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**REGENERATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:
THE INFLUENCE OF RELATIONSHIPS ON TEACHER IDENTITY, AGENCY AND
ADVOCACY**

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B.A. University of Maine, 1994

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(in Literacy Education)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2023

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**REGENERATING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING:
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By Todd W. McKinley

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Susan Bennett-Armistead

An Abstract of the Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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The Graduate School
The University of Maine
May 2023

Professional development for teachers gained more attention with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 2001. However, reform efforts spurred by this act focused mainly on training for specific programs and curriculum materials, resulting in little attention to instruction. In the last thirty or more years, new approaches to professional development have emerged, with teacher leadership, in particular, gaining more attention in studies as an important mechanism for reforming classroom practice to raise student achievement. Research has mainly examined collaborative frameworks to sustain teacher growth through professional learning communities situated within the context of schools and districts. Future research focused on the role of relationships with mentors and professional networks outside schools and districts has the potential to advance a conceptual framework for transforming teacher practice and student learning.

This study used social network analysis and narrative analysis as conceptual and analytical frameworks to understand how relationships among teachers in a community of

practice influenced their practice and their growth. This study specifically considered the following broad question about professional learning: In what ways do relationships among National Writing Project teacher-consultants influence teacher-consultant's growth as learners, writers, and teachers of writing?

Data was collected through surveys of several participants and interviews with four informants; these teachers worked in the same school district and participated in the State Writing Project (SWP) at different times in their teaching careers. Participants indicated that they believed particular practices, such as reviewing student work and receiving feedback from colleagues was important to their professional growth. However, these participants also noted that they rarely participated in such activities. Also, the informants explained they chose to participate in the SWP because they sought ways to address the needs of their students and goals of their district, needs and goals not necessarily met with professional development experiences.

This study analyzed the experiences of these informants in their teaching and learning about writing and their perceptions of their participation in the State Writing Project. Their stories suggest that colleagues with this social network of the SWP had a significant influence on their knowledge about and understanding of teaching writing. These SWP colleagues had an impact on revitalizing the informants' enthusiasm for teaching, prompting a desire to enact particular practices in their schools and districts. Future studies could focus on these informal structures – these relationships within a network – as a way to support the professional learning of teachers. Additional studies might also examine how narratives serve both as a tool to understand these relationships and as a way to provide teachers opportunities to reflect on their growth as learners and teachers.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Pamela and Terence McKinley,
who always supported my desire to keep learning,
to my siblings, Matthew, Debbi, and Rick, who keep me humble
and remind me to offer my best,
and to my daughter, Abigail, who always inspires me to reach for my goals.

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A number of individuals have led me to this point as a learner, teacher, and writer; more recently, many of my colleagues guided me over the course of these years in my doctoral program. Without their support, suggestions, and assistance, I would have struggled to finish this work.

I want to thank my advisors, Rich Kent and Ken Martin – for their leadership in the National Writing Project, for their countless suggestions for my writing, and for nudging me to take this leap into doctoral studies.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues in the National Writing Project without whom this project would never have happened. I am especially grateful to the Writing Project teacher-consultants who offered me constant encouragement at our summer writing retreats. These colleagues reminded me why this work is so important and why teachers must advocate for each other's growth – as teachers and learners.

I am extremely appreciative of the members of my dissertation committee, who offered insightful comments and compelling questions to push my thinking and my work. Their perspectives not only guided me through this process of reaching publication, but also reminded me to be mindful of my audience and, ultimately, the potential of this research to affect change in professional learning.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, Terence McKinley, for instilling in me a belief in this calling to higher education. I also want to thank my mother, Pamela McKinley, for encouraging me to reach the end of this journey.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introductory Section

The history of public education must include an understanding of the history of reform: from its inception, public schools have shifted purposes in response to social, economic, and/or political agendas. Ultimately, each reform effort claimed to offer solutions to increasing student achievement, and typically, these reforms entered schools in the form of policy changes and curriculum mandates. In the last twenty to thirty years, policy makers and advocates for reform have recognized the importance professional development for teachers as a mechanism for implementing changes, yet, research has indicated that teacher experiences in professional learning often lack the characteristics of high-quality professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Birman et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2009).

Although many teachers participate in formal professional development, such as conferences, courses, and workshops, studies have suggested that these traditional approaches to professional learning fall short of the time needed for teachers to make significant changes in student learning (Wei et al. 2009). Also, teachers reported lacking adequate time during the school day to practice and apply skills in their classroom (Learning Forward, 2017). While studies point to positive gains in job-embedded, or site-based, models of professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Curry, 2008; Wei et al. 2009; Pella, 2011), more research is needed to explore the role of professional organizations and relationships with colleagues to foster effective teaching and learning. In particular, a growing body of research based on social network theory has identified informal structures which encourage collegiality and leadership

development among teachers (Daly & Little, 2015; Moolenaar, 2012; Penuel et al., 2012; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Baker-Doyle, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

In this age of educational accountability with high-stakes testing and the adoption of performance-based standards, conformity has become the wished-for remedy applied to low-achieving schools and the reform strategy for improving student learning. As districts address accountability measures in No Child Left Behind and schools align current practice to standards, such as the Common Core of Learning, many educators and researchers have recognized that the classroom teacher serves as an essential agent in reforming teaching and learning in schools (Birman, 2009; Wei et al. 2009).

However, in order to become effective agents of reforming teaching and learning, educators require effective professional development experiences. The U.S. Department of Education (Birman, 2009) found that, since the enactment of No Child Left Behind in 2001, “if professional development means participating in multiple sustained, active, coherent learning experiences that extensively focus on content, then most teachers were not receiving the type of professional development promoted by the law” (p.115). Desimone et al. (2002) identified six key features of professional development which improve teacher practice. However, data from an earlier survey of 1,027 teachers indicated that “most district-supported professional development activities do not have the six high-quality characteristics” (p. 83).

Summary of Literature

Background

Unfortunately, many policy-makers, politicians, and administrators have dismissed the perspectives of classroom teachers, suggesting that their ideas and observations lack the validity

and reliability of “evidence-based practices” and the hallowed status of hard science. Even among academia, many scholars have expressed doubts about the research by educators in their classrooms because teachers have failed to follow particular methodology or procedures to assure the validity of data. To compound concerns, teacher education programs are often criticized for focusing coursework on theories of teaching rather than practical methods for designing and delivering instruction. How, then, do educators find effective ways to narrow these gaps - between the federal and state mandates and the needs of their learners, and between research-based practices and feasible, realistic approaches to improve student learning?

My study stems from the belief that the key to transforming teaching and learning resides in the hands of practicing teachers, not in the accountability measures dictated by state and federal mandates, but rather through collegial relationships and networks. In other words, reform efforts have typically examined the formal structures of a school or district; however, researchers have suggested that enacting change requires leaders to consider the informal structures—the network of relationships—within an organization (Daly, 2010; Daly and Finnigan, 2011; Richardson and Placier, 2001). By examining and describing these collegial relationships, schools might more fully realize the concept of lifelong learning for students and teachers. In such learning spaces, educators can collaboratively create classrooms as sites for individuals and institutions to transform learning through social practices and to foster models of inquiry for teachers and students.

Several years ago, I joined a group of colleagues for two days of professional development facilitated by the Great Schools Partnership. Prior to attending the training, our facilitator asked each teacher to bring samples of students’ work for our training. We gathered in

the seventh-grade science laboratory on the second floor, seating ourselves around tables arranged in a U-formation.

After the facilitator reviewed the protocol, each teacher, in turn, presented a piece of student work from their classroom. Although the protocol focused participants' attention on the student sample, teachers used and learned a set of practices to experience how to make changes in their work: viewing and describing student products without judgment; listening to and incorporating multiple perspectives; and reflecting on the relationship between the goal for learning and what a student showed in their learning.

In this experience, the classroom served as the physical space for teacher learning, giving teachers a rare opportunity to collaborate while reviewing student work. The protocols served as the frameworks for teachers to experience new learning so that each of them could envision ways such practices might operate in their own classrooms to support student learning. Furthermore, this active participation allowed these teachers and the administrator to consider ways to transform their practices as a school. This site of teacher learning and inquiry simultaneously supported individual teachers and fostered a new vision for the school as a whole. With such a shared experience facilitated by a knowledgeable coach, these educators could now rely on this relationship with their colleagues to reflect on their teaching and their students' learning.

Purpose

This study explored the relationships teachers formed within their professional networks, using those experiences to deepen relationships with colleagues and to bring about changes in practices. This study also examined how these relationships served as catalysts or incubators for fostering leadership, whereby classroom teachers used their growth and learning to impact changes in instruction at the school and/or district level. The goal of this study was to explore the

implications for current approaches for professional development of practicing teachers, ultimately to emphasize that teachers are learners, and, as such, systems ought to revisit this purpose -- to support the growth of educators.

This study examined the perspectives of National Writing Project (NWP) Teacher-Consultants (TCs) about their relationships with other members of the NWP within their schools and district as well as outside their district. This study sought to understand how interactions among teacher-consultants influence their professional growth by addressing this broad question: In what ways do relationships among NWP teacher-consultants influence a teacher-consultant's growth as learners, writers, and teachers of writing?

In order to address this board questions, I framed my study with these sub-questions:

1. How do relationships among teacher-consultants influence their sense of efficacy as writers and teachers of writing?
2. How do relationships among teacher-consultants influence their roles as leaders within their school, district, and beyond?
3. How do relationships among teacher-consultants influence their ability to bring about change in their school, district, and beyond?

Justification

This study grew from the work of Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle on practitioner research, on principles of adult learners as described by Malcolm Knowles and his colleagues, and on the work of social learning theorists such as Etienne Wenger, Jean Lave, Kira Baker-Doyle, and John Daly. Practitioner research and adult learning theory position the individual as a learner engaged in a process of growth akin to our students. Also, several concepts for this study were rooted in research related to teacher leadership, in which scholars

view leadership less as a formal role and more as an activity aimed at changing teaching and learning. Finally, this study incorporated constructs from social network theory and analysis, specifically as a framework for exploring networks as a mechanism for learning and growth.

Teacher Leadership

The broader literature on teacher leadership confirmed that changes in teacher practice occur when educators have ongoing opportunities to work together. York-Barr and Duke's (2004) review of teacher leadership showed that teachers, acting alone or collectively, can influence changes in practice with colleagues and in their schools. Donaldson (2006) affirmed this idea of change when teachers acted in common with shared purpose and commitment. Furthermore, Spillane (2005) asserted that the distribution of leadership allows schools and districts to assume equitable responsibility for student learning. In other words, collegial interaction among educators – classroom teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators - based on shared beliefs, practices, and actions fostered a critical examination of teaching and learning to improve student learning.

From the perspective of teachers as learners, then, this discussion of leadership is important because much of the literature examined teacher leaders within the context of a classroom, a school, or a district. Within such a specific context, even with the interaction of effective features of professional development, such as collective participation and active learning, researchers attend to cultural and institutional elements leading to or inhibiting the growth of teacher practice and student learning.

However, I argue that teacher growth and learning require a shift in perspective, that the context of learning for educators must be broadened because the nature of teaching and learning has shifted. One aspect in shifting this perspective involves viewing teachers as learners, adult

learners who seek particular experiences and who share unique needs and characteristics as professionals seeking growth. Andragogy, the study of adult learning, developed a set of principles which can be applied to this notion of teacher as learner. More importantly, this set of principles conceptualizes learning as a complex process in which the interaction between the individual and the situation or setting influences the growth of the learner.

Andragogy: Principles of Adult Learning

In the case of teacher learning, the school often serves as the main setting for professional development, and public education, as an institution, remains remarkably adept at retaining its history, traditions, and accepted models of teaching and learning. However, Knowles et al. (2005) proposed that institutions and organizations designed to help people learn need to build an educative environment. Interpreting the work of change theorists, Knowles and his colleagues stated that organizations as complex social systems have a human purpose—namely, to help people to achieve their goals. Ultimately, such an environment would foster a democratic philosophy—with the following characteristics: a respect for personality, participation in making decisions, freedom of expression, and mutually determining goals (Knowles, p. 108).

In other words, educators who gravitate toward leadership roles may, in fact, seek avenues to satisfy their need for learner-centered experiences, a need often unmet when complying with locally controlled professional development. When viewed through the lens of adult learning theory, a teacher's desire for leadership stems from their genuine interest in addressing questions that they have about their practice and their students' learning. This need and ability to direct their own learning often requires teachers to seek resources outside their school or district. As a result, teachers position themselves in a larger educational context as an

agent of change, building relationships with colleagues through professional networks and organizations.

Green et al. (2013) suggested that education today should foster a broader awareness for teachers: an emphasis on practice alone provides growth for individual teachers in their classrooms yet does not necessarily contribute to the larger mission of professional learning. Citing Kemmis and Smith (2008), these authors propose that “praxis is what people do when, understanding the interrelationship between themselves, others and their conditions of practice, they take ‘the broadest possible view of what is best [and] act’” (p. 250). Changes within the classroom may directly influence the teacher and benefit their students, but such changes in isolation do not necessarily shift institutional beliefs and practices. Furthermore, a teacher can adopt new methods and strategies without engaging in dialogue with colleagues about the effectiveness of these new approaches and without soliciting feedback from their peers.

Teacher Research

Wilhelm (2009) addressed this notion of praxis when he discussed the importance of reflection as essential to effective teaching “because it orients us to deep thinking about what we know and have experienced as teachers” (p. 37). He added that teachers participating in inquiry with and for their students also engage in reflexivity, which he described as “consciously suspending one’s own history and assumptions in order to understand those of someone else” (p. 38). Teachers can shift their practice when they can view problems, challenges, or changes from another’s perspective. If they cannot physically interact with other teachers to explore instructional topics, they can, through action research in their own classroom, develop a mindset to examine their classrooms with this reflective lens to see past their assumptions and habits.

Connections to research and relevant practices allow teachers to foster their own learning and growth while supporting their efficacy as professionals.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) emphasized this position of educators engaged in inquiry. In particular, these researchers argued that teacher research is not simply an educational fad, but rather such forms of practitioner inquiry constitute a movement which views educators and teacher educators as agents of change. Furthermore, Cochran-Smith and Lytle situated teacher research and other forms of practitioner inquiry in the larger context of teacher education, professional development, and school reform. In other words, the daily life of classrooms and school provides the setting for intellectual projects and sites for academic inquiry. Rather than serving only as an arena for transmitting traditional models of professional development and curriculum programs, the school can become a venue for interrogating practices and assumptions with the goal of transforming classrooms and schools into spaces for fostering learning--for teachers and students.

Collaboration with Colleagues

This study sought, in particular, to understand the ways collegial relationships within learning communities--situated within schools and districts or through professional networks--operate as incubators for change in practice, for teacher growth, and, ultimately, for teacher leaders to transform schools. Penuel et al. (2012) examined how collaboration with peers impacted teacher instruction, finding that “[t]eachers’ own instructional practices in writing changed more when they received help from colleagues who themselves benefited from professional development” (p.128). Pella (2011) connected the situative perspective to professional learning communities in her examination of collaborative inquiry. Using a practice-based approach through lesson study, Pella concluded that “[t]hese engagements inspired self-

efficacy, particularly toward aspects of writing instruction that participants felt were challenging: pacing, scaffolding, and integrating multi-modal, collaborative activities for student engagement” (p. 122).

Although relatively new to the discussion of educational reform, social network theorists have provided compelling evidence about the power of professional networks and interactions to enact change, to support teacher efficacy, and to increase the likelihood teachers will remain in the profession (Daly, A. J., & Little, J. W., 2010; Baker-Doyle, K.J, 2011; Coburn, C., Russell, J., Kaufman, J., & Stein, M., 2012; Moolenaar, N., 2012; and, Penuel, W.R., Fishman, B.J., Yamaguchi, R., and Gallagher, L.P., 2007). Of particular interest for study, communities of practice have advanced another model for exploring the ways people share knowledge, foster interactions, and identify a common practice (Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. M., 2002). These researchers examined networks and communities as the social structures for supporting teacher learning and as the context for bringing about improvement in schools (Lieberman, A., 2000; Kaplan, J., 2008; and, Wenger, E., B. Trayner, and M. de Laat., 2011). In other words, social networks operate as communities of practice for a teacher—within and outside their schools—because *who* a teacher knows rather than *what* a teacher knows allows a teacher to learn and change.

Ultimately, the study of social networks and communities of practice affords researchers and policymakers a better understanding of this complex, contested terrain of educators. On the one hand, teachers must manage the pressures of experts from without—outside their schools and districts—pushing change strategies. On the other, teachers rely on their experience and expertise from within to resist changes which fail to address local needs and the realities of their classrooms. Studies related to teacher change suggest that educators and administrators examine

carefully the formal and informal structures within a system to sustain improvements in their schools and to support the growth of their teachers (Daly, 2010; Daly and Finnigan, 2011; Baker-Doyle, 2011; Richardson and Placier, 2001).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the inauguration of standardized tests and the adoption of standards, much attention has been given to the formal structures within districts and schools in order to bring about change. Naturally, research efforts in the last two decades have examined how these approaches to change affect growth in teachers. In general, researchers describe a continuum of attempts to implement new policies, practices, and professional development, ranging from more formal and traditional models of professional development to more collaborative, reform-based approaches to teacher learning (Richardson & Placier, 2001; Daly, 2010; Baker-Doyle, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to examine the ways in which relationships among teachers influence their sense of efficacy, their roles as instructional leaders, and their ability to bring about change in their practice as well as change among their colleagues. Specifically, this study explored the phenomenon of collegial interactions—the relationships of teacher-consultants in the National Writing Project among each other and their Writing Project colleagues in their school and district.

In this chapter, I first discuss theories providing the theoretical framework for this study: social learning theory, andragogy, and transactional constructivism. In particular, I consider how these theories relate to professional development for educators. In the second section of this review, I focus on the ways in which communities of practice have attempted to meet the needs of teachers while serving the larger purposes of professional development experiences and reform in schools. I present various studies which identify important features of effective professional development and how various approaches to reform support teacher leadership, communities of practice, and social networks. Having discussed these elements of professional

development and reform, I discuss of how the National Writing Project offers a model of teacher growth which effectively incorporates several elements leading to teacher growth and change in practice. Finally, I close with a discussion of social network theory and analysis, highlighting how this area of research examines collegial relationships as a way to support school-wide reforms in teaching practices.

Social Learning as Transaction

This study was framed by two related theoretical frameworks: social learning theory and adult learning theory, both of which conceptualize learning as an interaction between the individual and their situation. Both of these frameworks are rooted in the theoretical foundation of constructivism, a theory of learning which posits that individuals actively make meaning from new situations, integrating new knowledge with their existing understandings of the world. However, this integration of new knowledge can only happen when the learner is actively engaged in the learning process, which, according to constructivists, is a natural, ongoing process (Tracey and Morrow, 2017).

Constructivism has broadly influenced education, framing theories of comprehension in reading as well as informing practices for student learning and teaching methods. The works of American pragmatist John Dewey (1916) and Soviet psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (1978) have had a significant impact on education, particularly in terms of their concepts of the learner in relation to their environment.

Although his theory grew out of a critique of behaviorism and its limitations in education, Dewey's (1916) view of education has appealed to many educators due to his emphasis on active learning based on student inquiry and on the role of experiences in fostering the growth of a learner's knowledge. However, I draw upon features of Dewey's work relevant to the concept of

transactional constructivism in order to discuss the connections between his theoretical framework and adult learners, specifically to the growth of educators.

Sutinen (2007) wrote that transactional constructivism posits “that knowledge construed by an individual emerges in the transaction between the individual’s activity and the environment for action” (p. 2). Dewey suggested that the environment provides conditions for the individual to consider a problem, a context to raise doubt and stimulate thinking, and “thinking is a process of inquiry, of looking into things, of investigating” (1916, p. 148). Through this process of thinking, an individual participates in a reflective experience. Such reflection engages a person in analysis and elaboration, two features which make “thinking itself into an experience” (1916, p. 150). Dewey’s notion of experience reveals this transaction between a person and their environment: the process of thinking allows a person to understand the relationship between what they do and what happens as a result (1916, p.144).

Sutinen (2007) also indicated that the educator plays an important role in this transactional process. When a learner struggles to make that connection between an action and consequence or to find a solution to a problem, the educator engages in their own process of thinking “to *interpret* and construct the problem that s/he believes to be the obstacle to the growing person’s growth and to change, *transform* both the growing person’s action environment and his/her action so that his/her growth can continue...” (p.9, emphasis in original). Sutinen’s description of education as this “*interpretative transformational action*” highlights the transactional relationship between the learner, their situation, and the teacher as interpreter and change agent. Sutinen made this distinction from the broader constructivist view of learning because the social interaction between the facilitator and the learning happens within a shared space.

This ability to interpret and transform the learner's growth depends on communication between teacher and learner in this shared experience. Vanderstraeten (2002) examined the role of communication in Dewey's transactional constructivism, as language allows the learner and teacher to participate in the "reflective reconstruction of experience" (p. 240). Similarly, Dewey described the learning experience as a cooperative, mutual enterprise in which the interactions between the teacher and learner allow them to share their experience in ways that create meaning (1916, p. 15). In addition to supporting Sutinen's interpretative transformational action between a teacher and learner, Vanderstraeten calls attention to Dewey's conception of communication in social situations as the means to bring about changes in a person's thinking and behavior. For Dewey, this function of school—as a place for shared experiences and meanings developed in common situations—benefits society as a whole. "Common subject matter accustoms all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated" (1916, p. 21). In other words, social interaction—through constructions of meaning and interpretations of experiences—supports the growth of learners in ways that individuals could not develop independently and in isolation.

In my study, I interviewed a high school English teacher who participated in the National Writing Project and now serves as a teacher-consultant and mentor within this community of practice. Bonnie (a pseudonym for my informant) discussed her experience as a new teacher, bringing her love of reading into teaching students how to analyze and discuss literature. However, she recognized that writing about texts could move beyond the traditional five-paragraph, academic essay. When Bonnie participated in the State Writing Project, she discovered a network of teachers willing to demonstrate and share a variety of writing strategies to support. More importantly, her identity as a teacher of writing shifted as she collaborated with

members of the Writing Project and reflected on the professional readings. First, Bonnie realized that the other teachers in the program were not “traditional English teachers.” Among this community of teacher-writers, she realized that “I just got to see that difference of a stodgy old English teacher that I thought I wanted to be and, and what the actual energy could be.” As she made this shift in her identity as a teacher, Bonnie said that she also reflected on her experience as a writer. She never considered herself a writer, admitting that she did feel as passionate about writing. However, Bonnie stated the Writing Project allowed her “step outside of my comfort zone. And, and showed me that...I do have things to say, and like I even though I don't feel like I do, and I know that I do. I have experiences that are valuable.” As much as she tried to grow through her own efforts—by relying on her coursework and by reading professional literature, Bonnie experienced significant growth as a teacher and writer through these social interactions within this community of practice.

Bonnie’s experience illustrates the primacy of social interaction at the heart of sociocultural views on human development. For example, Vygotsky (1978) argued that communication, specifically speech, serves an important role in a person’s cognitive development. Like Dewey, Vygotsky suggested that educational experiences rely on social interactions. Learners use language as a problem-solving tool, combining speech and practical activity to lead to more complex intellectual development (pp. 24-25). In his discussion of Vygotsky’s theoretical framework, Glassman (2001) discussed the role of language in the learning process: “Language by itself creates a context for activity and, especially, for reflective thinking about (the consequences of) that activity” (p. 7). In other words, language mediates this transaction between a situation and the learner, providing tools—knowledge and experience—for

them to engage independently in that reflective process to interpret and transform their actions and environment.

Although much of my discussion has, thus far, focused on the role of social interaction in cognitive development, the theories of Dewey and Vygotsky highlight essential ideas in the process of learning. In particular, their thinking addresses what Lave and Wenger described as “the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning” (1991, p. 50). They added that “learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (ibid. p. 51). Lave and Wenger not only revealed this transactional nature of making meaning—in, with and among others and active participation, but their statement also effectively connects the theories of practice found in Dewey with theories of situated practice such as Vygotsky.

Wenger (1998) situated social learning theory at the intersection of multiple intellectual traditions. He conceptualized theories of social structure and theories of situated experience as a large body of work growing from the tension between these two fields of study. In fact, Glassman (2001) raised a similar tension between the learning theories of Dewey and Vygotsky. While Dewey considered experience as the primary context for learning to generate individual reflection, Vygotsky suggested that daily activity through social intercourse allows a learner to develop historical and cultural knowledge (pp. 8-9). Wenger indicated that this participatory nature of learning at the intersection of these theories reveals the transactional construction of meaning: “Through these local actions and interactions, learning reproduces and transforms the social structure in which it takes place” (p. 13). In other words, the actions of the learner shape their understanding of their situation and these new understandings change the experiences of others and the sociocultural context of the learner.

As Wenger illustrated the backdrop of his theory, he positioned another set of categories—theories of practice and theories of identity. This intersection of dominant traditions and theories bears relevance to my discussion of constructivism because Wenger identifies a theoretical tradition which links the work of Dewey and Vygotsky. In particular, I call attention to one area of his theoretical context: theories of meaning, the ways in which people generate meanings of their own (pp. 14-15). Through practice and experience, Wenger explained that people engage in a process to which he refers as the “negotiation of meaning” (p.52). According to Wenger’s description, negotiation of meaning becomes a dynamic process, a transactional relation between experience and the world, a “continuous interaction, of gradual achievement, and of give-and-take” (p. 53).

For Wenger, this process becomes essential to a person’s participation within a community, and this participation plays a significant role not only in the negotiation of meaning, but also as “a constituent of our identities” (p. 57). Through this interplay between the individual and a community, a person engages in various practices, and “practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context” (p. 149). In addition to these notions of identity as negotiated experience and as practice, Wenger posited identity as a learning process. Events and participation give significance to the present, incorporating the past and the future, allowing individuals to “sort out what matters and what does not, what contributes to our identity and what remains marginal” (p. 155). In other words, identity operates as a transactional process, serving as a mechanism for individuals to make meaning from experiences and to clarify their role in social communities.

I have, to this point, focused my discussion on the transactional nature of making meaning and its role in the process of learning. However, I believe that in this discussion of the

theories of Dewey and Vygotsky I must clarify that their work was, in large part, based on studies of children (Dewey, 1916; Vygotsky, 1978). The literature of social learning has, over the years, offered compelling arguments that their theories aptly describe the cognitive development and learning process of any individual. Because the work of Dewey and Vygotsky have formed the theoretical pillars of pedagogy and practices in education as a whole, my theoretical framework regarding teacher learning must also address theories about the learning process of adults.

Wenger's work in social learning theory provides a logical transition from Dewey and Vygotsky, so that I might explore the process of learning for educators. Lave and Wenger (1991) explained that they wanted to build a theory of learning by "shifting the analytic focus from the individual as learner to learning as participation in the social world, and from the concept of cognitive process to the more-encompassing view of social practice" (p. 43). In my earlier discussion of Wenger's model, I pointed out how Wenger incorporates theories of meaning to bridge theories of practice and experience. This shift from the learner to participation and practice of the learner bears importance to my framework because adult learners learn differently than younger learners. As such, adults position themselves differently within learning situations and, as Wenger points out, bring to these learning contexts notions of identity which influence how they negotiate meanings from their participation and experiences. In short, adults have developed a self-concept which shapes the goals and purposes of learning.

Principles of Adult Learning

This notion of self-concept in adult learning theory, or andragogy, represents an important principle within the framework of Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005). In this discussion of andragogy, I intend to show how a transactional view of learning provides insight

into the ways in which educators make meaning in participation with members of a community. In my later discussions, I will address how these principles of adult learning relate to the professional development of classroom teachers, particularly teachers of writing.

In their review of theories of learning, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson discussed how the role of self-concept gained attention as researchers and public education extended its span into secondary and adult education. These authors explained how scholars scrutinized why adults continued their education and developed a better understanding of how adults learn differently than children and adolescents. These studies discovered types of learners, what motivated adult learners, and the process or phases experienced by adult learners as they developed competency. As a result, the field of research for adult education blossomed in the middle of the twentieth century, allowing scholars to articulate more clearly this theory of learning (pp. 58-60). For Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, this theory of learning—*andragogy*—“is a transactional model of adult learning that is designed to transcend specific applications and situations” (p. 143). These authors intended to create a model for describing adult learning in any setting, rather than limit their framework to illustrating the ways adult education programs deliver instruction to learners in specific settings.

In their model of adult learning, the authors identified a set of six learning principles; however, two of these principles—the self-concept of the learner and prior experience of the learner—remain particularly relevant to my discussion. According to this first principle, the learner’s self-concept, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson explained that adults want to be perceived as responsible for their own decisions and as capable of self-direction. The authors argued that institutions and organizations designed to help people learn need to build an educative environment. Interpreting the work of change theorists, Knowles and his colleagues stated that

organizations as complex social systems have a human purpose—namely, to help people to achieve their goals. Ultimately, such an environment would foster a democratic philosophy—with the following characteristics: a respect for personality, participation in making decisions, freedom of expression, and mutually determining goals (p. 108). Adopting such democratic characteristics, organizations become innovative rather than static; without a set of principles which recognize learning as a complex, democratic system, Knowles et al. suggested that individuals within organizations are unable to articulate and achieve their own goals.

Secondly, because adults conceive themselves as capable of directing their own learning, Knowles, Holton, and Swanson also emphasized the importance of recognizing and valuing the experiences of adult learners. For this reason, adult learning activities must take into account their own experiences because “any situation in which the participants’ experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience, but rejecting themselves as persons” (p. 67). Whereas experience happens to children and allows children to develop shared meaning and knowledge of the world, these authors claimed that experience for adults defines who they are, forming their self-identity.

This transactional nature of learning, then, becomes far more than a framework for understanding how people learn and interact with situations and communities. Rather, I present these theories to emphasize the primacy of identity in learning: who we are and the experiences that we carry into a learning environment impacts how we engage in the learning process. Furthermore, by recognizing identity as a core principle in learning, institutions and communities must consider what practices support the growth of their members. To that end, I turn my attention now to five questions to address features, concepts, and models which influence teacher growth. Again, my review intends to examine what practices align with social learning theory,

with particular attention to a transactional process of learning, to frame a model for understanding professional growth in teachers.

What features of professional development influence teacher growth?

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001 spurred more attention to the professional development of teachers. Such learning experiences are often site-based: school districts allocate in-service time to address changes in curriculum due to results of test scores, mainly in reading and math, and to align local learning targets to state and/or national standards. Educators can also select professional development through professional networks and courses, yet constraints such as funding and workload become barriers to a teacher's access to higher education.

Based on prior research, Desimone et al. (2002) identified six key features of professional development which improve teacher practice. These researchers described three features as structural: reform type, duration, and collective participation. Desimone explained that these structural features related to the form or organization of professional development of the activity. On the other hand, the remaining three features labeled as core features—active learning, coherence, and content focus—dealt with the content or substance of the activity. As Desimone and her colleagues explained, the structural features shaped the core elements. For example, reform type activities were more likely to include collective participation and longer duration (p. 83).

Data from an earlier survey of 1,027 teachers indicated that “most district-supported professional development activities do not have the six high-quality characteristics” (p. 83). In their own longitudinal study of 207 teachers, Desimone and her colleagues measured which features had the most impact on teacher practice. Their data reveal that collective participation

and active learning opportunities, such as reviewing student work or obtaining feedback on teaching, support teachers in making changes to their practice (p. 102).

Wei et al. (2009) reported that “student achievement improved most when teachers were engaged in sustained, collaborative professional development that specifically focused on deepening teachers’ content knowledge and instructional practices” (p.5). Pella (2015) investigated how practice-based designs impacted teacher professional development. This researcher explored the ways in which a specific practice, lesson study, resulted in shifts of pedagogical reasoning and action. “Participating teachers’ shifts resulted from their collaborative investigation into methods that engaged their students in thinking for and about writing through discussion, collaboration, peer feedback, and the analysis of texts” (93). These studies demonstrated that practice-based models of professional development allow teachers to engage in collaborative inquiry, informing their decisions about content, strategies, and learning targets.

Dearman and Alber (2005) echoed these findings of practice-based professional development. These authors offered a conceptual framework to assist classroom teachers in dealing with accountability measures dictated by federal and state mandates for student achievement in reading. Rather than adopting new programs or practices, Dearman and Alber mapped an action plan incorporating key components for teachers to cope with educational challenges: discussing and understanding practices supported by research; studying student assessments and work samples; and, reflecting on the practices and strategies framing the students’ work. In their review of research literature, these authors highlight the importance of teachers having time to work together, adjusting their practices, and developing skills to meet the diverse needs of students in order to improve their teaching and student learning (p. 27).

Although the literature illuminates key features of professional development, such as collaboration among teachers and working over a period of time, the research also indicates that teachers rarely experience the characteristics which foster lasting change (Richardson & Placier, 2001; Birman, 2009). Furthermore, educators typically learn about and practice new methods or programs in isolation: in-service days dedicated to prescribed agendas, or attendance at conferences. Without the ongoing support and feedback of colleagues, teachers struggle to transform their own practices and to sustain their own growth (Desimone et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wei et al, 2009).

How do communities of practice influence professional growth?

Borko (2004) proposed that “we cannot expect teachers to create a community of learners among students if they do not have a parallel community to nourish their own growth,” adding that researchers need to study more fully this connection between student learning and teacher growth (p. 7). Ultimately, the classroom teacher has the most impact on student learning; regardless of policies or mandates, the essential factor in fostering achievement rests in the art and craft of teachers as they build better relationships between students and the content, between the students, and between the teacher and students.

Within communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) described “participation as a way of knowing” (p. 95) by which newcomers move in a centripetal direction toward mastery. This mastery takes shape through a learning curriculum, which “is a field of learning resources in everyday practice *viewed from the perspective of learners*” (p. 97). Likewise, teachers within their learning communities must also be seen as learners, relying on the resources of the community to transform their practice; these resources include the artifacts and technologies of teaching as well as the people within their communities and networks. Even the organizational

structures, formal and informal, wield untapped potential as tools for making meaning and mediating activity to support teachers in their learning. Such a conceptual framework of teacher, practice, and the school context allows educators to assert that “learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world” (Lave and Wenger, p. 51).

Site-based and practice-centered approaches have led many schools to develop communities of practice, usually referred to as professional learning communities (PLCs). Because the literature suggests a wide variation in professional learning communities, my review examines one form of these professional learning communities, called Critical Friends Groups, or CFGs. More importantly, this model of professional development provides an important link to the connection between teacher learning and leadership, another key element discussed in the following section.

In a study at one high school, Curry (2008) examined the benefits and drawbacks of six CFGs, with a particular focus on four design features: a diverse menu of activities, a decentralized structure, interdisciplinary membership, and the reliance on protocols. Among the positive outcomes of this study, Curry found that CFGs linked instructional practice with school reform goals in tangible ways, reduced teacher isolation, and influenced broader discussion of practices in the school (p. 769). Despite the constraints of these CFGs, participants’ responses pointed to the most significant gains of their collaboration: determining practical solutions and better understandings of ways to improve instruction.

In his study at three Maine schools, Nave (2000) explored a similar pattern of infiltration of practices by those participating in CFGs at the elementary, middle, and high levels. As teachers in the CFGs developed new approaches to teaching writing, Nave observed these same

practices adopted by non-CFG teachers at the elementary school. The increased collegial conversation and collaboration in all schools provided evidence that CFGs fostered a professional learning community. Additionally, Nave cited numerous examples demonstrating that teachers participating in CFGs changed their thinking about teaching and students. Furthermore, evidence from classroom observations and interviews showed that teachers made significant changes in their practice.

