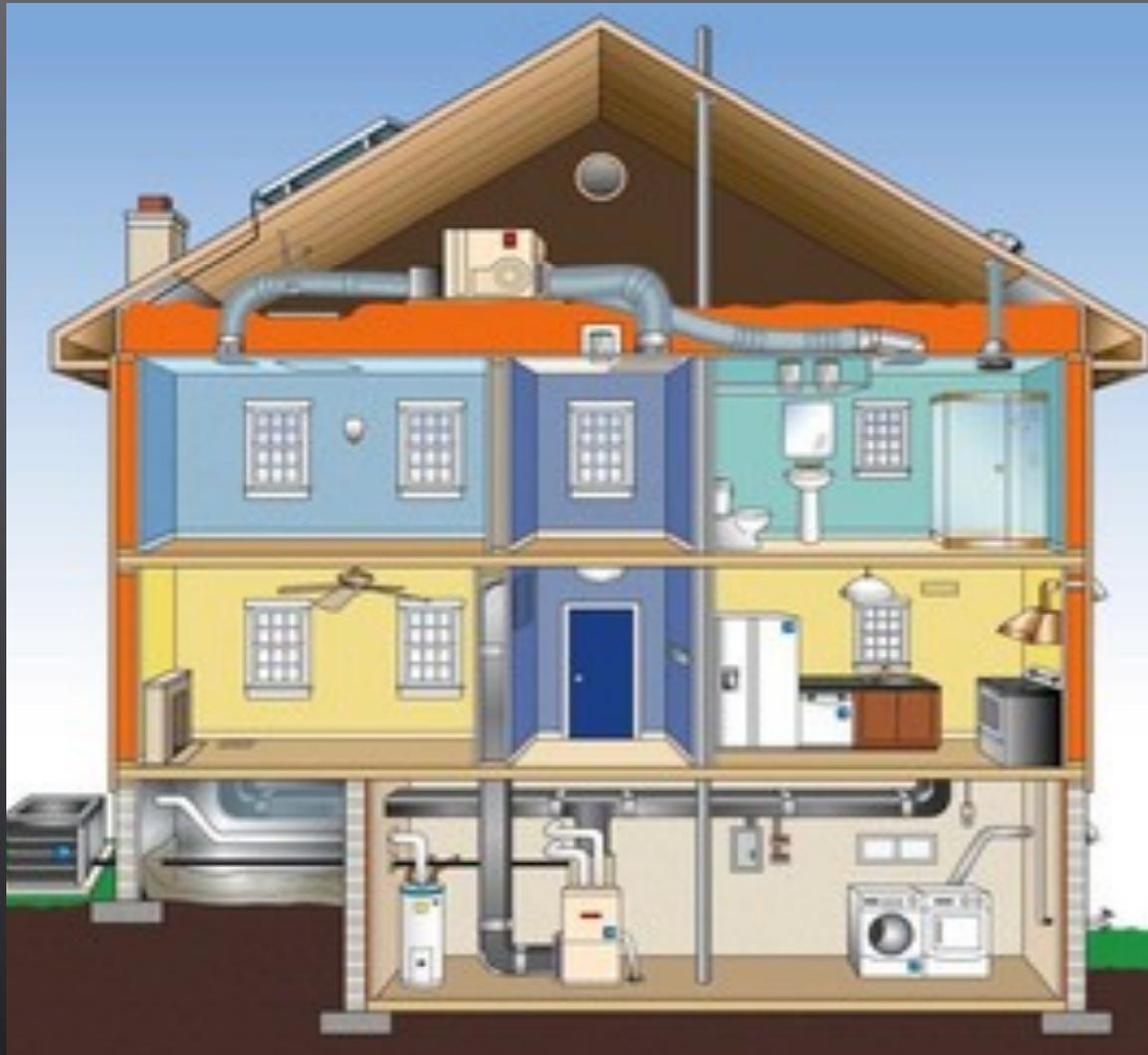


The Formal (Designed) Organization: Organizational Routines, Formal Positions...

Diagnosis and Design Work

FRAMES RULES POSITIONS
WORK TOOLS
SCRIPTS
CONCEPTS
PROCEEDURES
STRUCTURE
POLICIES
ROUTINES
REGULATIONS
ORGANIZATIONAL
THEORIES
ROUTINES
PROTOCOLS
CONCEPTS
POSITIONS
NORMS
REGULATIONS
POLICIES
ROUTINES
STRUCTURE
ORGANIZATIONAL
SCRIPTS
CONCEPTS
POSITIONS
NORMS
REGULATIONS
POLICIES
ROUTINES
STRUCTURE
ORGANIZATIONAL
TOOLS
CONCEPTS
POSITIONS
NORMS
REGULATIONS
POLICIES
ROUTINES
STRUCTURE
ORGANIZATIONAL
PROGRAMS
RULES
PROCEEDURES
STRUCTURE
ORGANIZATIONAL

Infrastructure



CONCEPTS
NORMS
SCRIPTS
POLICIES
SCRIPTS
TOOLS
PROCEDURES
STRUCTURE
WORK
FRAMES
CONCEPTS
POSITIONS
ORGANIZATIONAL
ROUTINES
REGULATIONS
FRAMES
POSITIONS
ORGANIZATIONAL
ROUTINES
RULES
POSITIONS

Designing Organizational Routines

- **Adams School:** Breakfast Club, Grade level meetings, Teacher Talk, Teacher Leaders, Five-Week Assessment, Literacy Committee, and Mathematics Committee.
- **Baxter School:** Cycle Meetings, Leadership Team Meetings, Literacy Committee, Math/Science Committee.
- **Kosten School:** Report Card Review, Grade Book Review, Lesson Plan Review, Faculty Meetings, Grade Level Meetings.
- **Kelly School:** Skill Chart Review, Professional Development.

Organizational Routines

Organizational Routines are “repetitive, recognizable patterns of interdependent actions carried out by multiple actors.” (Feldman & Pentland, 2003)



Organizational Routines

Advantages

Allow efficient coordinated action

Provide source of stability

Reduce conflict about how to do work

Disadvantages

Result in inappropriate responses

Inertia, mindlessness, and de-motivation

Organizational Routines and Administrative Practice

- School leaders used organizational routines to connect school leadership and management practice with government policy and with classroom instruction.
- Government policy and instruction figured prominently, often together in the performance of organizational routines.
- Organizational routines structure interactions among school staff.

Spillane, Parise, & Sherer (2011)

Connecting with Teaching?



