Taking A Distributed Perspective to School Leadership & Management: Diagnosis and Design for Instructional Improvement

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The Argument

- Engaging with the *practice* of leading and managing instruction is what matters.

- Beyond an 'implementation mindset,' engaging the twin processes of *diagnosis* and *design*.

- To do diagnosis and design well a framework is necessary; such as a distributed framework.

- Diagnosis and Design in Practice: Examining the formal and informal organization.

"We have one hunter and one gatherer … everyone else is a consultant"

Diagnosis and Design

Diagnosis = identify nature or cause of something

Design = Shaping the organization and system infrastructure to purposes

Overview

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

b) Diagnose and Design from a Distributed Perspective.

- Formal Organization: Positions & Organizational Routines

- Informal Organization: Getting to Practice

c) Challenges in taking a Distributed Perspective for Novice Principals.

A Distributed Perspective: Elements and Entailments

Task One

- What does 'distributed leade[rship]' mean to <u>you</u>?

- Write a one sentence definit[ion that] captures your understanding [of] distributed leadership.

The Leader-Plus Aspect

The **Leader-Plus** aspect:

- The principal often works with others when performing leadership and management tasks.

- At times other formally designated leaders take responsibility for leadership and management tasks.

- And, individuals with no formal leadership designations often have a hand in leading and managing instruction.

Embracing the Realities

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

Dr. Johnson

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

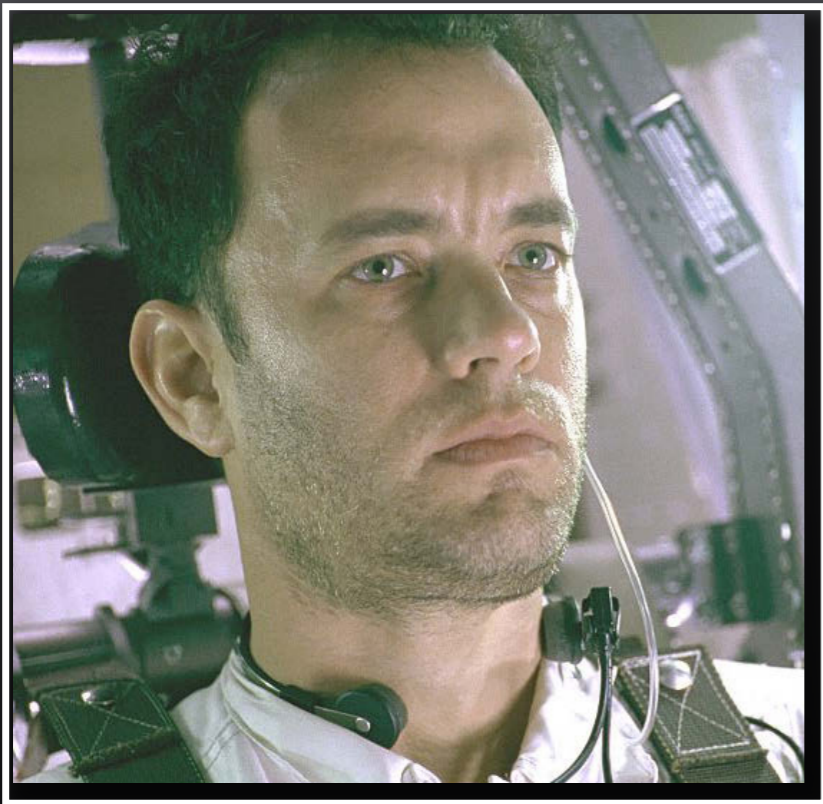Adriana

Task Two: Examining Leadership in Practice
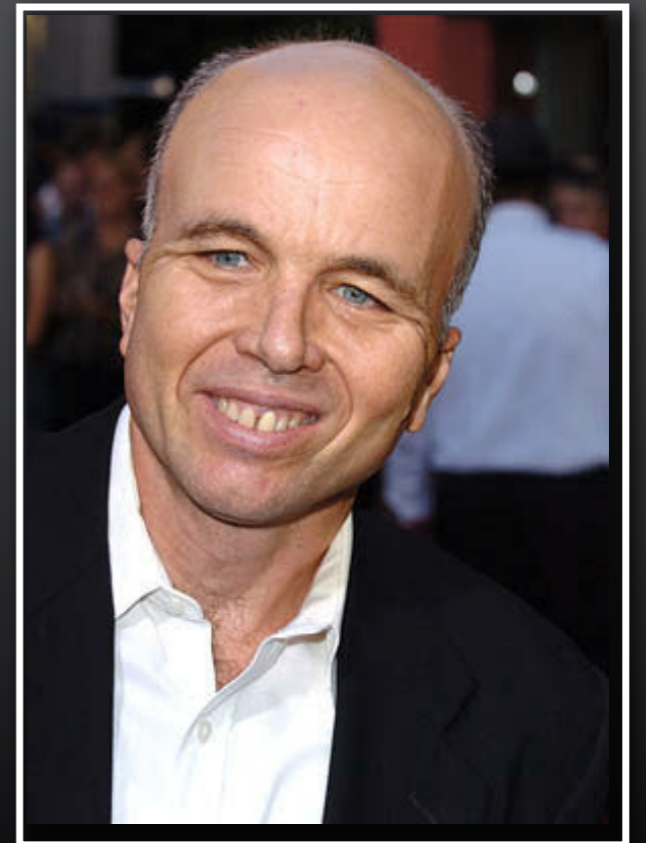
Mission Control and Beyond

- Watch the scene keeping in mind the distributed perspective. Take notes about who is leading and in what capacity. Where is leadership practice?

