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How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special Education Teachers Shape Their Practice

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How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special Education Teachers Shape Their Practice

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Teaching and Learning

by

Amie Wong

Committee in charge:

Professor Amanda Datnow, Chair
Professor Alan Daly
Professor Tom Humphries

2016
The Dissertation of Amie Wong is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016
Dedication

To my colleagues in special education who struggle to have their voices heard and understood—let us change this paradigm.

To the teachers who participated in this study, I thank you for sharing your insight into education. Your commitment to students with special needs and the profession is truly respected and appreciated.
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incented me to strive towards my goal.

To my nephew, Chevy Chen, thank you for inspiring me to dream big and to
live life loud.
Vita

**Education**

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<td>June 2016</td>
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<td>Doctor of Education in Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>Dissertation: <em>How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special Education Teachers Shape Their Practice</em></td>
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<td>June 2013</td>
<td>University of California, San Diego</td>
<td>Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>Thesis: <em>Virtually in Class: Using Advanced Technology to Connect Homebound Students to the Classroom Setting</em></td>
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<td>June 1996</td>
<td>San Diego State University, San Diego</td>
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<td>June 1986</td>
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**Current Position and Professional History**

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<td>2007–Current</td>
<td>Home Hospital Teacher, San Diego Unified School District</td>
<td>Provide one-on-one instruction in the homes of students who, due to medical reasons, are not well enough to attend the comprehensive school site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003–2007</td>
<td>Site-Based Diagnostic Resource Teacher, San Diego Unified School District</td>
<td>Worked directly with the school site for the special education program office to resolve parent concerns and legal matters.</td>
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Developed and implemented a model inclusion program in conjunction with San Diego State University. Developed a highly recognized peer tutor program for inclusive education. Created a paraprofessional manual and peer tutor training manual used in the district.

Selected Publications


Selected Invited Talks
Invited talk given once each semester at Point Loma Nazarene University, San Diego, CA

2015 Diving Deep: Transforming Educational Practice for All Students in the Era of the Common Core and NGSS.
Invited panel member at University of California, San Diego

Professional Affiliations
American Educational Research Association (AERA)
Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)
Abstract of the Dissertation

How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special Education Teachers Shape Their Practice

by

Amie Wong

Doctor of Education in Teaching and Learning

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Amanda Datnow, Chair

Teacher collaboration has long been considered a vehicle for educational improvement. Meanwhile, some teachers find themselves disconnected and isolated from their colleagues, in part due to the roles they serve in schools. This study was designed to provide insight into such social connections from special education teachers’ perspectives. There is currently little research on the social networks of special education teachers. Thus, the findings will help provide a better understanding of their networks and their collaborations, which can ultimately benefit special education students’ academic achievement.

Using a parallel mixed-methods approach involving interviews and an ego network analysis, this study examined how special education teachers connect with general education teachers and other special education teachers. The study is grounded
in research and theory on social networks and communities of practice as well as in research on the work of special education teachers. Analysis of the data revealed that special educators of students with mild/moderate disabilities viewed themselves in support roles rather than as true co-teachers, and those who work with students with moderate/severe disabilities perceived their instruction as different and separate from general education. Although special education teachers shared more connections formally with general education teachers, they had informal connections through co-teaching and social gatherings on campus, and by proximity of class location. The study also found that special educators did not perceive new policy initiatives as impacting their instruction because they saw it as more of a general educator’s role. This has implications for how leadership structures educational reforms and for issues regarding the lack of planning and support in specialized programs.
Chapter 1:

Introduction

Special education students continue to underachieve academically in comparison to their general education peers (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001). U.S. Department of Education data from 2011–2012 show “a four-year graduation-rate gap between students with disabilities and those in regular education that ranges from a high of 43 percentage points in Mississippi to a low of 3 percentage points in Montana” (Samuels, 2014, p. 1). California’s graduation-rate gap is 17%, which is in the mid-range in comparison to the other 49 states.

A common explanation for the achievement gap between special education students and their general education peers is the disconnect between research and practice (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Westling, Herzog, Cooper-Duffy, Prohn, & Ray, 2006). Indeed, this disconnect exists in both special education and general education programs, but the problem is compounded by a scarcity of research-based effective practices in special education (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001; Westling, Herzog, Cooper-Duffy, Prohn, & Ray, 2006). What is significant in the findings is “the lack of ongoing opportunities for practitioners and researchers to receive regular input from each other and to engage in professional development” (Greenwood & Abbott, 2001, p. 281). This contributes to the achievement gap described above, and points to the need for more collaboration and professional development opportunities.
The gap worsens when special education students’ needs are not being met in the classroom in accordance with the law when there is a lack of teacher collaboration. Current legislation gives students access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). FAPE is discussed in Section 504 of the U.S. Department of Education’s Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Under Section 504, FAPE is described as “the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services that are designed to meet individual needs of handicapped persons as well as the needs of non-handicapped persons” (Rehabilitation Act, 1973, section 794a). The law has changed requiring general and special educators to collaborate in order for the academic success of special education students.

The reauthorization of IDEA law was added in 2004 requiring students with disabilities to have appropriate access to grade-level, standards-based curriculum, and be included in a statewide system of assessment and accountability. As a result of special education students taking statewide assessments, the United States Department of Education enacted regulations in April 2007 for alternate assessments based on modified achievement standards (Cahill & Mitra, 2008). IDEA clarifies that students with special needs have the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and the presumptive right to be in an integrated setting. Furthermore, schools are responsible for providing a continuum of services for special education students to meet their individual needs. Prior to the IDEA law of 2004, over 4 million students were denied access to public education, while others were placed in segregated or regular classes without support for their special needs (Katsiyannis, Yell, & Bradley,
In sum, educational programs must be individualized to meet each child’s unique needs, provide access to the general curriculum, meet the grade-level standards established by the state, and provide each child with educational benefit. In addition, the law necessitates the need for special and general educators to collaborate to better support students with special needs.

The challenge for special education teachers is safeguarding the needs of special education students in the regular education classroom. These teachers must also focus on paperwork and compliance, which can constrain collaboration with colleagues and efforts to support accommodations and modifications for special education students. When a district is given a corrective action plan, teachers are faced with a tremendous amount of paperwork and numerous required trainings from the special education program. According to Samuels (2014), the Office of Special Education Programs has measured states on factors such as how quickly they scheduled individualized education program (IEP) meetings, or whether high school-aged students had postsecondary goals written into their IEPs. Samuels argued that the focus instead should be on “results-driven accountability” (p. 8) aimed at systematic improvements and at what academic standards must be met for a regular diploma for a student with a disability. These foci geared towards academic outcomes will better support special education students academically and improve graduation rates.

An additional challenge is that many special education students are seen as the minority in the classroom and not like their nondisabled peers, who are considered the majority (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). Unfortunately, many special
education students are not capable of or comfortable in explaining their learning challenges or, most importantly, being proactive in tackling them and advocating for their rights, especially at the secondary level (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002). Conderman and Katsiyannis (2002) recommended allowing greater flexibility and a system of support to help students understand that they have choices concerning their goals, areas of focus, and secondary program outcomes. Supporting special education students in this way means that collaboration and communication between general and special educators will foster effective practices, while teaching students to become greater advocates for themselves. The collaboration promotes a greater awareness and understanding of the shared roles (Conderman & Katsiyannis, 2002).

Teacher collaboration is key in order to have an effective program where students with special needs are included with their general education peers. Likewise, limited collaboration between special education and general education teachers may contribute to the underperformance of special education students (Sharpe & Hawes, 2003). Austin (2001) explained there is currently a lack of collaboration between general and special education teachers, and both special and general educators need training in collaborative teaching techniques to ensure competency for supporting students. Opportunities for collaboration need to be strategically implemented and supported for special and general education teachers to communicate (Samuels, 2014).

Meanwhile, Rice (2006) noted that general education teachers are afraid and uncertain about having students with special needs in their classes. Rice discussed that general and special education teachers need to develop trusting relationships, clearly
define roles, share leadership, and communicate to insure the success of special
education students. Developing trust is important in order to develop a collaborative
relationship, so that teachers feel there is a commitment to support each other and that they are comfortable talking openly.

Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) and Garriott, Miller, and Snyder (2003) have argued that preservice education is the precise time and opportunity to alleviate fear by dispelling the misconceptions about special education students, and by providing an understanding of how an inclusive program for students with special needs is supported. Research supports the need to improve preservice training of teachers to ensure the academic success of special education students, and to develop a clearer understanding of their range of needs. Thus, supporting teachers in the beginning of their teacher preservice programs will help to delineate roles and create a better support system for all students.

Teacher burnout and attrition are also high in the field of special education; Wasburn-Moses (2005) described these problems as an epidemic. The annual attrition rate for special education teachers has been estimated to be between 8% and 12% (Whitaker, 2000, as cited by Wasburn-Moses, 2005) which is almost double in numbers to general education teachers according to Brownell, Hirsch, and Seo, (2004). Special education teachers are leaving the field in much greater numbers than their general education peers (Nichols & Sosnowsky, 2002 as cited by Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Brownell, Hirsch, and Seo, (2004) explain that the attrition rate for special
education teachers in their first 5 years is 75% to 80%, compared with 50% for teachers nationally.

According to Wasburn-Moses there is a persistent national shortage of approximately 29,000 fully certified special education teachers each year. The high teacher turnover causes problems with budgets, frustration concerning time spent on teacher training and mentoring, recruiting challenges for schools and districts, and most importantly the special education students’ mental outlook.

Two of the major reasons that special educators leave are due to administrative support and team efficacy as discussed by Conely and You (2016). Conely and You (2016) studied the reason why special educators leave in a national sample of 2060 secondary special education teachers (students 13-18 years old). The study found that special educators who perceived that when administration was characterized by supportive behavior, a clear vision, and teacher recognition were less likely leave teaching or transfer to another school. When there were perceptions of unsupportive supervision this did not motivate teachers to make their best efforts or enhance their commitment to teaching. Team efficacy according to Conely and You (2016) explained that supportive and cooperative colleagues encourage and assist special educators work efforts to stay in their assignments (p.15). The findings emphasize the importance of principal support and collegial work relations.

Special education students need to have consistent teachers working with them to support their learning. The lack of a stable teacher can cause behavior problems and loss of pace with curriculum instruction because, oftentimes, students are without a
permanent teacher for weeks or even months. Some special education teachers take a leave of absence for health-related matters caused by stressors from the workload (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Substitute teachers then need to be trained and need time to develop relationships with the teachers at the site. These conditions can hinder student learning outcomes and collaborative work efforts.

In sum, in special education we find low student performance, a disconnect between research and practice, lack of collaboration between special and general teachers, weak professional development, and teacher burnout. Improvements in collaboration for special education teachers could help to address these issues. In general, studies suggest that teachers who collaborate are better able to access and make use of the individual and collective resources embedded in their professional networks (Rigano & Ritchie, 2003). Although many school reform efforts have collaboration as a key component, there is little research on the social networks and collaboration of special and general education teachers. Collaboration is a vehicle that can facilitate reform and the academic success of all students (Little, 2003).

Studying the connections between general education and special education teachers can contribute to improving the academic achievement of special education students and effective school design. However, the social networks of special education teachers are uncharted research territory. Thus, this study aims to fill critical gaps in research by exploring the social connections of special education teachers, both formal and informal. In turn, this work will help to reveal how these networks impact teachers’ professional lives, their knowledge, and their classroom practices.
Personal Experience

Mertens (2014) described the importance of researchers clarifying their personal closeness to a research topic and the inherent influence of their closeness to the research that they are conducting. Therefore, it is important to describe my own experiences as a special education teacher and the interests that led me to study the social interactions between special and general education teachers.

I have been a special education teacher for 24 years, and I have coordinated and often taught alongside general education teachers. I have included students with moderate to severe disabilities in general education classes such as math, English, history, science, physical education, and electives. Students with special needs received classroom support with the special education teacher, special education aides, and/or as much as possible with peer tutors. Because my students were included in general education classes, I developed relationships with the general education teachers. My connections with my peers took time to develop into collaborative relationships, which I worked diligently to build. I developed a model program of inclusion for students with moderate/severe disabilities and worked closely with the local university for support. The local university has acted as consultant with other schools, both within and outside the district, to educate visitors to my school about inclusion and to see what the program looks like.

Including my students with moderate to severe disabilities into the general education program was complicated and challenging. I had to educate and change the perceptions of general education teachers. I taught them to understand how
moderately/severely disabled students’ learning objectives were different yet still the same. I had to educate them about students’ behaviors that included aggressive acts towards other students, loud vocalizations, and habits normally associated with developmentally younger children. Many were afraid and had no experience teaching students with moderate/severe disabilities. Most did not know much about inclusion and felt their preservice teacher programs did not provide sufficient training. I often had to barter for inclusive opportunities by providing extra support in the classroom with my aide.

I developed trust with teachers by following through with my promise to be present in the classroom. I made connections with them by assisting with their instruction and providing miscellaneous support to make their jobs easier. I was very determined to make connections with my colleagues at my school site, and the outcomes brought a new awareness to the teachers, students, and administration about how moderately/severely disabled students can learn in an inclusive setting.

In the general education classrooms, the special education students had the opportunity to learn side-by-side with their general education peers by observing and modeling; an important part was socialization with their age-appropriate peers without disabilities. These connections were key in helping the special education students improve in their abilities to learn, be more independent, and experience a sense of belonging. My students often had severe behavioral problems, but through inclusion their behavior was changed and reshaped. The parents of my special education students noticed a remarkable change in their socialization and learning outcomes and
were grateful for the inclusive model. I developed close connections with parents who asked for my input as their children moved on to new schools. I advocated and fought for the rights of my students to be included since most teachers did not see the value of having them in general education classes. I had to teach general education teachers that special education is not a placement, but rather a service.

My current role is as a homebound teacher, where I provide instruction to both general and special education students who, for medical reasons, are not able to attend a comprehensive school site. The special education students I support can have mild to moderate or moderate to severe disabilities. By law, the students who meet eligibility requirements have the right to educational services in our district’s specialized homebound program. Part of my role is to collaborate with the students’ teachers from the comprehensive school site on their coursework during their absence. At times, this can be a challenge—teachers no longer consider these students their responsibility since they are no longer enrolled at the school site. Some say they are too busy to collaborate, that this is not in their job description; some refer me back the district pacing guide without discussing their timelines and/or any supplementary work they may be using for instruction.

This lack of communication puts homebound students behind in their coursework and feeling stressed when they return to school. In particular, special education students who have already had learning challenges fall even further behind their general education peers while in the homebound program. Many have to spend extra time grasping concepts, causing the gap in learning to further widen upon their
return. Many of these problems could be avoided through better collaboration with their classroom teachers.

The academic gaps between special and general education, the continued marginalization of special education students, and my personal experiences have led me to develop a research interest in social networks. Collaboration between general and special education teachers appears to be key to insuring the academic success of diverse learners in the classroom. The current study will help to inform my current practice as I continue to collaborate with teachers at the comprehensive school site. Furthermore, the information learned from this research will support the learning community by providing research-based evidence to better support special education and general education teachers’ collaborative efforts.

**Research Focus**

As noted earlier, the purpose of this study was to explore the social connections of special education teachers. There is currently little research in this area, especially from the perspective of the special education teacher. It is important to explore how special education teachers connect with general education teachers and with other special education teachers to understand how these networks impact teachers’ professional lives, their knowledge, and their classroom practices; ultimately this will help special education teachers do their jobs more effectively.

The overarching research question guiding this study was: *What characterizes the social networks of special education teachers?* The following subquestions were also addressed:
1) How do special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their professional interactions and personal satisfaction?

2) How do special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their curriculum and instruction?

3) What conditions support/constrain the development of effective social networks for teachers?

These questions were addressed through a mixed-methods research study combining semi-structured interviews with an ego network analysis of the connections of special education teachers.