The evidence indicated that CFGs resulted in changing teacher practice; however, Nave observed that the most important factor supporting success of a particular CFGs was due to the skill of their coach (p. 78), suggesting that this leadership role enacted a vital element for these communities of learning. Poekert (2012) explored this link between professional development and teacher leadership, suggesting that teacher leadership, like site-based collaboration, provides “a form of job-embedded professional development” (p. 185). Furthermore, York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggest that communities of practice provide the context needed to support the development of leadership (p. 281).

Naturally, this connection between collaboration and leadership raises the question about leadership roles for teachers. If traditional reform models lack these opportunities for teachers, then educators lack avenues to support colleagues and to influence changes beyond their own classrooms. Moreover, the research on teacher leadership must be viewed within the context of the reform movement rather than simply a feature to elevate a classroom teacher to a formal role within a school or district.

How does teacher leadership influence teacher growth?

Many publications in the last three or four decades have investigated professional development for educators, with an increased focus on leadership and professional learning

communities. York-Barr and Duke (2004) described teacher leadership as “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (287-288). Poekert (2012) investigated the link between teacher leadership and professional development, citing research which suggests that effective professional development must be “collaborative, coherent, based on content matter over time, based on instructional practice, and sustained” (p. 170).

In the decades since York-Barr and Duke’s review of teacher leadership, much research about professional development has focused on the concept of distributed leadership. Like professional development in general and critical friends groups specifically, my review examines distributed leadership in the context of teacher practice. Spillane (2005), viewed by many as the leading expert in distributed leadership, encouraged educators to view distributed leadership as a “perspective - a conceptual or diagnostic tool for thinking about school leadership. It is not a blueprint for effective leadership nor a prescription for how school leadership should be practiced” (p. 149). In other words, leadership roles are not constrained by formal, traditional positions, such as the principal or assistant principal, but, rather, are viewed as individuals who facilitate particular tasks and responsibilities and reflect on their interactions over time.

Spillane wrote that “leadership is a system of practice comprised of a collection of interacting components: leaders, followers, and situation” (p. 150). Rather than viewing leadership within the context of a complicated and often unwieldy bureaucracy, Spillane’s work conceptualizes leadership within a more dynamic, complex network of relationships within and across schools and districts. Such complexity speaks to the nature of change within education: systems and changes within organizations cannot be viewed as complicated machines operating

in a linear fashion, but rather as vibrant ecosystems of learning in which the organization as a whole and education as a wider social endeavor benefit as individuals thrive in their growth and learning.

Camburn et al. (2003) examined this concept of distributed leadership within the context of comprehensive school reforms (CSRs) at elementary schools. The authors of this study were particularly interested in learning whether instructional leadership roles were distributed widely and whether distributed leadership led to changes in programming and improvements in instruction. This study focused on three different programs - the *Accelerated Schools Project (ASP)*, *America's Choice (AC)*, and *Success for All (SFA)*, each of which required schools to designate formal leadership roles, such as coaches, coordinators, and facilitators. The authors noted that implementation of these CSR programs also placed additional demands on principals to monitor progress and to focus on improvement goals. Camburn and his colleagues were particularly interested in how these roles of instructional leadership focused on setting instructional goals, developed instructional capacity, coordinated curriculum, and monitored improvement.

In schools implementing comprehensive school reform, the authors observed that principals and assistant principals spent more time on instructional leadership. Also, coaches reported spending as much time as principals on instructional leadership; however, these coaches did not need to dedicate their time to addressing issues related to building management, accessing resources outside school, and maintaining relationships with partners (p. 361). These researchers also found that the professional development for these leadership roles served as a catalyst for specific leadership functions; however, the authors determined that "it is not exclusively the number of professional development days received that affects leadership

practice, but also whether those experiences spur leaders to think about their practice in a new light” (p. 362). Based on the data from their study, Camburn and his colleagues concluded that “leaders whose professional learning experiences provoked them to reflect upon their practice were more likely to provide instructional leadership than were other leaders” (p. 366). Of note, these authors identified an essential feature of leadership: reflection. Their findings suggest that the adoption of a specific program for reform seems less significant than describing the practices enacted by individuals, particularly those people placed in formal leadership roles.

DeMatthews (2014) placed the concept of distributed leadership within the context of professional learning communities, citing earlier studies which indicated the lack of leadership as a key factor in the dissolution of these communities (p. 178). This study examined how leadership contributes to the development of and sustains the vitality of professional learning communities. DeMatthews described PLCs as “inquiry-based social interactions where teachers meet regularly to focus on their teaching practice” with five essential characteristics: shared values and vision, collective responsibility for student learning, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration, and an emphasis on group and individual learning (p. 180). He added that PLCs vary in their organization and configuration, but he noted the importance of involving teachers in the process of making decisions about the organization and norms of their learning communities (p. 181).

DeMatthews emphasized the role of the principals in his study as “catalysts for a distribution of leadership because they focus their efforts on cultivating teacher leaders, building relationships, and developing networks” (p. 184). Based on surveys, DeMatthews found that teachers’ professional development at their schools enhanced their craft and learning and that they felt supported by their colleagues (p. 188). Observations and interviews indicate that the

principals believed teacher leadership played an important role in the success of the PLCs and the growth of teachers: “having teacher leaders made all teachers more likely to share ideas, advocate for new policies, try new instructional practices, and communicate frustrations or problems” (p. 190). Additionally, these principals shared that these teacher leaders need support, quoting one principal whose comment reflected the others in the study: “Teacher leadership is only effective when we support them, provide them with training, feedback, and motivation. Leadership is difficult work and it’s not something we should distribute without thought or support” (p. 190). In other words, teacher leaders cannot operate as solitary agents; they require intentional guidance from a community of practice to serve as their advocates and their connection to ongoing development.

Using a distributed approach in these professional learning communities at six elementary schools allowed teachers and principals the flexibility to address their needs: “...if teachers are given time and support, they can solve many of the issues they confront in their daily work lives and in doing so build community, trust, and shared values centered on student achievement” (p. 200). Recognizing the importance of supporting leaders, DeMatthews proposed that candidates in principal preparation programs become more familiar with activities related to teacher leadership and ways of fostering professional learning communities (p. 201).

Lowery-Moore et al. (2016) also examined the role of professional development in promoting teacher leadership. To frame their phenomenological study, these authors cited literature in the field which indicates teacher leadership plays an important role in reforming education. They point out that a significant obstacle to teachers assuming formal or informal roles is this long-held belief that, “I am just a teacher.” Training becomes an essential

mechanism to guide teachers toward understanding and, ultimately, embracing these roles as teacher-leaders (p. 3).

In this study, researchers examined the final reflection papers from an online Teacher Leadership graduate program at Lamar University, analyzing 82 papers that spanned grade levels and years in the program. Lowery-Moore and his colleagues found the largest number of responses were related to growth and change in professional and career development. First, the teachers in this program described a renewed sense of confidence and well-being, which the researchers noted appeared in conjunction with statements about improvements in instructional knowledge. Second, the authors reported that better use of assessments and research provided evidence that “students in this program perceived themselves to have a stronger and increased use of research and assessment to drive curricular and instructional decisions” (p. 6).

These studies call attention to the principles of self-concept and identity central to social learning theory. As I shared earlier in this review, self-concept becomes especially important with adult learners. Knowles et al. view self-direction as an essential element in supporting professional growth.

The problem is that the culture does not nurture the development of the abilities required for self-direction, while the increasing need for self-direction continues to develop organically. The result is a growing gap between the need and ability to be self-directing; which can produce tension, resistance, resentment, and often rebellion in the individual (p.62).

Even though systems or institutions adopt frameworks to incubate teacher leadership, such as professional learning communities, the culture for teacher growth within a school or district perpetuates a bounded system: collective participation and active learning serve merely as

features of a prescribed learning activity for required professional development. These predetermined experiences are designed by the district to address local needs and to meet local requirements rather than explicitly framed as opportunities to build an educative environment. Additionally, these mandated professional development experiences often fail to address teachers' needs, problems, and concerns as they seek ways to expand their knowledge and skills.

Educators who gravitate toward leadership roles may, in fact, be seeking avenues to fill this gap between locally controlled professional development and learner-centered experiences. When viewed through the lens of adult learning theory, a teacher's desire for leadership may stem from a need to address questions that they have about themselves and their students. This need and ability to be self-directing may require teachers to seek resources outside their school or district, positioning the teacher as an agent of change as they build relationships with members of professional networks and organizations.

Furthermore, these studies of professional learning communities and teacher leadership typically describe the formal structures shaping communities of learning and leadership (Desimone et al, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Penuel et al., 2007; Wei et al. 2009). Given the limited resources of time and money within many districts, such an emphasis on the formal structures and programming of professional development makes sense: district administrators seek models to implement in their local settings to address local concerns, models with proven results in similar settings and with features relatively easy to replicate and support (Richardson & Placier, 2009). However, these studies also reveal gaps in the research, specifically, an examination of the informal structures within schools: the strength of relationships among teachers may serve as a barrier to or a gateway for change. Also, these relationships among teachers serve as connections, pathways to knowledge and experience; these networks, within a

community of learning, share social practices to foster teacher growth (Lieberman, 2000; Lieberman & Wood, 2003; Penuel et al., 2007; Daly & Little, 2015).

How do social practices and communities of learning influence teacher growth?

In this section of my literature review, I focus on the National Writing Project as a model of professional development. I will summarize important aspects of this model, including social practices and refer to specific studies to highlight how this model aligns with my earlier discussion of the social transaction of learning, communities of practice, and leadership. I will also connect concepts of social networks to this National Writing Project model to highlight areas of future study to speak to my own interest in studying a local writing project site.

Since 1974, the National Writing Project (NWP) has created a national network of local sites to support the teaching of writing. This network leverages partnerships between university faculty and teachers in local districts through courses and summer institutes. The model of the NWP centers on three core activities: engaging teachers in discussions about relevant research and professional literature; providing time for teachers to write and share their writing with peers and mentors; and, teachers learning from other teachers, building from their expertise and knowledge about effective approaches for teaching writing. By leveraging teacher expertise and by promoting leadership opportunities, this model delivers to classroom teachers sustained, ongoing professional development, so that they can implement changes in their practice and foster student engagement and voice through their own writing.

Before examining elements of the NWP model, I present an explanation of communities of practice and social networks. Given the various ways professional learning communities have been enacted in educational settings, I give this attention to clarity not to prove or disprove the merits of a particular permutation of learning communities. Rather, I want to focus on the

characteristics of these frameworks to elucidate how the social practices in the NWP model support teacher growth.

Wenger, Trayner, and de Latt (2011) provide a helpful distinction between a community of practice and a social network, stating that they “prefer to think of community and network as two aspects of social structures in which learning takes place.”

The *network* aspect refers to the set of relationships, personal interactions, and connections among participants who have personal reasons to connect...

The *community* aspect refers to the development of a shared identity around a topic or set of challenges. It represents a collective intention – however tacit and distributed – to steward a domain of knowledge and to sustain learning about it (p. 9, emphasis added).

When thinking about a community of practice as a shared identity, then the boundaries of that community extend beyond the bounds of a school building or a district. For example, a local Writing Project allows teachers to develop a network of relationships regardless of when a teacher completed university coursework, using this network to support one another with their own writing. Often, teachers build similar networks through professional organizations, such as middle level educators who meet for an annual conference and sustain connections throughout the school year.

On the other hand, the Writing Project serves as a community of practice, using workshops, conferences, and presentations to sustain knowledge about effective practices in teaching literacy. In recent years, given the tools of technology in today’s world, a domain of knowledge can even be maintained across the distances between schools, districts, and even states, leveraging these established networks to share information and ideas.

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) discussed the challenges of distributed communities while offering important guidance for designing such communities. Many of their design elements are evident in the NWP, particularly this structure “that promotes both local variations and global connections” (p. 125). In their study of National Writing Project sites, Lieberman and Wood (2003) stated that the work of the NWP allows teachers to address the needs and goals within their schools and classrooms while relying on common practices across sites to maintain a recognizable and effective national model (p. 80).

For Lieberman and Wood, this cohesive identity arises from the social practices of these NWP sites. These researchers studied two sites, observing and interviewing participants at five-week summer institutes. Lieberman and Wood stated the NWP professional development begins with teachers – their knowledge, their expertise, their goals—an approach that “echoes the recursive processes of composing writing” (p. 20.) Theories about the process of writing frame the methods for teacher learning in the NWP. In her study of another summer institute, Whitney (2008) echoes the importance of viewing writing as a factor in teacher learning. Whitney discussed how writing shapes identity, and, like Wenger, suggested that identity is part of the learner process in the Writing Project.

This identity work helps to illuminate how learning (through writing) in the context of a teacher network is at least in part a process of coming to identify oneself as a member of the network’s community and of acquiring the conventions of participation in the activities of that community (p. 149).

The act of writing has the potential to foster changes in identities—as writers or as teachers of writing—but writing becomes the tool of mediation to connect the individual to a community and its practices.

Lieberman and Wood (2003) identified several social practices of the NWP which align with these core learning principles described by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson. These practices include “honoring teacher knowledge,” “turning ownership of learning over to learners,” and “encouraging a reconceptualization of professional identity and linking it to professional community” (p. 22). These practices also echo principles described by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson in their framework for adult learning: facilitating self-directed learning, and designing activities that tap into the experiences of the learners (2005, p. 65-66).

Furthermore, such a reconceptualization resembles Wenger’s discussion of negotiated meaning and identity, in which he describes the interplay between the individual and the community as people engage in practices and learning experiences. He explains that “learning -- whatever form it takes – changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning” (p. 226). This change happens as a result of a transaction between the learner, in this case, the teacher, and these socially shaped practices in the NWP. For Lieberman and Wood, such change occurs when teachers engage in reflection on their learning. During the summer institute, teachers engage in daily conversations with other teachers, talking about their own writing as well as researching and discussing what they wanted to know. Teachers are provided multiple opportunities to reflect on their learning and writing while finding opportunities to express themselves in writing of their own choosing. Participants in the institute learn new strategies and walk away with new ideas for their classrooms; more importantly, these teachers also commit to changing their teaching because of their experience as learners (p. 28).

In her study of seven teachers in one summer institute, Whitney (2008) also addressed this potential for change through participation in the NWP. Framing her research around Jack Mezirow’s (1991) explanation of transformational learning experiences, Whitney shared that

several teachers reported gains in confidence and competence through the summer institute: knowledge and skills acquired through presentations, writing, and feedback. However, Whitney reframes Mezirow's stance that competence and confidence grow when people assume new roles and relationships, claiming that confidence and competence are in fact "gained *through* those roles and relationships" (p. 173, emphasis in original). These new positions on teaching and perspectives on learning develop because these teachers gain expertise and experience within a community, in which they form relationships with their colleagues.

For Lieberman and Wood (2003), such roles and relationships remain rooted in specific social practices of the NWP: "situating human learning in practice and relationships," and "sharing leadership" (p. 22). Within this professional learning community, teachers recognize that they can depend on their colleagues for honest, open feedback. Lieberman and Wood explained that learners can participate in such critiques when tolerance and compassion exist in spaces where people are likely to make and share mistakes (p. 27). During the summer institute, teachers rotate leadership roles, whether sitting in the author's chair, demonstrating a lesson, or supplying snacks for the day. After the institute, Lieberman and Wood observed that these teachers became leaders in their buildings and districts (p. 29). These social practices related to teacher learning and leadership align with the characteristics of an educative environment described by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (p. 108). In particular, a respect for individual personalities and active participation in making decisions build relationships between learners and engender a willingness to assume roles to support the community and its practices.

How do relationships within social networks influence teacher growth?

In this final section of my literature review, I discuss ways in which social network theory and analysis offers important perspectives on educational change and professional

learning. I summarize key concepts central to understanding social network analysis, highlighting ideas most relevant to collegial interactions. I also discuss the role of teacher networks and leadership in making instructional changes while also pointing out the ways teachers find support within these networks. As I review literature related to social networks, I make connections to my earlier discussion of communities of learning, leadership, and the social nature of teaching and learning. I conclude this section by summarizing areas of future study offered by researchers in social network analysis, pointing out areas related to professional learning for teachers.

As teachers form relationships within communities of learning, they develop shared practices and a sense of shared identity. Through this community, teachers also access knowledge and resources from their colleagues. Social network theory refers to such knowledge and resources as social capital, and a growing body of research indicates that organizations interested in professional learning would benefit by examining more carefully how this social capital is embedded within the network of informal relationships among colleagues. More importantly, social network theory examines how this social capital—the knowledge, expertise, and information of individuals—can be accessed and leveraged through relationships within an organization (Daly, 2010). Social network theory suggests that the more social capital available within an organization, the more likely individuals have more access to knowledge and resources; as a result, this increased access increases the potential for more innovation—by individuals within a system or across the whole organization (Baker-Doyle, 2011).

Social network theorists examine the nature of these relationships as a way to measure the availability of and access to social capital within a network. In particular, researchers examine the ties, or connections, between individuals and across the network. People within an

organization form these ties when they develop relationships with one another. Researchers generally describe the reasons for these ties in one of three ways: homophily, proximity, and expertise. Researchers explain that homophily refers to the notion that people reach out to others who share the same structural position within the organization. Other studies suggest that proximity plays a role in tie formation as people will more likely form relationships based on physical or perceived distance within the organization. Finally, research suggests that individuals seek out others for advice or information for their expertise (Daly, 2011). Ultimately, the formation of these ties—these relationships between members of an organization—indicate how easily social capital can be accessed and shared.

This discussion of ties is important to understanding teacher networks because the characteristics of a network can influence how a teacher accesses the knowledge and resources within an organization. Also, the characteristics of a network can also determine how easily a teacher can share their experience and expertise with others. The literature suggests that these networks can be characterized as closed or open networks. Closed networks are characterized by tightly-knit connections between individuals, where many members of an organization are connected to each other. Such closed networks tend to develop shared norms and values while building support and trust among members. By contrast, open networks are characterized by weak ties, where members of an organization have fewer ties to each other. Researchers suggest that open networks may not share many norms, yet these networks provide a diversity of knowledge, perspectives and resources, often leading to innovation and increasing social capital (Lin, 1999; Baker-Doyle & Yoon, 2010).

In a study of teacher networks, Baker-Doyle (2011) investigated what kinds of networks build social capital and support for new teachers. Baker-Doyle framed concepts of support with

the *Continuum of New Teacher Support*, in which she described support practices as traditional to professional or reform. Baker-Doyle examined five beliefs or practices to analyze personal interactions and organizational approaches to new teacher support: time span, norms of teaching, professional interactions, occupation definition, and curricular agency (p. 11). Based on her study of new teachers, Baker-Doyle found that these new teachers received the most support from colleagues who collaborate informally within their buildings. These colleagues, whom Baker-Doyle identified as Intentional Professional Allies, interact frequently to develop strong ties. These Intentional Professional Allies provide more intense reform-based support for new teachers by helping these teachers navigate norms of their school, addressing and solving everyday problems. Relationships with these colleagues also helped new teachers foster confidence in their professional identity.

Baker-Doyle also identified individuals who provided influential support for these teachers, people not typically viewed as forms of support for teachers: Diverse Professional Allies. Baker-Doyle describes Diverse Professional Allies help teachers to challenge the traditional norms of a school and to consider different approaches to curriculum and instruction. Diverse Professional Allies typically become part of a more open network, forming diverse and distant relationships. Baker-Doyle states that network researchers describe such people as “boundary-crossing ties” (p. 22). These ties provide innovative information not necessarily available within an individual’s network; they may also offer important resources and support.

Returning to her initial question about what types of networks support new teachers, Baker-Doyle concluded that both open networks and closed networks are beneficial to teachers. Intentional Professional Allies form within close, often closed, networks, and these colleagues have the information and resources to address local, immediate concerns for the classroom and

within the school. On the other hand, Baker-Doyle argues that Diverse Professional Allies, having weaker ties within an open network, tend to foster innovation and to challenge the norms of instruction and practice. For Baker-Doyle, these findings related to types of support offer teachers ways to understand their own roles within a network; more importantly, this awareness of their roles and the types support available from colleagues allows teachers to cultivate agency as they determine for themselves how to develop their support networks (p. 17).

In addition to fostering agency in teachers, social network approaches in research support professional development by analyzing the influence of collegial relationships on teacher practice and school-wide reform. Penuel et al. (2012) studied the writing practices of 20 different schools engaged in a longitudinal study by the National Writing Project. Penuel and his colleagues described the extent of a teacher's changes in instructional practice after participation in sustained, content-focused professional development. Their study also explored how interactions between these teachers and their colleagues related to changes in collegial instructional practices. Penuel et al. found evidence that the duration of content-focused professional development influenced a teacher's instructional practices in writing. Additionally, this study indicated that other colleagues who had interactions with these teachers who had received this professional development frequently engaged in using these target practices for writing. In other words, these collegial interactions with a social network foster changes in practice within the school: teachers who participated in external professional development by the National Writing Project spurred internal changes as they shared their knowledge, expertise, and resources with colleagues in their schools.

In their study of five schools implementing reforms around literacy, Daly et al. (2009) found that the underlying social networks influenced the extent to which grade levels

implemented the reforms. Their study indicated that these social networks had the ability to support or to constrain the district's efforts to make changes. Daly and his colleagues concluded that three factors influence the extent to which the reform efforts were enacted in the school: the role of the principal, the informal social structures of the school, and the quality of relationships within grade-level teams. Their study suggests that organizations and systems interested in reforming practices would benefit from gathering social network data because social network analysis can reveal the ways in which collegial interactions can deepen the learning from professional development.

In addition to analyzing what characteristics led to changes in teacher practice, social network analysis can also examine the internal structures of a school community to understand how members access the social capital of a school, the resources and expertise within the community of professional learning. Penuel, Riel, Krause, and Frank (2009) studied two schools to examine the relationship between the social capital of a school and the implementation of schoolwide reforms in literacy instruction. Penuel and his colleagues found evidence that teacher social capital is important to making changes in a school. Furthermore, these researchers emphasized that systems and organizations would benefit from attending to the distribution of resources and expertise. In particular, the researchers found that supportive norms, leadership, and content-area expertise cultivated conditions in which teachers were willing to take risks as they made instruction improvements. Ultimately, these researchers believe that these cases provide further evidence that social network analysis offers useful ways to examine the efficacy of a strategy for achieving reform efforts within a school and across a district.

In this review of the literature, I first established the major contributions to my theoretical framework, highlighting theories relevant to a transactional process in learning. Next, I examined

numerous studies related to professional development experiences for teachers. In so doing, I revealed how particular features and social practices within learning communities promote changes in a teacher's practice and support a teacher's growth as a learner. Additionally, I discussed how approaches in social network analysis can inform reform efforts by examining informal structures within a school. With an emphasis on analyzing social capital, social network analysis also accounts for key principles in adult learning, specifically by understanding how teachers leverage and access expertise. I devote the closing section for a discussion of these practices with a view to future research so that educators and institutions might consider models of professional development which include these key elements and practices of teacher learning.

Discussion

The studies selected for this review demonstrate that the specific features of collaboration and practice-based activities in professional development have the most significant impact on changing instruction. In particular, framing these features within communities of practice where members share leadership roles yields even greater changes in teachers' understanding of effective methods of instruction and assessment and increases the likelihood of changing instructional practices. Furthermore, professional development activities which foster reflective thinking not only promote change to those educators participating in these experiences, but also serve as catalysts for change in school-wide practice.

Despite these positive findings, this review would be incomplete without addressing two concerns raised by researchers. First, researchers identified barriers to teacher improvement within communities of practice (Curry, 2008; Nave, 2000) and models of teacher leadership (York-Barr and Duke, 2004). These obstacles were usually related to school culture, roles and relationships, and structures. York-Barr and Duke (2004) discussed norms in the profession

which often inhibit teachers from assuming leadership roles: “one of the most prevailing norms in the teaching profession is egalitarianism, which fosters the view that teachers who step up to leadership roles are stepping out of line” (p. 272). However, these researchers also pointed to features fostered by communities of practice and teacher leadership as playing a significant role in overcoming these barriers. The literature clearly demonstrates the need for increased training and professional development to overcome these cultural, structural, functional, and relational impediments to improved practice and student learning.

Secondly, researchers revealed limitations in the formal and traditional approaches to professional development. In response, these researchers advocated for different approaches to professional development, calling for more strategic and systematic planning. Desimone et al. (2002) stated that their findings “support the idea that districts and schools might have to focus professional development on fewer teachers in order to provide the type of high-quality activities that are effective in changing teaching practice” (p. 105). Poekert (2012) argued that “rather than continuing to waste money on providing ineffective professional development to a broad number of teachers, it would be wiser to target these resources more narrowly to provide fewer teachers with more substantial and effective professional development that we know to be effective” (p. 186). Naturally, these conclusions raise questions about how to select teachers for this targeted professional development. Nevertheless, these researchers point to the reality that professional development models for teachers need to change.

Researchers consistently indicated the importance of reflective practice as a feature of professional development for improving instruction (Camburn, E., Rowan, B., & Taylor, J., 2003; Nave, 2000; Curry, 2008). However, no study indicated how this concept of reflexivity might drive systemic changes in transforming the delivery of professional development. In other

words, my review suggests that schools and districts could benefit from a framework for understanding the features of effective professional development, for assessing current models for professional development, and, more importantly, for considering what social practices effectively support teacher growth through their relationships within networks and communities of learning.

The literature in this review, however, deviates from this discussion about who receives quality professional development, instead addressing what kind of professional development experiences districts and schools should offer to educators. The U.S. Department of Education (Birman, 2009) found that, since the enactment of *No Child Left Behind* in 2001, “if professional development means participating in multiple sustained, active, coherent learning experiences that extensively focus on content, then most teachers were not receiving the type of professional development promoted by the law” (p.115).

These concerns about the type and scope of professional development highlight a limitation of this review: publications and studies focusing activities related to the formal structures within schools and districts. Although some models, such as critical friend groups and comprehensive school reforms, provided ongoing support facilitated by a coach, more research needs to investigate the role of professional development experiences that foster teacher learning beyond the contexts of a classroom or school building. For example, Borko (2004) draws on a situative perspective to describe teacher learning in other settings:

For teachers, learning occurs in many different aspects of practice, including their classrooms, their school communities, and professional development courses or workshops...To understand teacher learning, we must study it within these multiple

contexts, taking into account both the individual teacher-learners and the social systems in which they are participants (p. 4).

A conceptual framework of professional development must explore ways that teacher participation within networks and through professional organizations outside their districts can change practices and support teacher learning over time. Furthermore, research is needed to consider how such participation may serve some of these important functions of a community of practice, such as fostering shared roles and activating teacher leadership.

Lieberman and Miller (2005) discussed the importance of teacher leadership as a response to changes in schools. These authors list a number of understandings about teacher leaders, but two in particular highlight the importance of a community of practice:

- Teacher leaders learn to lead in communities of practice that promote collegueship and support risk-taking and experimentation.
- Teacher leaders reproduce these communities of practice when they work with novice and veteran teachers and create safe environments for professional learning (p. 161).

In other words, these teacher leaders adopt the social practices found within networks and communities of practice, such as summer institutes for the National Writing Project and introduce these practices into their schools and districts. When viewed from this perspective of teacher leadership, professional learning, then, becomes less about transmitting new ideas into the classroom to improve the quality of instruction and more about transforming the culture of learning for adults, and, by consequence, for students.

In their study of teacher change, Richardson and Placier (2001) addressed these ideas of transmitting new practices and transforming teacher learning through professional development. These authors noted that approaches to change in education had, until relatively recent years,

been dominated by an empirical-rational strategy. With this more traditional approach, research or theory outside the classroom introduces a new behavior, method, or program. Teachers, in turn, implement this change within their classroom (p. 906). Many teachers, administrators, and university faculty would simply describe the empirical-rational approach as “top-down” with the flow of decisions made through a chain of policymakers at federal- and state-level departments and passed down to the classroom teacher fulfilling these mandates in their classrooms. However, in their review of numerous studies examining the effectiveness of the empirical-rational approach, Richardson and Placier found that these staff development programs showed limited long-term effects (p. 918).

Richard and Placier also researched professional development programs based on a normative-reeducative approach, which could be described to as a “bottom-up” approach: the direction for change comes from the individuals within the local system and relies on the problem-solving abilities of the people involved in the process for change (p. 906). Richard and Placier explained that the normative-reeducative approach encourages collaboration within an organization to bring about collective change. These researchers noted that many of the programs based on this approach encouraged teachers to adopt a constructivist orientation: changes in beliefs about teaching methods, engaging in dialogue with colleagues about professional literature and instructional strategies, and reflecting on their own learning (p. 918-920). Furthermore, Richard and Placier identified community as an important element in these studies, concluding that “the development of a discourse community is productive in beginning this process of change” (p. 921). These researchers concluded that sustainable changes in education likely requires a normative-reeducative approach to change because current reforms call for

instructional changes which necessitate changes in beliefs, and, by consequence, changes in culture (p. 938).

Baker-Doyle (2011) came to a similar conclusion regarding teacher support networks, identifying five factors along a continuum of support: norms of teaching, professional interaction, time span, occupational definition, and curriculum agency (p. 11). Within this framework, this continuum of support, Baker-Doyle describes characteristics evident within two perspectives--traditional and reform. Based on her studies of new teachers, Baker-Doyle's findings echo research on teacher support, that high-quality support reflects characteristics of the reform perspective (p. 11).

Many of these characteristics of the reform perspective bear a close resemblance with the social practices of the National Writing Project identified by Lieberman and Wood (2003). Collectively, these researchers identified the need for encouraging collegiality so that teachers might develop relationships to refine their knowledge and practice. Likewise, teachers require collaboration through long-term interactions, rather than working in isolation and attempting to change practices based on single workshop experiences. Also, these researchers emphasize the need to view teachers as professionals, whereby their teacher knowledge and experience can initiate and sustain change. Finally, their research revealed the importance of supporting teacher reflection and agency, allowing teachers the freedom to examine curriculum and to adjust instruction based on students' needs (pp. 10-11).

Thus far in my discussion, I have identified several characteristics and practices which support teacher learning and guide teacher change. I have also described a body of research that demonstrates the need for schools and districts to shift from formal, traditional models of professional development—which mainly reinforce the transmission of strategies and programs

from training sites to classrooms—to reform models of teacher growth—which embody practices designed to transform beliefs, cultures, and relationships. In particular, I described three bodies of work directing areas of future study: Lieberman and Wood’s social practices in the National Writing Project, Baker-Doyle’s focus on social networks to support teachers, and Richardson and Placier’s research on planned change strategies. These three frameworks of change and teacher growth highlight a constellation of practices and characteristics which point to a need for examining not only the formal structures of reform networks like the National Writing Project model, but also the informal structures developed among educators. Researchers must recognize that recent reform efforts requiring cultural changes within institutions place teachers in a tenuous situation: educators often assume incalculable risks as they shift their beliefs and practices, particularly when the system in they teach either lacks the necessary features and practices to navigate such terrain or when the system does not make complementary shifts in practices.

Lieberman and Wood (2003) stated that their own research revealed the need for further study of the NWP model. These authors concluded that their study of two NWP sites offered an important lesson: “...if professional development is to become a part of a teacher’s life, it must combine not just new knowledge but a way of building new relationships within a professional community” (p. 51). Yet, Lieberman and Wood wondered how the NWP approach to learning changes teacher practice and improves student learning (p. 86). Furthermore, these researchers emphasized the ability of the NWP to link the inside knowledge of teachers and schools to the outside knowledge of university faculty and programs (p. 89). Such an organizational structure can overcome the boundaries of content areas and the isolation of classroom teachers; however,

Lieberman and Wood emphasize that the NWP deserves further study to better understand how this network manages such a complexity of practices.

Daly (2010) spoke to this need for future studies to examine external expertise as well as expertise within a system. “Successful organizations engage in both exploration (accessing resources from outside the system) and exploitation (accessing existing resources within a system) in order to learn and change” (p. 264). Teacher-consultants in the National Writing Project, for example, fulfill both these roles of exploration and exploitation. First, they operate within a bounded system, their school and/or district; yet they benefit from and remain connected to knowledge and resources outside the system -- the university supporting the local Writing Project as well as conferences and workshops sponsored by the local Writing Project.

Daly also argued that the stronger the professional network, the more likely that educators are to stay in the profession, feel a greater sense of efficacy, and engage in deeper conversations about teaching and learning (p.1). In other words, studies of social networks suggest that relationships among educators cultivate a regenerative process of practice, reflection, and praxis—moving teachers through this cycle to advocate for themselves and others about effective changes—in their classrooms and in their schools and districts. Furthermore, these networks serve as incubators for teacher leaders, who, in turn, influence colleagues beyond their own districts, forming relationships to affirm the wider enterprise of lasting reforms in education and of framing professional learning for teacher growth over time.

Closing

In this chapter, I presented a conceptual framework grounded in social learning, specifically outlining theories relevant to transactional construction. The purpose of this

theoretical discussion was to show how relationships between the learner and their environment, including other learners and teachers, allow individuals to shape meaning. In my review of the literature, I framed four questions to examine how various studies point to practices and characteristics of professional development that support teacher growth, particularly through social networks and communities of practice. Ultimately, my review reveals areas of further study, focusing on social practices and relationships within the Writing Project.

In the following chapter, I explain how I plan to explore these relationships within a local Writing Project. As I discussed in my literature review, my study views the teacher as a learner, relying on social networks to gain knowledge and experience while finding support and opportunities for growth within a community of practice. Because this study examined the practices of writers and teachers of writing, I framed these case studies to emphasize the individual stories of these educators and writers.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explored the relationships teachers form through professional networks, networks which range from working with colleagues in their buildings and districts to forming relationships with educators in professional organizations. This study also examined how these relationships serve as catalysts or incubators for fostering leadership, whereby classroom teachers use their growth and learning to impact changes in instruction at the school and/or district level. The goal of this study was to understand how these collegial relationships nurture and grow teachers' ability to, in turn, foster growth and change in one another. This study also endeavored to understand how these networks address the needs of teachers, recognizing that teachers are learners, and, as such, institutions should endeavor to support the development of their careers. I organized this chapter into the following sections: statement of purpose, definition of key terms, research design and data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and limitations.

Statement of Purpose

In my twenty-four years as a middle level educator, consultant, and presenter, I have observed how often teachers rely on relationships to support their growth as educators. Not only do these relationships extend beyond the boundaries of schools and districts, these interactions among colleagues often span across years and disciplines. These relationships typically grow from attendance at workshops, annual conferences, and university courses, particularly in settings where teachers share their expertise with other teachers. I have been fortunate to work in these settings, witnessing firsthand how these professional development experiences provide

effective strategies and approaches for educators and sustain their desire to improve learning for students as well as to change practices in their schools.

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind (ESEA 2001) and the adoption of the Common Core of State standards, many districts have shifted their attention to the professional development experiences of teachers in order to support the improvement of student learning. Much of the research examines formal structures of professional development, such as coursework, conferences, and in-service workshops (Birman, 2009; Wei et al. 2009). While studies point to positive gains in job-embedded, or site-based, models of professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Curry, 2008; Wei et al. 2009; Pella, 2011), more research is needed to explore the role of professional organizations and relationships with colleagues to foster effective teaching and learning. In particular, a growing body of research based on social network theory identifies informal structures which encourage collegiality and leadership development among teachers (Daly & Little, 2015; Moolenaar, 2012; Penuel et al., 2012; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Baker-Doyle, 2011).