- While noting what happens in the scene, keep in mind the characters below.
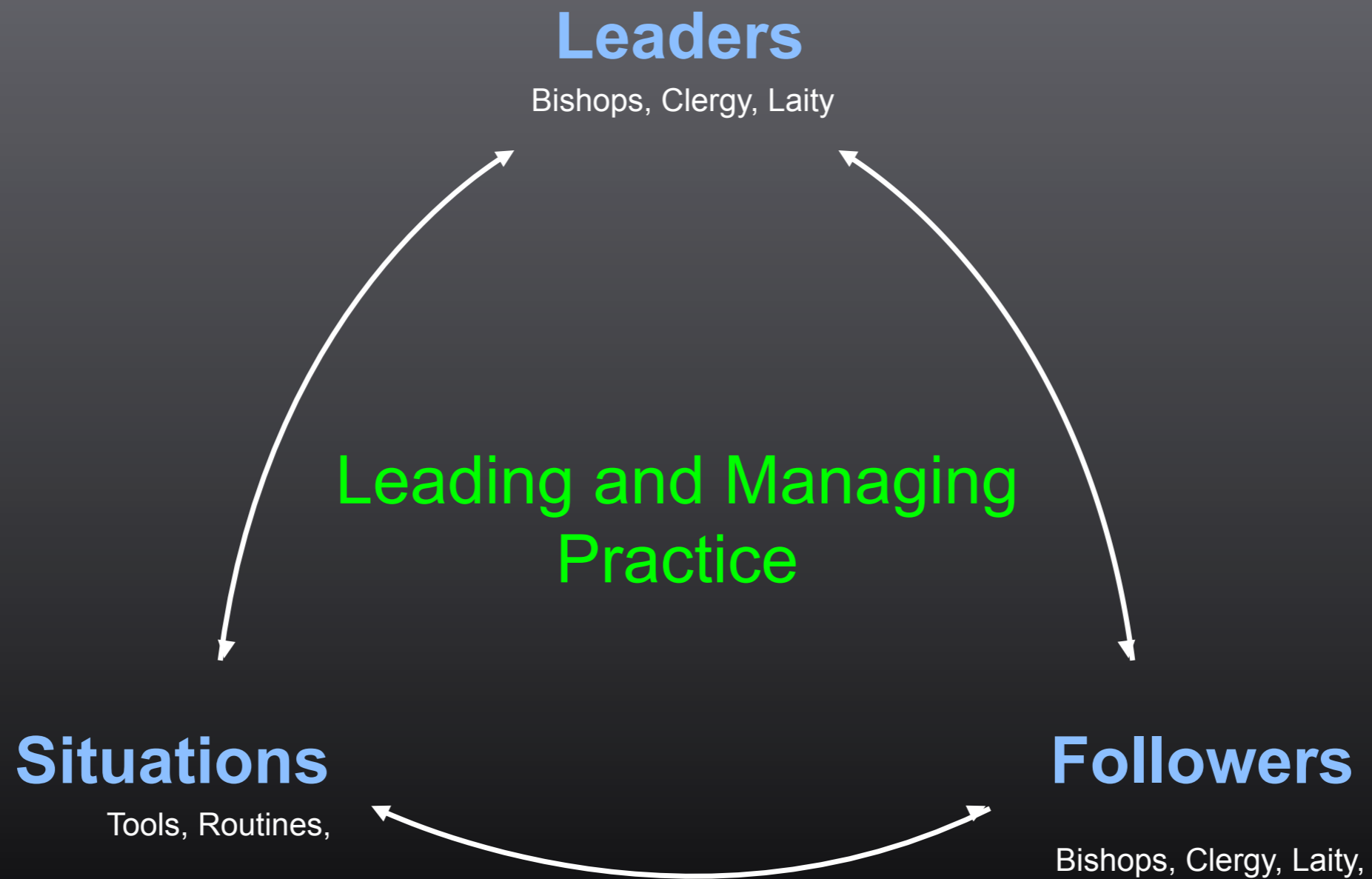

Jim Lovell

Gene Kranz

EECom (Cy)

The Practice Aspect

Leaders

Bishops, Clergy, Laity

Leading and Managing
Practice

Situations

Tools, Routines,

Followers

Bishops, Clergy, Laity,

A Distributed Perspective

- A diagnostic framework that draws attention to particular dimensions of leadership & management

- A design frame for guiding leadership and management improvement efforts

The "Heroics of Leadership" Genre

- The lure of leaders and their gallant acts

- The leader is center stage, while others play supporting roles

- This is a leader-centric model

Dispelling Some Myths

- Principal and other formal leaders are somehow less relevant

- Everyone is a Leader

- The More Leaders, the Better

Task Three

- Watch the brief video clip.

- How many times does the white team touch the ball?