**Overview of Theoretical Framework**

**Ego Network Analysis and Social Network Theory**

This study was informed by social network theory. Daly (2010) explained that social network theory looks at the social structure of an organization and the impact of the relationships among people within the setting to identify patterns. Individuals within an organization are referred to as a *network of actors* because persons engage with one another in various ways and degrees (Daly, 2010). Social network theorists challenge assumptions about the meaningfulness of organizational boundaries and forms, asking “how patterns of change might be explained in the web of relations through which ideas, information, resources, can influence flow” (Daly, 2010, p. xi). These patterns of collaboration and communication provide insight into the structure of an organization and how the network of actors can effect change and the implementation of best practices.
Many studies of social networks are conducted through a methodology called social network analysis (SNA). SNA is a “systemic approach used to quantify and visualize the ties and overall structures of formal and informal networks” (Daly, Moolenaar, Bolivar, & Burke, 2010 p. 360). SNA looks at the connections of the social actors in an organization and the web of patterns created from the interactions. The web of patterns can be mapped to form a network map that provides a visualization of relationships (Daly, 2010). Additionally, social networks are impacted by social capital (Lin, 2001). Social capital theory discusses how the achievement or success of a program is based on the resources/benefits individuals offer to each other through their connections.

This study will also use ego network analysis (ENA) and ego network mapping to describe the quality of social network connections. ENA is a technique used to understand how individuals account for their social networks (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013). In ego network analysis, the researcher selects a sample of respondents from a population. Each respondent, referred to as the ego, gives her or his own perspective regarding supportive network members, called *alters*, who exist in their lives. Egos also explain the ties between the different alters mentioned. Traditionally, ENA is used to answer research questions regarding how individual people are affected across different settings (DeJordy & Halgin, 2008). ENA allows the names of individuals named on network maps to be viewed ethnographically. In the context of this study, incorporating ENA provides a deep layer of understanding
regarding how special and general education teachers are either connected or not, and how this can impact the social capital within their networks.

**Communities of Practice**

This study also has a foundation in Wenger’s notion of communities of practice (Wenger, 2010). A community of practice (CoP) can be viewed as a social learning system. Wenger (2010) explained how the process of learning “exhibits many characteristics of systems more generally: emergent structure, complex relationships, self-organization, dynamic boundaries, ongoing negotiation of identity and cultural meaning, to mention a few” (p. 180). Engagement in social contexts involves a dual process of individuals making meaning of their connections and of their associations within the cultural community. We engage directly in activities, conversations, reflections, and other forms of personal participation in social life that shape our connections. At the same time, Wenger explained, we “produce physical and conceptual artifacts such as words, tools, concepts, methods, stories, documents, links to resources, and other forms of reification—that reflect our shared experience and around which we organize our participation. (Literally, reification means ‘making into an object.’)” (p. 180). Learning in social contexts requires both involvement and reification.

Thus, over time, the social history of learning is created and formed by the individual and collective aspects of the group’s interactions. “This history gives rise to a community as participants define a ‘regime of competence,’ a set of criteria and expectations by which they recognize membership” (Wenger, 2010, p. 180). Over
time, the historical context of learning becomes an informal and dynamic social structure among the participants, and this is a community of practice.

A CoP can take on a life of its own (Wenger, 2010). People work together in a community to formulate practices in response to situations, and often become creative in doing so. Wenger (2010) explained, “one’s practice has a life of its own and it is a response based on the active negotiation of meaning” (p. 181). Thus, people’s awareness is in their sense making, and this learning creates a social system that is a property of a community.

In sum, social network theory, ego network analysis, and the notion of communities of practice provide the framework for this research. Patterns of collaboration and communication provide insight into the structure of an organization, and these bodies of theory will help explain how groups of individuals learn from and make sense of their environment. This study is also grounded in extant literature on a variety of related topics, which I discuss in the next chapter.
Chapter 2:

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I review existing literature to discuss: (a) the current view of special education; (b) teacher collaboration; and (c) social networks, including a summary of factors that influence them. I draw from a wide body of literature to provide a richer understanding of teachers’ social relations. This, in turn, has informed my research on the social networks of special education teachers.

Current View of Special Education

According to Westling et al. (2006), there are “several challenges characterizing the special education profession” (p. 136). The literature is full of reports of high levels of stress, teacher burnout, high attrition rates among special educators, an insufficient number of fully qualified teachers, and the gap between research-based effective strategies and teachers’ daily classroom practices (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Westling et al., 2006). Nationally, there is a widespread shortage of teachers in special education because of perceptions that they hold a low social status position, earn low salaries, and endure poor working conditions, a lack of support, and diminished student motivation and discipline (Fish & Stephens, 2010). There have been various proposals, model programs, and agendas to help support new special education teachers’ mentoring or induction. These programs have been implemented but not with universal effectiveness (Billingsley, 2002; Billingsley, Carlson, & Klein, 2004; Kennedy & Burnstein, 2004). There are pockets of new teacher support
programs with effective strategies, and a key element is professional collaboration to solve problems (Westling et al., 2006).

As noted briefly in Chapter 1, Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) discussed how, despite efforts to link general and special education through conceptual work, program-based directives, and research-centered practices in teacher education, there continues to be a longstanding fissure that separates the two from each other. And, “despite what appear to be common goals and commitments, the various ‘diversity communities’ in teacher education and special education have generally not participated in the same professional, policy, and research conversations” (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012, p. 237). Thus, it is important that programs focused on general teacher education and special teacher education develop common theoretical underpinnings to unite the two.

Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) explained that the current divide between special and general education stems from differing frameworks. Special education communities look at behavioral psychology, medicine, and psychometrics (concerned with the objective measurement of skills and knowledge, abilities, attitudes, personality traits, and educational achievement) for theoretical grounding. The influence of behavioral psychology underpins the assumption widely held in special education that any behavior can be broken down into a finite set of component skills and subskills that, in turn, are the focus of remediation (e.g., Adams & Carnine, 2003; Engelmann & Carnine, 1991). In other words, special education teachers look at effective teaching strategies for students with special needs as a matter of identifying
the essential skills that make up learning to read/write, to do math, or other problem solving issues. They determine where students are deficient and identify the most effective methods or best practices for teaching those skills. The medical model, with its emphasis on diagnosis and treatment of disease, has long influenced the practice of special education (Clark, Dyson, & Millward, 1998). Overall, Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) explained how special education’s stance is to “focus instruction on fixing students (i.e., supporting their deficits), giving little reason to consider the role that other factors, such as poverty and discrimination, play in academic failure” (p. 240).

In contrast, many general teacher educators work from a social justice stance, which draws on entirely different disciplinary traditions to inform their work perspectives. Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) noted:

Rather than behavioral psychology, medicine, or psychometrics, general education instruction looks to anthropology, sociology, cultural psychology, and sociolinguistics for our influences. Informed by these perspectives, many social justice educators work from a sociocultural theory of learning, which holds that learning cannot be reduced to sets of autonomous skills stripped from the sociocultural contexts in which they are used. (p. 239)

General education teachers’ work from a social justice perspective stems from a sociocultural theory of learning, which holds that learning cannot be reduced to sets of autonomous skills stripped from the sociocultural contexts in which they are used. General education instruction tends to focus on how people learn (through participation in cultural activities) and what is learned (social practices), and the context itself is part of what is learned. From this perspective, the crucial point is that
psychological (learning) processes are not independent of sociocultural contexts; indeed, they are constituted by the contexts of which they are a part (Cole, 1996; Gee, 2008). The social constructivist viewpoint positions human learning (and learning failure) in the context of human relations. From this standpoint, no one can be disabled on their own, but rather it is the institution (school) and actions that produce the disability.

Despite the differences in how learning is viewed between general and special education, Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) explain, “no one denies the existence of physical, cognitive, or emotional differences” (p. 63). What is important to understand is that disabilities exist, and educators consider different approaches to addressing the naturally occurring human variation. Special educators are trained in understanding the medical model when supporting the instructional needs of special education students, but also learn that the needs of special education students must be advocated for in their instruction. In other words, special education teachers are often concerned with social justice. Part of this advocacy for educators means the communication and collaboration that occurs to insure the rights and services of special education students are met in general education classes. Special educators also may advocate for both inclusion of students with disabilities as well as students with varied racial and language backgrounds. Advocacy for students can be compared with the social justice stance that general educators are trained in since these are the same educators are working from critical perspectives to understand the needs of special education students.
Nevertheless, this lack of common underpinning that we sometimes observe between special and general education contributes to the divide between the two. The view of special education through a medical lens versus the general education social justice lens creates a divide in opinions about how instruction should be handled. Additionally, special education needs more highly qualified teachers, professional development opportunities, and model instruction programs for others to follow and to learn from. Teacher educators need to understand the problem of disability not just as a social justice issue, but one that calls for careful examination of systemic and medical needs as well as thoughtful consideration of how individuals and groups relate within sociocultural contexts. The next section will focus on research regarding teacher collaboration and how this impacts teachers’ professional lives, student learning, and educational reform efforts.