(Cohen & Ball, 1998; Delpit, 1996; Hawkins, 1977)

Organizational Routines at Adams School

Routine	Functions	Tools	People
Five Week Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Formative evaluation -Teacher Accountability -Monitor Instruction -Teacher Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Standardized Tests -Standards -Student Assessments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Language Arts Coordinator -Assistant Principal -Principal -Teachers
Breakfast Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher Development -Build Professional Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research Articles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teachers -Language Arts Coordinator -Principal
School Improvement Planning (SIP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Identify Instructional Priorities & Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Previous Year SIP -District Guidelines -Test Score Data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Principal -Administration -Teachers (approved LSC)
Classroom Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Teacher Development -Monitor Instruction -Accountability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -School Protocol, -District Protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Principal -Assistant Principal
Real Men Read	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student Motivation and Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Language Arts Co-ord. -Assistant Principal -Principal -Community Members

The Five Week Assessment

“We were just kind of casually saying that for the majority of teachers they all work very hard, but some of them get very low results when it comes to these achievement tests ... So this [Five Week Assessment] was a way to find out ‘Are they learning?’ ”

(Literacy coordinator, 5/15/00)

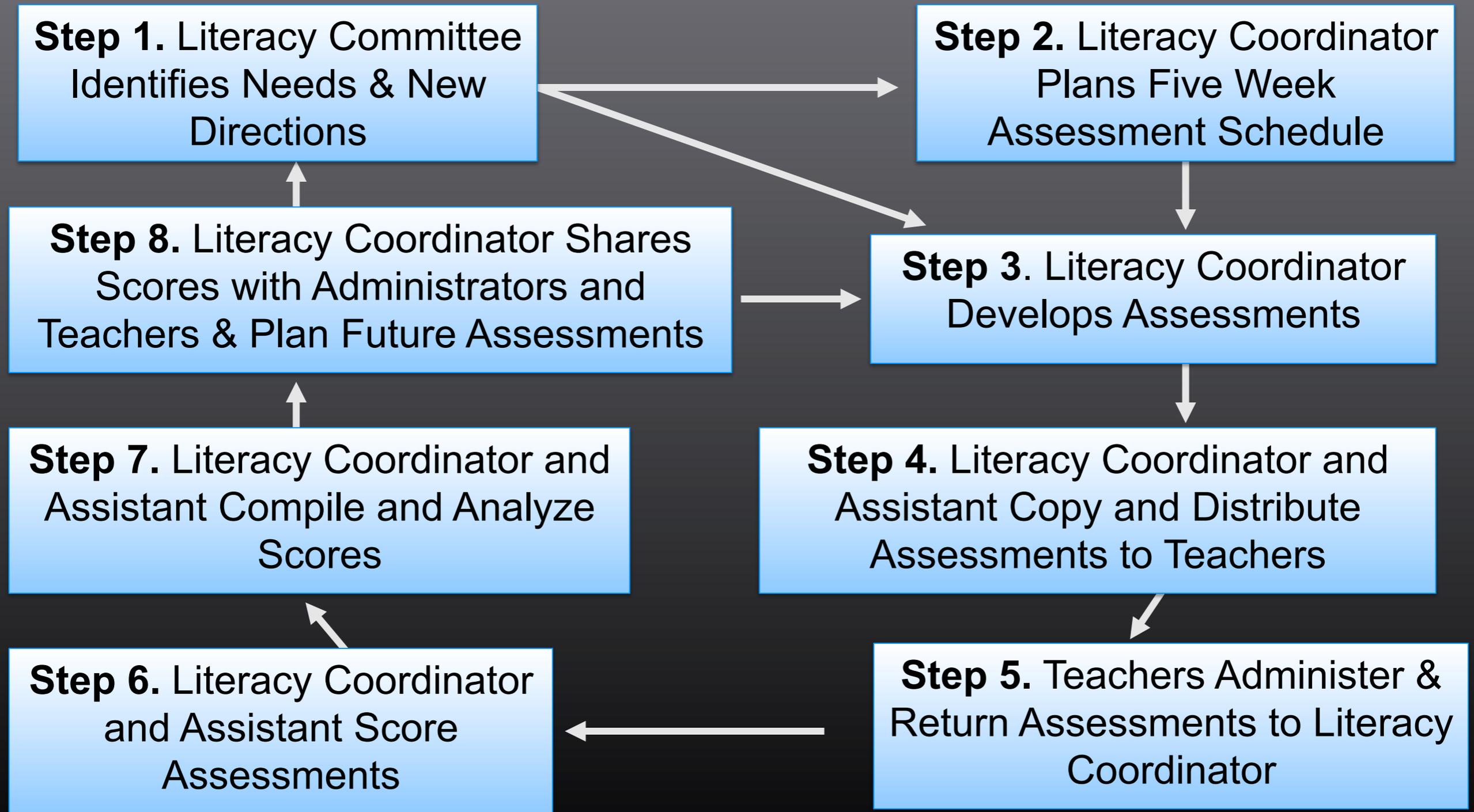
(Literacy coordinator, 10/23/00)

“The [standardized] tests ... didn’t give us much information about what we could do to improve our scores because we received the results well after we could do anything about it. We thought that a more frequent assessment ... would tell us where the children were”

“The Five Week Assessment enabled teachers to see assessment as a tool for letting them know what they need to work on in the classroom. That was the goal.”

(Principal Williams)

Five Week Assessment: Ostensive Aspect



System of Organizational Routines

- Breakfast Club organized around topics that came out of the Five Week Assessment.
- Grade level and literacy committee were forums for discussing information generated by the Five Week Assessment and brainstorming strategies for improvement.
- Organizational routines together with tools, formal positions, rules, regulations and so on form an infrastructure for the practice of leading and managing instruction.

Changing Infrastructure, Changing Interactions

“Everybody did absolutely their own thing as far as literacy. Some people used the Basal series . . . we had different Basal series going in the building. A lot of people were going to a literature-based instruction. Nobody ever talked to each other. It was just—everybody went into their own room, closed the door and did their own thing. So we’ve tried to develop some common vocabulary and common ways of doing things.”

“You close your door. You do what you want. You don’t know what everybody else is doing and it’s fine. Nobody is interested. Nobody’s checking on you or even interested in what you are doing . . . but it changed since then. We work much closer together and I was a very quiet person. . . . Until I was probably elected to . . . chair cycle. First of all, we probably were forced to do some exchange of ideas in—when it first started. Then people found it’s very helpful and nobody keeping anything as a secret so we share freely. And it helps.”

Teacher Interview

Pushback in Practice: The Kosten Case

Mrs. Koh began “Kosten is a good school. The former administration did a good job, but we can’t take it for granted. Society is changing.” She continued, “We are putting those preventative resources in place. Why should we wait for a disaster?” Then she told the teachers, “You’ve got to have higher expectations, ... a teacher quickly interjected, “But our scores are going up.” Mrs. Koh responded, “But our students are changing, and we want to insure that everyone is going up.” But then another teacher responded with a different interpretation: “We’re getting more and more kids now with problems at home. There’s no discipline in the household, and I can model things here, but if they don’t get it at home...” (Fieldnotes).

Koh tells them the school needs to do something to improve reading, because their scores are down “1.3” on the IOWA tests. In contrast, the reading scores at the other neighborhood school are at 70, “I have to go over there.” Teacher—“I’ll go with you,” and “They must be teaching to the test” because the two schools are “servicing the same population” (Field notes).

Asking the Difficult Questions about Organizational Routines

What is the theory of action behind the routine?

What arguments explain and evaluate the routine?

Why should it work?

Why might it not work?

What are the advantages of this routine?