Since 1974, the National Writing Project (NWP) has created a national network of local sites to support the teaching of writing. This network leverages partnerships between university faculty and teachers in local districts through courses and summer institutes. The model of the NWP centers on three core activities: engaging teachers in discussions about relevant research and professional literature; providing time for teachers to write and share their writing with peers and mentors; and, teachers learning from other teachers, building from their expertise and knowledge about effective approaches for teaching writing. By leveraging teacher expertise and by promoting leadership opportunities, this model delivers to classroom teachers sustained, ongoing professional development, so that they can implement changes in their practice

(Whitney, 2008) and engage with a community of learning (Lieberman, 2000; Kaplan, 2008). Furthermore, Lieberman and Wood (2003) identified several social practices of the NWP which not only support teacher's growth as teachers and as writers, but also allow educators to assume new roles and positions as teachers of their colleagues.

While the literature indicates a number of benefits to the NWP model in supporting professional development for teachers, much less is known about the ways in which relationships among teacher consultants influence teacher growth. This study intends to build on recent research on social networks and communities of practice. I will explore the relationships within a closed network of teachers who completed the spring course and summer institute of the Maine Writing Project. This network of teachers also provides a unique opportunity to contribute to the research because these teachers work within the same school district. Roughly twelve teachers in this local school district have become teacher-consultants (TCs) in the State Writing Project. Compared to other districts in Maine, such a number of TCs in one district is a rare occurrence. This study will contribute new understandings of the ways in which the National Writing Project model of professional development fosters relationships to support the growth and development of teachers of writing.

Definition of Key Terms

Agency: related to the concept of self-efficacy, in that a person has the ability to bring about a desired change or effect in their practice

Andragogy: a model, or theory, about adult learning, articulating principles, characteristics, and practices different than pedagogy (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 2005)

Community of Practice: a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion

about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis. (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4)

Praxis: refers to a process through which a teacher reflects on the work they do in their classrooms and examines this work under the lens of research and collaboration. This process of reflection allows teachers to take action on their practice and contribute to the wider body of knowledge about effective practice (Green et al. 2013; Latta & Kim, 2010; Lieberman & Miller, 2005).

Self-efficacy: the belief that one can successfully carry out a specific behavior to achieve a particular outcome (Bandura, 1977)

Social Capital: the relationships and memberships one has in a community, and the possible resources derived from these relationships (Baker-Doyle, 2011, p. 4). A member of a network accesses these resources to increase the likelihood of success in purposive action (Daly, 2010, p. 4).

Social Network: individuals who are connected to one another through a set of different relations or ties. Resources (communication, knowledge, innovation, practices) flow through channels between people and organizations (Daly, 2010, p.4).

Teacher-Consultant: through a local site of the National Writing Project, teachers participate in coursework and a summer institute to write, learn about writing practices, lead workshops, and advocate for writing in their schools through curriculum development and professional learning experiences.

Research Design and Data Collection

In order to explore the research questions, I conducted a multiple case study of four teacher-consultants (TCs) from a local site of the National Writing Project. I selected these four

primary informants from study participants – those TCs within a local school district who agreed to complete the initial study survey. My approach to the study was qualitative, following an interpretivist framework while relying on empirical evidence to define and describe the sample of participants. Data collection consisted of surveys, interviews, and document analysis.

Following a case-study design, this research focused on TCs from a State Writing Project who currently teach within the same school district. This district provided a unique opportunity to examine these questions since roughly a dozen TCs work in here. First, such a large number of TCs in one district is rare for Maine, and, second, little research exists which examines teacher-consultants within the same district.

Population and sample

At the time of my study, twelve teachers in a local school district participated in the National Writing Project to become teacher-consultants. This group represented a diverse sample ranging across grade levels, disciplines, years of experience, and educational backgrounds. I invited all of these TCs to serve as participants in a survey. In addition to collecting some basic demographics from each teacher, such as years taught, year(s) of participation in the Writing Project spring and summer courses, participants also indicated how frequently they engage in Writing Project activities as well as whom they ask for advice on instruction and resources. I explored participant responses for patterns and connections, drawing conclusions about the ways in which these teachers seek out information from colleagues and published sources. Based on the analysis of the survey results, I determined four primary informants to examine more closely their experiences as writers and teachers within the Writing Project as well as within their teaching roles.

I selected these informants based on their network of relationships indicated on their surveys. Because I investigated how relationships among teacher consultants influence growth and development, I evaluated the survey data to determine informants based on two criteria:

- How frequently this person was identified by others as influencing their practice; and,
- How frequently this person identified others within the network as influencing their practice

In other words, I wanted to identify those teachers nominated by their colleagues as important to their work, and I wanted to learn how often a teacher identified colleagues within the State Writing Project network as important to their work as teacher-writers. These informants reflect a range of teaching levels, from elementary through high school, and eleven to thirty-six years of experience. Each of these teachers has taught in this district for several years, and I know each of the informants through our shared network in the State Writing Project. I have also attended professional development activities with them, such as literacy conferences held locally and regionally.

I also reviewed responses for levels of participation in the State Writing Project activities as well as roles within the advice networks identified by the survey participants. For example, I learned that some teachers have remained highly active in the State Writing Project, attending conferences, presenting at conferences, and serving leadership roles. These more active informants have been identified by other participants as someone to whom they seek out for advice. As such, this case prompted me to interview this teacher to understand this informant's experience. By contrast, another participant in the survey showed little activity within the State Writing Project and identified fewer relationships with other members of this network. However, this teacher reached out often to their colleagues within the network for advice. As such this

informant served as an important case to understand how this teacher's relationship to colleagues and the local Writing Project support their teaching and learning.

Instruments

I designed a thirty-item survey to gather biographical information about each participant and to ascertain how these teacher-consultants seek knowledge from their colleagues and other sources (see Appendix B). Following guidelines from Prell (2012) and models from Gedney (2018), I designed this instrument to help me answer how relationships among teacher-consultants influence their ability to bring about change in their school, district and beyond.

For example, item sixteen on the survey asks respondents to consider how they benefit from another colleague, such as learning concrete teaching strategies, teaching a wider range of students more effectively, using assessment to inform instruction, keeping up-to-date on research, meeting local and state standards, connecting to professional development, or sharing personal writing. I borrowed six of these categories from a questionnaire created by the Inverness Research Associates (2008) in their annual surveys of National Writing Project summer institutes. Since these categories informed findings in previous studies about similar communities of practice in the National Writing Project, I designed this item to examine what benefit each informant received from individuals within their school, district, or beyond their district.

On item eighteen, I listed these same categories, yet I asked respondents to indicate how frequently they consulted other sources for this information. Asking similar information about different sources allowed me to compare the two items on the survey. For example, when these teacher-consultants ask for information from colleagues, what information do they seek? When they investigate information on their own, what information do they look for?

This descriptive data also allowed me, at least in part, to answer how relationships among teacher-consultants influenced their roles as leaders. For example, do multiple participants identify the same colleague as a source of information? Do they identify this person for the same reason? Such data yielded avenues of inquiry during my interviews, using these results to follow up with informants about their perceived role as a leader within their network. The biographical information also provided details about leadership roles because I asked respondents to indicate how often they assumed leadership as mentors, planned events for or presented at conferences, and/or participated in summer writing programs.

Finally, I used semi-structured interviews to learn about the role of relationships in influencing their sense of efficacy as writers and teachers of writing. The first interview asks informants to share their lives as students and teachers so that I can frame a foundational picture on which to build questions in a second and/or third interview. I drafted a set of potential questions based on a toolkit created by Wenger, Trayner, de Laat, M. (2011). These second and third interviews focus more specifically on results from the survey, such as a visual map of their network, and each informant's experience within the local Writing Project. In particular, I will ask each informant to share a story in which they provide concrete examples of how this network of educators helped them as a teacher and/or as a writer.

Data Collection

In the first step of this study, I invited all TCs in this school district to complete a survey (Appendix B). The survey instrument consisted of closed- and open-ended items. For example, some questions provided demographics of participants: the year that they participated in the local Writing Project, number of years taught, number of years in this district, grade levels and subjects taught. Closed-ended items relied on five-point Likert scales to allow respondents to rate

the quality of a professional development experience. As discussed, these survey items are based on items similar to items on previous studies of the National Writing Project (Inverness Research Associates, 2008). I also asked respondents to indicate ways in which they have participated in the State Writing Project events, such as conferences, retreats, and mentoring. Finally, I asked these TCs to explain their decisions for choosing whether or not to participate in these activities offered by the State Writing Project, such as the fall conference, summer retreats, or writing events. I believe that understanding why teachers choose not to engage in professional development provides information as equal in importance to knowing what draws teachers to learning experiences.

Once I reviewed the survey data, I invited four teachers to interview about their experiences with the State Writing Project and the work in their schools. I used a semi-structured interview protocol with each informant. Initially, I had planned for the three-interview series recommended by Seidman (2013); however, I was able to complete each interview in one session. Although this study is not phenomenological by design, I explored the role of relationships in influencing instructional decisions.

I first asked informants to share their lives as students and teachers so that they might offer details about experiences related to writing, their decisions to become teachers, and what role their relationships with others shaped their decisions to become teachers of writing. My questions then focused more on the details of each person's experience in the State Writing Project - the spring course and the summer institute as well as professional development offerings. These interviews provided an opportunity for informants to reflect on their participation in the State Writing Project and how these experiences have shaped who they are - as a writer, as an educator, and as a learner. In addition, these interviews allowed me and these

informants to consider how their relationships with other members of the State Writing Project influenced their growth as a writer and teacher of writing.

Finally, I asked the informants to reflect on their relationships with other members of their cohort – fellow students and mentors in the State Writing Project. Because I asked the informants on the survey to identify people within their network in the last twelve months, I wanted to provide the informants the opportunity to talk about those individuals within the State Writing Project who had a strong influence on their teaching and writing during this period of time. This interview allowed the informants to identify individuals during their coursework and during professional development events who played a significant role in their growth as a teacher and writer and to reflect on how that individual influenced their present work.

Data Analysis

Once I received the completed surveys from respondents, I reviewed the demographics from the participants: years of teaching experience, their attendance at events planned by the State Writing Project, how often they consulted colleagues, and how much colleagues influenced their practice. As part of my analysis, I averaged the frequencies by activity and respondent.

Next, I examined participant responses to collegial sources of knowledge: whom they consulted, how often, and the primary benefit that they received from their colleagues. I then described these results by way of summarizing patterns in their responses. For example, I learned that some of the participants communicate multiple times each week and that these colleagues teach within the same building. I also identified patterns in the primary benefits, such as a majority of participants indicated that they sought advice on concrete learning strategies to use in the classroom.

The survey instrument also asked participants to indicate how often they consulted published sources of knowledge, such as social media and professional literature. In addition to describing patterns and summarizing general findings, I also used the data to make comparisons to their responses about collegial sources of knowledge. In the survey, items 16 and 18 addressed the same areas of teaching and learning, so I compared how frequently participants consulted colleagues and sources of professional knowledge for each area. For example, I share dhow often teachers consulted colleagues about the latest research in comparison to seeking out the latest research from other sources. Table 3.1 displays the results of this analysis, and this data allowed me to identify how often these teachers consulted colleagues for various reasons.

Table 3.1					
<i>Mean Frequency Teachers Consulted Colleagues & Resources</i>					
Eight Reasons for Consulting Resources	Mean Frequency of Interaction from 0-5				
	A. Colleagues From School	B. Colleagues From School & District	C. Colleagues Outside District	D. Colleagues In Network (A-C)	E. Published Resources (see Table 4.2)
1. Providing concrete strategies to use in the classroom	2.29	1.68	0.76	1.20	3.13
2. Offering ways to teach writing to a wider range of students	2.14	1.58	0.67	1.10	2.38
3. Helping to examine student work	1.79	1.32	0.52	0.90	2.43
4. Keeping up-to-date on the latest research and practices in teaching writing	1.92	1.39	1.14	1.26	2.50
5. Meeting local and state standards	1.86	1.37	0.57	0.95	1.50
6. Seeking professional development	2.29	1.68	1.52	1.60	2.00
7. Giving feedback on their writing	2.36	1.74	1.45	1.59	1.75
8. Guiding them to seek out leadership opportunities	1.83	1.29	1.05	1.16	1.00
Mean of the Means	2.06	1.50	0.96	1.22	2.09

Table 3.1

Because this study examined relationships with a network, I also analyzed the survey data for my four informants using online mapping software from Kumu (<https://kumu.io>). These maps provided a visual depiction of a person’s network to explore patterns and connections among colleagues. The software also provided measurements common to social network analysis allowing me to describe details about the whole network based on participants and about the individual, or ego, networks of my informants. I focused my analysis on size, degree, closeness, and density because these measures allowed me to analyze the nature of relationships within the whole network as well as to understand the role individuals have with other members of the network. In Table 3.2, I explain each of these terms; in Chapter 4, I provide a detailed explanation of each of these measures as I discuss my analysis.

Table 3.2	
<i>Definitions of Measures Commonly Used in Social Network Analysis</i>	
Measure	Definition
Size <i>Members of a Social Network</i>	Size measures the total number of people in an individual network. This number includes the person and the people that they name in their network.
Degree <i>Involvement in Social Network</i>	Degree identifies the number of connections, or lines, from one person to another person in their network. Degree is a measure of centrality and identifies the important connectors in a network.
Closeness <i>Access to Colleagues & Information in a Social Network</i>	Closeness, another measure of centrality, takes into account the entire network of ties and measures the distance between one person and another. A high score (closer to 1) indicates that an individual can access information or spread influence more easily than other members
Density <i>Connections to Colleagues in a Social Network</i>	As a measure of a network, density can be calculated as proportion — dividing the number of connections in a network by the total number of possible connections.
Table 3.2	

In addition to a qualitative social network analysis, I adopted a case study approach by using multiple-case sampling and cross-case analysis in order to understand how collegial interactions - participation in professional networks and relationships with colleagues - influence teaching practices. Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) argue that “multiple-case sampling adds *confidence* to findings” (p. 33). Therefore, I proposed four cases because these informants shared

a number of properties which yielded thick data for me to analyze through coding methods and narrative analysis.

For example, each informant taught within the same school district, some within the same building. As teachers of writing, the informants shared a common body of knowledge related to literacy instruction, whether through their formal training in college, through their years of teaching experience, or as a result of district-wide literacy initiatives. Additionally, these informants shared a similar learning experience through the State Writing Project and they have developed ongoing relationships with colleagues in this network. Despite different years of completion, these informants encountered similar routines, protocols, and professional literature in their courses. Finally, cross-case analysis served as a way “to enhance *generalizability or transferability to other contexts*” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 101). By analyzing data across these four cases, I was able to understand how a phenomenon—collegial interactions—related to growth in teacher learning and to changes in instructional practices.

To analyze the transcripts of the interviews, I identified start codes based on my research questions and the interview questions. To generate this initial list of codes, I listed key terms and concepts which would likely emerge from an initial analysis of the transcripts. Using Dedoose, I created codes related to forming an identity as a writer and teacher, experiencing challenges in learning and teaching, and finding support from colleagues and mentors. After reviewing these questions and key ideas, I generated tentative coding categories to enter into Dedoose. This coding process allowed me to generate broader themes or categories; I also documented my interpretations in memos as the themes emerged in the second cycle of coding (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3	
<i>Coding Scheme</i>	
Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a writer • As a teacher • Impact of teachers (K-12) • Impact of colleagues
Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of community • Collegial support • Influence of mentors • Influencing knowledge • Influencing enthusiasm
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Opportunities • School/District Initiatives • Influence on colleagues
Table 3.3	

Furthermore, I analyzed the transcripts of the interviews following a model described by Riessman (1993) who offered an investigator’s example of Labov’s method of transcription: abstract, orientation, complicating action, and resolution/coda (p. 35). This method allowed me to reduce each transcript to its essential elements so that I might uncover broader ideas linked across my informants’ stories of themselves as young writers, as teachers of writing, and as teacher leaders.

To test or confirm the findings, this study, by design, relied on the triangulation of data sources: multiple cases in different sites and the examination of artifacts. I asked for feedback from colleagues, individuals unfamiliar with my study who provided feedback about my conclusions and suggested alternate viewpoints. Traditionally, qualitative studies involve a process for intercoder agreement (Creswell and Poth, 2018) or inter-rater reliability whereby additional coders apply a set of established codes to a transcript. However, I invited two colleagues to offer feedback on my narrative analysis of informant interviews, focused on two

areas: what conclusions they reached from the data and how well the narrative plot structure progressed from my discussion of identity, agency, and advocacy. I used their reviews to explore the extent to which my colleagues reached similar conclusions and raised different interpretations. I also considered their insights about the relationship between my social network analysis and narrative analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Given the nature of the surveys and interviews, I sought the informed consent from participants and assured them that this information would be used only for the purposes of this study. Second, I anonymized all data and used pseudonyms for participants and primary informants to guarantee confidentiality.

Prell (2012) discussed the issue of gathering data and ethical concerns related to studying social networks. In gathering data through a questionnaire, Prell reviewed options for the researcher, either through a roster of identified actors or with free and fixed recall (pp. 69-70). I opted to use the free-recall technique, and I asked respondents to list all the names of the people that they could recall within their network. With the roster approach, I could only list the names of the teacher-consultants within the district, asking my participants how often they consulted these colleagues, and the fixed-choice approach would have placed an upper limit on participant's nominations.

Prell explained that decisions about the design of the questionnaire relate to decisions made earlier by the researcher about the sample population. In social network analysis, the researcher has the choice to study ego or bounded networks or to study complete, unbounded, networks. Studying an ego network, the researcher gathers data on the immediate, personal networks surrounding each respondent; as with traditional research methods, these participants

can be selected randomly. However, when studying a complete network, Prell pointed out that the issue of population and sampling within a network boundary becomes more complicated. According to Prell, a network boundary “refers to the boundary around a set of actors that the researcher deems to be the complete set of actors in the network study” (p. 66).

I chose to study a specific set of actors within the school district—the teachers of the district who are also teacher-consultants from the State Writing Project. I also wanted respondents to identify actors—other teacher-consultants and instructors—outside their schools, at other schools within the district or in the wider network of the State Writing Project. Following this nominalist approach (Prell, 2012), I asked teachers to identify in their network any colleagues associated with the State Writing Project. By asking teachers to limit their networks to members of the State Writing Project, I could potentially ignore other ties influencing decisions made by these educators about their practices in teaching writing. However, the interviews with informants revealed more information about some of these additional ties.

Regardless of these design choices, Prell also addressed ethical concerns unique to social network analysis, particularly issues around anonymity. If I had used the roster approach, my respondents would have seen the names of the other participants in my study, which, as Prell indicated, may have caused some respondents discomfort knowing their participation was no longer anonymous. Because I wanted to learn how relationships within this network influence teaching and writing, I asked participants to list the names of colleagues within the State Writing Project who were important to their work as teachers of writing and/or as a writer. My decision to use a free-recall and fixed-choice approach, by design, relates to one of my sub-questions: how relationships with their colleagues influence their sense of self-efficacy as teacher-writers.

In other words, I wanted participants to feel comfortable listing colleagues they consider important to their work, listing as many as eight people within the State Writing Project. My analysis of participant responses also answered another sub-question related to leadership: how relationships influence their roles as leaders within their school, district, and in the wider network of the State Writing Project. Additionally, this free-recall from participants allowed me to identify connectors within the network. The connectors serve an important role within a school community and within the wider network, providing support and information for teachers (Baker-Doyle, 2011). My interviews with the informants also revealed how these connectors, particularly people in leadership roles, influence multiple teachers in the network.

Prell emphasized that the solution lies through informed consent, explaining to participants how I plan to use the data, and how I will take steps to anonymize the data in my analysis and reporting of findings. Furthermore, I will explain that this data will not be used for evaluation purposes, sharing results with district administrators to improve programs of instruction or with leaders in the local Writing Project to adjust their model of fostering growth in the teaching of writing.

I would also make clear the purpose of the study and the potential benefits - to the local Writing Project and the local school district. This national model of professional development has demonstrated success for decades; however, very few professional development experiences build on this concept of teacher-based learning. This study can contribute to the larger project of informing conceptual models for effective professional development while offering local districts a mechanism for evaluating its current practices with supporting teacher growth.

Researcher Bias

I completed the coursework for the National Writing Project to become a teacher-consultant in 2015. I have also participated in numerous activities, including serving as a member of the local Writing Project Leadership Circle. Equally important, I have worked nearly twenty years in this local district, affording me the opportunity to develop professional relationships with many of the participants. Given my relationship with and support of NWP and my years of teaching in this district, I addressed my positionality as researcher and participant to prevent my bias and perspective from negatively influencing the study. The cross-case analysis, coding, and member checking served as checks on these potential biases.

In addition to guarding against my own bias, I recognized how my presence as a researcher affected informants. Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) discussed this potential for the researcher as an outsider to influence informants as the insiders (p. 298). In many respects, I identify more as an insider: a member of the writing project network and the district community, both as a teacher and resident. For example, some teachers might have included me in their advice-seeking network. Depending on my relationship with informants and how often that I work with them, I clarified my intentions for participants: the purpose of my study and my role as a researcher, not as a colleague passing judgment or evaluating performance in some way.

I also recognized the possibility of elite bias (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014; Krathwohl, 2009) in selecting informants for interviews. Although I invited all teacher-consultants within the district to complete the survey, I chose only a few teachers for a series of interviews. Since my research questions focused on the influence of relationships among teacher-consultants, I did not overlook data suggesting that these relationships have little effect on a

teacher's growth. In fact, such a case would warrant closer examination to learn more about this person's experience with this professional network.

Because I have experienced such a positive relationship with the Writing Project, I must check my assumptions. In other words, I cannot assume that all teachers share this experience with professional development activities and within this community of practice. In fact, my stronger ties to this network may have as much influence on my practice as another person's weaker ties to the Writing Project.

As I suggested in my opening to this section, the method of triangulation offers a reliable approach to confirming findings. Although this district serves as a case for my study, each teacher within their distinct locations—one of three elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school—represents a case; as a data source and a method of analysis, this cross-case approach allows me to examine similarities and differences to strengthen my findings. Miles et al. proposed that cross-case analysis can enhance generalizability and transferability (p. 101). Although my study examines a specific network and a model of teacher learning, these findings may have broader implications for professional development experiences of educators in general.

Finally, I will rely on member checking to receive feedback from participants about the accuracy of quotations. Also, I propose consulting with Writing Project colleagues outside this school district to review my narrative analysis of informant transcripts. This step would allow me to corroborate and to challenge my findings as well as consider how bias may influence the data.

Since this study seeks to understand how advice-seeking networks influence teacher growth, using the survey results with informants as part of the interviews may reveal important characteristics of information-sharing among these teacher-consultants. If, for example, multiple informants identify a participant as an important influence in their teaching, I would like to

explore more in depth the nature of such relationships. For example, I might ask informants what qualities that they think are important when deciding to seek out advice from a colleague. I could also ask what qualities the informant possesses that might encourage others to seek advice from them.

On the other hand, multiple informants may identify a member of the Writing Project who works outside the school district – at another school or at a university. I would explore with informants the question of why teachers might seek advice from colleagues outside their own schools. Again, a closer examination of the survey results with informants may uncover important elements about this advice-seeking network and about this community of practice.

Finally, semi-structured interviews would provide the third source of data. I would determine selection of my primary informants after an initial analysis of the survey data. Although I plan to interview three or four informants, I would seek candidates who represent the network as a whole: individuals who seem closely connected to others, serving as brokers of information, while also including an informant who seems to have fewer ties to this community of practice. These interviews provide opportunities for these informants to share early experiences as writers and teachers, and their stories offer another tool for examining the role of relationships as influences on their growth as writers and teachers of writing. In other words, their stories determine the direction and structure of this study rather than my theoretical framework or hypothesis imposed upon their stories.

Possible Limitations

Although Creswell and Ploth (2018) point out limitations of convenience sampling (p. 159), I proposed this method of sampling out of necessity: working full-time as a teacher required me to locate willing subjects whom I could easily access. Additionally, as I shared

previously, social network analysis requires a researcher to make decisions about the kind of network being studied. In my case study, I purposefully selected a bounded network of teacher-consultants so that I could understand the ways relationships within this network influenced a teacher's growth and practice as a teacher and, potentially, as a writer.

The sample size could be considered a limitation; however, the experience of teachers in local writing projects is well-documented in multiple studies. These interviews yield thick data, generating stories which connect to the larger narrative of transforming teacher learning through the National Writing Project's model of professional development. Since my study examined the phenomenon of collegial relationships, this sample drew from individuals who could identify multiple relationships with colleagues within the Writing Project. These informants were more likely to report factors which contributed to their growth as teachers and writers. However, social network theory recognizes that strong and weak ties within a person's ego network can have a similar influence in building knowledge for that individual. Despite the body of literature documenting the experience of teachers in the Writing Project, I recognized that the members of this network may not have represented the experiences across the sites of the National Writing Project.

Finally, as I discussed above, my own role as a teacher-consultant and teacher within this district could be interpreted as a limitation in this study. Therefore, I addressed my position in terms of interacting with participants and analyzed the data to prevent my own role from negatively influencing the study. By using field notes, memos, and a research journal, I ensured the reliability of this study, and I used these records to bracket my experience, as advised by Creswell and Poth (2018).

As I discussed earlier, I represent the dual roles of insider and an outsider, so my knowledge of this district and the local Writing Project as well as my relationships with colleagues had potential effects on the data and its generalizability. I remained cognizant that participants may be tempted to divulge too little or even too much because of our shared experiences and roles. Given the voluntary nature of the study, I also recognized that I may not have accessed all of the data available and relevant to this study.

However, I ensured that my methods of collecting and analyzing data strengthened the reliability and validity of my study. First, I framed my study within well-established theory in social science and educational research. Second, using a case-study approach allowed me to compare and contrast findings from my respondents to additional studies. Third, by triangulating my data through surveys, interviews, and documents, I increased the integrity of my study so that my findings were not dependent on a single measure or method of collection.

Closing

Having given so much attention to the design and ethics of this study, my ultimate goal rests near to the mission of the National Writing Project: to examine the practices shared among teachers that foster relationships which bring about changes in teaching and writing. In sharing these stories of specific cases of teacher-consultants working in the same network as well as the same district, I want their voices to impart lessons and experiences worthy of attention, both in academic research and in teaching praxis . Their reflections and insights offer researchers and educators multiple perspectives on ways to regenerate teaching and learning.

CHAPTER IV RESULTS

This study was designed to understand how the relationships among teacher consultants in the National Writing Project influence their growth as teachers and writers. Since a local school district contained twelve teacher-consultants, I wanted to learn how these relationships within their schools and within the district supported their writing instruction and their personal writing. Because the State Writing Project serves as a professional network across the state, I also wanted to know how relationships in this broader network influenced teacher-consultants, both in their practice and in their writing.

My study began with this broad question: **In what ways do relationships among NWP teacher-consultants influence a teacher-consultant's growth as a learner, writer, and teacher of writing?** I sought to understand how interactions with other teachers offered sources of knowledge about the teaching of writing, shared specific strategies to use in their classroom, and provided opportunities for feedback. I also wanted to understand how frequently teacher-consultants sought out their colleagues for information about teaching writing or for feedback on their personal writing. Finally, I was curious to learn how much particular colleagues within their school, districts, and wider network of the State Writing Project influence their enthusiasm for teaching.

In order to discover answers to my broad question, I focused my inquiry through three sub-questions:

1. How do relationships among teacher-consultants influence their sense of efficacy as writers and teachers of writing?

2. How do relationships among teacher-consultants influence their roles as leaders within their school, district, and in the wider network of the State Writing Project?
3. How do relationships among teacher-consultants influence their ability to bring about change in their school, district and in the wider network of the State Writing Project?

In my own experience as a teacher, I have learned that the influence of other educators has allowed me to thrive, whether working with fellow classroom teachers through professional organizations or learning from educators in graduate courses. More specifically, my experience in a State Writing Project site has addressed a need not fulfilled by other professional development: my life as a writer. Given my own experiences as an educator seeking ways to grow in my knowledge, practice, and enthusiasm, I suspected that other educators found support and inspiration from colleagues outside their schools and districts.

Beyond identifying whom these teachers sought for advice, the first step in my study was to learn why these educators interact with their colleagues. I developed a survey instrument to ask colleagues within a closed network—members of a State Writing Project site and employees in the same school district—how often they interacted with colleagues and for what reasons. I also wanted to know what sources of information—colleagues and publications—these educators sought as they developed their practice as teachers and writers (see Appendix C).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the literature suggests that the relationships within a community of learning and social network support practices enabling the growth of teachers, particularly teachers of writing (Nave, 2000; Lieberman and Wood, 2003; Dearman and Alber, 2005; Curry, 2008). I felt motivated by my own experience in the National Writing Project to explore how relationships among teachers influence their growth. Specifically, I wanted to

investigate a network of teacher-consultants within the same school district to learn how these relationships influence their teaching and learning.

I incorporated social network analysis into a case-study to investigate the influence of colleagues and writing practices. I applied measures common to social network analysis in order to describe characteristics of the whole network as well as to learn about the networks of individuals, also known as ego networks. By design, my study focused on these teacher-consultants who participated in the same National Writing Project site and who taught within the same school district.

Interviews with four participants provided most of my data, allowing me to develop a picture of each informant's story as a writer and a teacher, to pursue in greater detail their responses on the survey, and, ultimately, to understand more clearly the influence of colleagues in the State Writing Project on their teaching, learning, and writing.

In this chapter, I discuss the results of this survey, my analysis of this network, and details from these interviews; however, I preface this discussion with an explanation of the structure of this chapter to clarify my approach to telling the story of these educators and their relationships with their colleagues. I open with my analysis of the survey in order to establish the terrain of my study—how frequently and for what reasons educators seek information from their colleagues. This comparison of participant responses informed my selection of interview questions and informants, and these findings also frame my analysis of this network of teachers, selecting measures which align with the purpose of this study and my research questions.

I follow my discussion of the survey results with an analysis of the whole network. In social network analysis, the whole network approach allows the researcher to consider patterns and the structure of the network (Daly, 2010; Prell, 2012). First, I present a visual map of this

network to display the relationships present in this network, and, second, I discuss specific measures of the network, such as density and presence of communities, to examine how these relationships—more specifically, these interactions with colleagues—influence the teaching of writing. The analysis of the whole network provides a backdrop against which I can provide a more detailed discussion of individuals within the network.

As I discuss the informants of my study, I open with an analysis of their individual networks, offering measures to compare and contrast the details of the whole network. This analysis allows me to revisit data from the survey—results specific to each informant—to highlight elements unique to each case. I weave into this discussion statements made by the informants, using their own words to connect the quantitative measures to this qualitative data. Ultimately, I intend for my discussion to support my broader purpose of centering my study around the stories of these teachers. As discussed in chapter 3, my approach also aligns with Baker-Doyle's (2015) mixed-methods model of examining networks in stories and stories in networks (p. 76).

Finally, I close with an examination of the themes present in the informants' statements collected during the interviews. I asked for feedback from two colleagues to examine my selection of themes and to provide feedback on my analysis. In effect, I return to a discussion of the whole network, albeit a smaller group of four teachers, for two reasons: first, to focus the discussion on my research questions, and, two, to identify emergent ideas explored in my final chapter (Chapter 5), implications for professional development of teachers and considerations for future study.

Survey Results

I asked participants to identify up to eight people in the local Writing Project whom they thought were important to their work as a teacher of writing and/or as a writer. I invited eleven teachers within this district to respond to the survey; eight of those teachers participated. As a whole network, these eight participants named the same number of colleagues from their school and out of their district. In total, the respondents identified sixteen colleagues from their own school, six colleagues in their district, but not their school, and twenty-one colleagues outside their district. These teachers reported that they interacted weekly to multiple times each week with colleagues from their schools while they reported far fewer interactions with colleagues out of their district, typically several times a year.

These educators indicated that the most influential colleagues in their network were people with whom they interacted least often. When asked how much a colleague has influenced their understanding of teaching and learning about writing, these teachers indicated that out-of-district colleagues were more influential than colleagues in their district. For example, when asked how much each colleague influenced their understanding of teaching and learning about writing, the mean of their responses equaled 3, matching the rating scale on the survey for “somewhat influential.” On the other hand, the participants indicated that the influence of out of district was “very influential,” the average of their responses equal to 3.86. By comparison, when participants were asked to rate how much colleagues revitalized their enthusiasm for teaching and/or writing, the results were remarkably similar. For colleagues from their school or district, the average of their responses was 2.9 whereas the average for out of district colleagues was 3.81. In other words, these teachers indicated that their closest colleagues were “somewhat

influential” on their enthusiasm for teaching while colleagues with whom they interact less frequently had been “very influential” on their enthusiasm.

Having established a relationship between these participants and their colleagues, I was curious to learn how much they believed that they influenced the knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching of their colleagues. Surprisingly, these participants, on the whole, indicated that they were “slightly influential” on their colleagues’ knowledge and enthusiasm for teaching and learning. In fact, of the eight participants, only three indicated that they were very influential in their colleagues’ understanding of and enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing. In each of these cases, their colleague was a teacher in their own school, someone with whom they interacted weekly or multiple times each week.

I also asked participants to indicate how often they interacted with colleagues for particular reasons. Table 4.1 lists the eight reasons for consulting resources and the average of how frequently these teachers consulted resources for each reason.

Eight Reasons for Consulting Resources	Mean Frequency of Interaction from 0-5				
	A. Colleagues From School	B. Colleagues From School & District	C. Colleagues Outside District	D. Colleagues In Network (A-C)	E. Published Resources (see Table 4.2)
1. Providing concrete strategies to use in the classroom	2.29	1.68	0.76	1.20	3.13
2. Offering ways to teach writing to a wider range of students	2.14	1.58	0.67	1.10	2.38
3. Helping to examine student work	1.79	1.32	0.52	0.90	2.43
4. Keeping up-to-date on the latest research and practices in teaching writing	1.92	1.39	1.14	1.26	2.50
5. Meeting local and state standards	1.86	1.37	0.57	0.95	1.50
6. Seeking professional development	2.29	1.68	1.52	1.60	2.00
7. Giving feedback on their writing	2.36	1.74	1.45	1.59	1.75
8. Guiding them to seek out leadership opportunities	1.83	1.29	1.05	1.16	1.00
Mean of the Means	2.06	1.50	0.96	1.22	2.09

Table 4.1 Mean Frequency Teachers Consulted Colleagues & Resources

On the whole, this network of eight educators did not indicate a particular reason for more frequent interactions, most averaging around 1, referring to the rating of “once or twice a year.” However, I believe that it is important to note the difference in the frequencies of interactions with colleagues in their schools in comparison to colleagues outside their district. For out of district colleagues, the averages of the scores from these respondents range from 0.52 to 1.52, falling mainly in the ratings “rarely” and “once or twice a year.” For colleagues in their schools, the averages of these scores range from 1.79 to 2.36, falling somewhere between “once or twice a year” and “multiple times a year.”

Although the variance in these scores may not seem significant, I want to address two points. First, these scores indicate these teachers are more likely to seek out advice from the colleagues closest to them, usually a teacher within their own building. Second, these respondents indicated that they reach out to colleagues in their schools for four main reasons: providing concrete teaching strategies to use in the classroom, finding ways to teach a wider range of students, seeking out more information and/or participation in professional development, and receiving feedback and ideas about their writing. The participant ratings for these four reasons averaged from 2.14 to 2.36, falling between “multiple times a year” and “multiple times each month.”

These findings provide a point of comparison to consider how frequently these participants refer to published sources of professional knowledge. First, I asked participants to indicate how frequently they consulted various resources about teaching and writing. Table 4.2 lists the published sources for the teaching of writing and the averages for how frequently the respondents consulted these resources.