**Teacher Collaboration**

The professional community of a school comprises those working, teaching, and learning within it. This includes the administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Ideally, the educators in a school community work together to improve the culture, build relationships between teachers and students, nurture feelings of inclusion, and promote a collective investment in student learning (Little, 2002). Teacher collaboration has been the topic of much research in the field. As Little (2002) explained:

>[It is] taken as a fundamental premise that resources for teacher development and the improvement of teaching are created in and through interaction, as teachers talk with one another and with others, and as they work with and on the material artifacts of teaching and learning.
(instructional materials, lesson plans, products of student work, tests and assessments). (p. 935)

In a comprehensive review of research on teacher collaboration, Kelchtermans (2006) provided a broad picture of teacher collaboration and collegiality in the workplace, which he defined as the cooperation of people and the ability to work with each other. He argued that there have been basic judgments about the benefits of teacher collaboration and few justifications of the negative views about teacher autonomy. Thus, in a successful educational setting, “part of the collaborative culture is also a view on the balance of autonomy and collegiality” (p. 232).

Furthermore, Kelchtermans (2006) explained how collaboration and collegiality are connected: “collaborative actions and collegial relations constitute important working conditions for teachers and as such they influence the professional development of teachers and school” (p. 220). He explained how the cultural and structural working conditions in schools help to regulate and mediate actual teacher collaboration. A culture or climate of collegiality in a school community influences the potential for educational reform, as Little (2003) and Daly (2010) also argued.

Teachers participate in professional learning activities, such as professional reading, sharing ideas with colleagues, or improving lessons, but there is limited involvement when “collaborative activities demand more than just talking or discussing” (Kelchtermans, 2006, p. 225). Kelchtermans further argued that providing the structural and organizational conditions for teacher collaboration and professional learning is important but not sufficient to turn schools into learning organizations. Teachers’ personal characteristics, including their attitudes and personal efficacy, also
determine their participation in professional learning, more so than characteristics of the tasks or the environment.

Little’s (2003) research on teacher collaboration drew on intensive case studies of teachers in mathematics and English in two high schools. Her study looked at how teachers’ classroom practices became understood within the context of their out-of-classroom interactions. Specifically, she attempted to explain how does interaction open up or close down teachers’ opportunities to learn. She looked at the coordination of classroom and collegial practice expressed by teachers’ interactions, and how the teachers’ work accommodated the difficulties of change. Little explained, “the understanding of the nature and significance of communities of practice is how the practice comes to be known, shared, and changed through participation” (p. 917). Thus, understanding the professional community is vital to understanding the social networks, how the CoP impacts teachers, and ultimately what characterizes their collaboration to better support collegiality.

Talking about classroom practices only scratches the surface of professional communities; more important is listening to the narratives of the teachers to provide a more elaborate account (Little, 2003). Little found that when teachers met to spend time discussing reports of classroom practice they felt rushed. They wanted time to have their concerns heard first and in those cases they were more likely to move forward with conversations about curriculum and/or change directives. The key is finding the right amount of social interactions so teachers can be heard and
acknowledged. Also, using coaches as experts to support teachers with deeper and more practical classroom-focused conversations can build a sense of agency.

Little (2003) also explained the need for a professional community in order to develop how teachers view the “collective capacity of schools, and the improvements in the practices of teaching in school” (p. 913). The professional community of teachers will be strengthened and improved by teachers when they work together and share in the questioning of good teaching practices, including both new and routine practices. Whether teachers agree or voice differences of opinions in supportive ways, they can grow professionally together.

There is currently little research on the social connections of special and general education teachers. Although a number of effective collaboration strategies have been developed over the last decade, current research suggests that general educators are still more likely to interact collaboratively with other general educators than with special education staff (McGregor et al., 1998; Prom, 1999, as cited by Sharp & Hawes, 2003). And according to Friend, Cook, Chamberlin and Shamberger (2010), the model of co-teaching is recent practice as it has evolved from federal legislation and policy changes. This could account for the scarcity of research available on this topic.

Another problem that could impact collaboration as discussed by Sharpe and Hawes (2003) is that “teachers typically maintain a high degree of autonomy and individual decision making” (p. 3). The high level of decision making for many general educators cause them to feel they are ill-prepared to undertake such a
responsibility to reach students with an increasingly diverse range of educational needs (Monahan, Marino, Miller, and Cronic, 1997, as cited by Sharpe and Hawes, 2003). This finding underscores the importance of special and general educators and how they need to collaborate to meet the needs of special education students.

Instructional planning for general and special educators on educational standards needs to be seen as a mutual responsibility, according to Sharpe and Hawes (2003). Collaboration is necessary in order for special educators to become more competent in subject matter knowledge and curriculum development. Sharpe and Hawes also pointed out that general educators must understand their role in implementing IEP goals and objectives within the general education classroom to insure special education students’ needs are being met. Active involvement between special and general educators—along with administrative support—is greatly needed to turn the corner and make long lasting changes (Sharpe & Hawes, 2003). Without administrative support, special education teachers are further divided in their interactions with general education teachers.

In summary, studies of teacher collaboration have revealed that relationships are reliant on the actions and social ties that influence interactions. Thus, when we consider a network of social relationships, it is important to carefully examine organizational groups because the social relations within them can promote change or be sources of resistance. Creating opportunities specifically for special and general education teachers to collaborate on lesson plans and differentiate curriculum for all students may create more connectedness. In addition, administrative support is vital in
creating and managing effective connections of teachers; these connections must be cultivated at the site level to sustain change.

**Social Networks**

Research on social networks contributes important insights into teacher collaboration. In the last decade, interest in this area has exploded (Borgatti, Mehara, Brass, & Labianca, 2009). Borgatti et al. (2009) explained, “the theory of networks is a cornucopia of insights into the social influences of other discipline areas such as sociology, psychology and political sciences and economics” (p. 892). In fact, social network studies within the business world have been around for several decades.

Social network theory focuses on the relationships between people or organizations. While social networks have been analyzed since the 1930s, social network theory was not developed until the 1970s (Freeman, 2004). Social network analysis (SNA) consists of understanding the web of relationships in which people are embedded. It has been used as a form of analysis since Moreno (1934) used systematic recordings and analyses of social interactions in small groups in both classrooms and work places.

A study by Granovetter (1978) indicated that people within a given social network tend to have more uniform opinions. Having similar opinions was often a reason that members of a social network were interested in working with one another. In a more recent study, Fowler and Christakis (2008) found that people within a social network were more likely to be happy if other members of the social network were also happy. In addition, feelings of happiness increased in a person when other friends
in different social networks were also happy. Since these groups of people had similar ideas and opinions, individuals were able to find new knowledge and understandings when they developed friends and acquaintances in other networks. Perceptions of happiness increase if people believe they are involved in a social network consisting of happy people; likewise, people’s happiness can be constrained when they are in a network of unhappy people.

Relationships within social networks can both constrain and provide opportunities for the people or organizations involved (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010). When looking at individual achievement, network theorists have considered the attributes of the individual as well as the relationships within the environment that provide opportunities for achievement or constrain choices and actions. When organizations form alliances, partnership plays a role in shaping future alliances. Thus, understanding the social network of individuals in a school community can allow school teams to learn about opportunities to form new ties and strengthen existing ones (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010).

Social Networks in Educational Settings

The application of social network theory to educational research has evolved over the past 20 years, with most research conducted in the past 5–10 years (Moolenaar, 2012). SNA methods are relatively new in the field of education, which would also explain why little is known about the networks of special education teachers. Recent work has been fueled by “the increasing interest in teacher relationships and teacher collaboration to support teacher professional development
and capacity building in schools” (Moolenaar, 2012, p. 7). Using SNA, researchers can document the web of networks that influence teacher collaboration and practice. Through SNA research, we can advance our practices in education by better understanding teachers’ behaviors in the social context of their schools (Moolenaar, 2012). SNA can be used to examine the extent to which the pattern of relationships among teachers and the exchange of resources within these relationships supports or constrains school functioning and improvement.