What are the disadvantages of this routine?

How does it connect with classroom teaching and learning?



Getting to Practice: Advice & Information Interactions in School

Diagnosis and Design Work

Why Focus on Advice and Information Interactions?

- On-the-job interactions associated with the transfer of advice and information – essential to knowledge development:
 - Socialization: Tacit Knowledge—Tacit Knowledge
 - Externalization: Tacit Knowledge – Explicit Knowledge
 - Combination: Explicit Knowledge – Explicit Knowledge
 - Internalization: Explicit Knowledge – Tacit Knowledge

Some Lessons about Social Ties

- Strong ties - enable the transfer of tacit, complex knowledge and facilitate joint problem solving.
- Weak ties - enable the transfer of explicit knowledge.
- Ties that span organizational boundaries allow for new information and minimize 'group think'.
- Boundary spanners, individuals that connect different subgroups, facilitate the implementation of new approaches.
- Trust enable learning and supports improvement efforts.
- Ties can be important for motivation.

Formal Organizational Structure & Advice & Information Interactions

- Teachers more likely to seek advice from others of same gender and race.
- Prior tie strongly associated with having a current tie.
- **Formal** leaders more likely to provide advice or information.
- Teachers in the **same grade** were more likely to receive or provide advice or information
- Teachers more likely to seek advice about a subject from teachers who reported **more PD** in that subject.

Spillane, J. P., Kim, C. M., & Frank, K. A. (2012). Instructional advice and information seeking behavior in elementary schools: Exploring tie formation as a building block in social capital development. *American Educational Research Journal*.

Formal Leaders and Advice and Information Seeking Behavior

- **Part-time** leaders more likely than **full-time** leaders to belong to instructional advice and information networks
- **Formal leaders** more central compared with teachers in language arts (.042/0.28) and in the mathematics (.038/0.25) ($p < .001$).
- **Part-time leaders** more prominent in mathematics compared with full-time leaders (.045, .019; $p < .001$)
- **Brokers:** Part-time leaders higher betweenness scores in mathematics than full-time leaders (.024, .011; $p < .001$)

(Spillane & Kim, 2012)

A Study of Elementary School Mathematics

Study Design

14 elementary schools in Pleasantville, Nebraska.

School Staff surveys administered in Spring 2010, 2011, 2012, (& 2013).

Interviews with purposeful sub-sample in five schools in 2011 and 2012.

Survey Response Rate

2010: 311 staff, 89% response rate, ranging from 82% to 100%.

2011: 337 staff, 95% response rate, ranging from 93% to 100%.

2012: 375 staff, 94% response rate, ranging from 83% to 100%.

Research Question: How do infrastructure redesign efforts shape staff interactions?

Social Network Instrument

Screen Shot from SSQ – Math Advice Questions Page 1

School Staff Survey



NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY

During THIS SCHOOL YEAR, to whom have you turned for advice or information about teaching Mathematics? Please write full first and last names, and give a brief description of that person's role or position. You do not need to fill all the spaces.

I have not sought advice from anyone.

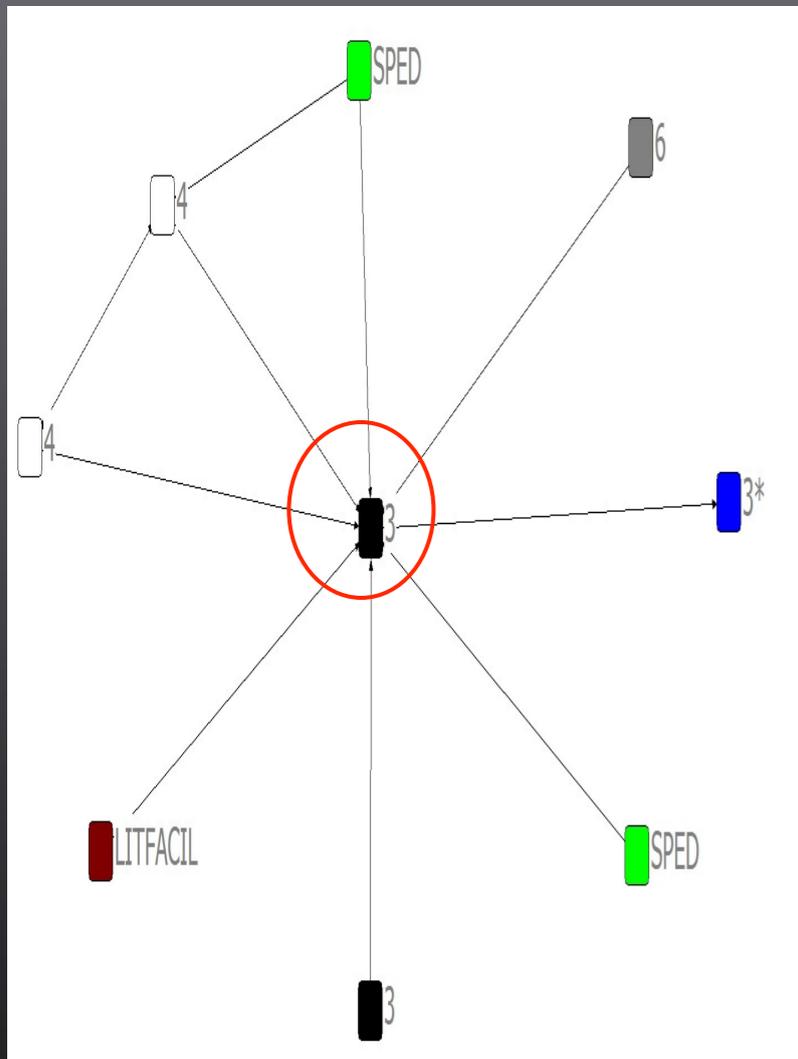
Name
Jim Spillane
James Pustejovsky
Virginia Pitts
Cindy Sigal