Doing Diagnosis and Design from a Distributed Perspective

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

DESIGNED

Designed vs. Lived Organization

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

LIVED

The Formal (Designed) Organization: Organizational Routines

Diagnosis and Design Work

Organizational Routines

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

Organizational Routines

Advantages

Allow efficient coordinated action

Provide source of stability

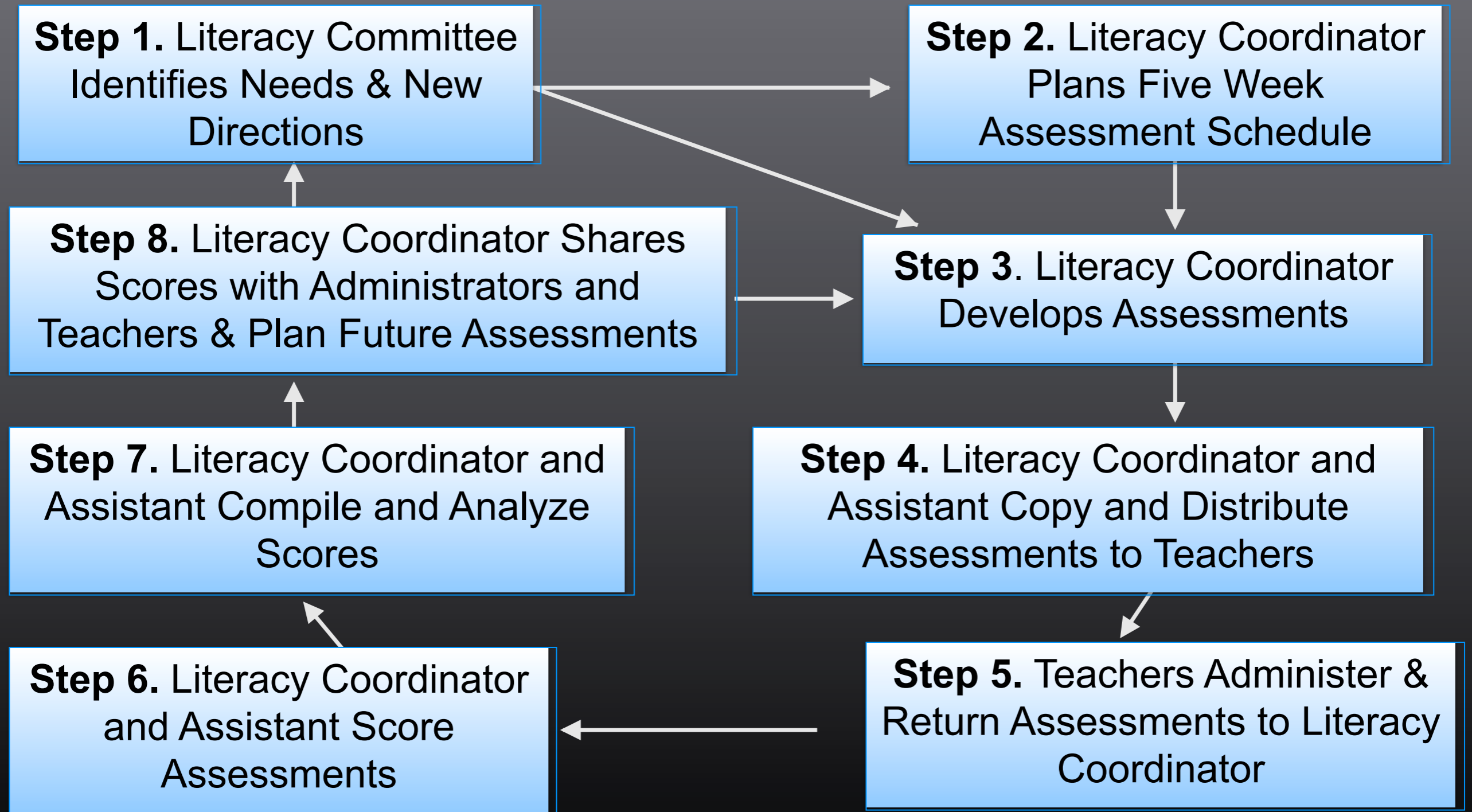Reduce conflict about how to do work

Disadvantages

Result in inappropriate responses

Inertia, mindlessness, and de-motivation

Organizational Routines at Adams School

Routine	Functions	Tools	People
Five Week Assessment	-Formative evaluation -Teacher Accountability -Monitor Instruction -Teacher Development	-Standardized Tests -Standards -Student Assessments	-Language Arts Coordinator -Assistant Principal -Principal -Teachers
Breakfast Club	-Teacher Development -Build Professional Community	-Research Articles	-Teachers -Language Arts Coordinator -Principal
School Improvement Planning (SIP)	-Identify Instructional Priorities & Resources	-Previous Year SIP -District Guidelines -Test Score Data	-Principal -Administration -Teachers (approved LSC)
Classroom Observations	-Teacher Development -Monitor Instruction -Accountability	-School Protocol, -District Protocol	-Principal -Assistant Principal
Real Men Read	-Student Motivation and Support	-Books	-Language Arts Co-ord. -Assistant Principal -Principal -Community Members

Five Week Assessment: Ostensive Aspect

Step 1. Literacy Committee Identifies Needs & New Directions

Step 2. Literacy Coordinator Plans Five Week Assessment Schedule

Step 8. Literacy Coordinator Shares Scores with Administrators and Teachers & Plan Future Assessments

Step 3. Literacy Coordinator Develops Assessments

Step 7. Literacy Coordinator and Assistant Compile and Analyze Scores

Step 4. Literacy Coordinator and Assistant Copy and Distribute Assessments to Teachers

Step 6. Literacy Coordinator and Assistant Score Assessments

Step 5. Teachers Administer & Return Assessments to Literacy Coordinator

Asking the Difficult Questions about Organizational Routines

What is the theory of action behind the routine?

What arguments explain and evaluate the routine?

Why should it work?

Why might it not work?

What are the advantages of this routine?

What are the disadvantages of this routine?

How does it connect with classroom teaching and learning?

Task Four: Organizational Routines

Identify one organizational routine in your school or school district (or a school or school district you work with) that is key in efforts to lead and manage classroom teaching.

- Jot down the components of the routine.

- What is the theory of action for this routine?

- How might it work? How might it not work?

- Is it working as intended? How do you know?

- Share your routine with the person next to you.

Getting to Practice: Advice & Information Interactions in School

Diagnosis and Design Work

Why Focus on Advice and Information Interactions?

- On-the-job interactions associated with the transfer of advice and information – essential to knowledge development:

    - Socialization: Tacit Knowledge—Tacit Knowledge

    - Externalization: Tacit Knowledge – Explicit Knowledge

    - Combination: Explicit Knowledge – Explicit Knowledge

    - Internalization: Explicit Knowledge – Tacit Knowledge

Blau, 1957; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Choo, 1998; Coburn, 2001; Daly & Finnigan, 2010; Elmore, 1996; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004; Hill, 2004; Little, 2002; Smylie, 1995; Spillane, 2004