Within SNA is the question of how individual actors and social relationships develop resources or ties—what is sometimes called social capital. Lin (2001) defined social capital as “the resources embedded in social relations and social structures which can be mobilized when an actor wishes to increase the likelihood of success in purposive action” (p. 24). Social networks shape teachers’ professional experiences (Lin, 2001), and applying social capital theory is one way to better understand the influence of these networks. For instance, social relations between individual actors in grade-level departments, subject matter departments, the school site, and/or the district are interconnected and ultimately affect the success of an organization. Social capital is concerned with the resources evolving from the relationships that develop (Daly, 2010). Moreover, the strength of social capital within an organization predicts the likelihood of challenging change such as educational reform—for example, weaker ties account for smaller or simplified change. These ties are thus important factors in understanding the role of social networks in education.
Daly (2010) explained that the resources of social relations are called the “ties between the actors” (p. 4), and thus actors must be aware of the assets in their network and take action through social ties to access to resources. It is the ties in a social system that create structure for an organization and opportunities for individuals to access them. Strong ties between individuals support joint problem-solving of complex situations, whereas weaker connections are better suited for simple or routine information. In the context of educational reform, change is more likely to happen where there are strong ties in the organization.

**Factors Shaping Social Networks**

**Professional autonomy.** In a study using social network analysis, Moolenaar, Sleegers, Karsten, and Daly (2012) explored the similarity between multiple social networks in school teams in order to classify them according to their underlying dimensions. They looked at 53 Dutch elementary schools located in a single district, and how multiple social networks among educators were shaped differently depending on their content. They found that one dimension differentiated the social networks in the school teams: the mutual interdependence of the relationship between educators. Specifically, there was a cluster of instrumental relationships involving advice, collaboration, and work discussions, as well as a cluster of expressive relationships involving friendship, contact outside of work and, to a lesser extent, personal guidance. In a friendship network, relationships were more evenly distributed among educators; in an advice network, relationships were centered on a few educators who were more often sought out for advice. The authors explained, “Social relationships
around spending breaks imply high levels of independence that may uphold a
traditional mode of instructional autonomy and noninterference” (p. 367).

This can be interpreted as teachers seeing their roles in education as more autonomous—i.e., special education teachers who deliver their instruction in a self-contained room and wish to work by themselves. In co-teaching, special and general educators are working together as partners for the success of students. However, the autonomous roles that teachers’ balance can add to the challenge they have in collaborating with each other. In fact, Moolenaar et al. (2012) explained that teachers often felt pressured to make connections with their colleagues, which can add a layer of stress in collaborative groups because teachers may be forced to work in those groups. Thus, there is key evidence from both Moolenaar et al. (2012) and Daly (2010) that careful planning in the construction of group dynamics is important, in part because successful reform relies on positive social interactions.

In a research review, Kelchtermans (2006) discussed the conditions that facilitate or constrain teacher collaboration. He argued that the main challenge for professional communities is “finding a balance between one hand maintaining the interpersonal ties and connectedness in a caring community, while on the other hand sustaining the constructive controversy (in which differences in opinion and beliefs can arise) that is necessary for authentic professional learning” (p. 223). Kelchtermans further explained that providing structural conditions for collaboration is no guarantee that teachers will actually work together because of cultural processes of interpretation. This means if the school culture conditions where teachers’
collaborative processes are not spontaneous or voluntary, can cause problems because they are steered towards a more predictable view. Hargreaves (1994) as cited by Kelchtermans (2006) explains the lack of freedom to express one’s opinion is discussed as “contrived collegiality” (p. 227). Contrived collegiality ultimately impacts teachers’ authentic views during collaboration in order to keep peace within the school community.

Kelchtermans (2006) found that providing teachers with out-of-class preparation time did not result in teachers working more collaboratively, because “preparation time became absorbed by the deep-seated culture of individualism and classroom centeredness that has become historically and institutionally ingrained in the prevailing patterns of teachers’ work” (pp. 230–231). There is a balance of staff interaction because some teachers want to have their independence, and if teachers feel pressure to be involved, they may experience stress. But through collaboration teachers have the opportunity to learn together and provide feedback to one another, which helps to develop a feeling of collegiality and shared responsibility for the school community. Autonomy is “an opportunity for self-determination and seen as central to intrinsic motivation: teachers feeling personally responsible for their students’ outcomes allows them to make internal causal attributions for pupils’ results” (Kelchtermans, 2006, p. 227). There are also different forms of both teacher collegiality and autonomy that is valued differently. For the goals of school improvement and teachers’ professional development a proper balancing of both autonomy and collegiality seems to provide the most promising way ahead. And, for
collegiality to be effective, it is important to note that providing a positive and supportive view of collaboration and autonomy is important to the school culture.

**Resources.** Moolenaar et al. (2012) noted that access to resources—such as curricular material, trainings, and technologies—is also important in the development of social networks. Specifically, social networks are shaped by the content or purpose of the social resources that are exchanged in the network (Burt, 1992; Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001). For example, a network that is used to exchange work-related information and expertise might look significantly different from a social network that is used for more informal personal support. While both contain social resources, the access and leverage in formal and informal networks can be shaped differently. Thus, it is important to examine multiple relationships simultaneously to better understand the content of their ties. Understanding how the social networks form differently around educational practice and policy with collaborative initiatives will help focus and optimally facilitate organizational goals.

**Social composition.** Moolenaar et al. (2012) discussed how social network theory argues that the quality and denseness of social composition eventually determines the speed, direction, and flow of resources through a social network. In turn, through the flow and use of social resources, collective action can be facilitated and organizational goals can be achieved (Lin, 2001). The importance of the mutual ties of individuals in education creates more social capital, which has a greater chance of leading to education reform.
In a related study, Coburn, Mata, and Choi (2013) discussed how “teachers are embedded in dyadic (one-to-one) relationships, these dyadic relationships are set in larger subgroups such as grade-level teams and departments, and these groups eventually form larger social structures such as schools and districts” (p. 313). Thus, school teams’ social interactions related to advice, collaborating, or attempting to obtain resources are interdependent and multileveled in the school environment. Coburn et al. explained that the theory of organizational embeddedness may be especially important for understanding social networks in public schools. In particular, public school systems are usually highly bureaucratized, with multiple levels of structures that likely influence interaction patterns (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Coburn & Talbert, 2006). Understanding how a public school’s organization is situated in complex policy and institutional environments is likely to increase knowledge of how schools influence teachers’ interactions and work towards educational reform.

Change and leadership. Daly (2010) discussed “how the social network theory approach provides insights into the motives of resisters to change, spheres of social influence, and the multiple social worlds that must be negotiated when change is enacted” (p. 3). Thus, successful reform efforts require a shift in the way change strategies are enacted in school districts (Daly, 2010; Moolenaar et al., 2012). “This shift entails a move from singular focus on individualized segments of the organization to engaging the entire system in a network of connections” (Moolenaar et al., 2012, p. 361). Educational leaders must carefully look into existing relationships
before beginning to implement reform. This will allow for the creation of formal opportunities for these networks to grow and endure reform efforts.

Just putting groups together does not necessarily mean people will connect; rather, how thoughtfully the groups are formed and supported by the organization and leadership can impact more meaningful collaboration. Indeed, Daly (2010) noted, “in terms of collaboration or professional learning communities merely providing time and directives to ‘work together’ does not necessarily result in meaningful collaboration between vertical and horizontal teams” (p. 3). A deeper understanding of the social networks in schools can provide insight into how individuals with varying roles, social influences, and responsibilities are (or are not) predisposed to work together and attempt change. This, in turn, can inform how collaboration can and should be supported.

The relational linkages within networks can also influence teachers’ experiences and the collective ability to reform. Daly et al. (2010) argued that the “structure of social relationships may influence the direction, speed, and depth of organizational change, and therefore may provide valuable insights in the social forces that may support or constrain reform efforts” (p. 359). In other words, as strong relationships form, interactions between teachers will contribute to student learning, teacher development, and the quality of school improvement. Thus, having a strong connection between individuals in an organization leads to the greatest potential for educational change.
Daly and Finnigan’s (2009) research examined what facilitates and constrains the social networks of teachers, including the role of leadership and the structural and cultural conditions for collaboration. The importance of looking at this study is to understand how the social network of school site administrators and central office leadership impacts the collaboration with teachers at the schools. They used an exploratory case study and social network analysis research design to examine the communication and knowledge networks among principals and central office staff. Their goal was to understand the critical role of leadership in organizational change efforts that took place in the context of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). They found that leadership overlooked the fact that organizational change efforts are often socially constructed.