Role
principal
6th grade teacher
math coordinator
roommate - also a teacher

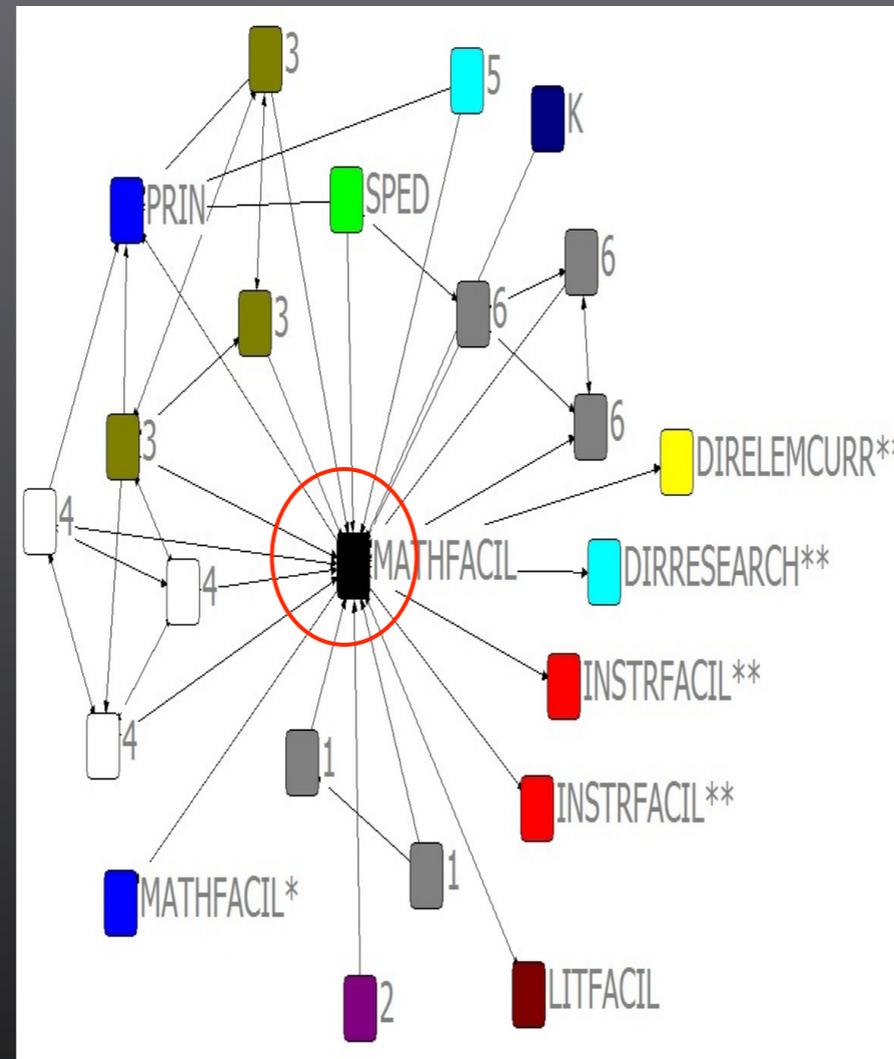
District Infrastructure Design for Teacher Leadership

- Infrastructure for mathematics instruction
 - New Inquiry-Based Elementary School Mathematics **Curriculum**
 - **Resource and material** adoption (Investigations)
 - State **standards** alignment
 - Unit **assessment** development
- Infrastructure (re)design for teacher leadership
 - District-wide and school specific **organizational routines** (e.g., arrays, toolbox, PLCs).
 - Math **Coaches** in some schools
 - **Professional development** in math for select teacher leaders

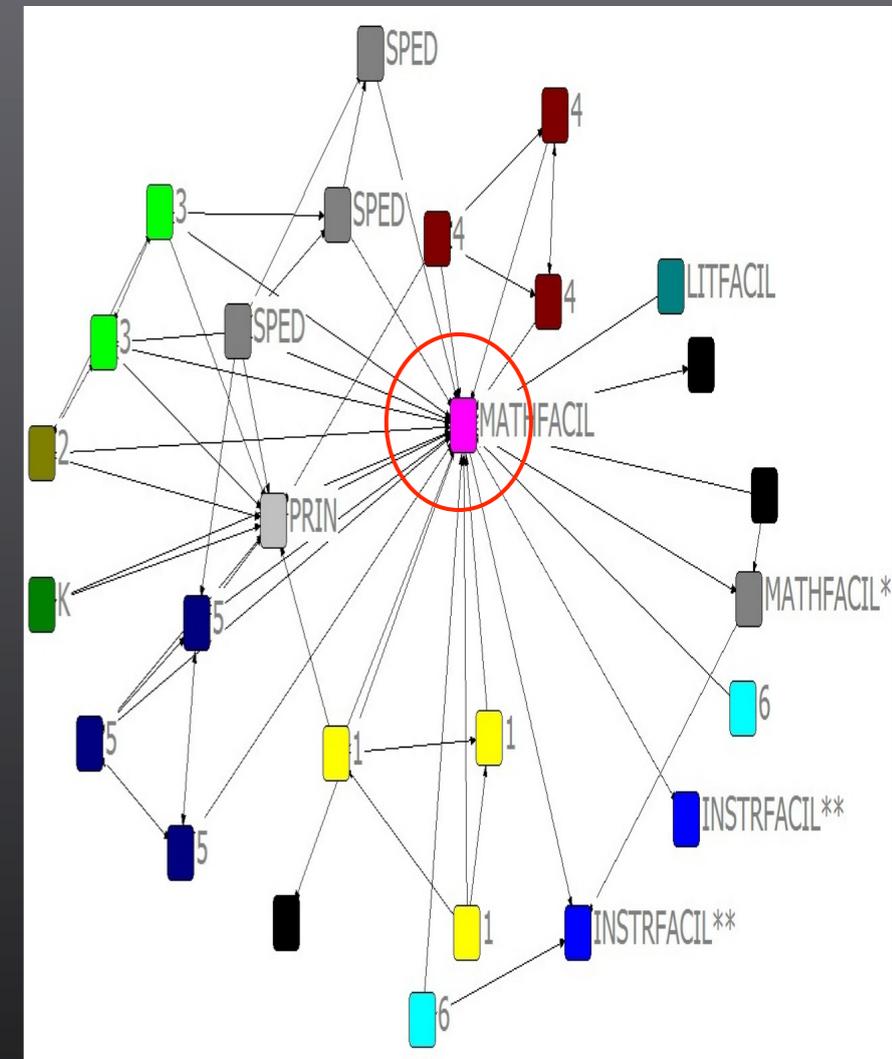
Math Coach (Emily) Facilitates Staff Interactions