Social Network Instrument

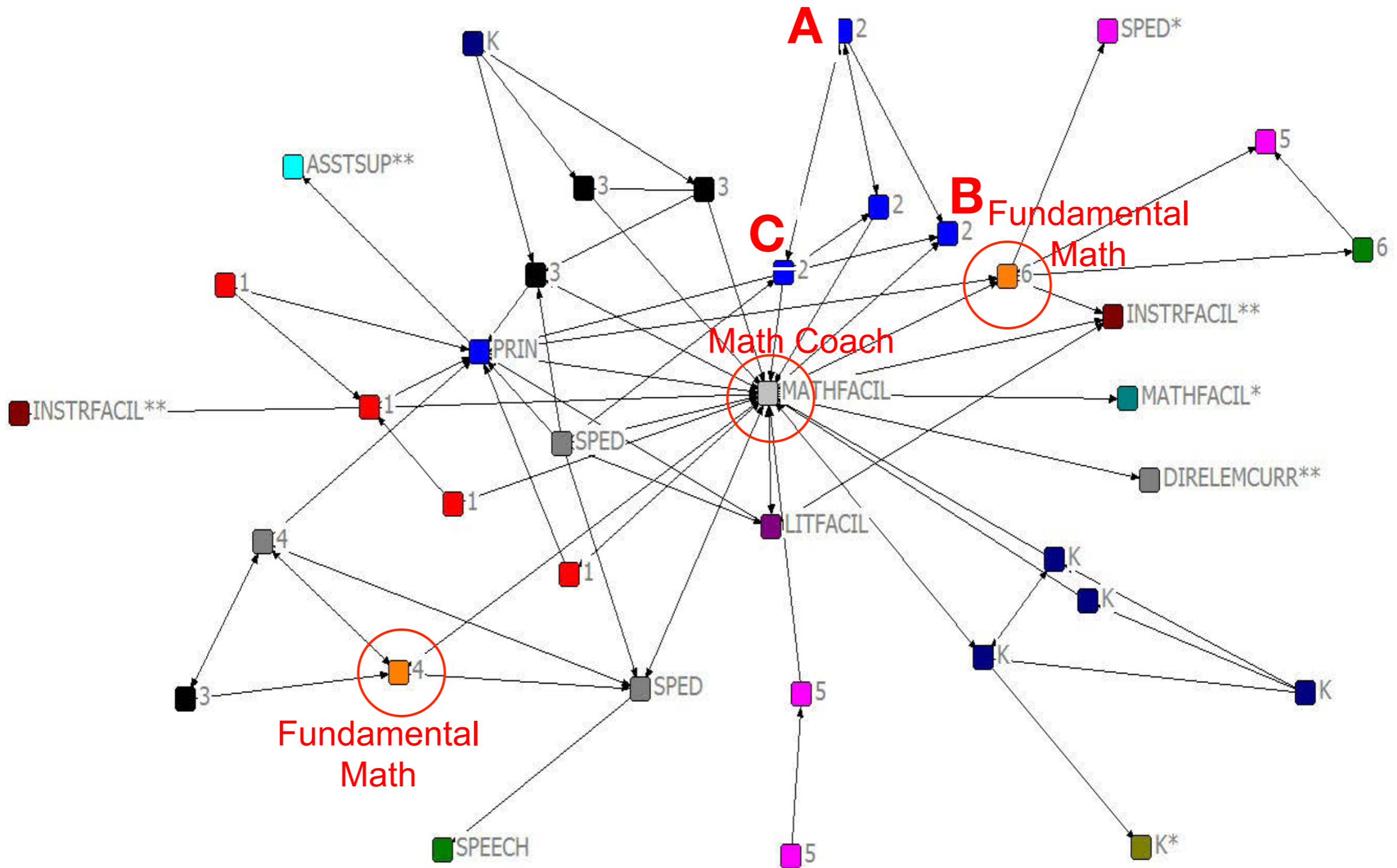## School Staff Survey

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

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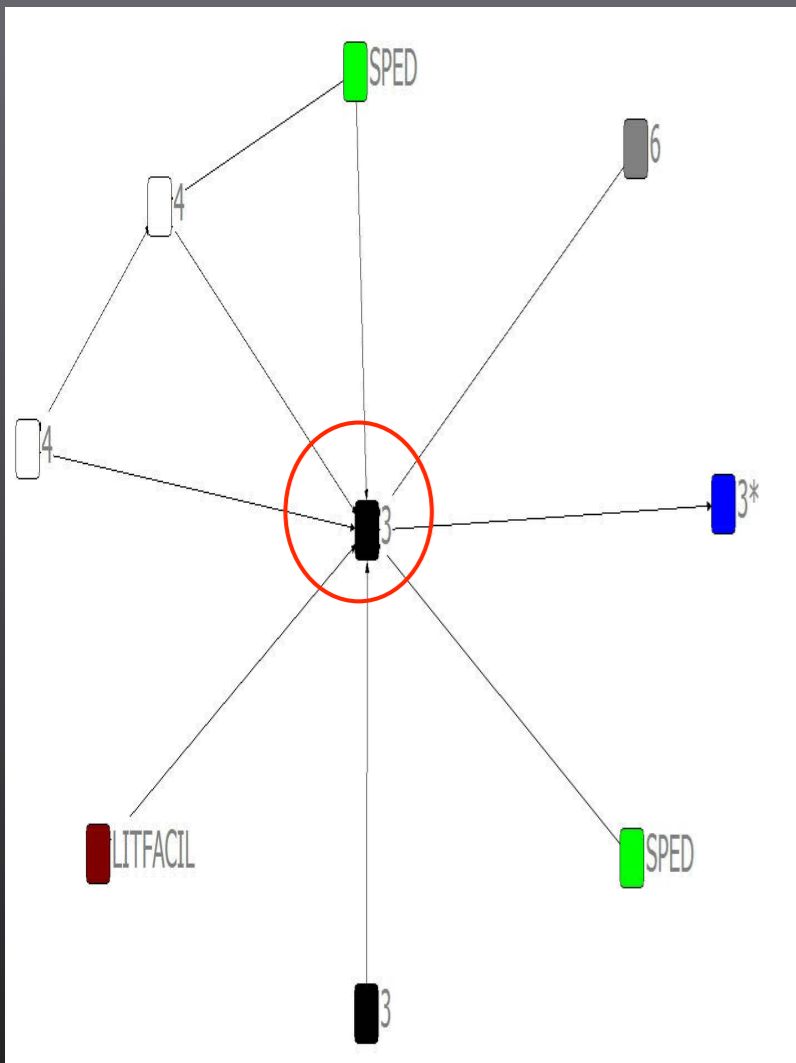
☐ I have not sought advice from anyone.

Name	Role
Jim Spillane	principal
James Pustejovsky	6th grade teacher
Virginia Pitts	math coordinator
Cindy Sigal	roommate - also a teacher