The findings from Daly and Finnigan’s (2009) study suggest a comparatively dense communication and knowledge network within the central office and sparse ties among site leaders, with 93% of site ties occurring less than once per month. When the district office administrators were looked at separately from school site leaders, an interesting network pattern emerged: “in terms of the communication network, the central office administrators have a density of 30% frequent communication ties between one another, compared with only 16% of the ties between site administrators” (p. 16). The authors found little communication between central office staff and site administrators at the core of organizational change efforts. This lack of connections with central office leaders constrained school site administrators’ ability to communicate and share work-related knowledge to inform practice at their school site.
A lack of communication from the central office ultimately limits innovation across schools. This ultimately impacts school site leadership and their ability to collaborate with staff when central office does not collaborate with the school site leaders.

Coburn and Russell’s (2008) findings indicate the importance of fostering greater expertise in coaches; this is a key strategy for bringing expertise into teachers’ social networks, where they make everyday decisions about curriculum implementation. The collaboration with the coaches is an important part of helping teachers facilitate connection so teachers can begin to dialogue about new practice or policy reform. District leaders facilitating healthy routines of interaction to foster conversations about mathematics instruction and using coaches to support these routines into teachers’ school sites may create conditions in teachers’ networks for deeper, more practical, more classroom-focused conversations.

Coburn and Russell (2008) also warned that “where school principals have direct supervisory authority over coaches, the principals may choose to use coaches in ways that pull them away from direct interaction with teachers or that configure their time such that they rarely work with teachers in a sustained way” (p. 224). This study underscores the importance of having school leaders who are fully committed to the curriculum implementation plan, because coaches influence a level of necessary expertise to the school site level with collaboration conversations that occur with staff development and learning. Therefore, what facilitates the development of structures
must also include intentional opportunities for routines of interaction that promote productive exchange (Coburn & Russell, 2008).

**Broader context.** Understanding the role of teachers’ social relations in individual change, organizational processes, and student outcomes may require greater attention to how social networks are embedded in and affected by the organizational and policy context. In a longitudinal study, Coburn et al. (2013) examined influences on teachers’ networks and explored why some are able to support individual and organizational change with the implementation of a new math curriculum while others are not. They cited evidence that teachers’ networks are more amenable to outside influence than previously thought. For example, new curriculum reform can disrupt ties, interrupt the flow of resources, and remove supports for new routines. Policies can play a role in promoting conditions in schools where teachers seek out their colleagues, share information, solve problems, and learn from one another in their networks. This study provided an understanding of how the structure of social networks are influenced with new curriculum policy, uncovering points of leverage for encouraging network improvement and sustainability of teacher connectedness.

Coburn and Russell’s (2008) exploratory study on the nature and configuration of teachers’ social networks within a reform effort provides insight into the role of policy in facilitating or constraining networks. Their study focused on a district-wide scale-up of mathematics curricula in two urban school districts. They investigated how new math structures and other aspects of the rollout influenced teachers’ interactions with one another. Their findings suggest that policy can play a role in influencing
some dimensions of teachers’ social networks, including structure, access to expertise, and depth of interaction among individuals in the network. However, the design of the policy initiative matters. Creating more opportunities for teachers to meet may have limited influence if multiple priorities compete for teachers’ time and attention. Teachers may need a balance of time for lesson planning and classroom work, and adding another meeting can constrain their willingness to participate in the policy initiative. The findings explained that understanding the dynamics of policy efforts with teachers’ social networks support the development of social capital for teachers. This implication provides knowledge for school leaders to understand how the design and organization of policy initiatives can better support the social networks of teachers with the implementation of instructional innovations at schools.

**Individual characteristics.** A study by Van Waes, Van den Bossche, Moolenaar, De Maeyer, and Van Petegem (2015) examined how collegial interactions might support or constrain faculty’s professional development in higher education—information that is applicable to understanding the networks of high school teachers. The researchers compared and contrasted the networks of faculty members in different stages of instructional development (novice, experienced non-expert, and experienced expert teachers). They used ego network analysis to examine the differences between the networks in size, tie strength, and diversity. Respondents mapped individuals they interacted with regarding their teaching practice. The researchers found that “experienced expert faculty had the largest and most diverse networks, followed by novice and experienced non-expert faculty” (p. 14). Experienced expert and novice
teachers with their larger networks are more apt to participate in innovations. Thus, this information provides insight into improving the social network connections of teachers in the experienced non-expert group because little diversity may also cause decline of networks or limited motivation for supporting reform. The social connections with novice, experienced non-expert, and experienced expert teachers can be supported to improve in their social networks which can ultimately improve the school sites initiatives with policy.

The finding that expert teachers had large networks correlated with findings in a study outside of education by Cross and Thomas (2008), who explained how experts had access to more diverse and plentiful resources within their networks, and they could optimally leverage their networks when implementing plans. Non-expert faculty had smaller network sizes, possibly due to having less time for interactions on teaching-related matters, or perhaps due to complacency. Ericsson (2006) explained that the experience of non-experts could lapse into arrested development due the lack of professional growth. The lack of networking interaction and motivation to enhance one’s teaching can cause isolation (Bakkenes, De Brabander, & Imants, 1999). Networks can settle after a while or become immobile if they are not actively worked on and supported (Van Waes et al., 2015).

Novices have large networks because inexperienced teachers tend to seek out many people for help due to their lack of experience (Van Waes et al., 2015.) The large networks of novice teachers most likely help them broaden their concepts on teaching and provide moral support (Fox, Wilson, & Deaney, 2011). Thus, expert
teachers tend to be sought out because of their knowledge and expertise (Van Waes et al., 2005). In other words, experts and novices have larger networks but for different reasons. According to Fuller and Unwin (2004), novice teachers also enrich the experts’ networks. These findings are in line with studies indicating that high performers have diverse networks that target and extend their abilities (Cross & Thomas, 2008). People with more diverse networks demonstrated more innovation (Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001).

In sum, in this consideration of how networks shape teachers’ professional experiences, a recurring theme is the importance of careful thought. The studies reviewed suggest that educational leaders need to organize networks of people so the individuals feel a sense of trust with their group and a sense that they are a part of the shared vision. Teachers need to have a rapport and the ability to feel comfortable asking for advice (not just from experts). Importantly, the diversity of a teacher’s network can impact his or her willingness to participate in innovative strategies, and expert teachers are seen as more experienced with their teaching concepts and approaches. A lack of network diversity might cause experienced non-expert faculty to stagnate in their development toward expertise. Overall, when people are more aware of their networks and their benefits, they can more actively shape them (Burt & Ronchi, 2007; de Laat & Schreurs, 2013).
Summary and Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter describes the factors contributing to the nature of special education teaching, as well as the collaboration and social network patterns of teachers more generally. However, there are lingering questions that require further study. For example, how can special education programs be supported so there is more cohesiveness, with special and general educators working together on lesson planning and differentiating curriculum? Likewise, it is important to find out how special education teachers balance autonomy and collaboration with the demands of their caseload and paperwork.

Special education teachers tend to have a high degree of autonomy, which can be good or bad. The literature suggests that teachers who are socially connected outside of work are more likely to have shared beliefs and more ties to each other. The importance of informal social ties implies that there are deeper connections and resulting in the potential for more resources for social capital exchange. Thus, it is important to investigate the social ties among special education teachers who may have more limited social connections with other teachers in the school and how leadership can help to grow these connections.

The literature on how networks shape teachers’ professional experiences suggests the need for careful thought regarding how teachers’ social relations are organized, as well as the importance of allowing time for individuals to voice their concerns or needs. Regarding curricular reform efforts, teachers are likely to only seek advice from those they consider to be experts. Thus, as we consider networks of social
relationships, it is important to carefully examine organizational groups of teachers because their social relations can promote change or become sources of resistance.

We still know relatively little about how the school culture may support or constrain the social networks of special education teachers. However, what is known is that communication from leadership is key in supporting change. For example, the use of a coach as an expert in facilitating teachers’ learning is beneficial. Likewise, finding a balance for teachers between working together and having autonomy is also important. Thus, it will be important to investigate constraints on social networks and how these constraints may impact special education teachers in particular.