2009-10



2010-11



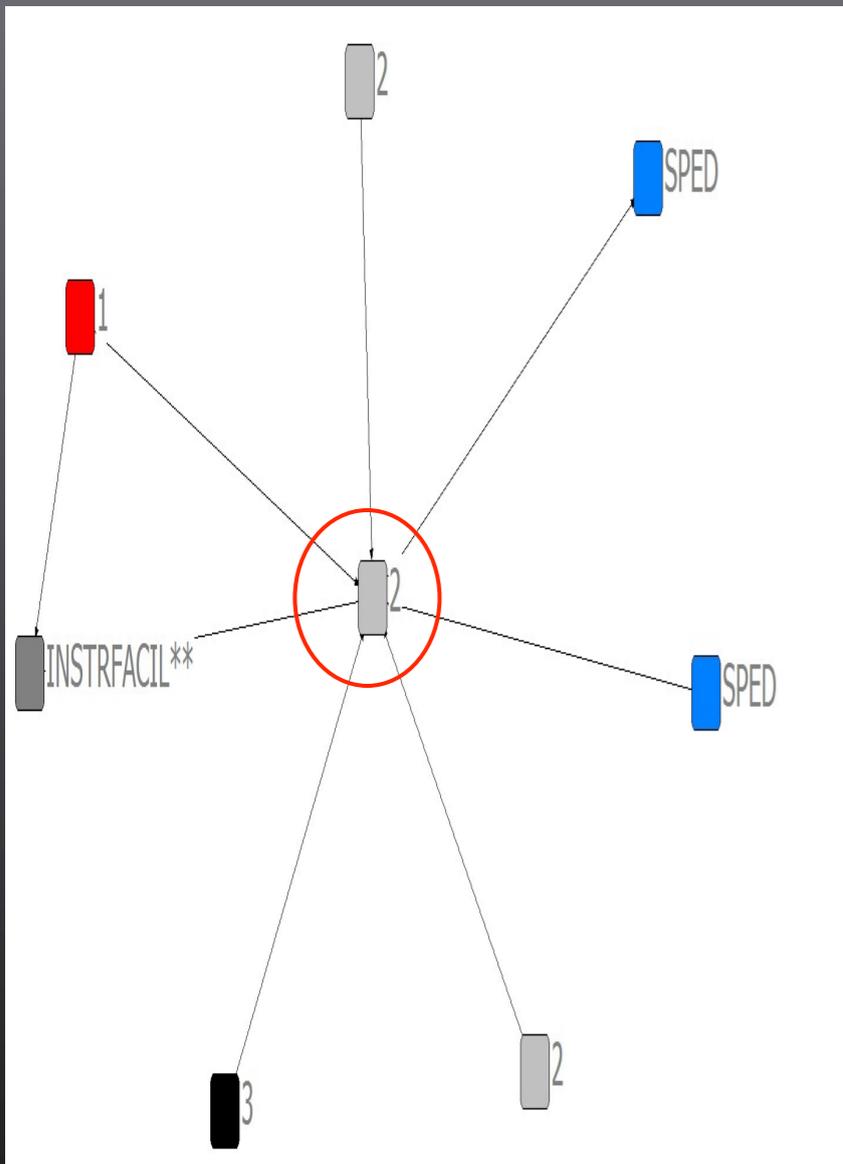
2011-12

Formal Position Promotes Advice Seeking

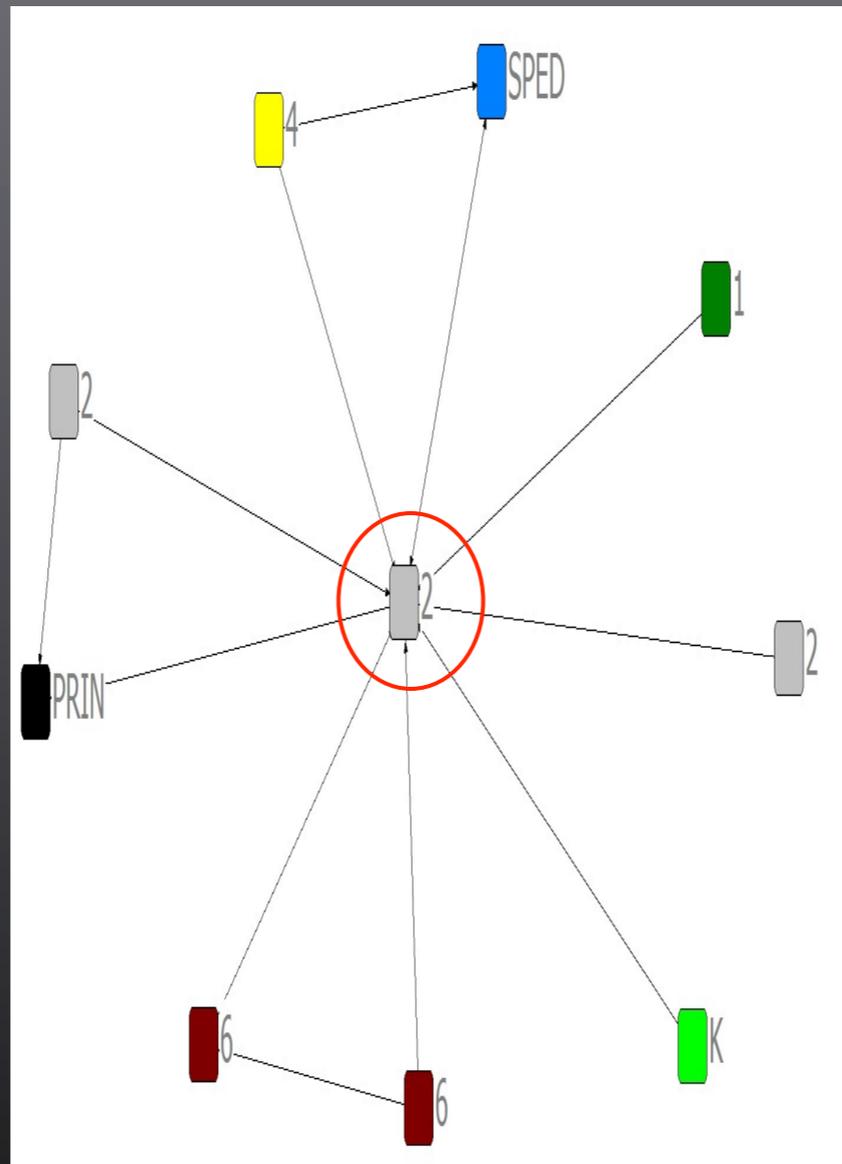
“[Emily] really wasn’t our facilitator [last year], though she was my co-worker, just a third grade teacher. I knew she had a wealth of knowledge, I just wasn’t in [her classroom] when she was teaching math. But, now that she’s moved into this math facilitator position, that’s different... She’s been trained in it. And, she’s gone to school for it and she’s a great coach. She knows a lot about math and I trust her that she has a lot of, a wealth of knowledge... She’s the go-to person.”