Back   Next

Advice and Information Interactions

Woodpecker Math Network 2011-2012
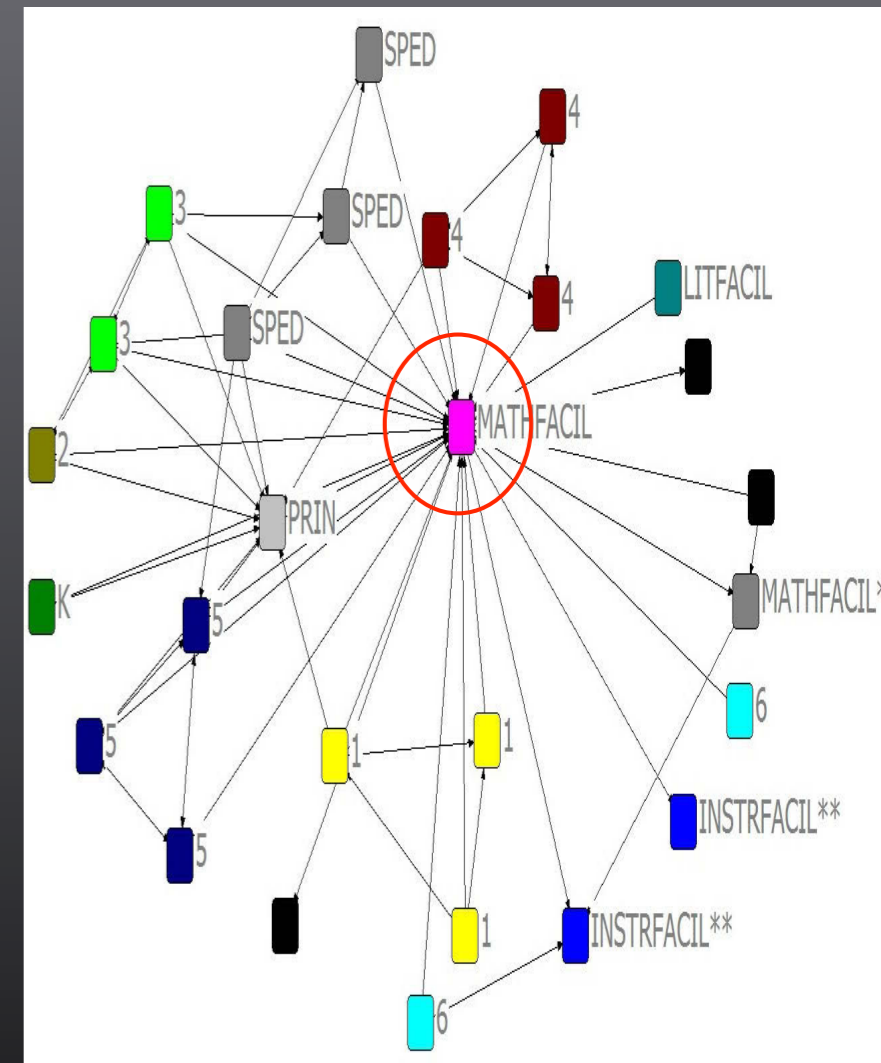
Math Coach (Emily) Facilitates Staff Interactions
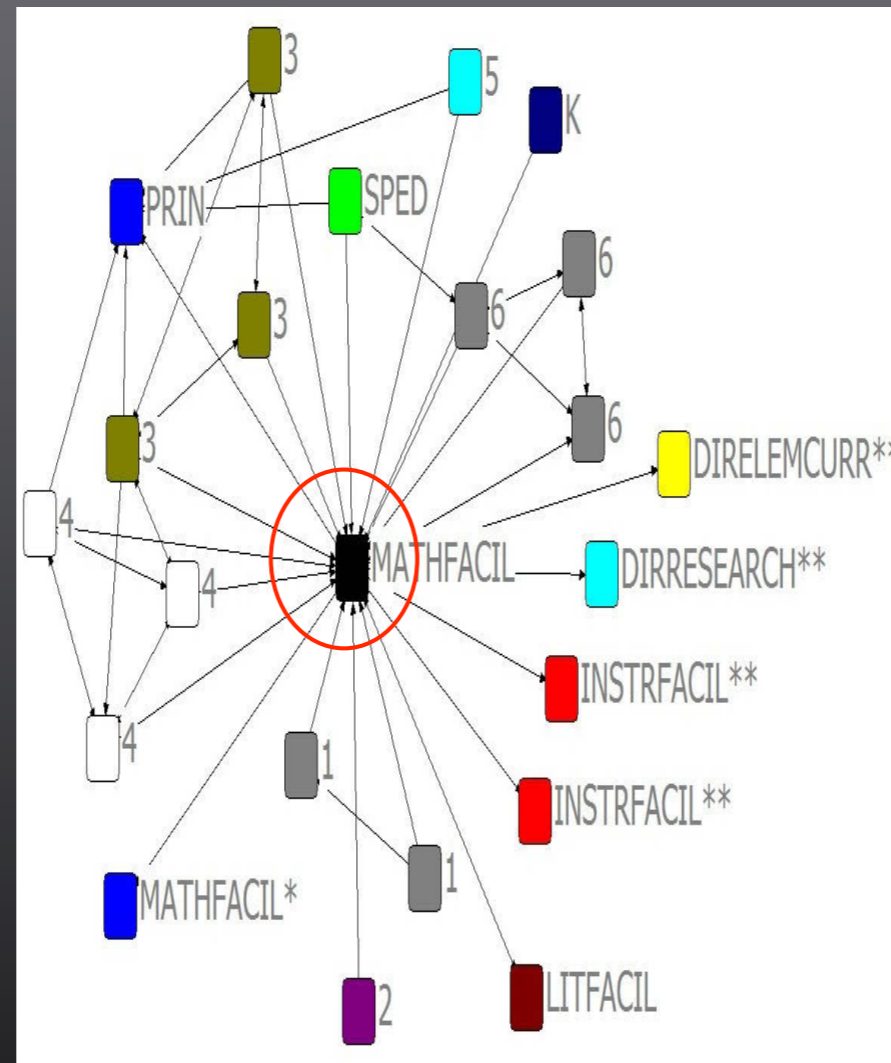
2009-10   **2010-11**   **2011-12**

Formal Position Promotes Advice Seeking

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

Angie, Special Education

Formal Organizational Structure & Advice & Information Interactions

- Staff more likely to seek advice from others of same gender and race.

- Prior tie strongly associated with having a current tie.

- Formal leaders more likely to provide advice or information.

- Teachers in the same grade were more likely to receive or provide advice or information.

- Teachers more likely to seek advice about a subject from teachers who reported more PD in that subject.

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

# Formal Leaders and Advice and Information Seeking Behavior

- Part-time leaders more likely than full-time leaders to belong to instructional advice and information networks

  - Formal leaders more central compared with teachers in language arts (.042/0.28) and in the mathematics (.038/0.25) (p<.001).