Published sources on teaching writing	Frequency (mean) from 0-5
Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest)	3.25
Professional organizations (NCTE, NWP)	2.25
Educational books (Heinemann, Stenhouse, Scholastic)	2.63
Journals (e.g. English Journal)	1.00
Blogs (e.g. Cult of Pedagogy)	1.50
Educational websites (ReadWriteThink, Edutopia)	2.50
Databases (ERIC, JSTOR)	0.75
Research studies or reports	1.00

Table 4.2 Frequency Teachers Consulted Different Published Resources

These participants indicated that they consulted four resources more frequently, ranging on from multiple times a year to multiple times per month: professional organizations, educational sites, educational books, and social media. These participants indicated that they turn most frequently to social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest. Two participants rated this resource highest among the eight options, indicating that they consult social media multiple times each week. Two other participants indicated that they consult social media weekly for resources about the teaching of writing. Of note, these teachers range in experience from eleven to thirty-four years of teaching experience. Initially, I wondered if teachers with fewer years of experience sought information from social media more than teachers with more years of experience. In fact, a participant with thirty-six years of teaching experience rated social media as the resource that they consult the most frequently, multiple times a month. The responses from these participants suggest that the years of teaching experience does not necessarily determine the type of resource most frequently consulted about the teaching of writing.

Next, I asked these participants to consider for what reasons they consulted these published sources of professional knowledge. Of the eight reasons for consulting published sources of professional knowledge, the respondents indicated four reasons as more frequent: providing concrete teaching strategies to use in the classroom, keeping up-to-date on the latest research and practice in teaching writing, examining student work to inform instruction, and identifying ways to teach a wider range of students. These teachers indicated that, on average, they consult professional resources for these reasons multiple times each month.

As discussed, I had asked these participants to consider the same reasons for consulting their colleagues. When comparing their reasons for seeking advice from colleagues and for consulting professional resources, these participants indicated two common reasons for seeking information: providing concrete teaching strategies to use in the classroom and identifying ways to teach a wider range of students. Based on their ratings, these participants, on average, consulted professional resources more frequently than their colleagues; however, I want to clarify two aspects of this comparison. First, participants rated how often they interacted with each colleague for each of the eight reasons listed on the survey. With twenty-eight colleagues identified in this network, these particular survey responses provide a thick set of data: 168 ratings. Second, when asked to rate the frequency of consulting published sources of knowledge about the teaching of writing, respondents indicated how frequently they consulted published sources for these particular reasons. Their responses produced a much smaller set of data with 64 ratings because they were not asked to rate separately each type of resource. Despite these differences in ratings, their responses show that they were more likely to turn to social media for published sources of information. Also, these teachers sought information more frequently from colleagues at their schools. These responses suggest that these teachers access sources of

information more readily available to them—through technology and the proximity of teachers in their schools—to find concrete teaching strategies and to teach a wider range of students.

Given my caution about forming conclusions, I decided to examine the data more closely for these two areas – concrete teaching strategies and ways to teach a range of students. I looked only at the ratings of the participants where they identified another participant as someone with whom they interacted for these common reasons. Focusing on these two reasons for seeking information from colleagues, I found that these eight participants recorded thirteen interactions with colleagues in their school or in their district. On average, the participants consulted with these colleagues for concrete teaching strategies a little more frequently than once or twice a year.

Likewise, the participants sought out colleagues for ways to reach more students less than once or twice a year, with their ratings averaging 0.85 on a scale of 0 to 5. For example, Judy consults Nancy and Pam multiple times a year for concrete teaching strategies, whereas Judy rarely consults Nancy for ways to teach a wider range of students.

I further narrowed the data set by examining scores for participants from the same school. In so doing, I found that the ratings for participants' interactions with colleagues from their own school were, on average, higher for both reasons, indicating that the participants sought out advice multiple times a year. I also observed, however, that these participants rarely sought advice for these two reasons—concrete teaching strategies and ways to teach a range of students—from their out-of-district colleagues.

Initially, I thought that my study revealed that the teachers seek out advice more frequently from professional publications than from their peers. However, upon further reflection, I recognized that his difference between advice sought from colleagues and

information consulted in professional resources signals an important point in my study: teachers seek something different in their relationships with colleagues, something beyond their professional needs.

Based on the survey results, these teachers seek out colleagues outside their district for reasons associated more with their growth as educators and writers. When compared to colleagues within their schools, these teachers turn less frequently to colleagues outside their district. Table 4.1 shows, on average, that participants consult their out-of-district colleagues once or twice a year. However, the top reasons for seeking out these colleagues relate more to their growth as educators rather than the day-to-day, practical concerns of classroom teaching. Also, these teachers indicated that they were influenced more by colleagues beyond their schools and districts. As Table 4.3 shows, these participants rated how much their colleagues influenced their knowledge and enthusiasm about teaching and learning about writing.

Influence on Teaching and learning about writing	Rating Scales for Collegial Influence			
	1 = Not at all 2 = slightly influential 3 = somewhat influential 4 = very influential 5 = extremely influential			
	A. Colleagues From School	B. Colleagues From School & District	C. Colleagues Outside District	D. Colleagues In Network (A-C)
Knowledge (mean)	3.00	3.05	3.86	3.46
Enthusiasm (mean)	2.54	2.90	3.81	3.37

Table 4.3 Influence of Colleagues on Teaching and Learning about Writing

The results in Column C indicate that these teachers rate these colleagues outside their districts as having more influence than colleagues in their schools and districts. More importantly, this level of influence appears unrelated to the frequency of interactions. Overall, these teachers indicated more interactions with their school colleagues, typically several times a month. By contrast, they indicated much fewer interactions with out-of-district colleagues, averaging

several times a year. Despite having less contact with these out-of-district colleagues, these teachers clearly identify these colleagues as important to their work as teacher-writers.

Understanding this difference in influence requires examining the results of survey responses with more than a descriptive analysis. Understanding the influence of colleagues within a network requires measures used in social network analysis. In the next section of my results, I will first examine the whole network, using tools of analysis appropriate for this community of practice. After providing this information about the network as a whole, I will move into findings from individual cases, or ego networks, sharing measures appropriate for this individual level of analysis. I will provide visual representations, or maps, for the whole network and individual cases. Like other measures of analysis, these visuals provide clarity for the complexity of relationships as these educators seek ways to grow as teachers and writers.

Whole Network

In this next section, I intend to describe the whole network to which these informants belong. To support the focus of my study—the ways in which relationships among teachers influence changes in practice, I turn to the work of Kira J. Baker-Doyle (2011, 2014) who offers a model more applicable to this study. Baker-Doyle presents the Continuum of New Teacher Support to show how teachers find support through two models—traditional and reform (2014). Furthermore, my decision to approach my analysis situates the study within the larger framework of the model fostered by the National Writing Project: training groups of teachers to work with other teachers, expanding a network of practices and ideas to support educators as writers and as teachers of writing.

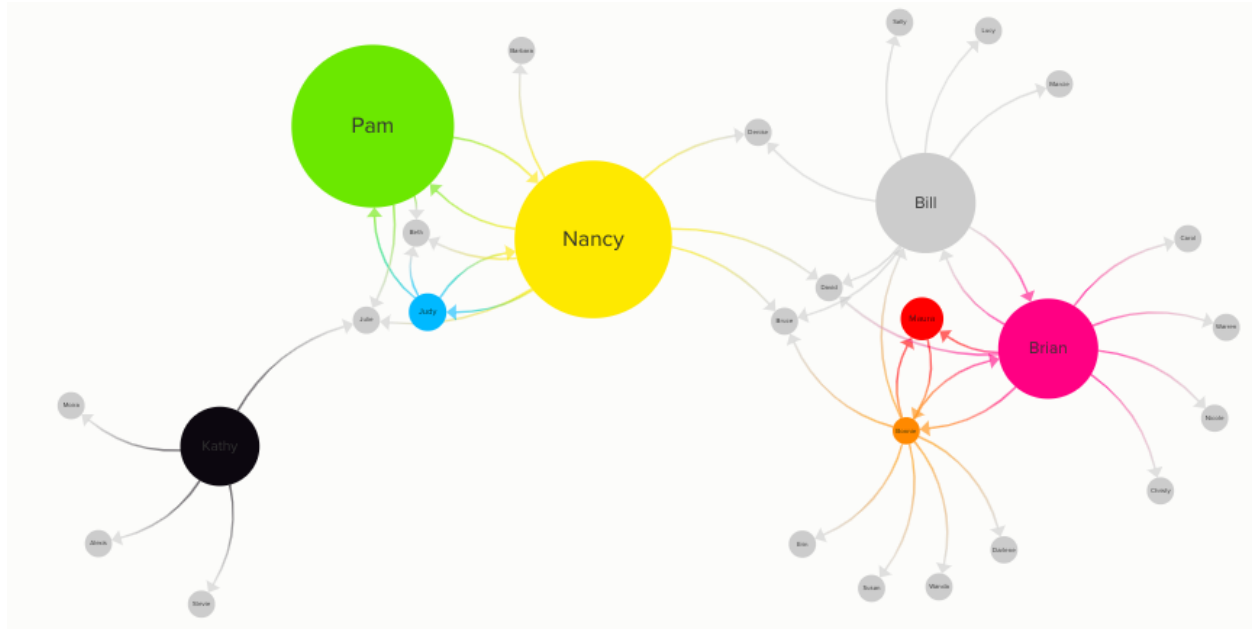


Figure 4.1: Whole Network of NWP Teacher-Consultants within a School District

I will present visual diagrams typical of social network analysis to illustrate how each participant access support through their community of practice. I will represent these networks with a diagram created using online software from Kumu (<https://kumu.io>). These diagrams, or maps, allow me to share key details about this network, and I will discuss key features of these maps to aid the reader’s understanding of my discussion.

First, each of the circles indicates a person in the network. The larger, colored circles show the participants of the survey whereas the smaller gray circles identify colleagues nominated by the participants. The size of the circle for participants represents their years of teaching; the color indicates the year in which they participated in the State Writing Project. Second, the lines, or ties, indicate who nominated this person, and these lines show directionality. For example, Nancy nominated Judy as important to her work as a teacher-writer, so the line running from her yellow circle connects to Judy, the smaller blue circle. This line

contains an arrow to indicate that Nancy named Judy. You will also see a line running from Judy to Nancy because Judy named Nancy as someone important to her work. Aside from Bill's circle, the remaining gray circles identify colleagues named by the participants. Again, you can see lines showing directionality when multiple participants named these same colleagues as important to their work as teacher-writers. After I discuss some features of the whole network, I provide in the next section a detailed explanation of a model network, with the intent to clarify my discussion and analysis.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the whole network of participants in this study is comprised of teacher consultants in the National Writing Project who work in the same school district. I invited each teacher to identify as many as eight people within the State Writing Project whom they consider important to their work as a teacher-writer. I will present a visual representation of the complete network so that I can describe properties of the network and how particular elements reveal the connections between teacher consultants and their colleagues.

Figure 4.1 provides a visual diagram of the whole network of these teacher consultants within this district. As I discussed, my analysis of this diagram, or map, will show how the frequency of interactions on the survey relates to connections between teachers in this network. In the next section, I will share individual, or ego, networks in relation to the whole network: properties of the complete network serve as a backdrop for me to describe ways in which individual teachers relate to and connect with their colleagues.

Using the online software, I applied several metrics, or measures, of this network to generate a clearer picture of whom these teachers seek out for information and support. To begin, I will offer a description of the whole network in terms of characteristics relevant to my study design and questions. This network contains 28 people, identified as "elements" on the

map. This number shows the participants and the individuals whom they identified as being close to them. The number of connections measures the number of ties between people: this network contains 42 ties among people—the lines linking one person to another.

Density

These features help to identify the density of a whole network, where density refers to the number of ties in the network described as a proportion, or fraction, of the total possible ties. (Carolan, 2013; Moolenaar and Slegers, 2010). Within teacher networks, many people are connected to each other in a dense network whereas in a sparse network, there are fewer connections among individuals. In this case, the density measures 0.06, suggesting a looser network. The closer this number is to 1.0, the denser the network; a density score of 1.0 would show that all possible ties are present in this network (Carolan, 2013). Because density measures a proportion, the density of this network equals 6 percent: out of all the possible ties, this network of teachers contains six percent of these connections.

One explanation for this looser network relates, in part, to the nature of the question that I asked in the survey. As I discussed earlier in the survey results, I asked participants to generate a list of names for colleagues whom they consider important to their work—as teachers and as teachers of writing. When reviewing the names and locations of these colleagues recalled by these participants, I observed that half of the ties connected participants to colleagues outside their district. Apart from three colleagues, the participants did not name any common colleagues outside their district. These three common colleagues can be seen in Figure 4.1 located near the center of the map between Nancy and Bill. In addition, responses on the survey indicated that the level of interactions with these out-of-district colleagues was noticeably lower than the interactions with colleagues within the school and district of these participants.

Although density provides one measure of a network, this metric for the State Writing Project network does not yield a clear sense of how participants access and share information with colleagues. Furthermore, the low density might suggest that these teachers work primarily in isolation—as writers and as teachers of writing. However, one study suggests that dense networks build more trust among colleagues and teachers in dense school communities view their schools as more innovative (Moolenaar and Slegers, 2010). Although my study did not involve all teachers in each school, this finding suggests that the teachers in my study may seek out colleagues with whom they are willing to take risks within a community of trust and innovation.

This potential finding compels me to revisit the purpose of this study: to examine how *interactions* with colleagues influence a teacher’s practices, specific to the teacher of writing as a whole and not in terms of implementing a particular reform or intervention. For this reason, I will turn to an examination of the ego networks—the individual teachers whom I selected to interview. These informants provide a more complex picture of how their interactions with colleagues within the State Writing Project have influenced their writing practice.

Community

Before I turn to my analysis of the informants, I will discuss two additional points about the whole network: the presence of connectors and community. I used social network software to identify connectors and to detect communities as methods for understanding how information is shared through a network. In Chapter 2, I shared literature describing the importance of leadership as a mechanism for bringing about change to approaches to professional development as well as to instructional practices in the classroom. My analysis of this network revealed that teachers within this State Writing Project serve as leaders because first, they serve as hubs, or

connectors, between ego networks, and, two, they link communities across the network, connecting people across buildings and grade spans within the districts as well as to the wider network of the Writing Project.

In Chapter 2, I also discussed the role of community in teacher learning experiences, and, more specifically, the social practices present in communities of practice, such as the National Writing Project. Given the centrality of community to my study, I chose to analyze my data for the presence of community to understand what role this phenomenon might play with my participants.

When I ran the online software to detect communities, the algorithm found three communities within this network, as seen in Figure 4.2. One community, depicted as triangles in the map, mainly contains middle and high school teachers while, in the second community, mostly elementary level educators comprise this community. This finding matches a number of studies on social networks regarding homophily—the idea that people tend to seek out or be attracted to people similar to them in some way (Prell, 2012; Coburn et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2001). Given that these teachers work within the same district and from the same school, these communities fall naturally along these grade spans. This result also supports my analysis of the survey responses in which participants indicated a higher frequency of interactions with colleagues from their schools. Although I will discuss these findings in greater detail in the following sections, these communities, or sub-groups, may arise from shared practices and a common language fostered by their participation in the Writing Project.

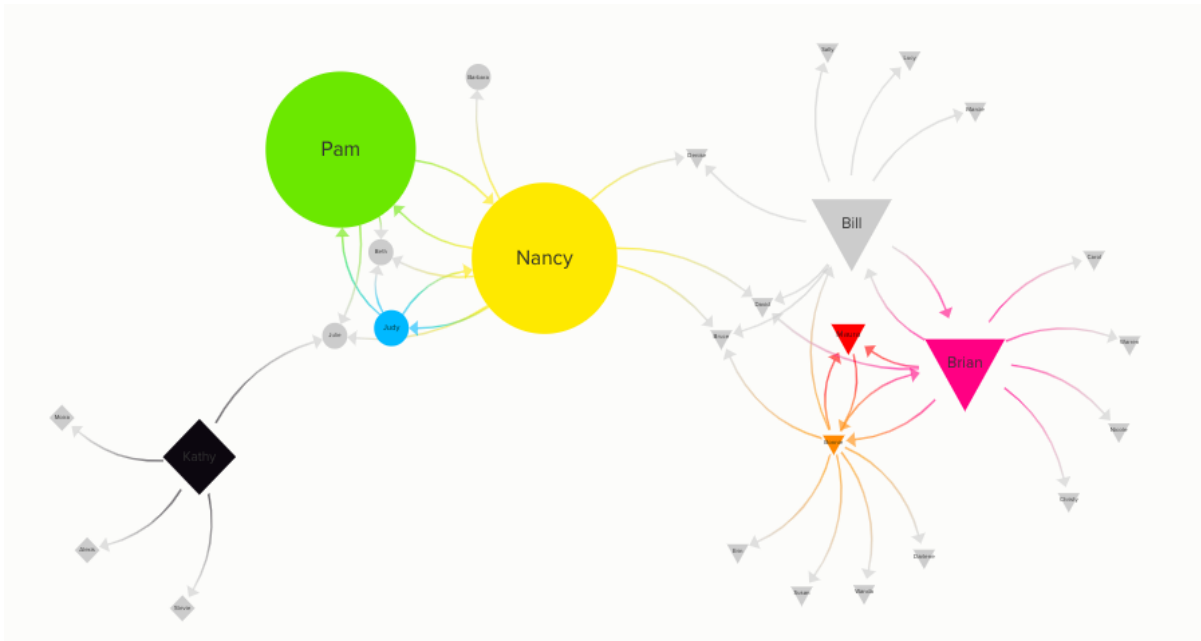


Figure 4.2: Communities Identified within the Whole Network of NWP Teacher-Consultants

As I analyzed these three communities, I attempted to determine what other elements or themes might connect the educators; however, I could find no additional characteristic unique to each community. For example, I wondered if teachers in either community might seek out advice from colleagues outside their district; the participants named roughly the same number of colleagues identified outside their district.

Despite uncovering no additional commonalities, I did discover that three individuals were associated with two communities. These individuals show a stronger association with the first community comprised mostly of middle and high school teachers: three respondents in this community nominated these colleagues as important to their work. Interestingly, these members of the network work outside the school district—as mentors and instructors in the State Writing Project. These *boundary crossers* or *boundary spanners* connect members of a network by providing vital support, information, and resources for individuals (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Finnigan and Daly, 2010). These individuals serve as a bridge between three veteran teachers

and, as a result, link the two communities of elementary teachers and middle-high school teachers. In other words, these colleagues bind the ties forming the larger network, and, as a result, this community of practice.

As I share my analysis of my four informants in the next section, I will discuss in greater depth the influence of these boundary crosses, using evidence from the interviews to describe more clearly the roles played by these colleagues. Prior to that discussion, I will start with profiles of each informant, sharing general background information about each person and their perspectives on their roles as writers and teachers of writing. I will then shift to my analysis of their individual networks, applying familiar measures of social networks while adding to the discussion more general interpretations of these individual stories.

Profiles of Informants

As I discussed, I invited eleven teachers within this district who were part of the Local Writing Project. In Chapter 3, I explained how I selected four of these participants to interview. Because I am investigating how relationships among teacher consultants influence growth and development, I evaluated the survey data to determine informants based on two criteria:

- How frequently this person was identified by others as influencing their practice; and,
- How frequently this person identified others within the network as influencing their practice

In other words, I wanted to identify those teachers nominated by their colleagues as important to their work, and I wanted to learn how often a teacher identified colleagues within the State Writing Project network as important to their work as teacher-writers. These informants reflect a range of teaching levels, from elementary through high school, and eleven to thirty-six years of experience. Each of these teachers has taught in this district for several years, I know each of the

informants through our shared network in the State Writing Project. I have also attended a professional development activities with them, such as literacy conferences held locally and regionally.

Judy has taught elementary special education for thirteen years, and she completed the Writing Project a few years ago. Although she does not view herself as a writer, she recognizes the importance of journaling to process experiences in her life and events in the world. She recognizes that she has had a limited participation in the Writing Project because she operates in an isolated role as a specialist, working with small numbers of students in specially designed instruction. However, Judy believes that receiving feedback from colleagues—whether on instructional plans or on writing pieces—helps teachers grow in their practice and provides the encouragement necessary as classroom teachers implement new approaches with students.

Bonnie is a veteran high school English teacher, with eleven years at the time of this study. She was one of the earliest participants from this district in the Writing Project, encouraged by a colleague's passion and positive experience with the spring course and summer institute. Bonnie has attended the annual fall conference multiple times and has participated in writing workshops. She finds these professional development experiences instrumental in shifting a teacher's perspective about their students and the curriculum so that teachers can address the diverse needs and experiences of their students. Although Bonnie does not view herself as a writer, the Writing Project has helped her to realize the power of telling stories and that everyone has something to say.

Brian has taught for twenty-five years, starting with elementary students and, for the last fifteen years, teaching middle school students. He completed the coursework for the Writing Project nearly ten years ago, and he has participated in various ways: mentor to Writing Project

fellows, presenter and participant at the fall conference, leader in a state-wide writing initiative, and writer in the Writing Project's annual publication. Brian has never considered himself a writer, but he does see the importance of writing as a way to bring about change—fostering growth in a young person's identity or making an impact in a community issue or problem. Brian turned to the Writing Project because he finds the act of writing a mysterious process, and he wants to engage in what he calls this “writing experiment” as schools at every level endeavor to teach this craft. Brian saw firsthand how the Writing Project experience creates a community of writers, and he hopes to discover ways that schools can sustain such close networks among teacher consultants in the same district.

Nancy is a veteran elementary school teacher, who participated in the Local Writing Project about seven years ago. Nancy taught for nearly forty years, and she believes that teachers need more support in the teaching of writing. According to her, the Writing Project experience – the spring course and the summer institute – provides the community educators need for professional development: an intense focus on writing theory and practices, opportunities to write daily with colleagues, and a shared understanding of strategies to use with students in their classrooms. Nancy participated in a number of Writing Project activities, including the annual fall conference, teaching demonstrations at the summer institutes, directing summer young author camps, and writing workshops. Her experiences have shaped her belief that schools need to devote more time for students to write in order to become better writers. Ultimately, she hopes schools can foster a love of writing, a love that Nancy developed as a young student and hopes will fuel her own writing in her future.

Ego Networks

In this section, I share my analysis of the four ego networks along with the visual maps for each informant. I repeat my social network analysis to accentuate the story revealed by each person's network. This analysis of individual networks connects to my analysis of the whole network and prepares for my discussion of larger themes generated from informant interviews. Through this analysis, I show how relationships with colleagues influenced these educators.

Before this analysis, I provide an explanation of ego networks—what they are and their role in understanding relationships as a mechanism for sharing information. An ego network or personal network consists of an individual, often referred to as an actor and termed as the *ego*. Each actor identifies a number of *alters*—people somehow connected to this person. Finally, analysis focuses on the ties between the actor and alters, with the intent to explore connections and the strengths of ties (Carrington & Scott, 2011; Daly, 2010).

Earlier, I described the whole network to display and describe the connections among a network of colleagues within the State Writing Project. Now I will explain how individual teachers relate to and connect with their colleagues. Shifting to egocentric networks allows me to consider patterns and characteristics of the people to whom these teachers reach out to for support and for what reasons. Furthermore, this level of analysis centers on the informants' perspectives on the influence of collegial interactions on their practice as teachers and writers.

I discuss each individual network in terms familiar to social network analysis, including size, degree, closeness, and density (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Prell, 2012; Carolan, 2013). Prior to sharing my analysis of my informants' networks, I provide a model generated from my ego network in order to discuss terms and measure common to social network analysis. I made this

decision to include a model network so that readers could engage in my analysis of the informant networks.

Following this model discussion, I will also use these measures to look for trends and interactions with and among colleagues in the informant networks. These patterns become particularly relevant when I discuss my analysis of the informant interviews as these emerging ideas shaped my selection of codes for comparing their transcripts. To that end, I turn now to my own network to clarify my descriptions and analysis. Again, using online software, I generated my own list of colleagues, as displayed in Figure 4.3. I used information from two colleagues as models so that I might illustrate additional features in these ego networks.

In this model situation each of us nominated eight colleagues as important to our work. For modeling purposes, I included colleagues nominated by the three of us. To discuss this model, I describe how these similarities relate to the analysis of an individual network and define measures commonly used in social network analysis, both for individual and whole networks. Using this model, I intend to make my discussions in the following sections clear and to present an analysis which speaks to the story of both the whole and individual networks in the State Writing Project.

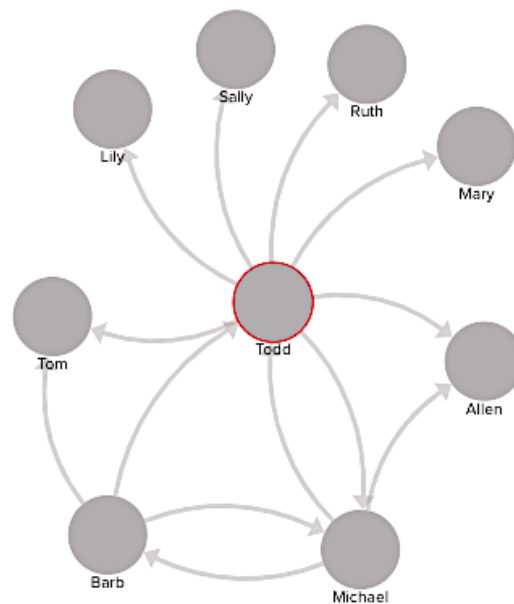


Figure 4.3 Todd’s Model Ego Network of State Writing Project Colleagues

For this part of my discussion, I have chosen a simplified view of my network, so that I can discuss basic measures of my ego network. Each gray circle identifies alters, people whom I have nominated as being important to my work as a teacher-writer. The lines running from one circle to another indicate that I named this colleague in my network. For the purposes of this model, I included information on two colleagues who nominated me and two colleagues in their networks. As I review common measures of social network analysis, I discuss how these connections relate to the analysis of networks.

Size: Members of a Social Network

I will first discuss size as a network feature because size is the simplest structural property to identify. Size measures the total number of people in an individual network. This number includes the actor and the alters that they name in their network. In my model, the size of my network equals nine—the eight colleagues whom I named, and me. The number of people in a network allows a researcher to consider how closely connected one person is to others. Smaller

networks tend to be more dense, allowing individuals to interact more frequently and to share information more easily. Size can also show whether an individual may be isolated—an element with few ties—or more central to a network—a member with many ties. Also, size serves as an important indicator showing what happens in a network, such as how resources are shared. In my model, two of my colleagues and I show mutual relationships among four colleagues, whereas I nominated four colleagues connected only to me. Size provides a researcher a first level of analysis, considering what patterns emerge as they learn more about each person in the network.

Degree: Involvement in the Network

Whereas size is simply determined by the number of people connected to an actor, degree identifies the number of connections, or lines, from one person to another person in their network. In social network analysis, degree is a measure of centrality, and identifying the central actors in a network reveals important details about leadership, visibility, prestige, and sharing of information. Degree centrality does not consider the direction of the ties between individuals and simply shows a person's involvement in the network (Prell, 2012; Carolan, 2013).

In Figure 4.3, I am the central actor, the gray circle highlighted in red. The number of lines between me and other members of my network contain nine ties, so the degree of my network equals nine. In other words, I am involved in nine relationships with colleagues while Michael and Barb have three relationships in this network. This degree of centrality suggests that I have more prestige or influence in this network. To make an analysis of a network more useful, I need to broaden the network to include colleagues nominated by Michael and Barb. I also need to consider additional measures of centrality—indegree and outdegree. Indegree centrality measures the number of ties received by an actor; outdegree centrality indicates the number of ties from an actor to others (Prell, 2012; Carolan, 2013).

In Figure 4.4, Michael has an outdegree and indegree of 10, and Barb has an outdegree of 9 and an indegree of 9. Using degree centrality, I held the highest score, suggesting that I am more involved in the network. A deeper analysis shows that I do not hold a more prestigious position in the network, as our measures of outdegree and indegree are nearly the same. In fact, Michael's measures would suggest that he holds a more important position in this larger network.

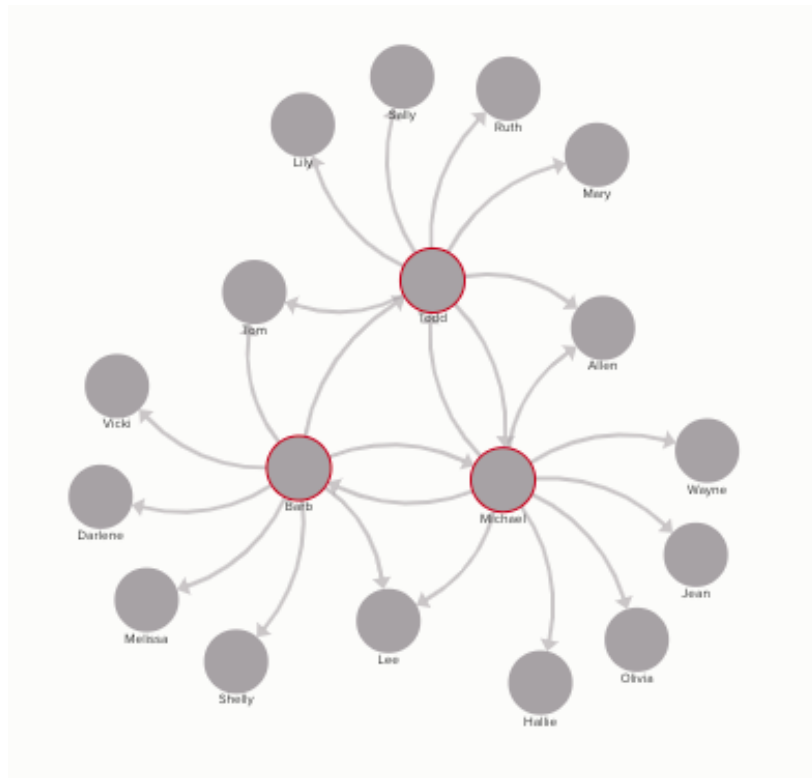


Figure 4.4 Model Network of State Writing Project Colleagues

Finally, degree centrality can also be used to identify connectors, or hubs, in a network. As the name suggests, these connectors link individual networks and serve an important source of information, advice, or support across ego networks (Daly, 2010; Baker-Doyle, 2011). My colleagues, Michael and Barb, also named me in their network, so the lines with arrows indicate the direction of their relationship to me. Also, when colleagues nominate each other, each line

shows an arrow tying these colleagues, suggesting a reciprocal relationship within their network. For example, Michael and I nominated each other in our network. Each of us also nominated Tom and Allen as members in our networks, so they act as connectors between Michael, Barb, and me. As seen in this larger model network, this measure of degree can highlight individuals who are considered connectors: individuals with a higher number of connections. If I were to expand my investigation, a larger network might reveal that Tom and Allen serve as connectors to more people than the three teachers in my model.

I can also weight these degree connections by strength as determined by the frequency of interactions with other individuals, providing another measure to highlight these local connectors. Degree, especially when weighted by a characteristic, measures the total value of an element's connections rather than just the number of ties. Using my model, I received a score of 27 compared to Michael's score of 26 when weighting degree by strength—the frequency of interactions with a colleague. These measures indicate that Michael and I play an important role in this network. Again, in a larger network, such as the network in my study, the weighting of degree would provide more details about the nature of relationships a person has within and beyond their individual network.

I have devoted some space to this discussion of degree because the purpose of my study is to understand how relationships within the State Writing Project network influence teachers. Degree centrality is an important measure in my study for two reasons. First, degree measures each person's involvement in the network. Beyond the visual information obtained from the map, degree scores help me to understand how centrally a person stands in the network, suggesting that they serve as a channel of information for others. Second, degree centrality reveals who plays an important role within the network, not in terms of prestige, but, more

importantly, how many people with whom they interact, hearing and spreading information and support to other members of the network (Prell, 2012).

Closeness: Access to Colleagues & Information

Degree centrality may help researchers describe relationships among people in a network, but degree, outdegree, and indegree only look at the immediate ties of an individual. Social network researchers recognize that the rest of the network contains important information. Closeness, another measure of centrality, takes into account the entire network of ties and measures the distance between one element and another. Closeness can reveal attributes of an individual, such as the extent a person provides a link to other members, the strength of relationships, and their level of influence on other members of the network. A high score indicates that an individual can access information or spread influence more easily than other members (Carolan, 2013). Closeness centrality can also measure how independent an actor is: the closer a person is to others, the less they need to rely on intermediaries to access information (Prell, 2012).

Based on my model, Barb and Michael score 0.735 on their closeness centrality. Looking at Figure 4.4, you can see Barb is relatively close to the other elements in the network. Her links to people require less distance: her path to other members of the network is only one connection away in her ties. Michael's network shows the same pattern of ties, suggesting that he, too, can access and share information quickly through the network.

As I mentioned earlier, these measures of centrality—degree and closeness—provide information about individual networks. The more that researchers understand the individual roles in a network, the better that they understand their involvement in their network and how independently they can access resources and how quickly they can spread information. Although

these measures of centrality rely on data from the whole network, researchers rely on additional measures, such as density, to analyze the whole network. Density allows a researcher to determine how well people in a network are connected to each other.

Density: Connections to Colleagues

Although size provides a helpful measure for describing the network, this number becomes especially helpful when looking at density because smaller networks are more likely to be denser than larger networks. Baker-Doyle (2011) explains that density refers to “the degree to which people in one network are linked to each other” (p. 24). As a measure of a network, density can be calculated as proportion — dividing the number of ties in a network by the total number of possible ties. The denser a network, the more people are connected to one another while a sparse network contains fewer connections between people (Daly, 2010; Baker-Doyle, 2011; Carolan, 2013). In other words, a denser network allows people to access and spread information more quickly and easily while a sparse network may suggest that some individuals are isolated or distant from resources. For schools, a dense social network affects a teacher’s perception of their school’s ability to create an innovative climate (Daly, 2010).

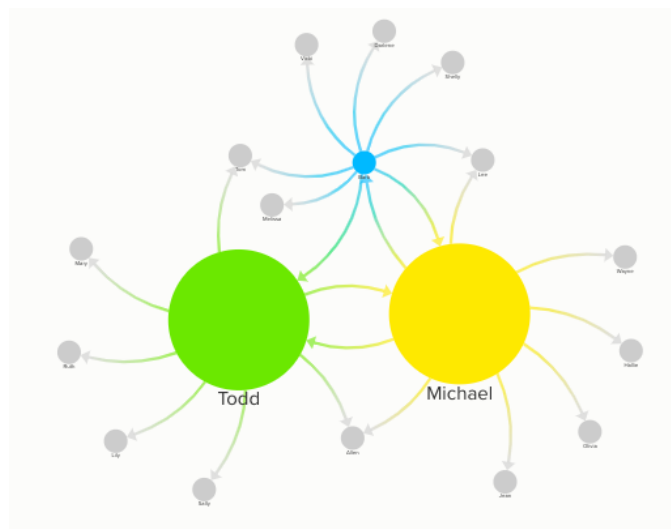


Figure 4.5 Model SWP Network based on Years taught and SWP cohort

Figure 4.5 shows a different visual display of this model network. I wanted to represent the members of the network so that the reader could easily distinguish each person as I talk about elements and characteristics of this network. The size of each individual represents their years of teaching: the larger the circle, the longer this person has taught. In this case, my map indicates that my colleague, Michael, and I have taught roughly the same number of years while Barb (teal blue circle, top center) has taught fewer years. The color indicates the year in which the teacher completed the State Writing Project; this map shows that Michael, Barb, and I completed the State Writing Project in different years. In a larger network, this feature would allow a researcher to see quickly how many colleagues attended in the same year and generate potential conclusions from this information.

Aside from this visual information, I intend to use this model to discuss density as a measure of a network. By using different colors and sizes of the nodes, or individuals, I hope to make this discussion of density easier to understand. Using Kumu software, the density of this whole network equals 0.08, suggesting a sparse, or loosely connected, network. This value is determined by counting all the lines, 23, divided by the number of possible ties in the network. The maximum number of ties is determined by counting how many nodes—all of the circles—contained in the network. Each node can potentially be connected to all other nodes, except to oneself. With 18 nodes, or individuals, this network could contain a maximum of 306 ties.