Angie, Special Education

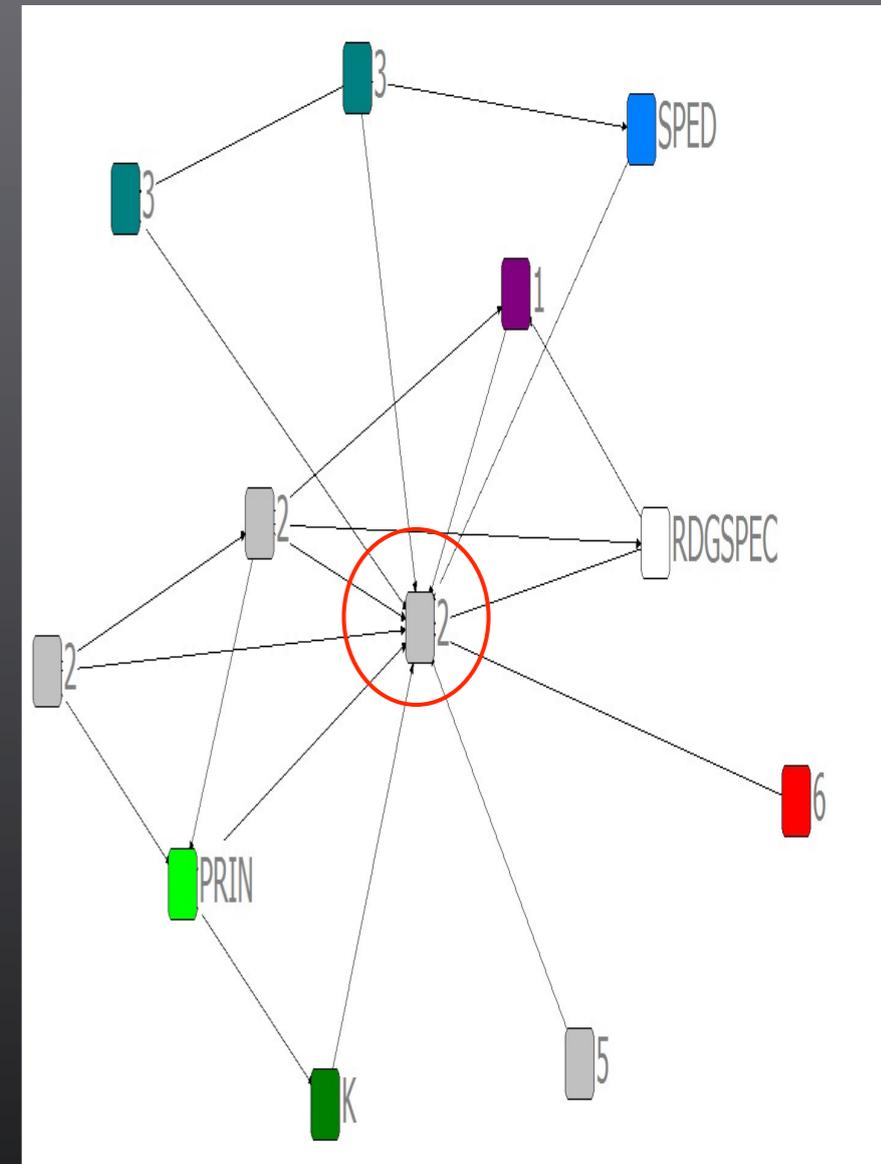
Professional Development Case (John)



2009-10



2010-11



2011-12

Training Also Serves as a Marker of Expertise

Karen (1st grade)

“Because he’s a second grade teacher....He’s kind of become the math person to see because he’s taken this extra training that nobody else in the building has done, and I know that he’s interested in math so, he’s just one that I’ve gone to that I know focuses very heavily on, I like his beliefs and the way that he has his room set up and the way that he carries himself.”

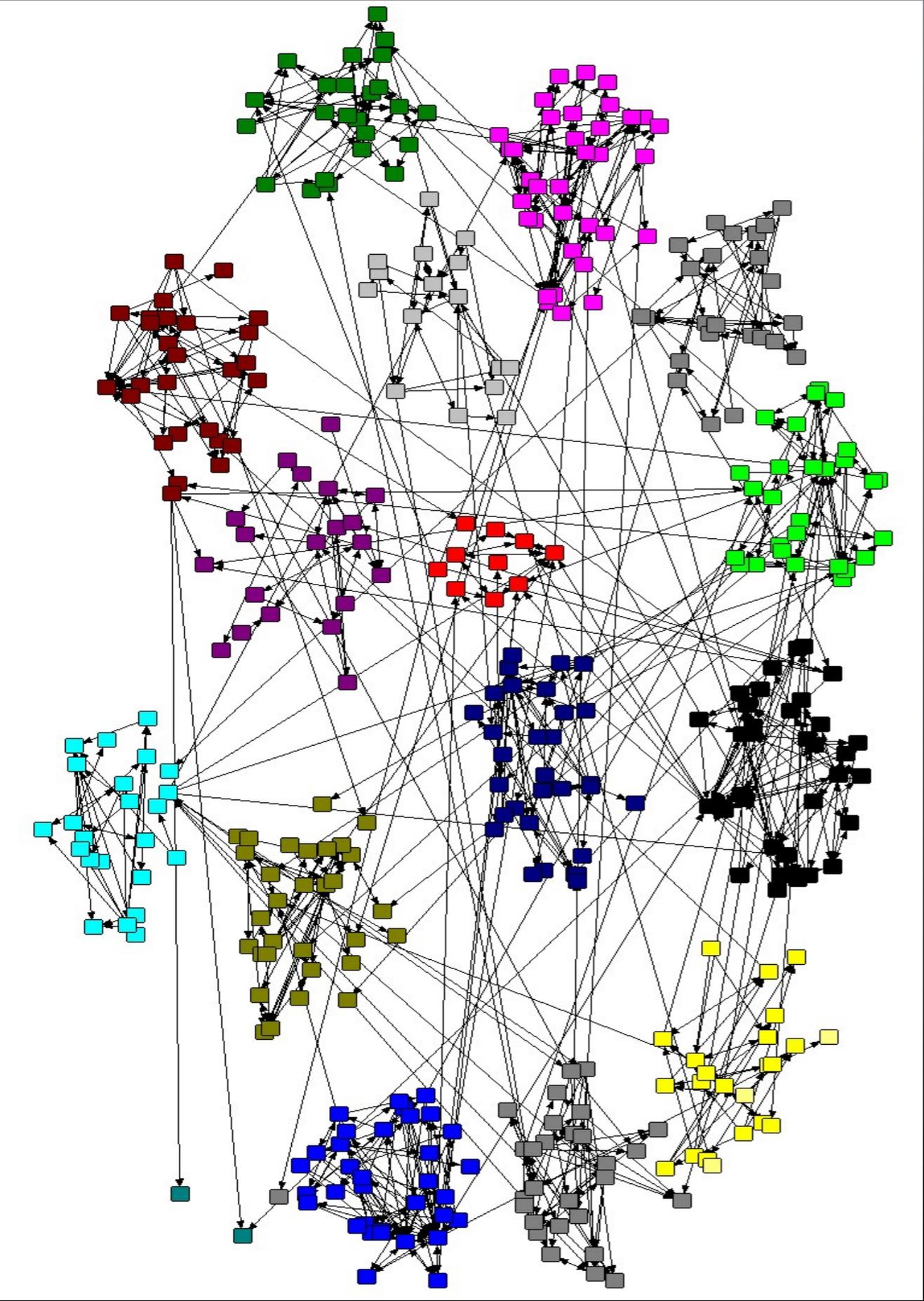
Infrastructure Redesign Promoted Advice and Information Seeking in Mathematics

Average In-Degree for Teachers Leaders and Other Teachers,
Pleasantville School District