It appears that the field is open to exploring the social networks of special education teachers and general education teachers; the synthesis of the information gathered through this review of literature has guided the current study. Ultimately, this research aims to help special education teachers expand and strengthen their social networks so that they include general education teachers. This, in turn, can support best practices in the classroom.
Chapter 3:

Methodology

The constructs of social network theory and communities of practice theory provide a conceptual framework for looking at the social connections of special education teachers and their perceptions of their relationships with other educators, including general education teachers. This study investigated these issues in order to better understand how informal and formal networks support special education teachers’ classroom practices. Specifically, the research uncovered how these networks impact special education teachers’ professional lives, their knowledge, and their work with students.

As noted in Chapter 1, the overarching research question guiding this study was: What characterizes the social networks of special education teachers? The following sub-questions were also addressed:

1) How do special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their professional interactions and personal satisfaction?

2) How do special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their curriculum and instruction?

3) What conditions support/constrain the development of effective social networks for teachers?

To explore these research questions, I employed a parallel mixed-methods approach. Specifically, the study included individual interviews with special education teachers to gather their insights into their collaboration patterns and how these patterns
have influenced them. The study also included an ego network analysis to further explore and quantify the social ties of the teachers. This design allowed the emphasis to be on the individual—specifically, on his or her connections with others and his or her perceptions concerning those connections (Borgatti et al., 2013). The data allowed me to determine what the social networks of special education teachers look like at the school site and whether there are other connections within the school district. In this chapter, I describe the research methods and study design.

**Research Site**

Williams High School (WHS)\(^1\) is an urban high school in Southern California. I selected WHS as my research site due to my previous work experience at the school (from 2002 to 2008), the diverse student population, and my knowledge of the special education program. WHS’s student body is made up of approximately 2,200 students. All of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. WHS’s student body is 70% Hispanic, 14% Asian, 12% African American, 2% white, and 2% students of other ethnic backgrounds. Thirteen percent are identified as gifted and talented students, 30% are identified as English learners, 44% are reclassified as English proficient, and 13% are in special education.

The faculty consisted of 79 general education teachers and 16 special education teachers. At the time of the research, WHS was supporting approximately 270 special education students. As of the 2014–2015 school year, the special

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\(^{1}\) To ensure privacy, pseudonyms are used for school, district, and person names.

\(^{2}\) A few years ago, the district hired special education administrators to provide direct leadership, but due to budgetary reasons those positions were cut. The responsibilities
The special education program consists of co-taught classes and special day classes. The co-taught model is where teachers of mild/moderate students work together with the general education teacher to share in the responsibility of instruction. Special day classes are where special education students receive all their academic
instruction with a special education teacher. The special day class model is primarily for students with moderate/severe disabilities but includes non-diploma bound students with mild/moderate disabilities who are instructed in applied course work because they are unable to meet the academic rigor in a general education class. Some moderately/severely disabled students who had higher cognitive skills were also taking applied classes. The teacher of the applied classes was teaching four core subjects classes that included math, English, job skills, and job placement.

Participants

The participants in the study included 15 special education teachers from WHS. My intention was to interview the entire special education department to provide a complete picture of the team’s social network. With this in mind, all 16 of the teachers in the department received an email inviting them to participate in the study (Appendix A). One teacher declined to participate. Thus, the sample included 94% of the special education teachers at WHS.

Each teacher of students with mild/moderate disabilities was co-teaching a class where the special education teacher was matched with a general education teacher. The special education teacher and the general education teacher worked on lesson planning together, and ensured that accommodations and differentiated instruction were provided to the special education student while learning for all students in the classroom was supported. There were no more than 12 special education students placed in a single co-taught intervention class. At the time of the
study, there were 12 co-taught classes at WHS: four in ninth grade English; two in 10th grade English; one in 11th grade English; two in Math 1; and three in Math 2.

The participating teachers were covering a variety of program levels of instruction—a special day class for non-diploma bound students; co-taught math and English classes with general education teachers; and English, science, and community-based instruction classes within their own programs. The teachers held credentials in teaching students with moderate/severe disabilities, mild/moderate disabilities, and other health impairments, as well as students who are emotionally disturbed. Also, the participants’ had a range of teaching experience from four to 35 years in special education.

The teachers of students with moderate/severe disabilities were focused on an adapted curriculum based on Common Core Standards in math, English, and science, as well as community-based instruction and transition skills (job and college readiness). Four teachers shared in the instruction of all moderate/severe students. Table 1 shows a summary of the teachers with pseudonyms, and type of program they support.
Table 1. Participants Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym Name:</th>
<th>Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harold</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katy</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephanie</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: MM refers to teachers of students with mild/moderate disabilities; MS refers to teachers of students with moderate/severe disabilities.

**Data Collection**

As noted above, the design of this study included two types of data collection: qualitative interviews and an ego network analysis. Combined, these two approaches provided an understanding of the multiple layers of the connections between the general and special education teachers at WHS. Table 2 explains the links between the research questions and the data collection methods.
Table 2. Research Questions and Data Collection Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Teacher interviews</th>
<th>Ego network mapping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What characterizes the social networks of special education teachers?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their professional interactions and personal satisfaction?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their curriculum and instruction?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What conditions support/constrain the development of effective social networks for teachers?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the participants received and signed an informed consent form (Appendix B). I interviewed 15 special education teachers individually for approximately 45 to 90 minutes each. The interviews occurred between July and October of 2015, either after school or during prep time at WHS, or over the summer at a mutually agreed upon quiet place. There were two parts to each interview: A semi-structured interview was followed by three ego network analysis questions.

Some of the semi-structured interview questions asked teachers to describe their formal and informal connections with teachers, their work practice ties to the school and to the district office, special and general education views, and impact of leadership on special education (see Appendix C). The questions were designed to gain a better understanding of their collaboration with general education teachers, how their instruction and curriculum were impacted, and what factors supported or constrained their practice.
Following the semi-structured interview, I asked each participant the ego network questions (shown in Appendix D) to create a map of teachers’ social connections. The three questions were: *Whom do you turn to for curriculum advice? Whom do you go to for personal guidance for work-related concerns? And, With whom do you like to spend your free time?* The teachers were asked to think about their interactions with people both inside and outside the school site and with other district-related individuals.

The importance of targeting the “right” social network questions was discussed by Moolenaar et al. (2012). Moreover, the order in which social network questions are presented in a survey may affect the shape of social networks (Burt, 1997; Pustejovsky & Spillane, 2009; Straits, 2000). Thus, I carefully framed and placed in strategic order the social network questions to target optimal results. However, when the participants where unable to respond with an name for their network, I would describe the school community and the types of connections that would be possible in the context of the school community. I would probe the participants by asking questions such as “are there connections with counselors, other departments, health center, other related service providers or are their connections outside of your school in the district” for more thoughtful thinking on the special educators’ networks.

The design drew upon other published ego network survey designs, discussed by Everett and Borgatti (2005) and Van Waes et al. (2015), in which information from the ego networks relates to the properties of the whole network. This approach provided a view of the social network as a particular set of connections from a specific
focal point, the ego (the special education teacher). This egocentric analysis (Borgatti & Ofem, 2010) asked participants to provide names of individuals and as well as information about the relationships, such as closeness and frequency of connections. The questions were considered to be a names generator, used to develop a list of distinct names for which respondents were asked to provide further details (Borgatti et al., 2013).

**Data Analysis**

This study primarily used qualitative data derived from interviews to determine common themes. I used a qualitative approach to understand the narratives of the individuals being interviewed. Merriam (2009) described qualitative research as interested in “understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13, emphasis in original). The individual stories gathered in this study have allowed for rich descriptive narratives from the special education teachers to explain their social connections both informally and formally in their practice. I supplemented the qualitative findings with quantitative data for statistical evidence. Quantitative measures in the ego network analysis revealed how these different kinds of ties affected each other (Borgatti et al., 2009). In the current section, I describe each phase of the analysis.

**Interview Analysis**

With the consent of the participants, all of the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim (see Appendix E for the consent form). Nine of the
interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using Inqscribe. The other six interviews were outsourced to a professional transcriber. These professionally transcribed interviews were checked for accuracy with random comparisons with the audio recordings. There were field notes taken during the interview and compared with transcripts. The transcripts were uploaded into a software program, MAXQDA, for data reduction and analysis to qualitatively code topics and themes.