The density score of 0.08 reflects a percentage of ties, or 8%. This low percentage, as I said earlier, indicates that this network contains few connections between people. As a result, I would look at additional information, such as the density of individual networks or attributes such as reciprocity. As Figure 4.4 shows, this network is more dense at its center, with multiple ties connecting me, Michael, and Barb. Since each of us nominated one or more of the same

people, our connections create a more dense set of relationships and a greater level of reciprocity. The nodes represented as gray circles indicate colleagues named by each of us not connected to each other—within our ego networks or within our school or district.

As much as density provides a measure of connectedness in a network, I require additional data to generate conclusions about these patterns of relationships. For example, in my study, I asked respondents to provide more details about the frequency of interactions with each colleague, what kinds of information they sought from their colleagues, and how much a colleague influenced their knowledge about writing and teaching writing.

Density, size, closeness and degree allow me to interpret a story from networks, such as a person's involvement and their centrality in a network as well as their ability to spread and access information. I will discuss later in this chapter how I use a narrative analysis of informant interviews to uncover more elements of their stories. For now, I turn my attention to the individual networks, addressing the same characteristics and measures of analysis that I discussed in my model network.

Prior to this discussion, I will explain how I have ordered my discussion of the ego networks of my informants. First, I have arranged the discussion according to the communities, or subgroups, identified in the previous section. As you may recall, Figure 4.2 displays evidence of three communities; the first two informants, Judy and Nancy, belong to one of these communities. Most members of their community are elementary school teachers, so my discussion allows some comparison to a second community containing middle and high school teachers.

Second, the order of my discussion allows me to focus on Judy's smaller network, permitting me to explain for the reader measures of social network analysis. In essence, I intend

to scaffold the reader's awareness of the terms to build clarity in my discussion. Third, as I move from Nancy's ego network to discuss Bonnie and Brian, other elements of my discussion highlight more complex relationships among members of the network. In particular, Brian's ego network makes more apparent the role of boundary crossers or spanners. As I discussed, such individuals play an important role in a network in terms of sharing information and for providing support. These boundary spanners also point to implications for professional development models, and I will expand on this implication in Chapter 5.

Finally, as I discuss each ego network, the maps provide explanatory power in their visualizations of these relationships. For example, you can see Nancy's network expanding from Judy's map, these links between shared colleagues expanding as I move from discussion to the next. By the time the reader arrives at Brian's map, I have covered all elements in this network of teacher-consultants. With such detailed visual information and analysis of these social networks, I can share the stories of these educators through their voices from my interviews.

Key to Figures 4.6 to 4.9

Each circle represents a colleague in the teacher's social support network. The size and color indicate years of teaching and participation in the State Writing Project (SWP).

Size: number of years teaching; larger size indicates more years this teacher has taught

Colors:

- Pink: participated in SWP 2012
 - Green: participated in SWP 2013
 - Yellow: participated in SWP 2014
 - Blue: participated in SWP 2017
-

Judy's Social Network of Support

The map in Figure 4.6 shows Judy's ego network displaying her links to three people. She named three teachers within her school building as colleagues important to her work in the elementary school. In her case, Judy identified Beth, Pam, and Nancy; Pam and Nancy also participated in the survey. As you can see in Figure 4.6, the colors and sizes of Pam's and Nancy's circles reveal that they are veteran teachers who participated in the State Writing Project at different times. The arrows on the end of each line indicate direction—who named this particular person as someone important to their work as a teacher-writer. Judy and Nancy named each other as important to their work. With the exemption of two other colleagues named by Nancy, Judy's ego network comprises the majority of people in this community of elementary teachers.

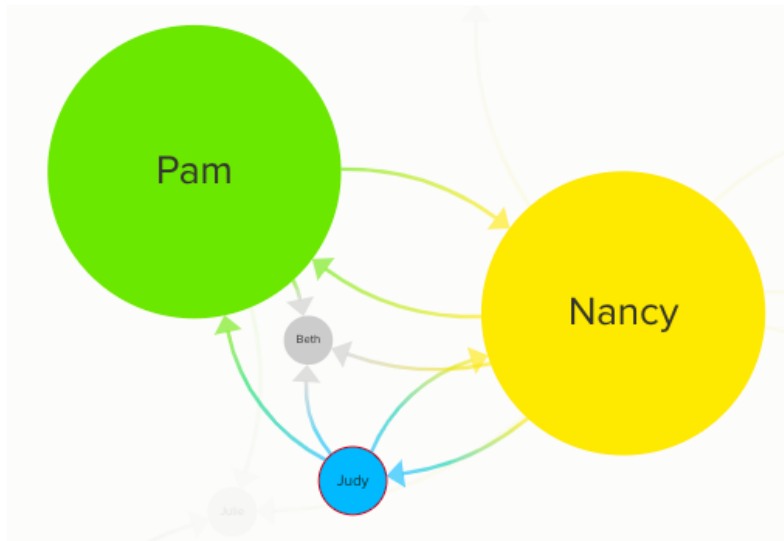


Figure 4.6: Judy's Social Network of Support

Density: Connections to Colleagues in a Social Network

To understand the story of Judy's network, I will first examine her network in terms of density. As I discussed earlier when sharing my model ego network, the density of this Writing Project network equals 0.06 whereas Judy's network shows a density of 0.33. The whole

network suggests sparser connections among members of the network whereas Judy's ego network indicates closer relationships with her colleagues. Within her smaller network, she finds more connections—more support and information-sharing among her colleagues. Naturally, her location among colleagues at the same grade level plays a role: she interacts more frequently with these individuals within the same school building. Unlike other respondents to the survey, Judy did not name any colleagues outside her school district.

Degree: Involvement in a Social Network

Density provides a limited view of Judy's network and the level of influence people have on her role as a teacher. In looking at her degree of centrality, I can describe more clearly her involvement in the whole network and how she benefits from her relationships with colleagues. Initially, I considered her degree of centrality by determining the number of connections Judy has to other colleagues. As I examined her map, her degree equals 11, more than double the size of her network. This number is important because the value points out how much information sharing occurs among her closer colleagues. Using measures of indegree and outdegree, Judy's centrality measures 4, indicating that she has a low level of influence in the whole network. Despite the size of her network and her level of influence, Judy has access to information through these connections with her colleagues. More importantly, Judy's network includes a key figure in the whole network: Nancy's degree equals 10 and, when weighted by the frequency of interactions, her network equals 27. This second measure indicates that Nancy serves an important connector among all members of this network.

Also, Nancy is one of two colleagues within Judy's network who have several years of experience—the size of the circle for each person indicates their years of experience in teaching. Again, the organizational setting of being in the same school provides some explanation for the

relationship. However, as homophily and proximity provide some explanation for this social influence and connection, social network theorists and analysts also consider the role of expertise as a factor for developing close ties to colleagues (Daly, 2010). For Judy, Nancy represents a source of expertise, both as a veteran teacher and as teacher-consultant who participated in the State Writing Project earlier than she did.

Judy has developed a reciprocal relationship with Nancy as someone with whom she interacts frequently. Although Nancy indicated that she interacts with Judy only two or three times a year, Judy indicated that she sought out Nancy multiple times each month or weekly for three reasons: motivating her to seek further information and/or to participate in professional development; giving her feedback and ideas about their writing; and, guiding her to seek out leadership roles and opportunities.

Judy named a similar tie to Pam, another veteran teacher working at the same school. As her map shows, Judy's relationship with Pam appears unidirectional, but only because Pam did not list Judy as a member of her network. However, Pam clearly represents a colleague serving an important role for Judy as a teacher-writer. In her survey responses, Judy indicated that she interacted with Pam multiple times each month, yet unlike her interactions with Nancy, Judy interacted with Pam far less often, generally once or twice a year.

Perhaps the most interesting tie in Judy's network stems from her relationships with Beth. Although Beth did not participate in the survey, she was named by three colleagues as being important to their work as teacher-writers. Judy rated her highest level of interactions with Beth, indicating that she sought out Beth multiple times each month and weekly for a number of reasons. Judy indicated that she sought out Beth most frequently for providing concrete teaching

strategies to use in the classroom. Yet, Judy also indicated that Beth motivated her to seek out professional development and gave her feedback and ideas about her writing.

Furthermore, Judy indicated that Beth has been very influential in her understanding of teaching and learning about writing. Judy first shared an experience in Beth's classroom where she had written a story and shared this piece with her students. Judy admired Beth's work as a writer and "putting [her]self out there, you know, for students to see." Beth suggested that Judy could do the same, by developing her writing through the Writing Project. Even though Judy did not consider herself a writer, she thought that Beth would be "a teacher that I would want to write for because she was supportive and encouraging."

In terms of support, Judy commented that Beth motivates her to seek further information and/or participate in professional development. Although Judy initially showed no interest in the State Writing Project because she is "not a writer," Beth's suggestion to participate did eventually lead Judy to enroll in the coursework and summer institute. Judy credits Beth's encouragement to participate in the Writing Project for maintaining her writing in a journal, a habit to which she turns regularly to "put her thoughts into words" rather than keeping them in her head. She commented that "...whenever I have that strong feeling I just need to write or whenever I see the headlines on TV that I have really strong thoughts about but don't want to express to anybody, I just kind of write them all down." Even though Judy does not devote regular time to her journaling, she recognizes how this habit gives a space to voice her concerns and process her emotional responses to situations. As much as she says that she is not a writer, Judy clearly views writing as part of her life, offering a way to work through concerns about her life and the world at large.

Judy also noted that Beth frequently provides feedback and ideas about her writing, a role that Judy described as important to her work as a teacher and as a writer. “I just think feedback helps you to develop and grow and I think it’s... a necessary thing.” In particular, Judy stressed the value of reviewing student work with colleagues because “somebody will see something that I didn’t see or read something differently than I would have read it.”

Closeness: Access to Colleagues & Information in a Social Network

Finally, I did want to speak about Judy’s network in terms of the measure closeness, particularly to demonstrate how this measure can identify the distance from one colleague to another. In Judy’s case, for example, examining closeness in her network reveals those colleagues who provide information to her about teaching writing. Despite her small network, her closeness score of 0.687 suggests that she can access information about writing and the teaching of writing within the larger network of State Writing Project colleagues.

Judy frequently seeks out her colleagues for ideas about her writing and opportunities for professional development. She also turns to these close colleagues to seek out leadership roles and opportunities. Given her role as a specialist, Judy does not see herself as “a quote unquote writing teacher,” so she hesitates in requesting professional days at workshops and conferences. Yet, through the Writing Project, she has found sessions and writing experiences as a way to stay connected to her writing life.

Finding #1: Networks Alleviate Isolation

My broad research question asks how relationships among State Writing Project teacher-consultants influence their growth. In this section, I applied measures common to social network analysis to reveal how Judy’s experience in this network supported her as a teacher and writer. I shared Judy’s social network of support first because her network appears smaller and less

connected, yet her responses on the survey and comments in her interview reveal how this network helps her.

Despite her unique role as a specialist and her feelings of being disconnected to colleagues, Judy finds support from a tight network of colleagues within her own school. The relatively small size and low degree of centrality for her network serves as a strength in her professional life and her work as a writer: these few individuals have clearly influenced her knowledge about teaching writing and writing. Her interactions with colleagues from the State Writing Project in her building offer her multiple ways to stay connected to a community whereby she accesses effective practices in teaching and opportunities to grow as a teacher and writer. Her degree of involvement and closeness to other colleagues in the whole network suggests that Judy might not serve an influential role within the network. Regardless of her position and influence, these relationships provide Judy opportunities to support her writing life and to stay up-to-date on writing practices for the classroom.

Nancy's Social Network of Support

The map in Figure 4.7 shows Nancy's ego network displaying her links to eight people—teachers within her school building and outside her school district whom she identified as important to her work as an educator and/or writer. The arrows on the end of each line indicate direction—who named this particular person as someone important to their work as a teacher and/or writer. Based on the survey, two colleagues identified Nancy as someone to whom they turned for advice. Also, in contrast to Judy, Nancy named four colleagues outside her district as important to her work.

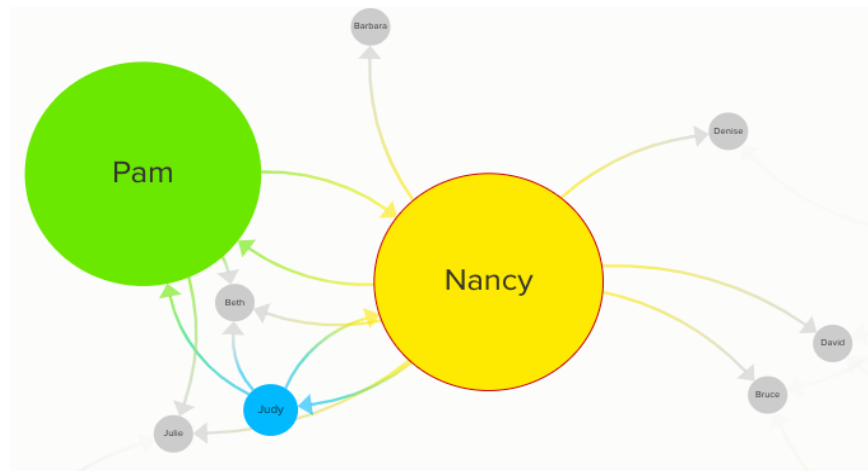


Figure 4.7: Nancy's Social Network of Support

Density: Connections to Colleagues in a Social Network

The density of Nancy's network measures 0.14, slightly higher than the whole network of 0.06. Given the increase in the size of her network, this measure of density suggests that Nancy has fewer connections within this local network. In fact, she identifies only one colleague more than Judy within their shared network of elementary school teachers. Two of these colleagues participated in this study, so Nancy's map displays her reciprocal relationships with these teachers, as these participants also named Nancy as someone important to their network.

However, Nancy named four additional colleagues outside her school district: Barbara, Bruce, Denise, and David. Except for Barbara, these colleagues have served in leadership roles with the State Writing Project, such as mentors, institute directors, and instructors. Given their leadership roles in the whole network, I will return later to discuss their influence within this network. At this point in the discussion, I will focus on aspects of Nancy's network to describe the ways colleagues influence her teaching and writing.

Degree: Involvement in Social Network

Much like Judy's network, density reveals Nancy's connections to other people, but I wanted to understand the level of influence people have on others in the network, so I turned to

other measures to describe Nancy's network. Nancy's degree equals 10—nine colleagues and herself; when weighted by the frequency of interactions, her network equals 27. This second measure indicates that Nancy serves an important connector among all members of this network. In other words, her frequency of interactions with her colleagues reflects a greater degree of involvement in this community. More significantly, Nancy relies on a wider cast of actors—colleagues whom she named as important to her work as a teacher-writer. Again, her relationship with people in leadership roles offers some explanation to Nancy's position as an important source of professional knowledge and expertise for her colleagues.

For example, Nancy named Beth as someone with whom she interacted multiple times each month. Nancy did not indicate a particular reason for these interactions, but she did suggest that she played a very influential role in influencing Beth's understanding of and enthusiasm for teaching and/or writing. Nancy commented that Beth often thanked her for sharing information about the State Writing Project, telling Nancy "you have changed my life by getting me into the Writing Project."

When Nancy did turn more frequently to other colleagues, she sought information for three main reasons: applying concrete teaching strategies to use in the classroom, teaching a wider range of students more effectively, and examining student work to assess student progress and to plan instruction. She thought it was important for teachers to find concrete strategies for teaching writing, referring to professional writers such as Ralph Fletcher and Donald Murray who provide a variety of instructional tools for teachers. "It's kind of like opening up a toolbox, and having that toolbox available to you." She added that these instructional approaches not only build efficacy in teaching young writers, but these concrete strategies provide a "similar

vocabulary, similar language in our talk about writing” when she collaborates with her colleagues.

Nancy raised this notion of creating a common language among colleagues as she talked about the importance of learning about ways to teach a wider range of students. Emphasizing the need for meeting the needs of every child, Nancy shared how teaching with a colleague in an adjoining classroom provided opportunities to look at student work together, stating “...if we could share that piece of writing, you can give each other ideas about it and help that particular child.” Not only did this collaboration give Nancy a different way of looking at a student’s work, she also said that she felt supported, knowing that she could always ask for help. “I knew that somebody could look at my work and say, ‘Hey, have you thought of this?’” These interactions with this colleague added to Nancy’s confidence as a teacher of writing while augmenting her professional knowledge from published authors like Fletcher and Murray.

Closeness: Access to Colleagues & Information in a Social Network

Finally, as I examined Nancy’s network for closeness, I discovered that her connection to her network was quite similar to Judy’s, measuring 0.704. This metric simply prompts careful consideration of other attributes within Nancy’s network, such as I discussed earlier in terms of density, size, and degree. However, Nancy’s network reveals other factors relevant to this notion of collegial influence because her roles as a connector impacts her colleagues’ knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching writing and writing practice. For example, when asked on the survey how much she influenced her colleagues’ understanding of writing, Nancy reported that she considered herself as somewhat or very influential with three of her colleagues in her building. When asked how much she revitalized their enthusiasm for teaching and/or writing, Nancy shared similar ratings.

Nancy spoke about Beth as someone she influenced by enhancing their enthusiasm for writing. Nancy commented that Beth was “forever grateful” to Nancy for connecting to the Writing Project, adding that Beth “was always writing” after the summer institute. “It just really lifted [Beth] up and it allowed her to put her writing out there when she hadn’t done that before.” Not only did Nancy discover Beth’s talent and passion for writing, but Nancy’s encouragement also prompted Beth to change her classroom practice. Nancy shared that she had observed Beth modeling approaches to writing for her students by sharing her own work and process as a writer. This new facet of Beth’s teaching also served to influence her colleague, Judy.

Finally, Nancy’s position as a connector serves a vital role in bridging two communities in this network: one community mainly comprised of elementary teachers, and the other community containing middle and high school teachers. These links between Nancy and this other community happen as a result of her relationship with Bruce, David, and Denise, three leaders within the State Writing Project. During Nancy’s experience in the institute, these colleagues were either instructors for the university courses or advisors and mentors for the fellows in the State Writing Project.

When Nancy talked about those colleagues who influenced her own writing, she suggested that David played some role. Nancy also indicated that she interacted with David multiple times each week, but for no particular reason, such as instructional approaches and professional development opportunities. However, Nancy did indicate that David was extremely influential on her understanding and her enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing. As her advisor, Nancy said that David influenced her writing to some extent, but he played a much more important role in developing her understanding of practices supporting student writing, including time, quick-writes, conferencing, and peer collaboration.

Finding #2: Networks Develop Leadership

By discussing Nancy's network after Judy's network, I can address differences between their relationships which point to one of my sub-questions—how relationships among teacher-consultants in the State Writing Project influence their roles as leaders.

First, Nancy's social network of support differs from Judy's network because Nancy seeks out advice from a greater number of colleagues and she chose colleagues outside her school district. Some of these colleagues include people who have served leadership roles in the State Writing Project, and these relationships have led Nancy to assume leadership roles in her school and within the network. Working with a colleague, she implemented a writing center at her elementary school, and she directed a summer writing camp for elementary and middle school students.

Second, not only does the size of her network reflect this difference, Nancy's degree of centrality suggests that she serves as a connector or hub for other teachers. Her interactions with colleagues within her school allow her to develop effective practices in her classroom. Her relationships with colleagues outside her district provide her access to instructional tools that Nancy can spread to others, influencing their ability to incorporate new strategies in their classrooms.

Third, Nancy's closeness to other colleagues supports her work as a writer and allows her to support other colleagues in their writing. Nancy identified two colleagues who provided feedback on her writing, reviving her love for writing, a passion she developed at an early age. Also, her invitation for another colleague to join the State Writing Project prompted this teacher to bring her passion for writing into her classroom.

Bonnie's Social Network of Support

The map in Figure 4.8 shows Bonnie's ego network displaying her links to eight people—teachers within her school building and outside her school district whom she identified as important to her work as an educator and/or writer. The arrows on the end of each line indicate direction - who named this person as someone important to their work. Based on the survey, two colleagues identified Bonnie as someone they sought for advice. Also, much like Nancy, Bonnie named five colleagues outside her district as important to her work as a teacher-writer.

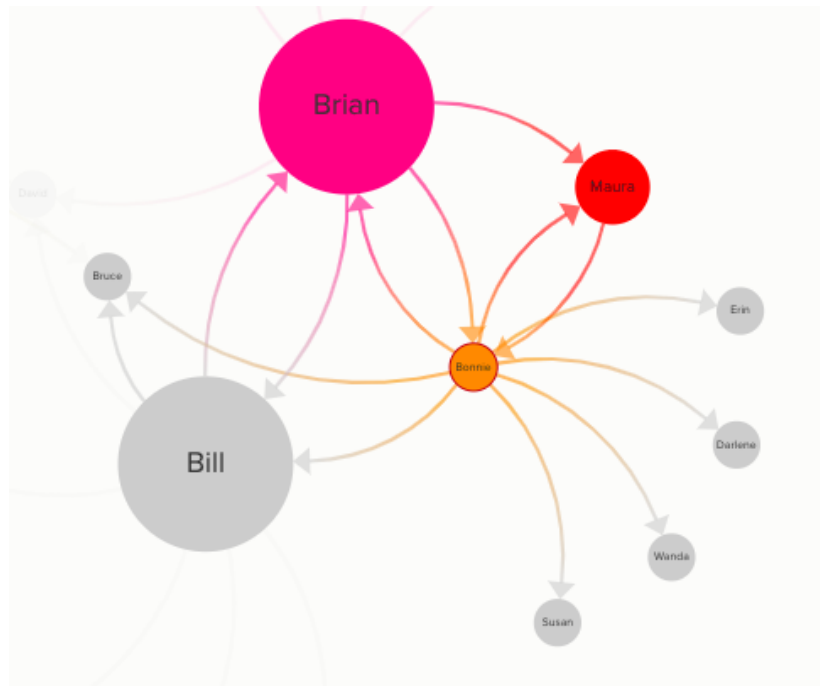


Figure 4.8: Bonnie's Social Network of Support

Density: Connections to Colleagues in a Social Network

The density of Bonnie's network measures 0.14, slightly higher than the whole network of 0.06. Given the increase in the size of her network, this measure of density suggests that Bonnie has fewer connections within this local network. In fact, she identifies only one colleague more than Nancy within her ego network; however, Bonnie's network is located in a unique

community comprised primarily of middle and high school teachers. This detection of a community bears importance to Bonnie's network because her relationships suggest a preference for colleagues similar to her. Although homophily might play a role in some of Bonnie's relationship with colleagues, particularly those outside her building and school district, proximity provides a more likely explanation for her relationship with colleagues in her network. In other words, Bonnie spends more time with high school teachers within her own building, so she naturally gravitates to those colleagues from whom she can access information about her instruction.

As I looked at the density of Bonnie's network, I found similar results to Nancy. While the whole network's density at 0.06 suggests a sparse network of connections, the density of Bonnie's network at 0.14 also indicates fewer connections to people. However, Bonnie named three people outside her district, and, since these colleagues did not participate in the survey, this measure of density fails to describe the influence of relationships on Bonnie's teaching of writing and writing.

Degree: Involvement in a Social Network

Because I am interested in understanding how such relationships influence a teacher's practice, I first examined Bonnie's network for any signs of reciprocal relationships among her colleagues. Three colleagues in her network also participated in my study as survey respondents—Bill, Brian and Maura—and these colleagues did also name Bonnie as an important colleague in their networks. This reciprocity provides a clearer understanding of the nature of collegial relationships and how they may influence a teacher's practice.

For example, Bonnie talked at length about Maura, not only as a teacher in her building, but as someone who teaches the same grade level. Maura participated in the survey and named

Bonnie as an important colleague, indicating that she interacts with Bonnie multiple times each week. Maura seeks out Bonnie for information related to concrete teaching strategies for the classroom, ways to reach a wider range of students, and opportunities to participate in professional development.

Bonnie's responses clearly echo Maura's answers on the survey; furthermore, Bonnie's responses suggest that she highly values her relationship with Maura as she indicated that seeks out information multiple times each week for several reasons: examining student work, up-to-date research, receiving feedback on her writing, and seeking out leadership opportunities. During our interview, Bonnie commented that she spends much of her planning time working directly with Maura. Even though they teach different classes, she and Maura often read the same professional books and share similar approaches to teaching writing. As much as they may have diverged in their courses of study for Master's degrees, Bonnie said that they exchange so much information it's as if they are "getting an extra degree, without actually having to do the work."

Bonnie also indicated that Maura has played another vital role as a colleague: she has revitalized Bonnie's enthusiasm for teaching. Bonnie shared that as a teacher, she can easily become "bogged down by the negatives" and forget the teaching "supposed to be fun, too." Maura reminds Bonnie how to enjoy this work of teaching reading and writing—with enthusiasm and with energy. "She and I are just good at not letting the other one get sucked into negativity by kind of bringing some joy...bringing some storytelling to each other." By exchanging moments in their classrooms, Bonnie and Maura capitalize on their shared teaching responsibilities in the same building while supporting each other's knowledge and practice.

This relationship between Bonnie and Maura suggests that Bonnie plays an equally important role for Maura, yet, Bonnie indicated on the survey that she had little if any influence on colleagues' knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching and/or writing. Bonnie's network suggests, however, that she represents an important connection with the network. First, she has one of the larger networks with nine people; second, her ego network connects her colleagues in middle and high school. Third, the degree centrality of Bonnie's network, when weighted by frequency of interactions, equals 24—the second highest in this State Writing Project network. This measure suggests that Bonnie's role within the whole network has greater influence than she indicated; her frequent interactions with colleagues and her willingness to assume leadership roles position her as an important connector within this network.

Closeness: Access to Colleagues & Information in a Social Network

Bonnie's measure for closeness centrality shows a high score. At 0.856, her closeness suggests that she serves as an important source of information for her colleagues and the frequency of her interactions with others influences their practices as teachers and writers. Given her leadership role as a mentor in the State Writing Project and her willingness to assume the lead on implementing literacy interventions in her school, Bonnie represents an important hub with this network of teachers. Furthermore, her relationship with leaders within the State Writing Project augments her accessibility to resources—people, practices, and publications—relevant to her work as a teacher and writer.

Bonnie talked about the importance of this relationship with Bruce, an instructional leader within the State Writing Project. First, she talked about how Bruce changed her view of writing. Rather seeing a piece of writing as a finished product, Bonnie said that Bruce helped her to appreciate the process of writing. Always prompting her with the question, "Have you

considered this?” Bonnie recalls rewriting her paper multiple times. Despite the frustration in revising her work, Bonnie realized the final grade mattered less than “how much you did to get here and all of the reorganizing and all the rethinking and all of the reconsidering.” Bonnie hoped to convey that thinking to her students through writer’s notebooks. Inspired by two well-known teachers of writing, Bonnie introduced these notebooks to find their voices and to explore ideas. Bonnie admitted that her practices around writing, such as implementing writer’s notebooks, are “definitely an evolving thing,” but she discovered from Bruce the power of providing choice and feedback in her own writing. Such ideas have revitalized her teaching of writing and have led her to share her work with her own students. These experiences with her colleagues have allowed Bonnie to set new goals as a teacher, as she hopes “to write more beside the kids and with them.”

Bonnie also indicated that the evolution of her practices as a teacher of writing develops from sharing student work with her colleagues. She talked about the importance of learning from multiple perspectives, whether hearing feedback from a colleague who can point out our poetic language or rhetorical moves used by her students or receiving feedback on lessons and instructional approaches. “I think hearing those extra perspectives and those other ideas are the only way we’re ever going to get better because we can’t just rely on ourselves.”

Finding #3: Networks Build Efficacy

My analysis of Bonnie’s social network of support allows me to address a second sub-question in my study—how relationships among teacher-consultants in the State Writing Project influence a teacher’s sense of efficacy. In particular, Bonnie’s involvement and experience in this network highlights the role of identity in learning for teachers.

Bonnie’s relationships with colleagues, especially those people outside her district, have helped her to evolve as a writer, thinker, and teacher of writing. As her own identity as a teacher and writer changed, so did her classroom practices. For Bonnie, the power of this network lies in the importance of soliciting multiple perspectives—from colleagues within her own building and from the expertise of colleagues in the State Writing Project.

Her relationships with leaders in the State Writing Project have given Bonnie more confidence as a writer and a desire to change practices in her teaching. This awareness of her journey toward change has enabled Bonnie to assume the lead within her department—devoting time to look at professional publications and creating courses to support literacy skills for students struggling with English courses.

Brian’s Social Network of Support

The map in Figure 4.9 shows Brian’s ego network displaying his links to eight people - teachers within his school building and outside his school district whom he identified as important to his work as an educator and/or writer. The arrows on the end of each line indicate direction—who he named this person as someone important to their work as a teacher and/or writer. Based on the survey, two colleagues identified Brian as someone to whom they turned for advice. Similar to Bonnie and Nancy, Brian named five colleagues outside his district as important to his work as a teacher and writer.

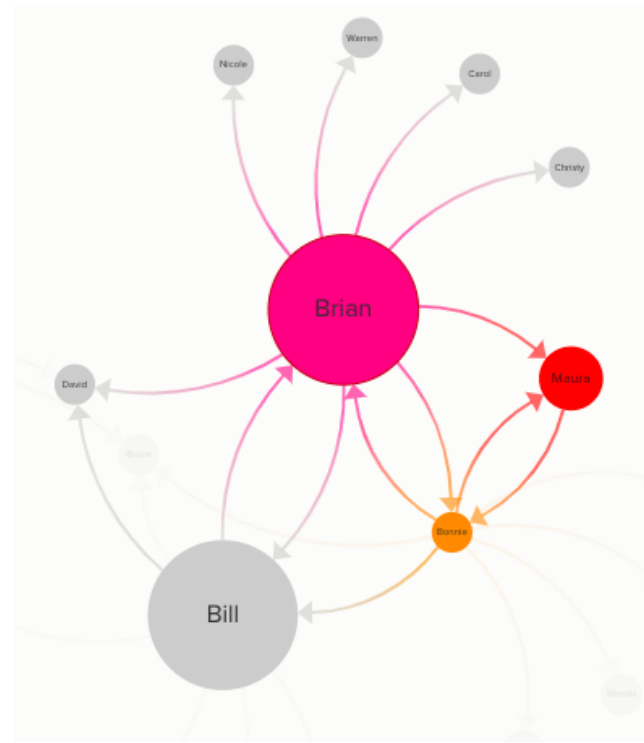


Figure 4.9: Brian's Social Network of Support

Density: Connections to Colleagues in a Social Network

The density of Brian's network measures 0.14, slightly higher than the whole network of 0.06. Given the size of his network, this measure of density suggests that Brian has fewer connections within this local network. Brian's network shares some similarities with Bonnie's network: Brian names eight colleagues important to his work as a teacher and writer, and most of these colleagues belong to this community of middle and high school teachers. Although a middle school teacher, Brian included five high school teachers in his network; in fact, Brian only named only one middle school colleague within his building as someone whom he considers important to his teaching. Similar to Bonnie, Brian's network shows some evidence of reciprocity: Bill and Bonnie also identified Brian within their network.

Degree: Involvement in Social Network

This lower density of his network suggests that Brian places importance on finding information and support for his teaching beyond his district. By examining Brian's network for degree, we can gain a clearer picture of the level of influence colleague's play in Brian's teaching. When looking only at degree, Brian's network measures three—the three individuals he named within his school district. However, when I weight degree centrality for frequency of interactions, Brian's network measures 26. Again, to understand how the degree of these relationships influence Brian's practice as a teacher and writer, I turn to his responses on the survey about whom he seeks out information and for what reasons.

For example, Brian indicated that he interacts with Bill multiple times each week for each of the reasons listed on the survey, from providing concrete teaching strategies to use in the classroom to seeking out leadership roles and opportunities. However, Brian reported that Bill had some influence on his understanding of teaching and learning about writing and only a slight influence on his enthusiasm for teaching and/or writing. Likewise, Brian indicated that he had little or no influence on Bill's knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing. In Brian's case, homophily appears not to serve as a factor driving his decisions about who he seeks information for his teaching and learning about writing.

On the other hand, Brian identifies two individuals outside his district who represent a more influential role in his life as an educator. First, he indicates that he interacts with Warren only once or twice a year, yet Brian noted Warren has been very influential in his understanding of and enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing. Brian mentions repeatedly the "mysterious process" of writing, and how, as a teacher, he seeks ways to make this abstract process more transparent and concrete for his students. Warren shares writing studies with Brian,

showing research to sequence writing tasks in a particular way for student writers. Brian admires Warren's approach to working with students. "I've seen the way he approaches questioning students that changes writing and the instruction of writing and can change just how a student thinks of writing." As much as Brian might not have time to read the full text of these studies Warren sends, Brian values the opportunities to consider "how can I apply this to my students?"

David is the second colleague identified by Brian who has revitalized his enthusiasm for teaching and writing. I should point out that David has been named in other participant networks, as he served in a leadership role for several years in the State Writing Project. David taught several literacy courses at a nearby university and acted as a mentor in Writing Project courses and summer institutes. Seeing David's name appear for Brian's network comes as little surprise; however, David had a greater impact on Brian's writing. Brian felt like David pushed him as a writer, moving him outside his comfort zone to produce a lot of writing during an intensive semester of studies. Brian spoke with admiration as David shared his knowledge and expertise, facilitating conversations which allowed Brian to write far more than he had previously in his life.

Closeness: Access to Colleagues & Information in a Social Network

Not only does Brian's relationship with David inform us about Brian's growth as a writer, but this relationship also connects Brian in a unique way within the whole network. Brian's network shows a high score for closeness, which, at 1.211, is the highest individual score among all survey respondents. Since David did not participate in the survey, I cannot speculate on how his presence in this network influences these teachers; however, this measure of closeness highlights how Brian's relationship *with* David reflects an important area of growth for Brian.

First, Brian served as a mentor to multiple writers during the spring and summer course for the State Writing Project. As he shared his experience with one writer in particular, Brian reflected that, despite some negative interactions, this relationship allowed him to rethink the ways that he interacted with other writers and how challenging it can be to recognize what practices influence colleagues. Second, Brian found himself in a leadership role through David’s interest in a project to promote writing in other content areas. This project led to a collaboration between a local children’s museum and the State Writing Project, promoting writing in natural settings and encouraging participants to publish their writing. Not only did Brian discover how to move beyond his comfort zone with his own writing, but he also realized that David pushed him “in ways that I grew as a professional” by assuming a leadership role in supporting other educators and promoting writing opportunities for the community.