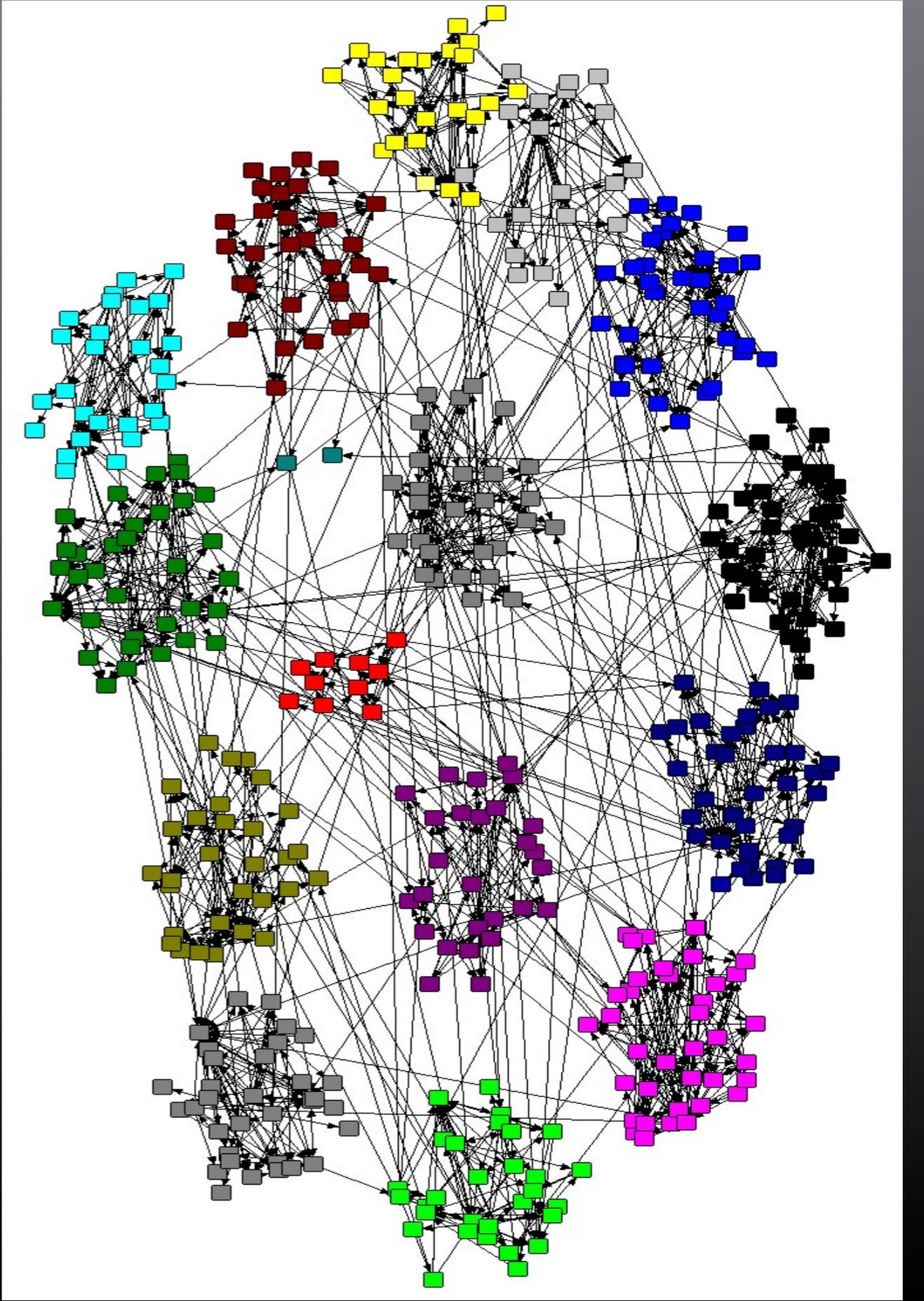
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Toolbox Members (6)	1.60	2.80	2.67
Fundamental Math Participants (9)	4.33	6.00*	6.00
Math Coaches (3)	6.33	16.33**	18.00
Other Teachers (256)	1.54	1.60	1.36