  - Part-time leaders more prominent in mathematics compared with full-time leaders (.045, .019; p<.001)

  - Brokers: Part-time leaders higher betweenness scores in mathematics than full-time leaders (.024, .011; p<.001)

(Spillane & Kim, 2012)

Spillane, J. P., Kim, C. M., (under review). An Exploratory Analysis of Formal School Leaders' Positioning in Instructional Advice and Information Networks in Elementary Schools. *American Journal of Education*

Some Lessons about Social Interactions

- Strong ties - enable the transfer of tacit, complex knowledge and facilitate joint problem solving.

- Weak ties - enable the transfer of explicit knowledge.

- Ties that span organizational boundaries allow for new information and minimize 'group think'.

- Boundary spanners, individuals that connect different subgroups, facilitate the implementation of new approaches.

- Trust enable learning in social interactions.

Pleasantville District Math Network
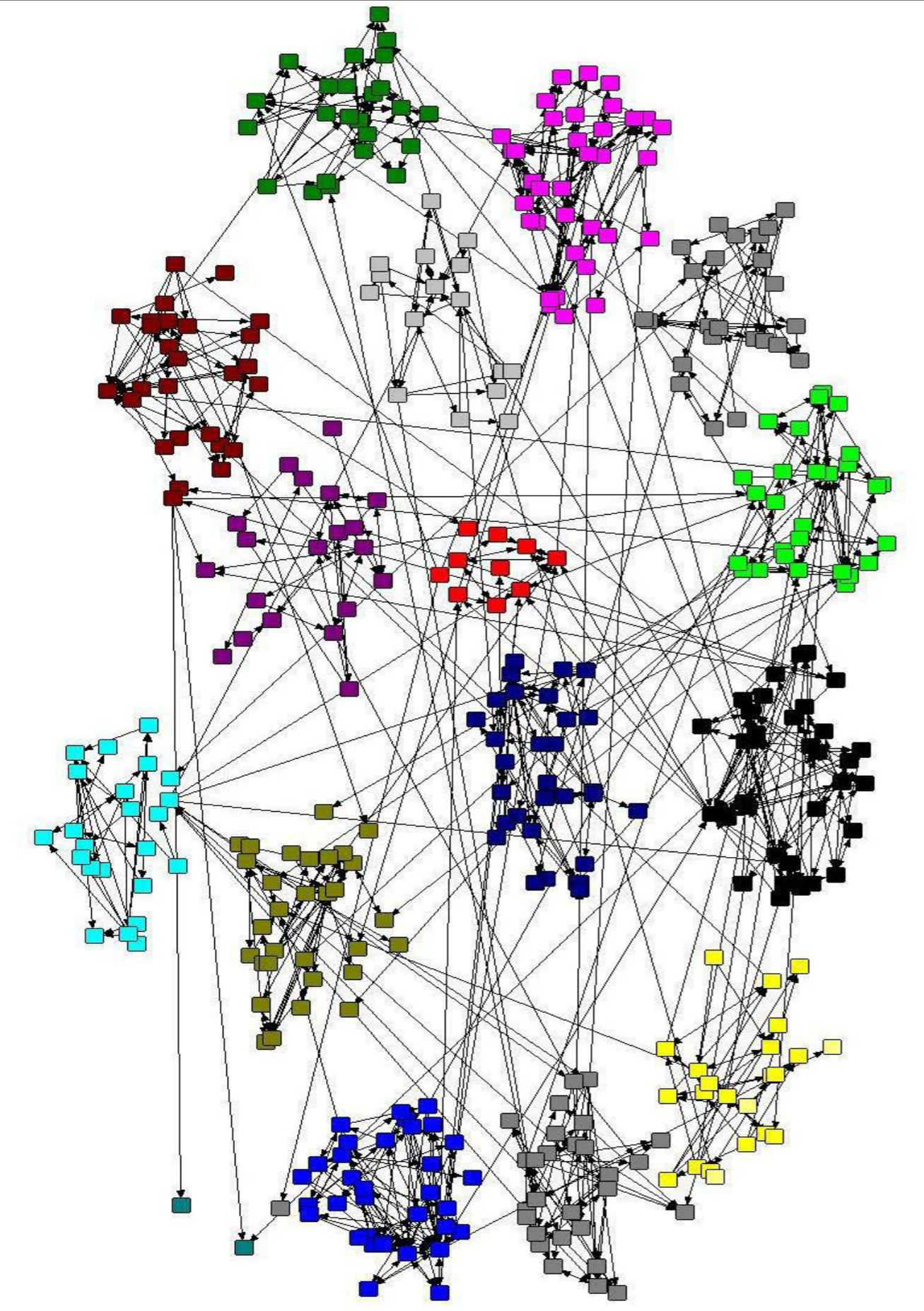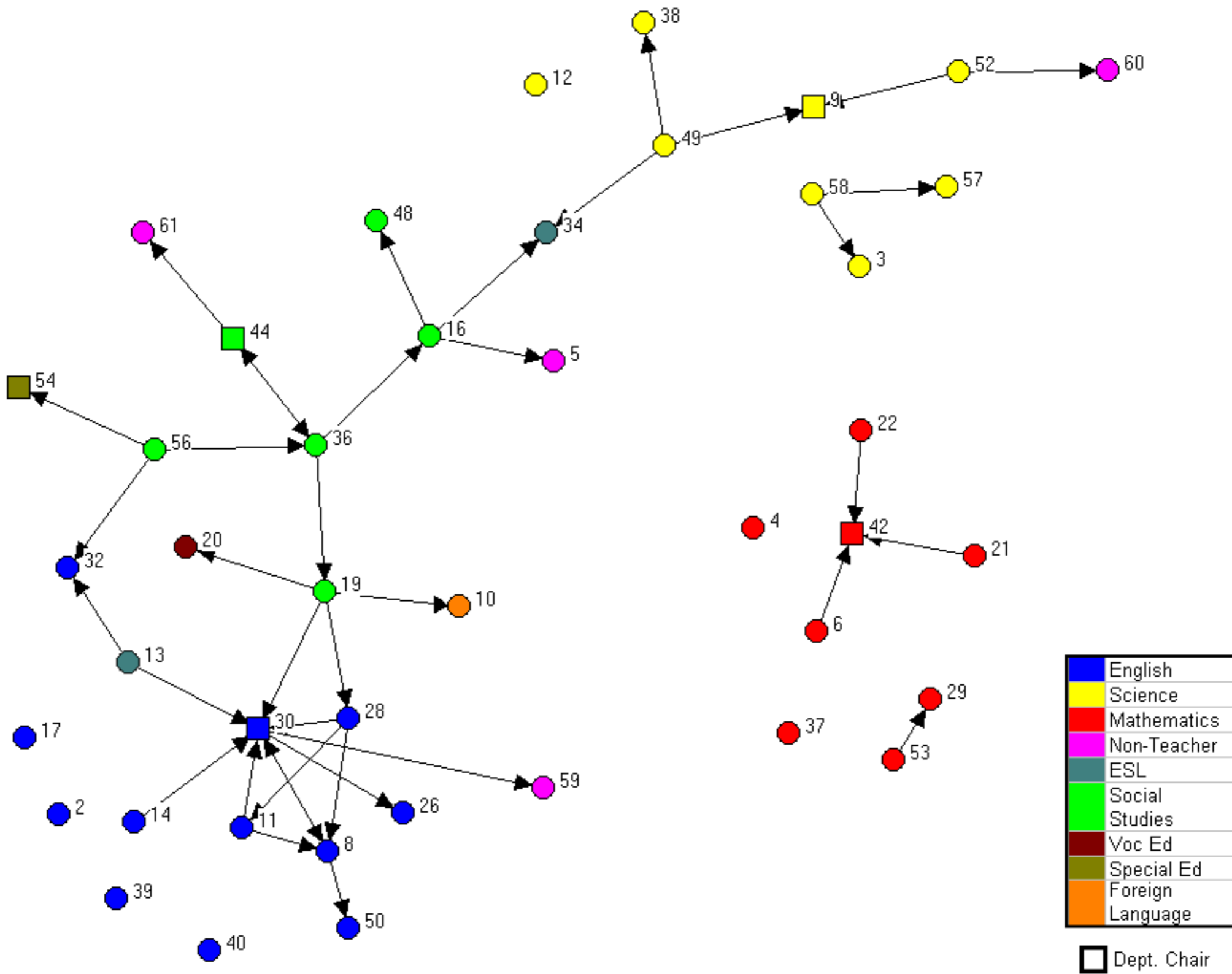
Pleasantville District ELA Network
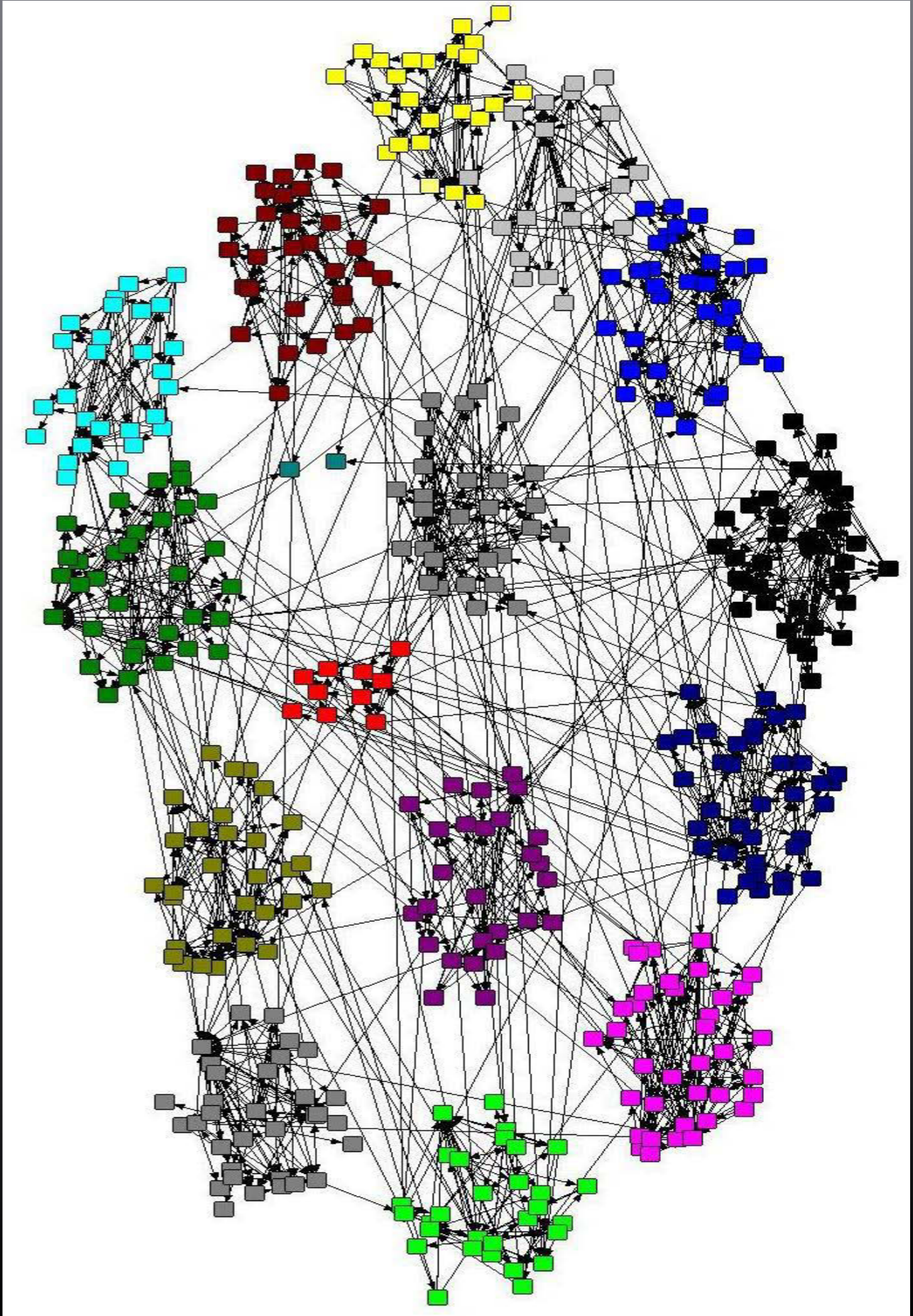
Task Five