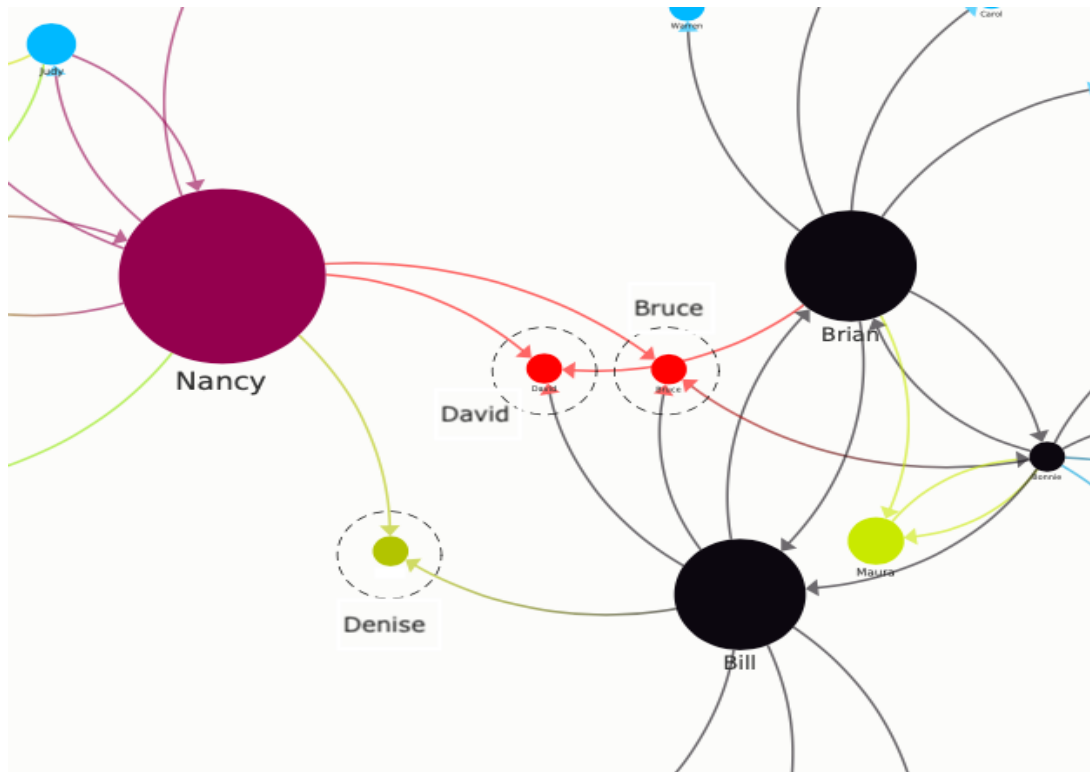


Figure 4.10: Boundary Crossers in the Whole Social Network of Support

Brian's measure of closeness also shows how his relationship with David indicates an important connection among multiple teachers within the network. In figure 4.10, I have selected a focused view of the whole network to highlight this region where the communities within this network connect through this relationship among Brian, Nancy, and David. Based on the map, three participants identify David as important to their work as teachers and writers. It is also important to note that Denise and Bruce represent key connectors within this network: two participants identified Denise and three participants named Bruce as important colleagues. Brian's closeness highlights the complexity of relationships within this network in which individuals interact with each other in different ways for numerous reasons over time. More importantly, these connectors represent relationships which had significant levels of influence on these teachers. As Brian stated, these relationships within this network allowed him to feel "like the needle of literacy was moving up and creating a hub of literacy was really important" in his school. In other words, Brian's relationship with colleagues outside his school provide resources to support changes within his school.

Finding #4: Networks Build Agency

In this section, I shared Brian's network to discuss elements of his network leading him to grow as a writer and an instruction leader. For Brian, this network provides opportunities to leverage a shared, collective experience to effect changes in teacher practices and in the culture of a school. By describing his network with metrics commonly used in social network analysis, I have paired his own words to highlight key features, such as closeness and degree, as ways to describe the role of collegial interactions in supporting the goals and practices within a system as well as to underscore the role of key connectors outside a school or district for meeting these goals and sustaining these practices.

Summary of Social Network Analysis

By focusing on an analysis of whole and ego networks, I have been able to describe elements and features to map the landscape of the relationships among teachers of writing in this State Writing Project network. Understanding relationships within a system provides essential information about the process of change, including points of resistance, sources of influence, and the controls over the flow of knowledge and expertise (Daly, 2010).

“Better understanding of our complex social world provides insights and opportunities in developing and leveraging social capital, which may better enable change agents and the systems they serve to meet the increasing demand for educational change.” (16)

In other words, recognizing this complexity of collegial relationships allows educators and educational leaders to examine and benefit from the knowledge and expertise of their colleagues. Since this social capital remains localized internally, a system can support change over time, rather than become dependent solely on short-term solutions and interventions from external sources. As a result of this localized network, knowledge builds from the interactions of agents within and through this community of practice, rather than knowledge simply transmitted as an object along the lines of connection. Expertise comes from the social practices embedded within and implemented among a community of learning.

By mapping this local network, I highlighted key features and characteristics of these networks to show how these relationships influence their work as teachers of writing and as writers. At this point, my analysis has, in effect, mapped a complex system of connections intersecting the lives of educators, identifying those people who serve as connectors among people and communities to support the work of teaching and writing.

In keeping with Baker-Doyle's (2015) tri-modal model of research, I now turn to a broader view: examining key moments of change emerging from the experiences of these four individuals, not simply within this network but stemming from their stories as they interact with people, events, and experiences. In so doing, I intend to reveal a pattern of growth—identity, agency, and advocacy—as essential elements within this complex system of a teacher's journey as a professional.

Narrative Analysis: Regenerating Teachers

As I described this network of teacher consultants, I feared that I would present a picture of a complicated set of connections, suggesting mechanistic linkages between the components of this network—in this case the people and their community. I chose social network theory and analysis to avoid reporting on the components of a complicated system; rather, my intent was to show how these relationships vary over time and across settings because each person seeks out information from others for different reasons at various points in their teaching and writing lives. Also, as Daly (2011) suggests, examining the complexity of social systems and relationships within a network allows researchers like me to identify those elements and features interacting within a community of practice and among the members of an organization.

Additionally, this section of my analysis supports two areas of my study. First, in Chapter 2, I discussed the importance of examining the principles of adult learning because organizations, such as a school and a professional network, operate as complex social systems with a human purpose—to support people in achieving their goals (Knowles, Houlton, and Swanson, 2015). Secondly, the focus of my study questions regarding efficacy and agency lie beyond the scope of social network analysis. As I discussed above, social network theory allows

researchers to study features such as homophily, proximity, and expertise as well as a host of characteristics including degree, closeness, and density.

However, qualitative analysis of interviews with four informants allows me to study more closely how features like expertise influence relationships within the network. In particular, I intend to call attention to individuals whose expertise within this network serves as an essential connector to multiple teachers. Rather than approach this discussion only from a quantitative approach within social network analysis, I intend to explore this element of expertise through my discussion of three themes: identity, agency, and advocacy. I hesitate to limit this discussion of expertise only within the context of a network; instead, I intend to describe how individuals who share their expertise serve as catalysts within a regenerative process of teacher growth.

This qualitative approach enhances data reliability and validity by providing a context for my analysis in the previous sections of this chapter. More importantly, Wenger, Trayner, and de Latt (2011) suggest that researchers examine both the collective and personal stories within a network:

“...it is largely through their personal networks that people participate in broader social networks. Social networks are the aggregation of personal networks. The stories of personal and social networks are two narratives about a single, integrated process.” (16)

In other words, schools represent a complex social world, a network building its own narrative and identity from shared norms, practices, and resources. As my analysis in the previous section shows, each informant developed their personal networks as their connection to the community. Consequently, through a study of their personal stories, I intend to describe how these themes of identity, agency, and advocacy arise from this interplay between personal and community relationships.

As I discussed in a previous section, I selected four informants from the pool of survey respondents based on two criteria:

- How frequently this person was identified by others as influencing their practice; and,
- How frequently this person identified others within the network as influencing their practice

I follow a semi-structured interview to ask each informant the same questions about their experiences as writers when students in K-12 settings and their post-secondary education. I also asked questions about their involvement in the Local Writing Project; in particular, I asked each informant to share a story associated with their experience in the Writing Project. Finally, I designed questions specific to their responses on the survey, such as why they thought it was important to review student work with colleagues and how specific colleagues influenced their knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching and writing.

I analyzed the transcripts of these interviews with Dedoose, using a set of initial codes related to my study questions: identity, agency, and advocacy. The first two codes connect to this question of efficacy - how people, such as teachers, mentors, and colleagues influenced their sense of identity and agency as a writer. The third code, advocacy, relates to my question regarding their ability to bring about changes in their school, district, and beyond.

Based on those initial codes, I generated a list of secondary codes to indicate relevant ideas emerging from the interviews. For example, as I analyzed the transcripts for identity, the informants talked about their experiences in terms of their identities as a writer and as a teacher. Furthermore, I noted that the sources of influence varied: informants shared that they made changes in practice based on resources that they read while some changes occurred due to the influence of colleagues.

Attending to these secondary codes allowed me to delve into the specific ways these educators spoke about their perceptions of influences on their teaching and writing. Also, these codes highlighted the opportunities for as well as obstacles to their growth as teachers and writers. As I mentioned earlier, their narratives serve as their path to connecting with colleagues and their networks; like any path toward change, their experiences include stepping stones toward success as well as stumbling blocks to their development.

I will discuss the stories of my informants in four parts: forming identity as a writer, developing identity as a teacher, building agency as a writer, and fostering agency as a teacher-writer. In each part, I will use excerpts from each interview to focus on key moments in their stories emerging from their experiences and their interactions with teachers, colleagues, mentors, and writers.

Part I: Forming Identity as a Writer

I asked each informant to share their earliest writing experiences in school, and each quickly recalled a moment in their elementary, middle or high school years when a teacher said or did something to consider the idea of being a writer. Typically, their recollections centered on a particular assignment or activity, and their comments as educators in retrospect often involved their critique of a teacher using or not using particular writing strategies.

In talking about these early years, these informants had clear memories of writing experiences in school. Brian talked about the number of book reports in his writing history, commenting as though channeling a younger version of himself, “Oh, I’m writing about something that I already know that doesn’t really have a purpose other than for the teacher.”

Bonnie echoed this perceived lack of purpose when, in middle school, her teacher used a workshop model for writing. She remembers producing a lot of writing, but she said, “I didn’t

feel like I was learning anything.” Bonnie recalled peer conferences as part of this writing process, and she remembers developing the habit of writing consistently. Even though she described these writing experiences as creative, Bonnie identified that she needed more feedback from her teacher and evidence that she developed skills from lessons.

Although Nancy did not recall doing a lot of writing, she did remember an experience as an older elementary student working on a research project with a small group of classmates. Otherwise, Nancy said that there was not a lot of emphasis put on writing. Despite this lack of emphasis, Nancy expressed her love of writing in these early years. “I think it was just the creativity and being able to write down what I saw and what I dreamed up in my head.”

On the other hand, Judy had clear memories of crafting how-to pieces, short fictional works, and interviewing a relative about their experiences serving in the military during a war. She added, “I wish at the time, I had asked him more about it because he was not one to share his war stories.” Judy also mentioned that she keeps a folder of her writings from elementary, including a piece about how to make a friendship bracelet.

This idea of preserving early writing samples was common among their recollections of writing experiences. These artifacts, in particular, revealed some of their beliefs about themselves as writers. For Nancy, the simple act of “getting those thoughts down on a piece of paper, that action of putting pen to paper” fueled her love of writing. Even though she did not consider herself a writer, Judy commented that she saved her work because “I must have thought I was like some star writer or something.”

Brian shared the same belief that he was not a writer, yet he admitted to holding onto artifacts of his early pieces. He also talked about writing outside school with his brother and friends, but he never felt like he was a writer. “I felt like...writers are people that have published

books. That's when you become a writer." Likewise, when she spoke about her earlier experiences in elementary school, Bonnie spoke warmly about having her writing published: wallpaper and duct tape collections assembled by her teacher that had "the look of books." In both cases, Brian and Bonnie associated a writer's identity with the production of a tangible, completed work.

As these educators talked about their middle and high school years, their experiences typically involved more formal assignments and increased expectations from teachers. Bonnie recalled writing a lot of essays and receiving her drafts marked up with red ink from her teacher. "I knew when I got back the paper what I needed to do to get better." Bonnie even attributed her experiences with this teacher as preparing her to excel in her early years in college, so she wrote to this teacher to thank her for "ripping all of my papers to shreds because I clearly figured it out." Yet, despite these successes, Bonnie never felt like she was a writer because she didn't love to write. Rather, she appeared to be driven by this desire to succeed as student

Unlike Bonnie, Brian shared how a high school teacher never provided any clear guidance to improve his writing. Brian recalled this teacher praising his essay on a novel, even reading aloud this essay to his class. Although he received high marks on this paper, Brian never knew what specifically he did well. In fact, he received a "D" on his next literary essay, again, without any sense of what he failed to do as a writer.

Similar to Bonnie's experience, Nancy talked about a high school teacher who was very tough on their critical writing essays about novels studied in class. As much as she and her classmates hated these assignments, Nancy commented that this teacher "made me realize the skills that I was lacking in writing." Even as a high school student, she loved writing, but Nancy felt inadequate as a writer, as though she lacked skills that she should have acquired.

Judy also recalled a teacher who used “her little red pen” to point out all the things that Judy needed to fix in her writing. Judy explained that her teacher would snack on Saltine crackers during these conferences and had a habit of spitting out crumbs while she spoke with students about changes to make in their writing. As a result, Judy and her classmates did look forward to these conferences; despite this memorable experience with this teacher, Judy does not recall these conferences being helpful to her as a writer.

Finally, as these educators recalled these experiences, each of them offered pedagogical critiques of their writing lives. For example, Nancy and Bonnie talked about the lack of writing conferences with the teacher and their classmates to receive helpful feedback on their work as younger writers. When these teachers do talk about feedback, the classic motif of the “red pen” appears: for Judy and Bonnie, this presence of a perceived expert returning papers marked with comments and editor’s marks. Only in one case, Bonnie, did this written feedback provide ways to improve the writing. For Brian, a letter grade served as the only marker of success or failure: other than public praise, his teacher offered no indicators for Brian to measure his development as a writer.

In this part of my analysis, I explained indicators shaping these teachers’ identities as younger writers. In so doing, I described important events, experiences, and people playing a role in their growth and development of writers. In the following section, I will assume the same approach to examine events, experiences, and people as factors in developing their identity as teachers.

Part II: Developing Identity as a Teacher

Much like their earliest memories of writing in school, the teachers talked about experiences in elementary schools as important moments leading to their decision to become a

teacher. Also, each one recalled someone playing a memorable role in their journey toward education.

Bonnie's story represents an interesting contrast to the stories of the other informants. She always wanted to be a teacher, relishing chances to be a group leader. Also, she excelled at math, and often found herself teaching her classmates. Bonnie attributes her success as a student to her third and fourth grade teachers who taught a multiage class and handled this mix of students, in her words, brilliantly.

Judy's experience with an influential teacher came later in her life - as a high school art student. Uncertain about her next steps after high school, Judy shared with her art teacher that she might take off a year, but her teacher persuaded her to rethink her decision. Judy talked about potential career paths related to helping others, but she knew that she no longer wanted to pursue nursing. So, her art teacher suggested education, leading Judy to enroll in a special education program.

Nancy's decision to enter the teaching profession came even later than Judy's moment in high school. Nancy planned to earn a degree in human services, wanting to work in group home settings with children identified with intellectual challenges. Instead she became a teacher, traveling to multiple schools within a district to work directly with students identified with special needs in self-contained classrooms. This experience in the schools helped Nancy realize that she wanted to continue this work and returned to school to earn her teaching degree.

Brian's story bears some resemblance to Nancy's in that his experiences with elementary school students prompted him to rethink his identity as a teacher. Initially, Brian felt inspired to pursue a science degree to work in the private sector because he said, "Science could see the heart of the universe, and you could know truths that no one else could even understand." Once

Brian started substitute teaching in elementary schools, he discovered how much he loved working children. Later, as he began teaching older children, he marveled at what kids could do in middle school. “I just saw people change before my eyes with writing,” changes that Brian thought were possible only through the lens of science inquiry and education.

As I heard these origin stories from these educators, I was surprised to learn how the relationship with another person, whether with a teacher in their formative years or with students in their classrooms, played such an influential role in their decisions to enter the teaching profession. Furthermore, each story offered a unique context for these educators to initiate their journey into education: multi-age classrooms, art class, human services, and science-related careers.

In discussing these stories forming their identities as teachers, I intend to show each person had an interaction with someone, and this interaction, no matter how brief, prompted their trajectory to becoming teachers. As I continue these stories in the following section, I will discuss the significance of relationships with mentors and colleagues in fostering agency as these teachers embrace more fully their identities as writers.

Part III: Building Agency as a Writer

Thus far, the pattern of these stories has focused on individuals acting, for the most part, on their own in relationship with one other person; a dyad through which a relationship has resulted in each informant recognizing their identity as a writer and teacher. My analysis seems to have strayed from the social network and community of practice I endeavored to map as an influence in the lives of these teachers of writing and writers. In this section, I will share their stories within a community in which practices and relationships serve a vital role in building their agency as writers.

As each of these educators shared their stories about connecting with the Local Writing Project, their experiences and relationships also provided opportunities to develop skills as teachers of writing. In fact, their primary objective in taking these courses - a spring semester and a two-week summer institute - was driven by a need to make improvements in their practice. Each of them found something lacking in their work as classroom teachers, and they turned to the Writing Project to fill that void.

When I asked Nancy what led her to the Writing Project, she responded without hesitation, “test scores.” She recalled how hard that she and her colleagues worked to raise their elementary school’s scores on the state test. “[W]hen I kept looking at those scores every year, I thought ‘I’ve got to do more.’ I need to do more to help me to help them. I need to be that writer.” Nancy recognized that her growth as a *teacher* dependent on her desire to grow as a *writer*: her efficacy as a writer shaped her agency as a teacher.

Nancy learned how important more time is needed for writing because, until she engaged in her process of writing, she did not understand “what hard, hard work it is to write.” She also talked about the value of feedback through writing conferences; again, she pointed out it’s hard to “put yourself out there” as an adult writer, but this process is necessary. “I think you need to be a writer to teach writing. If you aren’t a writer, you can’t teach writing because you don’t understand.” She added, “we discover who we are, as a writer through our own writing.” For Nancy, this discovery came from these people in the writing project who changed her own impression of herself. “I don’t think I had given myself permission to be a writer,” but her colleagues in the Writing Project “...opened my eyes and gave me permission to be a writer, you know.”

Brian also turned to the Writing Project to guide his inquiry into what he described as this mysterious process of writing. As a teacher, he felt intuitively that there was more to the teaching of writing than correcting the grammar on student writing pieces. Like Nancy, Brian discovered, however, that his growth as a teacher developed through his experiences as a writer. “I actually find the process of writing painful, like giving birth,” and, yet, Brian was able to reflect on this process, how writing changes what you want to write, how revising reveals what he captured or didn’t capture on the page. Also, working on his writing allowed him to learn about strategies for writers. “I felt it was the first time it really broke something down” into teachable concepts. As much as he still believes that writing is a mysterious process, Brian articulated through his own experiences as a writer that this process can be learned and explained amidst a community of writers and teachers.

Judy went into the Writing Project thinking that she could help her English language learners, adding that writing is often the hardest area to achieve proficiency. Despite this interest to help her students, Judy believes the Writing Project experience benefitted her more, particularly in gaining confidence as a writer. She discovered through journal writing that she allowed herself to write without worrying about the spelling and grammar as she wrote: “...just get the words out, just get the thoughts out - you can go back and edit later.” Even though her current job description does not allow her to work on writing with students, Judy recognized that this idea of “just get the words out” would help her English-language learners in their writing.

Judy continues to write regularly in her journal, using these entries to process her thoughts and feelings about things going on in her life and the world. “[W]henver I have that strong feeling I just need to write or whenever I see the headlines on TV that I have really strong thoughts about but don’t want to express to anybody, I just write them all down.” She also

recognized that she would not write as often in her journal if she hadn't experienced the work of the Writing Project. She especially credits Beth's encouragement to join the Writing Project as a key influence to making journal writing a regular habit in her life. While Judy might not identify as a writer, she has found her voice in writing to express thoughts and feelings on the page and to consider how this practice of writing without concerns for conventions could benefit her students.

Bonnie experienced a similar influence in her decision to join the Writing Project through her relationship with Maura. "[H]er enthusiasm and her excitement really alone is what pushed me" to enroll in the courses. Like Judy, Bonnie did not consider herself a writer because "I don't always feel like I have something to say." Bonnie had always felt comfortable with academic writing; building from her love of reading, especially the "classics," she would rather talk about and respond to what other people have to say through literary essays. However, the spring course broadened Bonnie's ideas of what academic writing could look like beyond the traditional essay. Furthermore, Bonnie reflected on a shift in her own identity: "I just go to see that difference between the stodgy English teacher that I thought I wanted to be and what the actual energy could be."

As she talked about making this shift as a teacher, Bonnie commented that Bruce, one of the course instructors, influenced her understanding of teaching and writing. Rather than thinking about writing only in terms of the assignment requirements or the end product, Bruce pushed her to see more clearly the process of writing. She learned that the writing is not about the grade, but "on how much work you did to get here and all of the reorganizing and all the rethinking and all of the reconsidering." Bonnie always felt intrigued by the idea shared by published writers that

the writing is never done. Yet, she said, "...it's powerful to hear that from somebody who knows what they're doing and to know that writing can change, just like we change."

In seeking to address a need as a teacher, each of these educators discovered the importance of developing skills as a writer. Additionally, by reflecting on their process as writers and through sharing their work with other writers, these educators not only recognized their position as experts in the classroom, but they also reflected on how this community of writers provided a critical audience to support their growth as writers and teachers. These teachers also identified ways in which colleagues within this network played essential roles in building their agency as writers.

In the following section, I will discuss how these teachers discovered ways in which their relationships within this network of writers and educators helped them to recognize the importance of advocating for themselves and for their students. More importantly, these teachers articulated specific practices from their own experiences as writers to foster in their student writers.

Part IV: Generating Advocacy through Reflection as a Teacher-Writer

In the previous section, these teachers talked about developing a better understanding of writing as a process and they engaged in this thinking through their own experiences as writers. As they talked about their experiences and relationships, these educators also revealed the power of reflection— in understanding their process as writers, in considering ways to connect this process to their practice with students, and in recognizing the influence of colleagues on their work as teachers and writers.

This connection between reflection and agency provides the final element revealed in these stories from my informants. More importantly, this fourth element completes a cyclical process through which these educators developed their identity as writers, formed their identity as teachers, fostered their agency as writers and teachers, and generated the reflexive stance to advocate for others, as shown in Figure 4.11.

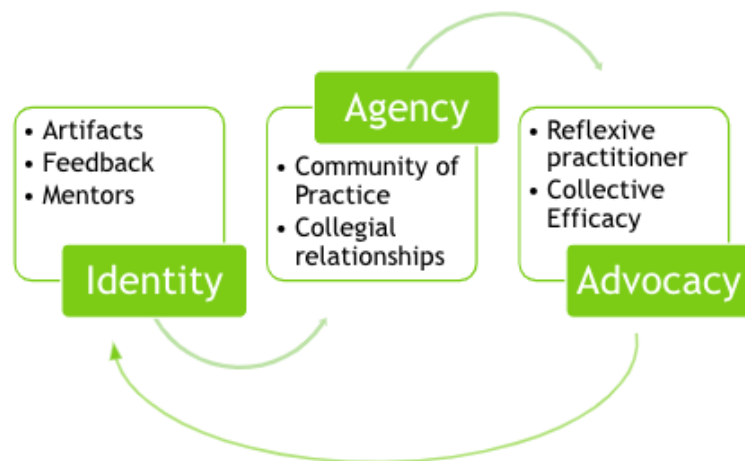


Figure 4.11 Regenerative Cycle of Identity, Agency, and Advocacy

This fourth section also connects to a key area of interest in my study: how relationships in this network allow teachers to bring about change in their schools, districts and beyond. Previously, I touched upon how these educators sought out the Writing Project as a way to gain skills and knowledge to improve student writing. In the following discussion, I will share how these educators developed practices to support their students and how their relationships with colleagues allowed them to make changes beyond their own classrooms.

In the previous section, some of these informants shared how learning about their process as writers guided them to understand what practices fostered their growth in writing. Their experiences also led to them to reconsider the conditions in the classroom to support their student writers.

For example, Nancy talked about the challenges of writing: “If you aren’t aren’t a writer, you can’t teach writing because you don’t understand...what hard work it is to write.” Her experience as a writer allowed to voice to her students that writing is hard work. When she talked about her experience in the Writing Project, Nancy learned how much more time needs to be devoted to students to write. More importantly, she realized the importance of conferences, particularly receiving feedback from peers. Nancy commented that sharing her writing with her peers was difficult even as an adult, to “put yourself out there. But you have to do it, because if you don’t do it, how can you expect your kids to do it?” As she became more comfortable with sharing her work with others, Nancy presented her writing to her students, soliciting feedback from them. For Nancy, her ability to teach writing effectively stemmed from her experiences and identity as a writer.

Nancy valued this feedback from her colleagues within the Writing Project and at her school. She mentioned how Pam was always willing to offer constructive feedback and, since they taught at the same school, they could talk to each other about their course work and writing pieces. This relationship with Pam also allowed Nancy to implement a writing center at their school. She described how much time they took to decorate a classroom to resemble an outdoor space: lawn chairs, camp fire, plants. Despite their efforts, other staff could not help run the writing center, and, in time, the project folded.

Nancy truly believed that this writing center and her shared work with colleagues in the Writing Project would convince her district to place more emphasis on writing instruction. “I really, really thought...if I proved to them that this was my passion, that maybe [the district] would, you know, say we need a writing teacher to work with teachers...” Nancy believes that schools and teacher training programs need to provide more preparation for teaching writing. She

views the Writing Project as playing an important role in fulfilling this need to prepare teachers because her own experience helped her discover ways to become more effective. “I thought I was an okay writing teacher. But I didn’t know how much I didn’t know.” Becoming that better writing teacher allowed Nancy to advocate for changes in her school and district, leaning on those relationships in the Writing Project to fuel her passion for writing.

This collaboration with colleagues represents an essential part of Bonnie’s experience as she reexamined her practices in her classroom and encouraged her colleagues in her department to participate in a book study. In the previous section in this chapter, Bonnie talked about Maura’s influence on her understanding of and enthusiasm for teaching writing. Since Bonnie and Maura participated in the Writing Project, I asked Bonnie to consider how this shared experience influenced their work as a team of freshman English teachers. Bonnie commented that their experience provided a common language and philosophy to shape their thinking and planning. Bonnie stated that this common experience “helped us to have some confidence in each other.” Even though the Writing Project emphasizes learning about teaching writing, she and Maura have found unique roles in their partnership: “I can lean on her for some of the writing stuff and she can lean on me with some of the reading stuff. So, we have enough commonalities, but we then can rely on each other to fill in some of our deficits.”

Having found a shared philosophy in her relationship with Maura, Bonnie and Maura often read the same professional books. This enthusiasm for learning motivated them to convince their colleagues in their English department to read and discuss the same book. Bonnie voiced a tone of pride in persuading their building principal to join their book study, perceiving his participation as implicit support for their work as teachers—in their growth as professionals and their efforts to improve student achievement in writing.

Nancy also spoke about the role of having a common language with her colleagues, a similar vocabulary about teaching and providing feedback on writing from their shared experience in the Writing Project. She spoke about her colleague Michelle who taught the same grade as Nancy and their classrooms were connected by a set of doors, allowing them to work together quite frequently. In particular, Nancy said that they often reviewed student work together, asking each other for feedback on lessons and how to provide ideas for their students. Nancy believed that this common vocabulary about writing strategies and instructional approaches allowed them to each other and their students. Nancy said that Michelle "...always knew what I was thinking," so that she could find a way to guide a particular student. Additionally, with an emphasis on writing in the Writing Project, Nancy knew that she could turn to Michelle for feedback on her own writing.

Bonnie talked about the importance of feedback for students, particularly with students who struggle in English classes. As she became more involved in the Writing Project, Bonnie learned that she could explain more clearly the purpose for a particular writing assignment, breaking down the task to make sense to students. "...if I can't break it down in a way that works for them, they're going to fail, every time. Or they're going to throw their hands up in the air and they're going to fail because they choose just not to do any of the work."

The stories of these informants illustrate the role reflection at the heart of advocating for changes in writing practices. First, these informants recognized the power of understanding their own process as writers so that they, as teachers of writing, could help their students to discover their writing process. These educators also learned how much work writing requires, a level of work which even adults find daunting, even painful. Yet, reflecting on this process amidst this cycle of forming an identity as a writer and teacher of writing reveals the purpose of teaching. As

Brian commented, “all the best teaching is going to occur in the process” and the students’ “thinking is being formed in the process.”

Secondly, until these educators immersed themselves in their own writing, these informants did not recognize what practices in their classrooms would allow their student writing to grow in skills and to feel confident. These informants now recognize the importance of pairing mentor texts with writing instruction, of devoting time each day for writing, and to adopt new approaches to assessment. Furthermore, these teachers became more attuned to those moments to intervene with struggling students, to ask the questions like “Have you considered...” this idea or strategy, and to provide more opportunities for feedback and choice.

Finally, each informant reflected on the ways in the Writing Projects promotes a particular culture of writing, one in which individuals find community—one in which fellow writers provide open and honest feedback and in which teachers refine their educational practice. First, this community allows teacher-writers to explore their vulnerability as writers. As Bonnie suggested, the Writing Project allowed her “to step outside of [her] comfort zone, and showed me that I do have things to say, even though I don’t feel like I do. I have experiences that are valuable.” Secondly, exploring their own vulnerability as writers allowed these teachers to recognize the vulnerability of their student writers. Brian said that you can “take the most reluctant writer, and if you can get past their vulnerabilities...they’re going to create something that will matter for the rest of their lives.”

Ultimately, building such a community of practice within a school or district presents many challenges and potential for these teachers. Brian believes that the Writing Project wants to recreate these experiences of passion, of vulnerability, of agency so teachers “go back and have this bond that can transform schools. And that is what is so hard to hang on to.” Bonnie reflected

on her experience with Brian who served as her mentor during the Writing Project. Being able to build a connection with him as someone in her district made her experience more powerful.

Bonnie wished that there were some way to recreate this kind of culture, to build these relationships among co-workers through the Writing Project. Similarly, Judy and Nancy found affirmation and connection with those colleagues who participated in the Writing Project. Not only could they turn to their colleagues for teaching advice, but they also knew that they could ask for feedback and guidance on their writing.

This reflective stance as a teacher-writer provides these educators with the ability to adjust their own practices and to revisit their own experiences as a way to inform their decisions as teachers of writing. Furthermore, the act of storytelling facilitated an opportunity for these teachers to bring to light ways in which their journeys as writers shaped their identity - as writers and teachers. When Nancy spoke about teachers developing their own writing practices and routines is important, she said that this practice allows teachers to “discover who we are, as a writer, through our own writing. And if we’re not writing [we] can’t discover that.”

At various points during these interviews, these educators commented that they did not believe that as writers they had something meaningful to share. However, their stories as writers and teachers of writing clearly reveal that their experiences highlight this connection between identity, agency, and advocacy. This reflective stance emerging from their storytelling allowed them to create a linked story framed partly within this network of colleagues, but also shaped by their unique experiences. The resolution of their story resides in their willingness to advocate for new practices in writing instruction, not only to support the agency and identity of writers in their classrooms, but also to guide their colleagues in discovering how to reexamine their own practices and to reconsider the purposes of their writing instruction. Furthermore, this reflective

stance allowed these informants to critique the larger structure of their schools and district, identifying barriers within the system which might allow them and their colleagues to implement a transformational culture of writing and literacy.

Closing

In these acts of storytelling, these educators transported themselves several years into the past, yet they carried with them their teacher identities to filter elements of their experiences. These informants neither appeared to judge teachers from their youth as committing some pedagogical crime nor did they seem motivated to repair instructional approaches to support their writing experiences. Rather, each of their stories about early writing experiences were colored by a newer identity, a teacher-writer identity who seemed to sit beside these earlier versions of themselves to inspect these moments when they began to understand themselves as writers.

Furthermore, as a researcher, I situate myself in a privileged position, not only to witness this reflexive process from these teachers, but also to leverage my own reflective lens to call attention to and honor these reflective moves encountered as part of the storytelling process. In other words, the nature of their stories about early writing identities becomes informed and influenced by their position as veteran educators and their relatively recent teacher-writer identity. Finally, my own lens as a researcher becomes a third set of eyes navigating and mapping this terrain of experiences unfolding through stories.

On the one hand, this unspoken meta-awareness of the teachers imbues their stories with clues to unearthing elements important to a writer's identity. Likewise, I must be aware of my presence as a researcher, both during the moments of storytelling and while I analyze their stories, so that I neither misread these clues nor misinterpret the significance of these moves made by these storytellers. In the end, assuming a reflective stance as a storyteller and listener

allows educators and researchers opportunities to discover ways to advocate for our colleagues - as teachers and as writers - and for our student-writers.

As I conclude the stories of these educators, I want to address a couple of key points about the narrative structure of my analyzing and retelling their stories. First, I arranged my analysis in chronological order, moving from the earliest memories of writing experiences to their more current discussion of experiences in the classroom and with the Local Writing Project. This structure formed naturally from the questions that I asked during the interviews; however, the responses of the informants often ebbed and flowed across time as they recalled people, events, and experiences related to questions, such as those about their memories of writing in school.

Secondly, whenever the informants spoke of colleagues and the ways in which their relationships influenced their knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing, their responses were not constrained by time; rather, these relationships reflect how often these educators interacted with their colleagues. More to the point, I want to emphasize that the level of influence by a colleague is not necessarily time-dependent: forming a relationship with a colleague at one point in time versus another point in time does not change the extent to which this colleague influenced their practice. In fact, these informants participated in the courses for the State Writing Project anywhere from six to fourteen years prior to my study.

However, the language used by these informants suggests that these relationships have developed over time. For example, when Brian talks about Warren sharing research in writing studies, he describes these interactions as ongoing: “he always drops these enormous writing studies” or “I’ve seen the way he approaches questioning students...” When Judy talks about visiting Beth’s to observe a writing lesson, she describes the moment in past tense; however,

later in the interview, she revisits this moment to highlight how Beth represents a model of effective practice for her own teaching. These episodes and events exist within a specific moment in time, but their importance to each informant operates within a context to foster their growth as teachers and writers.

Since membership in this network of teachers depends upon completion of the Writing Project, then these specific relationships and their significance are also relevant when these colleagues become connected, as it were, through this shared community of practice. The meaning of these stories, then, carries importance when told as a collective narrative: common themes and ideas emerge to reveal how these relationships support a teacher's growth—in this regenerative cycle of identity, agency, and advocacy. In other words, *when* these relationships were formed matters less than *how* these relationships influence their experiences as teachers and writers.

My choice to structure their collective narrative in a chronological order mainly reflects a pattern in their teaching trajectories: as they worked with students over time, these teachers recognized a desire to improve their craft for the purpose of giving students the tools to become better writers. However, that process of change remains ongoing, cultivated by this reflective stance—within the narrow context of these informants sharing their experiences and within the broader context of their classrooms to improve student learning. Ultimately, this reflective stance speaks to the larger project of making systemic change—of leveraging the power of a network of like-minded individuals with the skills and expertise to transform teaching and learning in their schools and districts.

Summary of Chapter

In this chapter, I presented an analysis of a whole network of teacher consultants within one district to show how relationships within a Local Writing Project network influence the work of writing teachers. While the whole network provides a descriptive backdrop of the survey participants, I offered a more detailed analysis of the informant's networks. This analysis provides a closer examination of key qualities and characteristics of these four ego networks to reveal key factors influencing collegial relationships. Finally, I presented case portraits of each of the informants to examine links among their stories in relation to the themes of identity, agency, and advocacy. For example, these teachers indicated that their identities as writers enabled them to adopt new practices as teachers, and this agency as a teacher-writer provided them with the knowledge and confidence to share these practices with colleagues, within and outside the Writing Project network. This cross-case analysis will allow me to discuss in the next chapter implications for professional development experiences for practicing teachers while pointing to the role of social networks and communities of practice in supporting the growth of educators.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS

When I started teaching, I found myself in the fortunate position to work with knowledgeable and passionate middle level educators. My colleagues committed themselves to designing learning experiences matching the needs and characteristics of young adolescents while seeking out ways to collaborate and connect with fellow educators—within their schools, districts, and in other schools throughout the state. Furthermore, these colleagues operated effectively as a team, adopting shared practices and a common vision to support each other’s growth and to improve student learning.