*p<.05; **p<.01

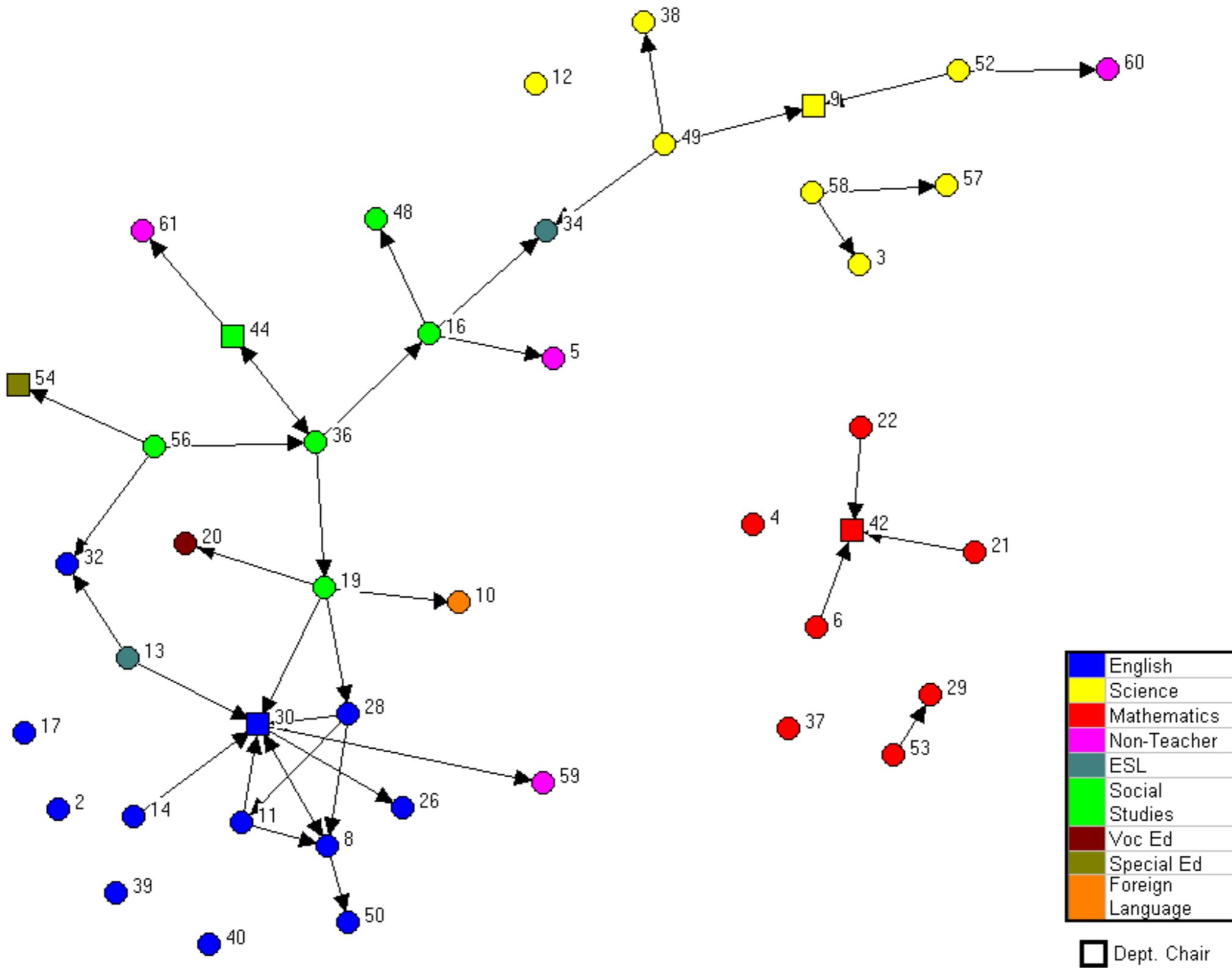
Pleasantville District Math Network



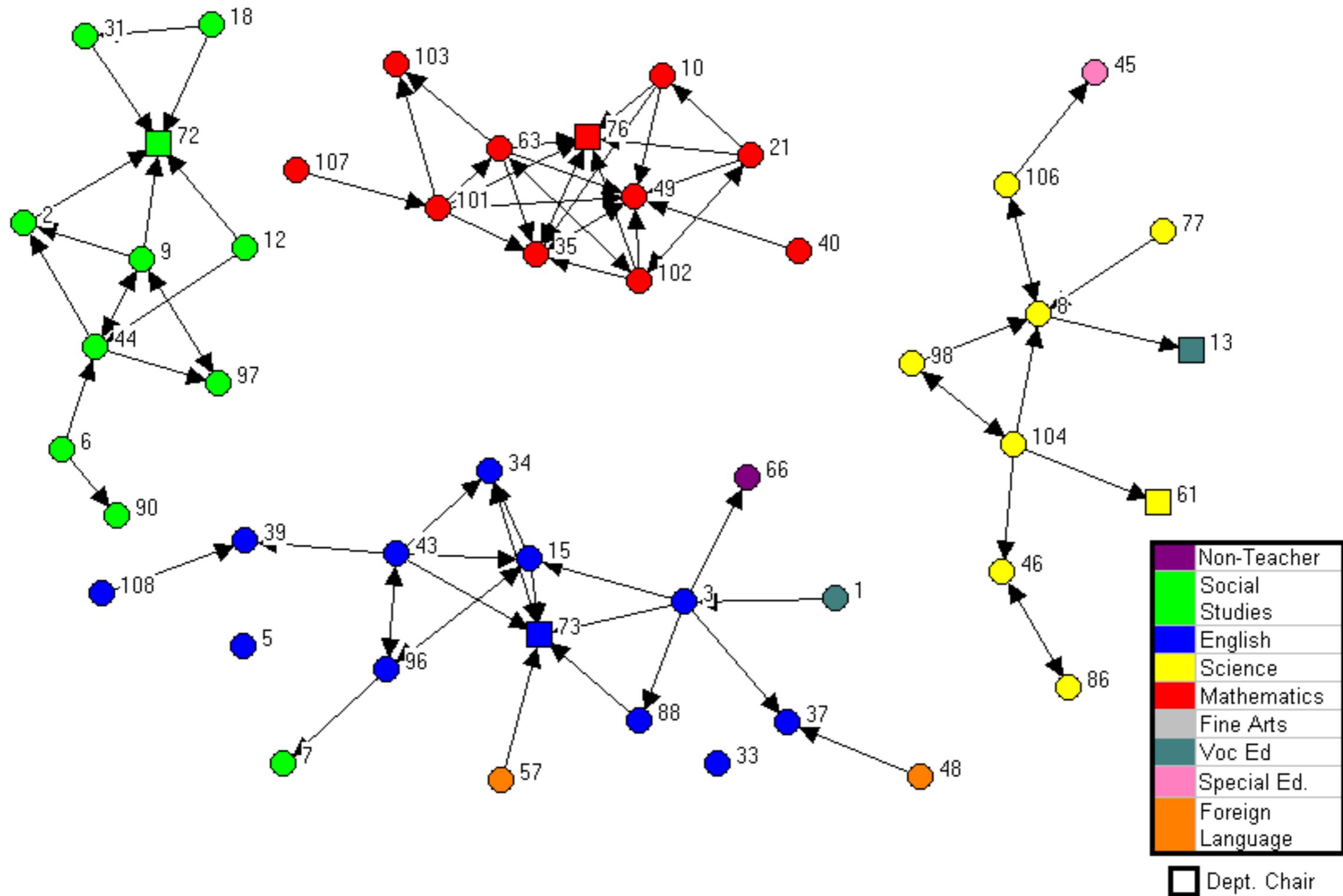
Pleasantville District ELA Network



Fern Center High School Curriculum Network



Pink Hamlet High School Curriculum Network



Principal Challenges in taking A Distributed Perspective

Principals' Work and Distributed Leadership

- Nature of the school principal's job both enables and constrains a distributed perspective on leadership.
- The diversity, unpredictability, and janus-faced nature of the principal's work appears to encourage and enable a distributed perspective on leadership.
- But, school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility appears to discourage and constrain a distributed perspective on leadership
- Fundamental tension between heroic and distributed perspectives on school leadership and management.

‘Jack of All Trades’

• “Jack of all trades and master of none I would say. It’s a **little bit of every profession rolled up in one**. It’s being a CEO of a company but having to do everything in that company from janitorial all the way to dealing with the CEO of Chicago Public Schools ... We’re mom, we’re a teacher, we’re a guidance counselor, we’re a friend, we’re a mentor, a coach.”

Emily

• “Your hands are in all the **cookie jars**. So like you need to know a little bit about everything and a lot about everything to some degree ... you need to be able to juggle the big balls of running a school. And be ok with the dropping a little ball once in awhile.”

Nancy

'Janus-Faced' Nature of the Work

Nelson

- And every, everyone's need is different ...
Because it's like you work to feed and nurture those ... I'm still Glenda; you know Glenda's good, she's also a witch.

Angela

- "It varies. A lot of it depends on the team. Sometimes you have to be a chameleon. ... some days- some years you have to crack the whip, other times you can you know reflect or kind of relax and say 'well that worked and let's keep doing what we're doing'."

Unpredictability/Volatility

- “Being a captain of a sailboat. You’re kind of in control, but you’re at the mercy of the wind too. You kind of set the course, direct it, sometimes the wind is your friend, sometimes it’s your enemy...”

Nelson

- “It’s like surfing without a surfboard on any given day. I mean one minute you’re on the board and the next minute you’re drowning ... the next thing you know, a wave comes and smacks you and you’re like ‘what happened?’ How do I get back above water? I mean things can just come out of nowhere.”

Lori

Ultimate Responsibility

- “I’m responsible for the whole building of students and I’m **ultimately**—for most purposes—the end all, be all accountability person. **Everything falls on me** ... no matter what One thing that really was smacking me in the gut Sunday night was **the responsibility part**. It’s like **the ultimate responsibility** ...”

George

Nelson

- “**the buck stops at your desk**. ... everything stops at my desk **so I’m ultimately accountable** for everything in this building. ... Everything is your responsibility.”

- “Captain of a ship ... things sometimes are smooth sailing and then in a moment, the winds can turn, and you’re not sure you’re gonna stay afloat ... **I’m the last one out.**”

Kathy

Conclusion: Moving Forward

- Moving beyond an implementation mindset, to put diagnostic and design work central in leading and managing instruction.
- Diagnosis and design necessitates a framework – one possibility is a distributed framework.
- A distributed framework urges attention to both the formal (designed) and informal (lived) organization *in tandem*.

MORE AT:

<http://www.distributedleadership.org>