- Imagine you are introducing a new program to teach reading across the curriculum/disciplines in Pink Hamlet and Fern Hill High Schools. Examine the curriculum advice networks in the two high schools.
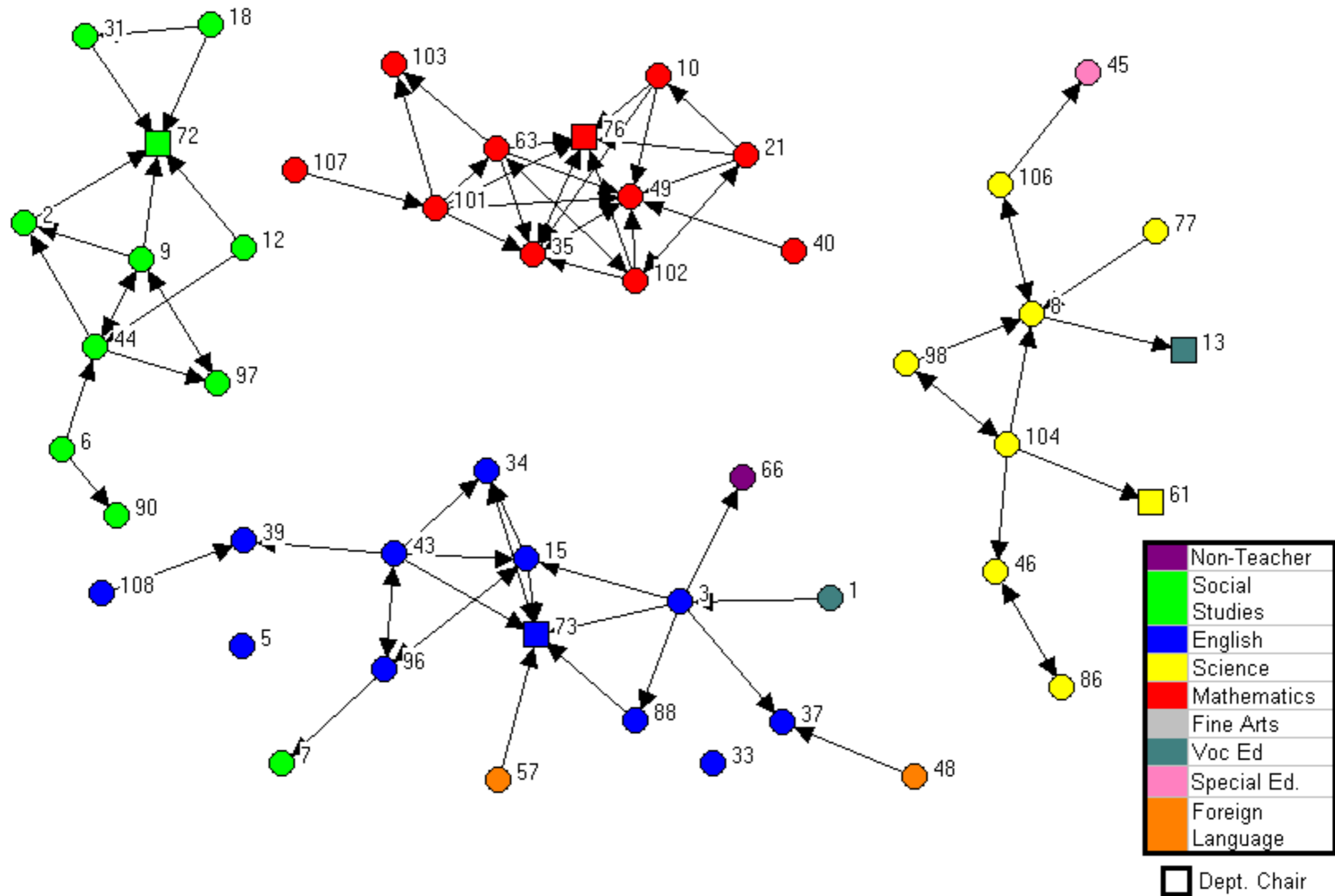
What patterns do you notice that might be relevant to your program implementation efforts?

Identify two differences between the two schools that you would consider in your implementation efforts.

Fern Center High School Curriculum Network

Pink Hamlet High School Curriculum Network

Legend:
- Non-Teacher
- Social Studies
- English
- Science
- Mathematics
- Fine Arts
- Voc Ed
- Special Ed.
- Foreign Language
- ☐ Dept. Chair

Novice Principals: Challenges in taking A Distributed Perspective

Ultimate Responsibility

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

George

"**the buck stops at your desk**. … everything stops at my desk **so I'm ultimately accountable** for everything in this building. … Everything is your responsibility."

Nelson

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

Kathy

'Janus-Faced' Nature of the Work

Nelson

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

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

Angela

Unpredictability/Volatility

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

Nelson

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

Lori

Leaders' Work and Distributed Leadership

- Nature of the leader's job both enables and constrains taking a distributed perspective on leadership.

- Novice school principals' sense of ultimate responsibility appears to discourage and constrain a distributed perspective.

- But, the diversity, unpredictability, and janus-faced nature of the leader's work encourage and enable a distributed perspective.

The Challenge of Distributing Leadership

"that tendency to … micromanage, I just felt like I had to keep that in check. … that was never my style before, but I think just because I would kinda get overwhelmed with the idea of the responsibility that I felt like I had to have my hand in, you know, all the different things going on. So I just had to challenge myself to let go gender differences …

Kathy

- "it was hard to release that, because I like to be in [involve], and some of it is trusting that it will get done, but with this [person] I know it will get done effectively and right. It's also just wanting to be a part of the process whole heartedly, but I can't whole heartedly be a part of everything "

Kara

The Challenge of Distributing Leadership

"If it's a bilingual, I'll send them to Evelyn. If it's a testing question … I'll send them to Helen. … And not to pass the buck, but they already know cause I gave them a sheet on who's responsible, but sometimes they just want me to hear.

Carol

"the art to really being a good leader I is just making sure you hire the right people because most of this work you do is delegated anyway. … But you go through and you make sure that these people have the capacity to do what it is you need them to do before you delegate that work to them. And then you manage along the way—build capacity, support, coach. That's your role ."

Joyce

Conclusion: Moving Forward

- Putting diagnostic and design work central in leading and managing instruction and efforts to improve it.

- Diagnosis and design necessitates a framework – one possibility is a distributed framework.

- A distributed framework urges attention to both the formal (designed) and informal (lived) organization *in tandem*.

MORE AT:

http://www.distributedleadership.org

http://distributedleadership.org/DLS/
Presentations.html