Within a few short years, I had established a network of professionals enabling me to adopt new practices, skills, and beliefs. Additionally, I found myself attending state, regional and national conferences and institutes as a participant and presenter.

After teaching for several years and working in a new school, I observed a shift in middle level education—from the national to the state level. Fewer teachers attended the state association’s annual conference and discussions rarely revolved around effective practices, such as teaming and integrated learning. At the district level, curriculum meetings focused on aligning curriculum with standards and how to improve scores on state-wide tests. Despite the occasional flashes of effective professional development centered on student work and collaboration with colleagues, teaching largely became a solitary act to generate daily lessons and materials for students. Growing tensions with administration, a burdensome teacher evaluation system, and an increasing workload of new initiatives pushed me to consider leaving teaching.

However, I still maintained connections with colleagues through professional organizations; meeting these educators once or twice a year reenergized my teaching and offered

glimpses of possibilities for changing professional development for teachers. In particular, I relished opportunities where teachers taught each other—sharing resources, practices, lesson materials, and student voices amidst their successes in their classrooms and communities. When I learned about the State Writing Project and this model of teachers teaching teachers, I knew that I had discovered a network to sustain my work as an educator as well as a community of practice to cultivate my personal passions for writing.

Following my experience in the State Writing Project spring course and summer institute, I realized that I relied more frequently on this network located outside my school and district. Meanwhile, I noticed how many colleagues turned more inward, finding the need to survive their increased workloads and time constraints by isolating themselves within their content specialties. In my school and in the wider circles of middle level education, I observed less evidence of and heard fewer discussions about ways to collaborate and to integrate practices across content areas.

Even though the Writing Project focuses on a content area typically taught by English Language Arts teachers, I rediscovered my enthusiasm for teaching because I reconnected with a model of professional growth from my early years of teaching: teachers teaching teachers. I had seen glimpses of this approach throughout my career, and the National Writing Project model was a stark contrast to the professional development experiences offered within my school district. Not only did the State Writing Project affirm my identity as a writer and an expert in teaching writing, the spring course and summer institute fostered relationships which allowed me to test ideas, to reflect on my practices and beliefs, and to grow into a community of practice. This experience was transformational for me, and I wondered how my experiences might be similar to other educators. In particular, I was curious how colleagues within the same school district benefitted from relationships with other teacher consultants—in their schools, in their

district, and in the wider network of the Writing Project. As a result, I designed this study to understand how relationships among Writing Project teacher consultants influence a teacher's growth—as a learner, writer, and a teacher of writing.

In this chapter, I discuss a few implications based on the findings from my study. The first section discusses implications regarding the ways in which collaboration can support professional learning for teachers through feedback and shared practices. In the second section, I discuss how professional relationships support efficacy for teachers. The third section addresses implications for schools and organizations to reexamine the practices and purposes of professional development. As I discuss these implications for professional learning, I will also consider potential directions for future studies.

Implication #1: Collaboration Benefits Teachers & Students

Although many teachers participate in formal professional development, such as conferences, courses, and workshops, studies indicate that these traditional approaches to professional learning fall short of the time needed for teachers to make significant changes in student learning (Wei et al. 2009). Also, teachers report lacking adequate time during the school day to practice and apply skills in their classroom (Learning Forward, 2017). While studies point to positive gains in job-embedded, or site-based, models of professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Curry, 2008; Wei et al. 2009; Pella, 2011), more research is needed to explore the role of professional organizations and relationships with colleagues to foster effective teaching and learning. In particular, a growing body of research based on social network theory identifies informal structures which encourage collaboration and leadership development among teachers (Daly & Little, 2015; Moolenaar, 2012; Penuel et al., 2012; Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Baker-Doyle, 2011). The findings from my study support this research and have implications for

ways in which schools provide opportunities for collaboration among teachers. In particular, I will discuss four implications for teacher growth and student learning.

The first implication is that collaboration provides opportunities for teachers to receive feedback to foster their own professional growth as well as their students' learning. In my study, participants indicated that reviewing student work and receiving feedback on lessons and instructional strategies as being two of the most important activities to their growth as a teacher of writing. According to my informants, teachers received feedback based on observations by their SWP colleagues and by discussing strategies and lesson plans during common planning times. However, participant responses showed that these teachers rarely engaged in such activities. These teachers indicated that they only had opportunities to receive feedback on their instruction and to examine student work once or twice per year in professional development experiences offered by their district. On the other hand, these teachers experienced multiple opportunities in the State Writing Project to receive feedback on their work as teachers and writers. These experiences not only fostered their growth as professionals, but the summer institute also cultivated key social practices: honoring teacher knowledge, basing learning experiences in the practice of skills, and encouraging reflection on teaching by practicing reflection on learning (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). As schools and districts plan professional development, these learning experiences need to leverage teacher knowledge, to incorporate practical learning, and to foster reflection, not only to support teacher growth, but also to generate a culture of learning.

For example, being able to observe colleagues delivering lessons to their students provides unique insight into the craft of teaching writing. When these teachers participated in the SWP summer institute, they presented demonstration lessons to share with their fellow

participants and with teacher-consultants from previous institutes. As these teachers prepared their demonstrations, they received numerous opportunities for feedback, generating a finished product designed to present at future conferences. Such observation and feedback provided these teachers leadership opportunities, using their expertise to teach their colleagues. In the school setting, these teachers visited each other's classrooms to observe their SWP colleagues present lessons. Such observation allowed colleagues to see strategies demonstrated under real classroom conditions rather than solely as theoretical understandings from professional literature. One informant commented that after observing her deliver a writing lesson to her students, her colleague felt inspired to participate in the State Writing Project the following spring semester.

When professional development experiences are devoted to teachers sharing their expertise with colleagues, these interactions provide a setting to engage in dialogue about effective practices to use in the classroom. Furthermore, such site-based, school-embedded professional development builds knowledge for the local community, fostering the notion that "schools and school systems have the potential to be centers of inquiry" (Cochran-Smith & Little, 1993, p. 55).

As school systems situate themselves as spaces for inquiry, the second implication is that collaboration among colleagues enhances shared practices. Participants in my survey indicated that they interacted frequently with SWP colleagues in learning about concrete teaching strategies and receiving feedback on lessons. This finding is important because these teachers reported that activities such as learning about concrete strategies, receiving feedback on instructional ideas, and reviewing student work were very important to their professional growth. They also indicated that they rarely participated in such professional development within their district. As a result, collaboration within their network of SWP colleagues was important to their

work as teachers. The informants benefitted from SWP colleagues in their building because they had a shared understanding of writing practices, developed a common language for instruction, and supported their efforts to try new approaches to teaching.

The teachers in my study also reported that their colleagues in the SWP outside their district played an important role in their growth. Participants reported that these colleagues outside their district had a greater influence on their understanding of teaching writing and revitalized their enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing. My informants explained that these SWP colleagues led them to professional resources and opportunities to broaden their understanding of teaching and learning about writing. Although these teachers interacted less frequently with these SWP colleagues outside their district, they discussed how these interactions over time with these colleagues fostered relationships with other members of the SWP network, and that these long-term relationships revived their enthusiasm for teaching. These findings are important because teachers need regular, ongoing access to people outside their schools who connect them to expertise and knowledge based on effective practices and current research. Furthermore, these SWP colleagues outside their district serve as innovators: despite having weak ties within the SWP network due less frequent interactions, these colleagues outside the school district allow teachers to overcome their isolation and provide access to knowledge and expertise otherwise unavailable to them within their district.

Such innovation speaks to the third implication: when teachers connect with people beyond their classrooms, they seek out resources to change their teaching practices as well as to improve student learning. Unlike traditional approaches, such as workshops and conferences, each primary informant in my study described their experience in the State Writing Project as a unique experience in their professional learning. When compared to other professional

development activities, these informants explained that they were engaged in more active learning opportunities and that they benefited from reviewing their work and receiving feedback from colleagues in this collective process of learning. This community of practice in the SWP effectuates a culture of learning in which teachers plan, manage, and direct their own learning. Teachers also articulate their own goals as teachers and writers, utilizing the knowledge and expertise of their colleagues to identify steps toward achieving these goals. These teachers have opportunities to assume leadership roles by facilitating presentations of their work to their colleagues. They even handle many of the day-to-day activities of the summer institute, such as facilitating daily meetings with opening and closing activities for their fellow participants.

These practices for organizing professional learning experiences are easily enacted in other settings where active learning opportunities and collective participation may lead teachers to take ownership of their professional growth. Brian, Nancy, Judy, and Bonnie voiced a desire to replicate a sense of community and shared practices in their schools. Since their experiences in the SWP, they wondered how they and other teacher consultants in their district could make changes to current approaches to professional development, particularly for writing instruction. As reported by my informants, these shared practices not only build a sense of community for teachers, but they also provide a common language, a common set of tools from which teachers draw their knowledge and implement new approaches to support student learning. These acts of knowledge-making within a professional network elevate a teacher's work within their classroom and the work of their colleagues inside and outside their schools to inform others about effective practices for effective instruction.

These acts of knowledge-making within social networks points to the fourth implication: collaboration supports teachers as learners. When teachers participate in a community of

practice, their learning focuses on activities which meet their needs as adult learners.

Collaborative professional development has the power to leverage the expertise and experience of classroom teachers. Such collective participation, in turn, leads an organization to show respect for personality, to promote participation of all members in making decisions, to support freedom of expression, and to lead members to mutually determining goals (Knowles, p. 108). In other words, collaborative professional development provides multiple benefits for students and teachers.

First, when teachers collaborate regularly, students benefit from these shared practices and common language. My informants discussed how meeting regularly with colleagues in their buildings often supported their instructional needs, addressing the day-to-day demands of teaching and working with students. For example, when these teachers talked about observing colleagues working with students, they recognized how students benefited from having two teachers in the classroom. These teachers shared how enthusiastically they responded to their colleagues' demonstrations and lessons. Not only do students witness the energy of such exchanges in the classroom, they also see their teachers as learners, as professionals willing and eager to learn from their colleagues.

Also, their shared and collaborative experiences shifted the nature of their conversations to become more instructionally focused. As one informant pointed out, she wished that the culture of her school fostered relationships like those she formed in the SWP. Instead, her time with colleagues is limited to faculty meetings packed with agenda items unrelated to her teaching and learning. Her work with her grade-level colleague, also a teacher-consultant in the SWP, however, was defined by a partnership in which they shared resources, teaching strategies, and a common language. In fact, their building principal often commented how he could walk into

either classroom to observe similar routines, lesson material, and teacher instruction. Even though these teachers at the same grade level did not work in the same classrooms, students directly benefited from their shared practices and their dedication to actively build a collaborative relationship. Such relationships advance the idea “that teaching and learning are not solo but rather social endeavors that are achieved in the context of schools” (Quintero, 2017, p. 20).

Second, these teachers in my study articulated how colleagues outside their district connected them to resources and practices not always accessible to them in their schools and district. These informants spoke about the importance of hearing perspectives on teaching and writing because such views from outside their classroom and district allow them to improve. These colleagues in the SWP, particularly during the summer institute, broadened teachers’ ideas of what writing could look like in their classrooms rather than relying on the same academic approaches that they had used each year. Finally, each of these informants voiced how their colleagues outside their district inspired their writing, not only helping to shift their identity as writers, but also instilling in them a new passion and interest in sharing writing practices with their students and colleagues in their buildings.

Third, creating communities of practice allows teachers to take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning. Fostering such agency through professional development also serves as a catalyst for leadership within schools: teachers recognize a need for changes in their own practice and extend their learning experiences to their colleagues. Colleagues within buildings who engage in shared experiences like the SWP broaden their scope of influence by sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm with more teachers. Furthermore, these collegial relationships within these social networks foster collective efficacy whereby teachers initiate and

sustain change through partnerships with each other and professional organizations. Through these interactions, these relationships generate a culture of teaching and learning, shifting their conversations from focusing solely on instruction in their classrooms to transforming practices throughout their school and district.

Participation in professional networks not only informs teachers about how they can access information and support; these networks also reveal to teachers the different ways in which their colleagues within a community of practice can support their growth and learning. In other words, collaboration with colleagues within and beyond their schools allows teachers to develop their own networks. Teachers position themselves as agents of change because they have the power to direct and nurture professional relationships serving various needs in their growth as professionals. Furthermore, collaboration within these networks also allows teachers to determine what roles they might serve in their schools and beyond their districts to support the growth of their colleagues.

Ultimately, collaboration within social networks permits teachers to shift from learning how to improve their own practice to generating praxis. Praxis refers to a process through which a teacher reflects on the work they do in their classrooms and examines this work under the lens of research and collaboration. Praxis moves teachers beyond a culture of compliance toward a community of learning in which educators can reflect on the current realities of their classrooms as well as explore current theories about teaching and learning. Such professional learning makes room for praxis so that teachers adopt a broader view of teaching as well as access knowledge and expertise outside their classrooms and schools (Green et al. 2013; Latta & Kim, 2010; Lieberman & Miller, 2005). In other words, collaboration with colleagues creates conditions leading to changes in teacher practices in order to improve student learning. Furthermore, a

community of practice enables teachers to engage in participatory action (Francisco et al., 2021), thus leveraging social capital within a network to transform a teacher's identity as well as the culture of professional learning.

The stories of my informants reveal this shift from practice to praxis: how teachers grow within a community of practice and how they, in turn, contribute to the wider context of teaching and learning. The informants in my study shared how they sought out the State Writing Project to address a specific need to improve writing instruction in their classrooms or their schools. After their experience in the SWP, these teachers felt equipped to lead their colleagues to learn about effective practices. Rather than focusing only on improving student learning in their own classrooms, these teachers became advocates for promoting changes in their schools so that more students benefited from effective instructional practices. These teachers in my study initially intended to make changes within their individual classrooms; however, the SWP model of collaboration and learning broadened their understanding to initiate change beyond their classrooms: sharing practices in the schools, offering support to fellow teachers in their district, and networking with colleagues outside their district through activities in the SWP network, such as annual conferences and facilitating workshops.

The research indicates that current approaches to professional learning do not provide opportunities for collaboration over time. Teacher knowledge, expertise, and growth represent key forces in enacting reforms, not simply within schools, but also in the larger enterprise of public education (Birman, 2009; Wei et al. 2009). Moreover, collective participation and active learning opportunities support teachers in making changes to their practice. When teachers engage in reviewing student work together and provide feedback on their teaching, these professional development experiences improve teacher practice (Desimone et al., 2002).

These implications based on findings from my study offer evidence for how collaboration within professional development experiences might foster relationships among teachers and leverage the power of social networks. Building and district leaders can support teacher growth by examining the formal and informal structures within their schools and districts to consider how teachers might spend more time discussing their practices and reviewing student work. Educational leaders can also investigate ways to develop partnerships with colleagues outside their districts to nurture long-term relationships with universities and professional organizations. To that end, I will discuss in the next section two ways to influence teacher learning through such professional relationships.

Implication #2: Professional Relationships Support Efficacy

In this study, the primary informants shared how the development of their writing identities had a significant influence on their ability to teach writing. In my study I wanted to learn how relationships with colleagues in the State Writing Project influenced this sense of identity. What I found suggests that relationships with colleagues in communities of practice shape a teacher's learning and identity. These relationships also foster a teacher's agency and allow teachers to advocate for their colleagues and students to improve learning. Finally, relationships within social networks can bring about changes in a teacher's practice and encourage innovation among colleagues.

Relationships Shape Learning and Identity

The findings from my study support Whitney's (2008) work about the importance of developing identity as part of the learning process for teachers in the National Writing Project. Whitney discussed how the act of writing itself shapes identity.

This identity work helps to illuminate how learning (through writing) in the context of a teacher network is at least in part a process of coming to identify

oneself as a member of the network's community and of acquiring the conventions of participation in the activities of that community (p. 149).

Although many teachers are not engaged in learning through writing, educators are involved in the pursuit of creating learning experiences for themselves and their students. Most teachers also participate in various activities with others as part of their professional growth, whether in professional learning communities at their schools, at conferences or workshops, or simply with colleagues planning instruction. This movement from an individual teaching in isolation to a professional collaborating with the community enables a teacher to develop a different perspective on their role as teacher and learner.

The first implication is that a community of learning fosters a teacher's sense of identity. By engaging in a process of learning with and through colleagues, a teacher discovers their own identity as a learner. This process of learning through community also offers an educator opportunities to reflect on their own growth as a professional. A community provides teachers access to information and resources that they might not have available to them within their school or district. More importantly, this process of knowledge-making with colleagues becomes the mechanism for connecting individuals to a larger social network, a connection to move a teacher from isolation to collaboration. Learning becomes a social endeavor to improve practices and to impact student learning. Teachers acquire tools to change their approaches to instruction and assessment, and, within a social network, educators identify what practices and activities within a community most effectively support the process of learning – for themselves, for their colleagues, and, ultimately, for their students.

For example, Bonnie reflected on a shift in her own identity: “I just got to see that difference between the stodgy English teacher that I thought I wanted to be and what the actual

energy could be.” As colleagues in the State Writing Project shared their teaching practices, Bonnie recognized that her image of an English teacher did not match the reality of her fellow teachers. Also, she realized that she did not need to hold onto antiquated approaches to literary analysis: these colleagues demonstrated effective ways to engage students in writing about literature.

This shift in identity among a network of colleagues leads to a second implication: a network provides teachers access to new approaches to teaching and learning. The findings from my study regarding identity as part of learning also reinforces the work of Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005), who discuss the role of self-concept as an essential principle within their framework of adult learning. Each of these teachers participated in the State Writing Project because they recognized areas of need in their schools: scores continued to decline on state tests, students struggled with developing writing, and instruction varied widely from teacher to teacher. My informants identified these needs through their own work with other teachers and with their students. They did not seek out professional development to address a concern raised by an administrator in their school or district. Instead, these teacher-writers sought an experience which allowed them to learn new approaches to writing and to implement instructional strategies for their colleagues and students.

This process of learning within a community leads teachers to develop new approaches to their instruction. Rather than turning to new strategies and methods on their own, teachers turn to members within their network for feedback and guidance on the needs of their students. Furthermore, the other members of the network serve as models of practice: these educators watch their colleagues demonstrate in real settings—the classroom and workshops—how to frame instruction or to enact a specific strategy. In isolation, a teacher faces countless challenges

each day in the classroom. Often the most immediate response becomes the efficient solution at the time, not always the most effective way to impact student learning. However, presenting these challenges to colleagues allows a community to seek collaboratively common approaches and to tap into shared resources. This community of practice fosters in teachers the belief that they can find answers with and through others. A community of practice leverages the power of collective efficacy to change the notion that teaching is a solo act.

As they completed the coursework for the State Writing Project, these educators discovered the importance of developing skills as a writer. Additionally, by reflecting on their process as writers and through sharing their work with other writers, these educators recognized their position as experts in the classroom. They also learned how this community of writers provided a critical audience to support their growth as teacher-writers. For example, Nancy commented how this community of writers led to her understanding about the connection between learning about and teaching writing. “I think you need to be a writer to teach writing. If you aren’t a writer, you can’t teach writing because you don’t understand.” She added, “we discover who we are, as a writer through our own writing.” Despite their vulnerabilities, perceived fears, and misconceptions about writing, these teacher-writers experienced open and honest feedback about their teaching and their writing so that they could implement effective practices for identifying students’ needs and for improving their students’ learning.

Learning among and with other teachers points to a third implication of collaborative, professional learning: such networks value and make effective use of teacher expertise through supportive relationships. These educators brought to the State Writing Project their years of teaching experience, ranging from two years to two decades of working in the classroom. Whether a novice or a veteran, each of these educators realized that their current practices

needed to change. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005) emphasized this need to recognize the experiences of adult learners. As I discussed in Chapter 2, adult learning activities must take into account their own experiences because “any situation in which the participants’ experiences are ignored or devalued, adults will perceive this as rejecting not only their experience, [sic] but rejecting them as persons” (p. 67). In other words, professional learning for educators must account for their identity as learners and for their experience as teachers; in so doing, schools and districts can enact more effective practices to improve student learning.

These complementary perspectives of teacher identities—as learners and as educators—reinforce the need for institutions to consider what practices support these mutual aspects of growth. The relationships formed by my informants during their courses in the State Writing Project and maintained through this professional network—in their school, district and beyond—influence this dual identity as teacher-learner. As a result, this network of relationships provides each teacher opportunities to access knowledge about teaching and to change instructional approaches in their classrooms and schools.

Relationships Foster Agency

Such changes in instruction can occur in schools when communities of practice guide professional learning. In their study of two National Writing Project sites, Lieberman and Wood (2003) identified several social practices not only important to supporting professional learning but also important to building relationships and community. The findings from my study provide evidence to support Lieberman and Wood’s study. First, participant responses on the survey identified colleagues within the State Writing Project—from their own cohort, from the larger network, and from their buildings or districts—who had a strong influence on their work as teacher-writers. In their interviews, my informants described specific ways in which these

colleagues influenced their knowledge about and enthusiasm for teaching and writing. These teachers spoke about moments when they received feedback about their work as teachers and about their writing. During these interactions with their colleagues, my informants recognized how much these fellow educators valued their contributions as writers and teachers. For example, Bonnie and Judy shared that they did not see themselves as writers, but their experience in the Writing Project allowed them to gain confidence in their writing skills. This recognition of their own competence fostered the beliefs that, first, they have something of value to say through their writing and, second, that they have expertise to share with colleagues.

These studies highlight this implication for professional learning: relationships in communities of practice nurture teacher agency. The State Writing Project strengthened my informants' agency as teacher-writers. As a result of their growing competence, these teachers talked about how they wished the culture of the SWP sense of community could be recreated in their schools and districts. Each of these informants described how their relationships with particular colleagues helped them to gain new knowledge in writing practices through professional reading and studies. These teacher-consultants in my study valued the feedback from colleagues about their writing and about their work as teachers. This feedback allowed them to make changes in their approaches to literacy instruction as well as to feel more effective in improving student writing. These educators shared that they had enrolled in the State Writing Project because they felt responsible for improving their students' skills and proficiency in writing. They also identified an openness to make changes in their practices so that they could better meet their students' needs. In other words, their desire for change fueled their willingness to gain greater competency, to raise student achievement, and to revitalize their interest in their professional growth.

In his discussion of social network theory, Daly (2010) explains that stronger networks are more likely to keep teachers in the profession and to foster a sense of efficacy for teachers: “the building and supporting professional relationships and networks is a critical way to sustain the work of teaching and learning and ultimately of change” (p. 1) The survey responses from my participants and the comments collected from my interviews provide evidence that the strength of relationships among colleagues of the State Writing Project fostered a sense of agency in these teacher-consultants, and this agency has allowed them to enact changes beyond their own classrooms. Initially, these teachers were motivated to join the State Writing Project because they identified needs in their classrooms and schools. Their participation in this experience and their relationships, however, broadened their understanding that their work as teacher-writers included supporting their colleagues and the profession. In other words, their agency as practitioners enabled them to reach out to other colleagues to change instructional practices within and beyond their schools and districts.

Relationships within Communities of Practice Generate Advocacy

As I discussed in the previous section, these teachers were committed to the idea of making changes in their own practice so that they could improve student learning. In their descriptions of their experiences within the State Writing Project, they also discussed sharing their knowledge with colleagues within and beyond their own schools. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, their participation in this community of practice shaped their identity as learners and teachers. As they made changes in their own approaches to teaching, my informants developed a sense of agency, motivating them to share their learning with colleagues in their schools. Upon reflecting on their own experiences and efficacy in their classrooms, these teachers found ways to advocate for colleagues beyond their schools within the network of the State Writing Project.

This idea of teachers sharing practices and knowledge within a community of learning remains one of the core principles for the National Writing Project (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). To that end, one of the common assignments in the State Writing Project involves demonstrating a practice, lesson, or strategy to colleagues in a conference-style presentation at the summer institute. These presentations can, in turn, act as incubators of leadership opportunities, allowing teacher-consultants to present these materials and ideas at professional events, including the State Writing Project's annual conference.

The teachers from my study share similarities with educators in other studies on the National Writing Project who assume various leadership roles. Whitney (2008) found that teachers in the NWP gained confidence and competence by taking on new roles and developing new relationships. These new positions and perspectives on learning within a community of practice provided teachers opportunities to gain expertise and experience. Lieberman and Wood (2003) observed that, having experienced a variety of leadership roles in the summer institute, many of these teacher-consultants become leaders within their schools and districts.

The first implication of this research is that relationships within professional networks promote avenues for educators to advocate for each other as learners. My informants shared in their interviews a variety of ways that they assumed leadership roles for their school and beyond. For example, Bonnie talked about her experience of persuading her English Department to complete a book study. Similarly, Nancy enlisted the help of a colleague to create a writing center at their school. Likewise, Brian served as the project leader for a statewide initiative to promote writing as part of the science curriculum. These roles and relationships within this community of practice, the State Writing Project, allowed these educators to share their expertise with colleagues. In addition, these leadership roles benefited colleagues, and, in turn, students

within and beyond their district. In other words, this level of leadership generates a sense of advocacy beyond the classroom: their work on behalf of their colleagues and students promotes a broader commitment to teaching and learning. As teacher-leaders, these educators expanded their impact on professional learning through an ever-widening circle of colleagues—from teachers in their own schools and districts to members of state and national professional networks.

A second implication is that such advocacy promotes a shift from classroom practice to praxis. In my previous discussion of collaboration in communities of practice, I discussed how reflexivity promotes praxis. More specifically, these teachers first reflected on their current practices and on their students' needs. They sought out professional learning to develop new approaches to teaching and to improve student learning. As they engaged with members of this community of practice in the State Writing Project, they also reflected on the feedback from fellow educators, examining their work as teachers and learners. Eventually, these acts of reflection and changes in practice led these teachers to assume leadership roles so that they might serve as agents of change within and beyond their schools.

The findings of my study share similarities with other studies examining this phenomenon: when teachers change individual practices, their work contributes to the wider body of knowledge about and skills in teaching and learning. For example, Green et al. (2013) and Latta & Kim (2010) examined the role of stories and professional learning. These researchers used narrative inquiry as a form of professional development, providing opportunities for teachers to describe how they found spaces within communities of practice to receive feedback on their practices and to consider ways to improve student learning. These interviews allowed these teachers time to reflect on and examine their process of change. In other words, the experience of narrative inquiry offered a mechanism for teachers to adopt this

reflexive stance on their learning and growth. These researchers concluded that these acts of storytelling supported teacher praxis by engaging educators with the wider context of professional learning and collective action.

Similarly, the informants in my study shared several experiences in their narratives suggesting this shift from practice to praxis. The data from the surveys and from the interviews indicated that these teachers believed it was important to address pragmatic concerns of the classroom, such as learning concrete writing strategies to meet the needs of particular students. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the narratives of these informants revealed this regenerative process of growth: establishing their identities as writers and teachers, developing agency as teacher-writers, and advocating for effective practices within and beyond their classrooms. These opportunities to share their stories with me—describing their trajectories as learners, writers, and teachers—allowed them to adopt a reflective stance on their experiences. More importantly, these reflections through their narratives, revealed this third stage of growth—generating advocacy. This stage, in turn, revealed how these teachers shifted from addressing the practical, daily concerns in their classrooms to becoming leaders and agents of change within and beyond their schools.

Relationships Within Networks Encourage Change

The results of my study also confirm findings from Kira Baker-Doyle's (2011) study of teacher networks. Using social network analysis, Baker-Doyle examined the networks of new teachers to identify the characteristics of high-quality support and the kinds of relationships formed by these teachers. She determined that these teachers form relationships through what she called Intentional Professional Networks. These colleagues are usually selected from people located nearby and with whom they interact more frequently, allowing these teachers to address

more immediate problems and to find their identity within the network. Baker-Doyle concludes that these new teachers form strong ties with colleagues within these Intentional Professional Networks because these colleagues provide collaborative, supportive relationships within the local setting (p. 22)

Baker-Doyle also described how these new teachers looked for support from what she calls Diverse Professional Allies. Baker-Doyle explains that these people are not typically sought out by teachers, particularly new teachers. Baker-Doyle explains that Diverse Professional Allies “help teachers challenge the traditional norms of the school or teaching and break out of notions about curriculum or practice that limited the teachers’ personal involvement in the curriculum” (p. 22). When examining a teacher’s network, these Allies typically appear as boundary-crossers, individuals linked loosely across the limits of their local networks. As Baker-Doyle explains, these boundary-crossers might suggest weak ties within a network, but these diverse relationships “spur innovation, challenge traditional norms, and work behind the scenes” (p. 23).

The notion of Diverse Professional Allies in a network raises this implication of professional learning: relationships with colleagues beyond a teacher’s school can lead to innovation in teaching and learning. Even though the participants in my study are veteran teachers, their responses on the survey showed similar characteristics to Baker-Doyle’s study of new teacher networks. They identified individuals in their own buildings who helped them to solve everyday problems in their teaching. In this survey, the participants indicated that they interacted more frequently with SWP colleagues in their buildings, seeking information about concrete teaching strategies, meeting student needs, asking for feedback on lessons and writing, and seeking out professional development as well as leadership opportunities. By contrast, the participants named individuals in the SWP outside their district who have had greater influence

on their knowledge about teaching writing. The respondents also indicated that these SWP colleagues outside their district were very or extremely influential in revitalizing their enthusiasm for teaching and learning about writing.

The literature clearly describes the benefits of teachers collaborating with colleagues in professional learning communities (Nave, 2000; Dearman & Alber, 2005; Curry, 2008; and Wei et al., 2009). The colleagues in these professional learning communities are typically classroom teachers within the same building who either teach the same content or the same grade level. Other than discussing the role of a coach or mentor for these professional learning communities, the literature does not discuss the role of colleagues outside a teacher's school or district in professional learning experience. However, numerous studies based on social network analysis have explored the influence of colleagues outside a teacher's school or district. Social network analysis refers to these colleagues as boundary-crossers (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Finnigan and Daly, 2010).

In this State Writing Project network, these boundary-crossers serve as connectors, forming relationships to people outside a teachers' school and district. As a result, these relationships with these boundary-crossers link together individual networks. In Figure 5.1, these boundary-crossers are highlighted in circles with dotted lines: Denise, David, and Bruce. The figure also shows the relationship among the four informants in my study: Judy in the upper left (blue circle); Nancy to the left-center (large purple circle); Brian to the right-center (medium black circle); and Bonnie to the middle right (small black circle). As I explained in the previous chapter, the size of the individual circles for the informants represents their years of teaching: the larger the circle, the greater number of years they have taught.

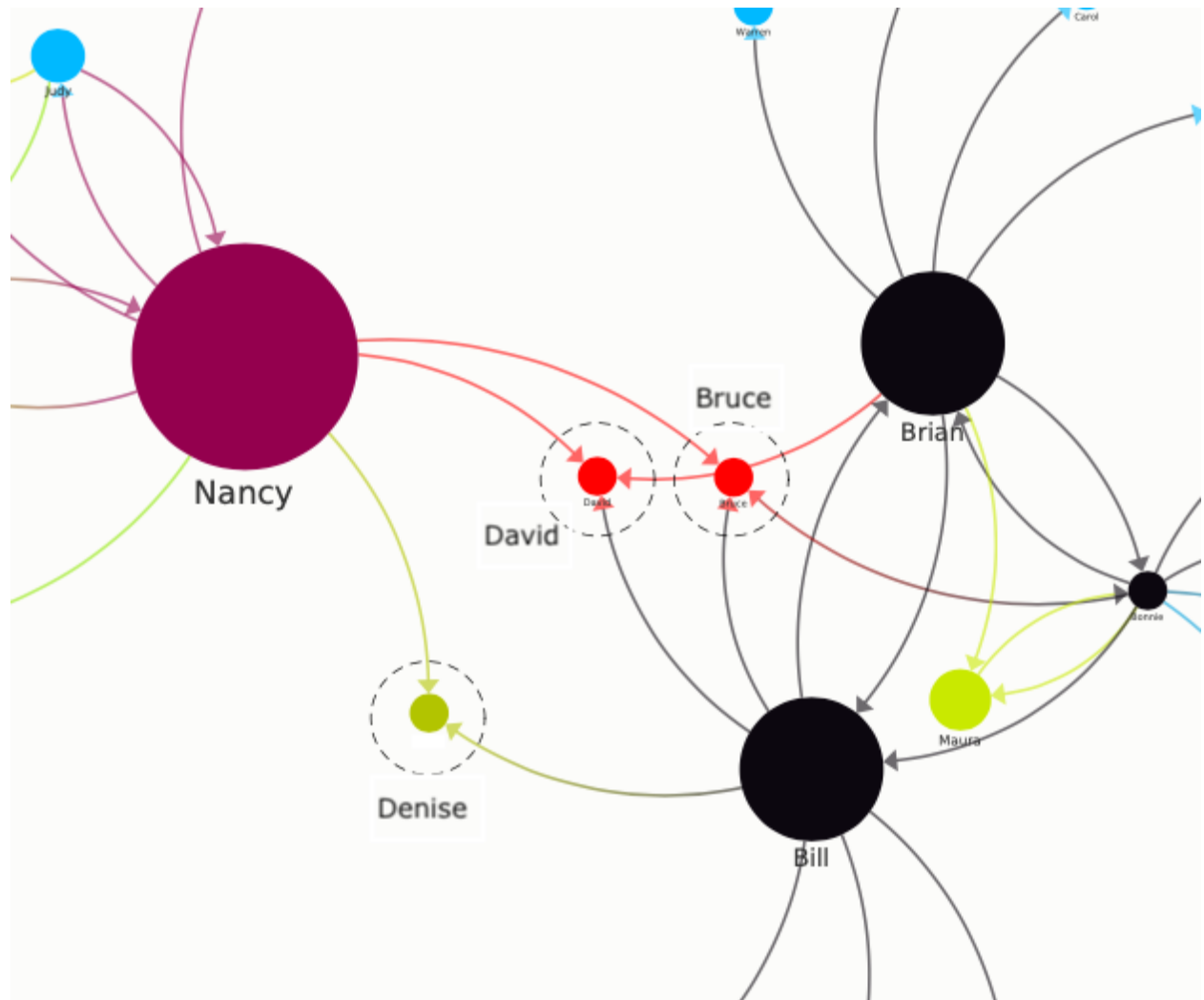


Figure 4.10 Location of Boundary-Crossers and Informants in SWP Network

The lines running from each circle show that the informant named this colleague as important to their work as a teacher-writer. Also, the arrows at the end of each line indicate the direction of the relationship: in other words, this participant named that person as a colleague. For example, Nancy and another participant, Bill, named Denise as someone outside their district who influenced their understanding of writing. Each of the arrows point to Denise because Nancy and Bill named her as part of their network. Denise did not participate in the survey, so the arrows only point one direction.

I want to focus my discussion on David and Bruce because these colleagues were identified by four participants in my survey. Additionally, three informants named David and Bruce as important to their work as teacher-writers. Nancy, Brian, and Bonnie indicated that David and Bruce had a significant influence on them, particularly in their understanding of teaching and learning about writing. Baker-Doyle's notion of building Diverse Professional Allies has relevance for the informants in my study because my informants developed these relationships with SWP colleagues outside their district, people who are not typically sought out by classroom teachers in their professional development experiences. Bruce and David assumed various leadership roles in the State Writing Project, serving as directors of the summer institutes, mentors to teacher-writers, and instructors for university courses.

The informants' relationships with these out-of-district colleagues provided support and resources beyond the practical concerns and everyday problems of classroom teaching. Bruce and David provided information about effective classroom instruction, feedback on their personal writing, and suggestions for leadership opportunities. These educators accessed knowledge and resources beyond traditional professional development, beyond mandates to change instruction and practices based solely on achievement scores on standardized tests. In other words, the relationships with David and Bruce—as Diverse Professional Allies—supported social practices from the SWP to enact within the classroom setting.

More importantly, the relationships with David and Bruce create an open network within the SWP. While much of the literature discusses the importance of an individual teacher's growth, social network analysis examines how social capital—knowledge and resources—develops within a network; open networks in particular foster innovation and adaptation because teachers can access new resources (Baker-Doyle, 2011). The relationships with colleagues, like

Bruce and David, beyond a district also highlight an important aspect of a teacher’s professional learning for teachers: as educators see more clearly their role and the roles of various colleagues within a network, they serve as agents of change by deciding how to develop their own support networks (p. 17, 2011).

Relationships Cultivate Regeneration

In the previous section, I explained how my study related to findings from other studies about professional learning in communities of practice and social networks. Specifically, I discussed how professional relationships support efficacy, explaining how relationships shape learning and identity, foster agency, and generate advocacy within communities of practice. I also discussed how relationships within social networks can create innovation. In Chapter 4, I presented Figure 4.11 as a conceptual model of this complex process showing the interaction of identity, agency, and advocacy.

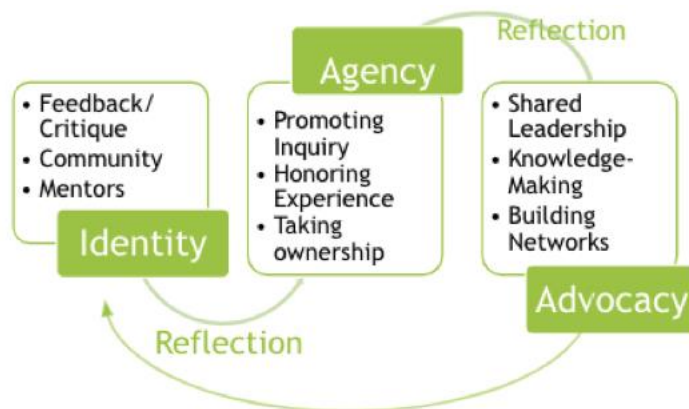


Figure 4.11 Regenerative Cycle of Identity, Agency, and Advocacy

As I explained in the previous chapter, this model represents a cyclical process through which these educators developed their identity as writers, formed their identity as teachers, fostered their agency as writers and teachers, and generated a reflexive stance to advocate for others.

I want to emphasize that this process lies at the heart of my study—this pattern of growth and change familiar to teachers who have participated in the National Writing Project. Based on my informant interviews and published studies on the National Writing Project (Whitney, 2008, and Lieberman & Wood, 2003), I have identified practices and characteristics evident within each stage of growth for these informants.

The purpose of this model is to show that professional learning is a complex process. Given this complexity, the first implication is that schools and organizations need to recognize the relationship between learning and identity for teachers. More specifically, professional learning needs to provide effective feedback for teachers within a community. Such a community allows teachers to access colleagues who might serve as mentors, coaches, or collaborators to support their goals and their growth.

A second implication is that professional learning needs to foster agency in teachers by engaging them in inquiry, honoring their experience and expertise, and allowing them to take ownership of their own learning. A third implication is that relationships within a community of practice promotes advocacy through shared leadership, participation in collaborative acts of knowledge making, and building support networks.

Finally, a fourth implication is that these practices within a professional network position teachers as reflective learners. As you can see in Figure 4.11, I have labeled reflection as a practice weaving through all stages, as noted by its presence on the curved lines in the diagram. Based on my study, reflection serves an essential practice allowing teachers to cycle continuously in their growth as teacher-learners. First, they reflect on their identity as learners and teachers. Next, this reflective stance allows them to gain efficacy as they seek to improve their practices based on feedback and as they determine their own goals for learning. Also, they

develop an understanding of how they and their colleagues assume various roles within a network. Finally, this reflection helps teachers make the shift from improving practice to engaging in praxis: acting on and sharing knowledge to affect change beyond their classrooms. This reflection also allows teachers to decide for themselves what support they need from a network of colleagues, seeking out individuals to address local concerns as well as colleagues with access to knowledge and resources beyond their schools. Finally, this stage of advocacy allows educators, in turn, to support their own colleagues as they cycle through their development as learners and teachers.

The complexity of teacher growth and learning also points to an implication for future research. In addition to considering narrative inquiry as a mechanism for professional learning, future studies might consider how stories elicit reflection, allowing teachers to describe the ways certain practices support their growth and changes in their teaching. In other words, narrative inquiry as a research method can play a role in facilitating reflexive practice in teachers. Research, then, might serve a critical function in generating advocacy for teachers as they seek ways to elevate their own practice and to promote changes for their colleagues and for their students.

I would like to point out how this trajectory of cycling through identity, agency, and advocacy describes my own experience in the State Writing Project. This cycle also matches the experiences of several colleagues who have shared informally their stories with me and other teacher-consultants. Given the findings of my study, future studies might focus on the nature of Diverse Professional Allies from Baker-Doyle's work, using similar methods of narrative inquiry to understand why educators seek out support and information beyond their schools and districts. Finally, I would suggest that schools and professional organizations consider models of

professional learning which address the needs of adult learners and incorporate key social practices. Such models would also investigate the role of informal relationships among educators and how these relationships influence professional growth. In the following section, I will offer some suggestions which support such models of professional learning for teachers and encourage long-term relationships among colleagues.

Implication #3: Reexamine Practices and Purposes of Professional Learning

The implications of the findings in my study may be particularly important for schools and organizations planning professional development activities. These site-based, short-term experiences typically focus on practical concerns of classroom teaching, such as raising test scores or learning about a new program for delivering curriculum and instruction. In the recent history of reform efforts, much of the focus on professional development for educators has centered on initiatives driven, in part, by federal and state mandates, such as the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards and related curricular materials.

Despite this renewed emphasis on professional development in education, research indicates that these experiences in professional learning for teachers often lack the characteristics of high-quality professional development (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone et al., 2002; Birman et al., 2009; Wei et al., 2009). In the following sections, I offer my discussion of three areas for instructional leaders to consider as they rethink professional learning for teachers. Specifically, I will address ways that professional learning should sustain collaboration, foster inquiry, and support allies within communities of practice. The findings from my study and from the literature suggest that organizations should consider how to cultivate a particular set of practices for ongoing teacher learning and professional growth.

Sustain Collaboration

Seeking models for ongoing, site-based professional development, many schools and districts have implemented professional learning communities. Activities in professional learning communities often require teachers to collaborate with each other in some fashion, whether as content-area specialists engaged in revising curriculum or as part of school-wide initiatives to address systemic concerns, such as social-emotional learning for students. In other words, the focus remains on the outcome: the extent to which one school adopts with fidelity a program operating in another school.

However, the implementation of a particular program in one setting may not yield the same results in another setting. In his study of collaboration among teachers, Ronfeldt (2017) found that teachers improve at faster rates when working in schools with strong collaboration quality. In a second study, Ronfeldt and his colleagues also found that preservice teachers showed greater growth in schools with stronger collaboration. Ronfeldt notes, however, that collaboration around different topics yielded different results. Although forming teams to examine student achievement did show positive results, Ronfeldt recommended that collaboration focus on specific student needs and instructional strategies. Citing multiple studies, Ronfeldt emphasized that, when collaboration focuses on instructional effectiveness, teachers are more likely to improve student learning.

Multiple studies on professional learning communities suggest that teachers are more likely to change their practices when engaged in collaborative professional development with their colleagues (Nave, 2000; Dearman & Alber, 2005; Curry, 2008; and Wei et al., 2009). As instructional leaders consider adopting models sustaining collaboration among teachers, the literature suggests that instructional leaders carefully consider the purpose of such collaborations.

For the informants in my study, their collaborations with colleagues often centered on learning about and trying instructional strategies to teach writing. More importantly, these educators also spoke about the role of feedback from their colleagues—on their own writing and on their lessons and student work—as important to their growth.

As organizations rethink opportunities to engage teachers in collaborative work, future studies may want to consider what specific activities lead to teacher growth and improve student learning. For example, in my study, I asked participants to share how often they interacted with colleagues in the State Writing Project for particular reasons. Overall, their responses indicated that they rarely met with SWP colleagues in their schools to review student work and to receive feedback from colleagues on lessons and instructional strategies. Yet, they indicated that these activities were very important to their growth as teachers. Future studies might consider how collaborating with colleagues changes practices when teachers review student work and receive feedback on lessons. Also, researchers might examine why teachers rarely participate in such activities in their schools.

Future studies might also show how collegial interactions influence a teacher's identity and build their efficacy as a professional when teachers are provided opportunities to reflect on their practices and beliefs. I know that my professional relationships in the State Writing Project and other organizations have played a significant role in shaping my identity as an educator, specifically my beliefs and practices as a teacher and learner. Because I have participated in several successful and affirming experiences in such collaborative relationships, I sought out opportunities to repeat those positive experiences and to share these opportunities to learn with other colleagues. Through my experiences and as a result of my research, I have also discovered how certain practices foster inquiry into teaching and learning. To that end, I turn my discussion

to consider how organizations might reexamine practices in professional development to promote a culture of reflection and change.

Foster Inquiry

The literature illuminates effective features of professional development, such as collaborating with colleagues and working over a period of time. The research also indicates that teachers rarely experience the characteristics which foster lasting change (Richardson & Placier, 2001; Birman, 2009). The reality is that educators typically learn about and practice new methods or programs in isolation: in-service days dedicated to prescribed agendas, or attendance at conferences. Without the ongoing support and feedback of colleagues, teachers struggle to transform their own practices and to sustain their own growth (Desimone et al., 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Wei et al, 2009).

As systems and organizations rethink professional learning for teachers, future studies might focus on what practices cultivate teacher efficacy. In their study of the National Writing Project, Lieberman and Wood (2003) identified several social practices of the NWP which led to a professional community. These practices include “honoring teacher knowledge,” “turning ownership of learning over to learners,” and “encouraging a reconceptualization of professional identity and linking it to professional community.” Lieberman and Wood emphasize that these practices are part of a complex system of learning and cannot in isolation successfully support a culture of change (p. 22). Researchers might consider how schools can generate cultures of professional learning to include these practices. Such studies could also describe what obstacles prevent such practices from operating within schools and within current professional development models.

In my interviews with my informants, two teachers spoke about this culture of the State Writing Project, a culture which they observed was difficult to sustain within their schools. For example, Brian talked about the bond created with other teachers and suggested that these relationships have the power to transform schools. Knowing that his school contained several teacher-consultants from the State Writing Project, Brian expressed his disappointment in how little he interacted with these SWP colleagues. He recalled moments when he saw glimpses of the passion created by the Writing Project.

[I]t felt like the needle of literacy was moving up and creating a hub of literacy was really important. And then there have been so many times, it just felt like we're all in pods doing our thing, trying to hang on.

Judy echoed this idea of isolation, talking about how her role as a specialist often left her feeling disconnected from colleagues and unable to apply what she learned about writing instruction with her own students. Bonnie wished that the teacher-consultants within her district could somehow recreate the culture of the State Writing Project, recalling the power of her relationships with SWP colleagues. She specifically commented that meetings in her school usually addressed practical issues and problems, but she would rather see “an open atmosphere that’s just ready for growth and ready for sharing and ready for improvement. And I wish that I could have that with more of my colleagues.” In this case, Bonnie’s reference to colleagues includes all of the teachers within her department and at her school. Her comment suggests that her relationships within the SWP network and her experiences with the social practices of such a network could provide opportunities for her school to improve teaching and learning. In other words, schools and organizations can benefit from members of networks framed by reform perspectives and social practices (Baker-Doyle, 2011; Lieberman & Wood, 2003). These

perspectives and practices support a teacher's growth while shifting the culture of teaching and learning within a school.

As I revisit these observations from my informants, I would encourage schools to consider how to capture these voices through methods of inquiry. The literature offers evidence that stories of professional learning act as professional development and promote teacher praxis (see Latta & Kim, 2013, and Green et al., 2010). In other words, narrative inquiry as a method of study, particularly within communities of practice, engages educators in a process of reflection. This act of reflexivity allows teachers to examine their current practices and to make changes in their instruction. As a result, they contribute to the wider body of knowledge about teaching and learning as they embrace their agency to affect change as teacher-learners. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) address this notion of knowledge-making through teacher research by suggesting that schools and classrooms serve as centers for inquiry. For Cochran-Smith and Lytle, teacher research generates knowledge for their own practice, for their community of teachers, and for the larger community of educators (p. 44).

Echoing this notion of knowledge-making, Lave and Wenger (1991) described participation in a community of practice as a way of knowing. These researchers state that "learning, thinking, and knowing are relations among people in activity in, with, and arising from the socially and culturally structured world" (p. 51). Within their learning communities teachers not only learn about their own practice, but they also contribute to learning about teaching. Future studies might consider a conceptual framework in which teacher practice and the school serve as the context for inquiry. Such a framework would recognize that this complex interaction between the learner, community, and reflection plays a significant role in generating knowledge for, with, and by teachers.

As much as my study represents an isolated act of inquiry, I believe that future studies should investigate these stories embedded in networks like the National Writing Project. Researchers might consider methods involving narrative inquiry and teacher research to identify practices fostering a culture of learning within schools. These research methods might also reveal how professional learning can shift teachers toward praxis—a reflective stance allowing them to critique their practice and to contribute to teacher learning. These projects of inquiry may require partnerships beyond classrooms and schools, such as university instructors and researchers. To that end, I turn my discussion to how these partnerships might also find support from allies and allow schools and organizations to rethink leadership.

Support Allies

I entered the State Writing Project in my nineteenth year of teaching because I sought opportunities unavailable to me in my previous years of teaching. By the time I connected to the Writing Project network, I had participated in many professional development activities and had earned my master's degree. Although I had established a rich network of colleagues outside my school, these local, regional, and national conferences, workshops, and institutes rarely encouraged me to reflect deeply on my practice as a learner and teacher. More importantly, the State Writing Project allowed me to engage in this reflective process among a community of teacher-writers, who, like me, found trust and support. When I have spoken with other colleagues about their experiences in the Writing Project, I hear similar comments about discovering their identity as writers and understanding more clearly how to teach writing. During his interview, Brian spoke about his own experience as unique, not only as a teacher, but also as a person.

There has never been any other teacher workshop where someone was moved to tears. People have laughed, people have gotten serious but never have I felt like such a bearing of who you are, and then a vulnerability presented that that experience creates.

Amidst this community, Brian and his colleagues expressed their vulnerability as people and writers while they explored their beliefs as practitioners. This process of developing identity and building agency allowed these teacher-writers to engage in a powerful act of collective knowledge-making, an act rarely found in other professional development experiences.

In her study of new teachers, Baker-Doyle (2011, 2014) described a framework for understanding teacher networks. Using this framework, future studies should examine the experiences of veteran teachers. Members of the National Writing Project might have a special interest in learning when and why a teacher participates in their program. Based on my findings, future research might focus on those colleagues Baker-Doyle describes as Diverse Professional Allies and how such relationships provide the support and growth that a teacher does not find within their school or district. Future studies regarding professional learning for teachers might examine the colleagues teachers seek out for advice, especially those people not typically connected to a teacher's school or district.

In particular, I suggest that researchers investigate the roles of leaders within social networks. Network researchers often refer to brokers, connectors, and boundary-crossing ties to describe relationships between people across communities of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Galucci, 2003; and Baker-Doyle, 2013). Based on the findings from my study, I believe that these leaders require further examination because my informants indicated that their relationships with these SWP colleagues had significant influence on their knowledge of teaching writing. These informants also indicated that these colleagues had influence on reviving their enthusiasm for teaching about writing. As I examined the whole network of these teacher-consultants, the presence of these connectors within the network formed ties among multiple

individuals, broadening their influence across the whole network rather than limiting their influence only on individuals. When looking at the model of the National Writing Project, directors, instructors, and other stakeholders might examine the leadership structure of Writing Project sites and study what support and resources these leaders, such as mentors, directors of summer institutes, and directors of State Writing Projects, provide for the members of these sites. Furthermore, organizations considering professional development models like the National Writing Project might also benefit from studying how teacher-consultants might function as Diverse Professional Allies and how these teachers support their colleagues, within and beyond the State Writing Project.

Conclusion

The challenge remains for districts, schools, and teachers to determine how to leverage the relationships and expertise within and beyond their schools and districts. At the district level, the temptation is to utilize this social capital through traditional models of professional development: maximize the spread of information by bringing teachers together in larger gatherings. The traditional method for teachers to share their expertise often occurs during professional in-service days, whether a full school day or a partial day, such as late-start or early release time. Teachers who have participated in an experience like the National Writing Project may be invited to lead a workshop, collaborating in sessions with other teacher-consultants and colleagues from their schools or districts. Such single events provide teacher-consultants with leadership opportunities, create interest in others to attend Writing Project courses or institutes, and spread effective practices in teaching writing. These experiences, however, typically lack the ongoing, sustained interactions necessary for supporting lasting change for a teacher or a school engaged in reforming practices to improve student learning.

At the building level, the schedule of a typical school day leaves little room for teachers to collaborate with one another. Teachers work at different grade levels and/or teach different content areas. Planning time rarely aligns with the schedules of multiple teachers, so most schools resort to professional development before and after school. This time might focus on curriculum specific to content areas or on school-wide initiatives, such as assessment practices or social-emotional learning. Even the grade configuration of a school can vary widely within school districts: some buildings house middle school students ranging from Pre-K to 8th grade while another holds grades 6 to 8. In rural communities, one person might be the only person who teaches English Language Arts to multiple grade levels, so this teacher would struggle to collaborate with a colleague on content-specific topics.

In recent years, the challenges facing teachers have only increased. As I write this closing, I would be remiss not to address the growing concerns about teacher burnout in public education. Throughout the winter and into the spring of 2022, much of the national conversation in teacher networks has focused on working conditions for classroom educators (Presley, 2021; Kim et al. 2022). Some of this conversation has been driven by a desire to change as schools emerge from a post-pandemic world. During the pandemic, existing systemic inequities were made far more apparent as teachers pivoted toward emergency remote and virtual learning experiences for students: lack of access to technology for students and their families (Ferri et al., 2020), limited time and opportunities for teachers to plan lessons and to adapt materials to virtual lessons, need for training teachers to use online learning management systems (Czerniewicz et al., 2020), and resources to meet students' social and emotional needs as many students and families experienced greater stress and anxiety (Shin & Hickey, 2021). In short, such conditions have led more teachers to consider leaving their profession. Consequently, this exacerbation of

teacher shortages has heightened concerns about enrolling students into teacher education programs and about retaining qualified, talented educators.

I raise this issue of teacher attrition because my own story reflects this current trend, and my own journey to engage in this study stems, in large part, from finding a network of colleagues who rejuvenated my enthusiasm for teaching. As I discussed in a previous chapter, my participation in the State Writing Project in 2015 came at a critical moment in my career. I needed a change and gave serious consideration to leaving education. Fortunately, this community of teacher-writers provided the connections that I needed as a writer and an educator to revive my beliefs about student learning and to reinvigorate my approaches to teaching.

Until recently, I did not feel any sense of urgency related to the findings and implications of my study. Given these recent conversations about teacher burnout and shortages in positions, I believe that this discussion about fostering teacher agency and generating advocacy with and through teacher networks becomes far more relevant. When I began this study, I viewed my work as contributing to future studies about professional networks, particularly those models similar to the National Writing Project. I truly believe that teachers need to participate in communities of practice within and beyond their schools so their relationships with their colleagues support their growth and drive change in their schools.

As I approach the culmination of my doctoral program, I now see a greater challenge for education: to sustain networks focused on people not policies and mandates, and to design communities of learning committed to improving practice not test scores. Such networks and communities of practice have the power to support educators as they navigate this increasingly complex terrain of teaching. Professional relationships within these communities of practice and

social networks provide paths for teachers to renew their commitment to the profession while regenerating their own enthusiasm for teaching and learning.

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Appendix A: Cover Letter

Dear Writing Project Colleague:

I write to you requesting your help with a unique opportunity. Based on conversations with various people connected to the Writing Project and based on preliminary research, our school district has an unusual and powerful body of experience and knowledge in writing - you!

The schools of RSU #34 contain twelve Teacher Consultants from Maine's local Writing Project sites - the Southern Maine Writing Project and the Maine Writing Project. Given that our district has such a rich representation of writing practice, I would like to explore how the presence of teacher consultants within our schools and within our district influences writing practices and instruction.

I invite you to complete a brief survey about your experiences as a writer and teacher of writing to learn how your relationships with colleagues influence your practices. This survey takes roughly 15 minutes of your time and is, of course, optional. Again, the purpose of this survey is to gather initial information about the ways our colleagues support our growth and practices.

I am not using this information to evaluate your practices, and administrators will not have access to your responses. I will use the results of this survey as a part of my research study as I complete my dissertation next year. Any identifying information that I report in my analysis of the data will be anonymized by using pseudonyms for schools and individual teachers. The readers of my analysis would likely include University of Maine instructors and members of my committee purely for the purpose of my research study.

This survey serves as a first step in learning more about you and our colleagues in the Writing Project. This network of Writing Project consultants in our district is unique; I will explore more in depth through interviews how our interactions with each other influence our growth as teachers and writers.

I would appreciate having the survey completed by *****. At that time, I need to begin analyzing the data to determine my selection of interview informants. I am happy to provide a gift to you as a token of my appreciation for completing this survey. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Todd McKinley

Survey link:

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

Dear Colleagues:

I write to you to seek your help with a unique opportunity. Based on conversations with various people connected to the Writing Project and based on preliminary research, our school district has an unusual and powerful body of experience and knowledge in writing - you!

The schools of RSU #34 house roughly twelve Teacher Consultants from Maine's local Writing Project sites - the Southern Maine Writing Project and the Maine Writing Project. Given that our district has such a rich representation of writing practices, I would like to explore how the presence of teacher consultants within our schools and within our district influences writing practices and instruction.

I ask you to complete a survey about your experiences as a writer and teacher of writing to learn how your relationships with colleagues influence your practices. I am not using this information to evaluate your practices, and administrators will not have access to your responses. I will use the results of this survey as part of my research study to identify participants to take part in interviews and to report my findings in my dissertation.

Sources of Professional Knowledge and Practice

Name (first and last):

Background Information

1. School Location:
2. For how many years have you taught at this school?
3. For how many years have you taught in this district?
4. For how many years have you been teaching?
5. Please check your highest education level:
 - Bachelor's
 - Bachelor's Plus
 - Master's
 - Master's Plus
 - CAS/EdS
 - Doctorate
6. In what year did you complete the spring course and summer institute for the Writing Project?
7. Where did you complete your coursework?
 - a. Southern Maine Writing Project
 - b. Maine Writing Project
 - c. Other:
8. How often have you participated in professional development offerings from the Maine Writing Project?

Scale:	0: Never	1- Once since attending the summer institute	2: Once in the last 3-5 years	3: Once every 2-3 years	4: Every year	5: Multiple events each year
Fall conference						
Summer Writing retreat						
Writing Ourselves spring writing event						
Young Authors Camp; Raise Your Voice						
Promising Practices July conference						
Online Book group						
Maine Writes Journal publication						
Leadership team/circle						

9. When were you a Writing Project Mentor?
 Never Once Twice Three or more times

10. What were your reasons for participating in these professional development offerings?

11. What were your reasons for not participating in these professional development offerings?

Collegial Influences on Professional Knowledge & Practice

12. Please identify up to 8 people in the Maine Writing Project who are important to your work as a teacher of writing and/or as a writer. *(Please write first and last names in the spaces provided. List as many individuals as you wish. You do not have to use all the spaces provided.)*

First and Last Name	From this school	In district, but not from this school	Out of district
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

13. How often do you interact with each person?

Scale:	0=Once a year	1=Two or three times a year	2= Several times a year	3=Multiple times each month	4=Weekly	5=Multiple times each week
Person 1						
Person 2						
Person 3						
Person 4						
Person 5						
Person 6						
Person 7						
Person 8						

14. How do you interact with each person? Check all that apply.

	Phone and/or email	Workshops/conferences outside district	Participation in courses	District/school meetings (faculty meetings, committees)	Planning units/lessons	Social gatherings outside school or district
Person 1						
Person 2						
Person 3						
Person 4						
Person 5						
Person 6						
Person 7						
Person 8						

15. For each person you have identified, please indicate the frequency you interact for each reason.

0=Rarely 1=once or twice a year 2= Multiple times a year 3= Multiple times each month 4=Weekly 5= Multiple times each week	Provides concrete teaching strategies that I use in my classroom.	Offers ways for me to teach a wider range of students more effectively.	Helps me to examine student work, to assess students' progress, and to plan my teaching.	Keeps me up-to-date on latest research and practice in the teaching of writing.	Supports me in being more effective in helping students meet local and state standards.	Motivates me to seek further information and/or to participate in professional development.	Gives me feedback and ideas about my writing.	Guides me to seek out leadership roles and opportunities.
Person 1								
Person 2								
Person 3								
Person 4								
Person 5								
Person 6								
Person 7								
Person 8								

16. For each person you have identified, please indicate how much each person has influenced your understanding of teaching and learning about writing.

Scale:	1=Not at all	2=slightly influential	3= somewhat influential	4=very influential	5=extremely influential
Person 1					
Person 2					
Person 3					
Person 4					
Person 5					
Person 6					
Person 7					
Person 8					

17. For each person you have identified, please indicate how much this person has *revitalized your enthusiasm* for teaching and/or writing.

Scale:	1=Not at all	2=slightly influential	3= somewhat influential	4=very influential	5=extremely influential
Person 1					
Person 2					
Person 3					
Person 4					
Person 5					
Person 6					
Person 7					
Person 8					

18. For each person you have identified, please indicate how much YOU believe you have influenced *their* understanding of teaching and learning about writing.

Scale:	1=Not at all	2=slightly influential	3= somewhat influential	4=very influential	5=extremely influential
Person 1					
Person 2					
Person 3					
Person 4					
Person 5					
Person 6					
Person 7					
Person 8					

19. For each person you have identified, please indicate how much YOU believe you have revitalized *their* enthusiasm for teaching and/or writing.

Scale:	1=Not at all	2=slightly influential	3= somewhat influential	4=very influential	5=extremely influential
Person 1					
Person 2					
Person 3					
Person 4					
Person 5					
Person 6					
Person 7					
Person 8					

Published Sources of Professional Knowledge

This section focuses on how often you connect with published sources of new knowledge, especially with regard to the teaching of writing.

20. How often do you consult the following resources about the teaching of writing?

Scale:	0=Never	1=once or twice a year	2= Multiple times a year	3=Multiple times each month	4=Weekly	5=Multiple times each week
Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, etc.)						
Professional organizations (NCTE, NWP, etc.)						
Educational books (Heinemann, Stenhouse, Scholastic, etc.)						
Journals (e.g. English Journal)						
Blogs (e.g. Cult of Pedagogy)						
Educational sites (ReadWriteThink, Edutopia, etc.)						
Databases (ERIC, JSTOR, etc.)						
Research studies/reports						

21. How often do you consult these resources for the following areas?

Scale:	0=Rarely	1=once or twice a year	2= Multiple times a year	3= Multiple times each month	4=Weekly	5= Multiple times each week
Concrete teaching strategies that I use in my classroom.						
Ways for me to teach a wider range of students more effectively.						
Approaches to help me examine students to assess their progress and to plan my teaching.						
Keeping me up-to-date on latest research and practice in the teaching of writing.						
Identifying ways for me to be more effective in helping students meet local and state standards.						
Seek further information about and/or to participate in professional development.						
Find ideas and support for my own writing.						
Locate opportunities to lead others in their teaching and learning about writing.						

Growth as a Teacher and Writer

This section asks you to consider areas of your growth as a teacher of writing and as a writer.

22. How often do you participate in each activity?

Scale:	0=Rarely	1=once or twice a year	2= Multiple times a year	3=Multiple times each month	4=Weekly	5=Multiple times each week
Reviewing student work with my colleagues						
Receive feedback from peers on lessons and instructional strategies.						
Reading professional resources (e.g. literature, periodicals, memberships)						
Meeting with colleagues in my school/district to discuss professional literature and/or research.						
Meeting with colleagues outside my school/district to discuss professional literature and/or research.						
Meeting with colleagues in MWP to discuss professional literature and/or research.						
Attending literacy conferences and workshops about the teaching of writing.						
Developing your own writing practice and routines (reading publications, attending workshops, writing on your own.)						
Presenting writing methods, practices, lessons, and/or strategies at professional conferences.						
Sharing your work with colleagues within your school or district at staff meetings or in-service workshops.						
Devoting time for your own writing (reading publications, attending workshops, writing on your own).						
Sharing your writing with friends or colleagues.						

23. How important are these activities to your growth and development as a teacher of writing?

Scale:	1= Not important	2=Slightly important	3= Somewhat important	4=Very important	5=Extremely important
Reviewing student work with my colleagues					
Receiving feedback from peers on lessons and instructional strategies.					
Reading professional resources (e.g. literature, periodicals, memberships)					
Meeting with colleagues in my school/district to discuss professional literature and/or research.					
Meeting with colleagues outside my school/district to discuss professional literature and/or research.					
Meeting with colleagues in MWP to discuss professional literature and/or research.					
Attending literacy conferences and workshops about the teaching of writing.					
Developing my own writing practice and routines (reading publications, attending workshops, writing on your own.)					
Presenting writing methods, practices, lessons, and/or strategies at professional conferences.					
Sharing my work with colleagues within my school or district at staff meetings or in-service workshops.					
Devoting time for my own writing (reading publications, attending workshops, writing on your own).					
Sharing your writing with friends or colleagues.					

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

FIRST INTERVIEW

Tell me about your earliest writing experiences in school.

- What do you remember writing as a child?
- Who helped you with your writing?
- How did you become a writer?

How did you become a teacher of writing?

- What experiences influenced your decision to become a teacher?
- Who has influenced your beliefs and practices in teaching writing?
- Who do you turn to when you have questions about teaching writing?

How did you become part of the Maine Writing Project?

- How did your participation in MWP influence your teaching of writing?
- Who in MWP influenced your writing? How?
- Who in MWP has influenced your teaching of writing? How?

SECOND INTERVIEW

I would like you to ask for more detail on some of your responses to the survey. For example:

- Why or how is it important for you to [insert respondent's rating on a reason for item 15, e.g. receive feedback on writing]?
- How or in what ways has [insert person indicated for item 16] influenced your understanding of teaching and learning?
- How or in what ways has [insert person indicated for item 17] revitalized your enthusiasm for teaching?
- How or in what ways do you believe you have influenced [insert person indicated for item 18] in particular?
- How has [insert published source from item 20] influenced your teaching and/or writing?
- How does your participation in [insert activity from items 22 and 23] influenced your growth and development as a teacher and/or writer?

How has your participation in professional development activities with the Maine Writing Project influenced your teaching? Your writing?

- What activities and resources have you found particularly influential?
- What relationships have you found helpful to your growth and how?
- What are some reasons for not participating in these activities?

What story can you share as an example of the ways people in the Maine Writing Project influence your teaching and learning about writing?*

- How did someone in the Writing Project change, challenge, or confirm your thinking about the teaching of writing?
- How did members of this network influence your identity as a teacher and/or writer?
- How did people in the Writing Project help you to make changes in your practices as a teacher and/or a writer?

- What leadership opportunities did the Writing Project provide for you?
- In what ways has this community allowed you to contribute to others – in your school, district, or other professional setting?

*This last question might serve as the third and final interview question.

Appendix D: Letter of Informed Consent for Teacher Participants

Dear Participant:

You are invited to take part in a research project being conducted throughout the fall of 2020, by Todd W. McKinley, a doctoral student in the College of Education at the University of Maine. The research will be conducted under the guidance of Dr. Rich Kent, Professor of Literacy, in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine, and Dr. Kenneth Martin, an Assistant Professor Emeritus of Literacy Education.

The purpose of this research is to explore the ways in which relationships among members of the Maine Writing project influence a teacher-consultant's growth as learners, writers, and teachers of writing.

What will you be asked to do?

- Fill out a brief survey. The survey should take about fifteen minutes. Sample questions include: *Please identify up to 8 people in the Maine Writing Project who are important to your work as a teacher of writing and/or as a writer. In the last twelve months, how often did you consult the following resources about the teaching of writing?*
- After survey results, you *may* be asked to participate in the second part of this study. If you agree to participate in the second part of the study, you will be asked to do the following:
 - Participate in two to three interviews, roughly forty minutes of your time for each interview. Each interview will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Interviews will be conducted where your responses will not be overheard, and I will remind you that you may choose to answer or not answer any questions that I ask. Sample questions include: *Tell me about your earliest writing experiences in school. How did you become a teacher of writing? How did you become part of the Maine Writing Project?*
 - Allow audio recordings of these interviews.

Voluntary

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any interview question or refuse to participate or withdraw from any of the activities listed above at any time. Withdrawing or refusing to participate in some or all of the activities or refusing to answer interview questions will not affect your standing with the researchers, the University of Maine, or the school district in any way.

Confidentiality:

Your name will not be on any of the documents. I will replace your name with pseudonyms on interview transcripts and field notes. Your real name or any other identifying information will not be used in any reports, publications, or conference presentations that result from this study.

I will store interview audio recordings in a computer folder in a password-protected file that only the interviewer can access. All audio recordings will be destroyed one year after the date of the interview, which I anticipate will occur by February 2022. Electronic copies of survey responses and interview transcripts will be stored in a computer folder in a password-protected file. All other documents related to this study will be secured in a dedicated and password protected Google Drive folder for a period of ten years, or until May 2030, at which time they will be destroyed.

Risks:

Other than time and inconvenience, risks to you are minimal to participate in the survey and interviews. There is a possibility that you may be uncomfortable answering some interview questions. You are reminded that you may choose not to answer any questions at any time. You also have the right to end participation at any time.

Benefits:

The possible benefits of your participation include an increased understanding of how your relationships with colleagues support your learning, teaching, and writing. The results of the research study will also benefit the National Writing Project, the Maine Writing Project, and other organizations and parties interested in effective practices in the teaching and learning about writing.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Todd McKinley (todd.mckinley@maine.edu). You may also contact my faculty advisors: Dr. Rich Kent at 207-581-2746 at rich.kent@maine.edu; or Dr. Kenneth Martin at 207-483-4734 at kenneth.martin@maine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Andrew Tomer, Research Compliance Officer I at 207-581-1459, or at andrew.tomer@maine.edu.

___ I agree to participate in the survey portion of this study.

___ If selected, I agree to participate in the interview portion of this study.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the above information. You will receive a copy of this form.

Signature: _____ Date _____

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Todd W. McKinley has spent most of his career in education as a middle level educator, focusing on ways for students to explore connections between their community and what they learn in the classroom. He was born in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1969 and moved to Maine at an early age when his father enrolled in Bangor Theological Seminary in Bangor. Todd attended a number of schools in central Maine, and he graduated from Winthrop High School. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in creative writing of poetry from the University of Maine at Orono in 1994. After teaching middle school for several years, Todd returned to the University of Maine to earn a Master of Education in Literacy and Leadership in 2009. Todd has mainly taught English Language Arts; however, he developed an interest in integrated curriculum and expanded his teaching to social studies and math on partner teams. As a middle level educator, Todd developed important relationships through professional organizations such as the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA) and the Maine Association of Middle Level Education (MAMLE). He has presented at state, regional, and national conferences, finding ways to connect his practices in the classroom while advocating for the professional learning of fellow educators. Todd has also pursued his passion for writing poetry, publishing his work in Puckerbrush Press, Maine Writes, and Off the Coast. He continues to work with colleagues in the National Writing Project to foster the goals of fellow teacher-writers. Todd is a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in Literacy Education from the University of Maine in May, 2023.