Data analysis is the practice of making sense out of the data. According to Merriam (2009), “making sense of data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (p. 176). As Merriam further noted, it is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation.

The intention of coding is to create an illustration (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My coding process was similar to a data analysis example from Lincoln and Guba (1985), who explained that after general coding, the next steps are: (a) filling in—adding codes, reconstructing a coherent scheme; (b) extension—returning to materials coded earlier and integrating them in new ways; (c) bridging—identifying new or previously not understood relationships within a category; and (d) surfacing—identifying new categories.

Miles and Huberman (1994) discussed the importance of creating contact summary sheets for time-limited data and providing a method to make notations about
the individuals interviewed. I used analysis memoing to connect different components of data into noticeable clusters. Analysis memoing are write-ups or mini-analyses about what patterns you think you understand from your data during the course of your evaluation. According to Miles and Huberman (1994) memoing is one of the most useful and powerful ways to make sense of your codes and patterns. In fact, LaCompte and Schensul (1999) also noted that memoing allows the researcher to comb through mounds of data and fine tune data analysis by “identifying and describing the causes—anticipated or unanticipated” (p. 180). With my data, I used a collection of quotations to demonstrate patterns and/or structures using narratives as evidence from the interviews. LaCompte and Schensul (1999) discussed using metaphors derived from the analysis to capture the sense or evoke the meaning the person being interviewed is inducing to create a link with the unfamiliar phenomenon being discussed.

I employed MAXQDA software to facilitate my qualitative data analysis. In MaxQDA, I created codes and analyzed information to be organized. I began analysis of the interview transcripts with provisional (or a priori) codes derived from the interview protocol as a start list (Miles & Huberman, 1994). My list was based on the conceptual framework of social network theory, ENA, and CoP, as well as the research questions used. Then, from the a priori codes, I took a list of keywords from the interview questions as emerging themes or categories, and developed new codes as subcategories to bridge information and to surface new codes. (A copy of the subcategory codes is included in Appendix F.) Lincoln and Guba (1994) suggested
that coding and recoding are over when the analysis itself appears to have run its course—that is, when all the incidents can be easily classified, and these categories are saturated where sufficient number of quotes regularities emerge.

After coding my data and developing memos, I examined the data to search for common threads. I began by looking at my research questions and used my memo analysis to see what evidence the data would support or explain. I was able to make inferences and develop claims around my findings based on the interview responses and ego network mapping with the support of the coding and memo analysis. Table 3 shows a summary of the a priori and the emerging patterns codes as related to the research questions.
Table 3. Summary of Pattern Coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A Priori Codes</th>
<th>Emerging Themes Related to Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With Emerging Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education teachers’ perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPED roles</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How SPED teachers make connections</td>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstandings of SPED work</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNA regarding Special education teachers’ connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SNA on curriculum and professional development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informally</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constraints</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ego Network Analysis

I used ego network analysis to understand how individuals accounted for their social networks (Borgatti et al., 2013). Specifically, ego network data were analyzed using SNA specifically designed for egocentric networks. This provided an in-depth picture and fuller descriptions of the special education teachers’ social worlds and allowed for both qualitative and quantitative parallel mixed-method analysis. The result was useful and robust information on the research topic, which expanded the breadth of the results related to the ego networks.
Traditionally, ego network analysis (ENA) is used to answer research questions regarding how individual people are affected across different settings (DeJordy & Halgin, 2008). It allows the names of individuals on the maps to be viewed ethnographically by the data collected through a network analysis lens. According to Everett and Borgatti (2005), ENA provides a deeper look at the flow and relationships of individuals; by looking at the particulars of their relationships, we gain an understanding of closeness, betweenness, and separateness.

I combined ego network analysis with quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. By using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, I gained a better perspective on what social networks look like and how information is exchanged within these networks. Datta (2001) discussed how a “crossover in tracks analysis” occurs because findings from mixed methodological strands intertwine and inform each other throughout the study (p. 34). Datta also explained how the findings from a parallel mixed method analysis can inform each other—qualitative analysis informs the quantitative data and vice versa.

I used descriptive methods to summarize the network data in order to look for trends and patterns, and to better understand and communicate the results. I created a priori codes from in interview protocol, which allowed me to code for reoccurring patterns occurring. According to Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009), parallel mixed data analysis allows for “cross-talk” between strands to occur in analysis (p. 266). I drew inferences on the basis of the results from the semi-structured interviews and egocentric mapping analysis, which were then integrated or synthesized to form
“meta-inferences” in analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The meta-inferences or memo analysis were used to generate conclusions through the integration of the inferences from the interviews and the egocentric mapping.

I employed quantitative ENA techniques that included analyzing the network size, network strength, and reciprocity of relationships in the network, as well as the composition, heterogeneity, and tendency of individuals to associate and bond with similar others. I used pivot tables to organize and summarize the data from selected columns and rows. The pivot tables acted as a database and I analyzed the information using frequencies and pattern summaries.

Furthermore, because of my prior relationship with the school, it is possible my data analysis was biased. As such, I arranged for through peers in my doctorate program to read through the interview transcripts and to review my coding system. By having a person not affiliated with the program assist with identifying commonalities and themes, I was more self-assured that my interpretation of the data was authentic.

I used the quantitative data to show the number of connections (total number and level of connections—1, 2, or 3), characteristics of the connections (type of special education credential and subject taught), years of experience, and connection by location. The spreadsheet was organized by the special education teacher’s name, room location, number of years in special education, type of credential held, and subject(s) taught. In addition, the three concentric ego mapping responses were included on the spreadsheet: the name(s) of the individual(s) they connected with; closeness of their connections (Level 1, 2, or 3, with Level 1 being the most
Positionality

Mertens (2014) recommended “that the researcher must be able to enter into a high-quality awareness to understand the psychological state of others to uncover dialectical relationships” (p. 261). Through the study, I remained aware of my role as a researcher and of my biases, particularly because my own interpretation of teachers’ viewpoints could be influenced by my own experience. As I described in Chapter 1, for example, I was a resource teacher in special education at WHS from 2002 to 2008. I was assigned by the district’s special education office to give support to the school’s special education program. As a result, I have past connections with the school, which could potentially give me an insider’s point of view. I have not worked with the staff for over six years, however, and there have been changes in leadership and school reform changes. Importantly, the special education staff has additional teachers with nearly all new faces in the department. Nevertheless, this past relationship must be taken into account.

Because I worked previously with some of the special education teachers at WHS, some may have viewed me as an insider and felt more comfortable telling me their genuine interpretations of their social connections with other teachers (Merriam, 1998). At the same time, however, some may not have fully explained their interpretations because they assumed I already understood the special education program. In addition, some teachers might have felt vulnerable sharing their views in
the context of a formal study. To counteract any of these potential limitations, I made sure to probe on each question thoroughly, to ensure I was gathering complete data from all participants. And, most importantly for the validity of gathering data, I assured the teachers I would protect their privacy and anonymity by clearly explaining confidentiality standards. I also made sure that any concerns or questions were answered.

Furthermore, because of my prior relationship with the school, it is possible my data analysis was biased. As such, I arranged for through peers in my doctorate program to read through the interview transcripts and to review my coding system. By having a person not affiliated with the program assist with identifying commonalities and themes, I was more self-assured that my interpretation of the data was authentic.

Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) discussed how validity can be looked at in four ways—credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability—and described strategies that can be used to insure reliability. These four measures were important for me to use in my study so that the information taken from the interviews and ego network questions would be accurate. I consulted with classmates, an instructor from my doctorate coursework, and my advisor to ensure the dependability and credibility of the coded interviews and of the patterns identified and inferences made. Table 4 shows a validity matrix of the strategies used to insure the validity of the data analyzed.
Table 4. Validity Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validity</th>
<th>Strategy Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>• Clear definition of terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Match research questions with methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Triangulation of data collection methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferability</td>
<td>• Detailed description of setting and activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Purposive sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>• Multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer examination of coding/data reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmability</td>
<td>• Transparency of methods throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflexivity on positionality to reduce bias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Approach was based on Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002).

Limitations and Implications

This study looked at the special education teachers at one high school site. In-depth interviews with these teachers can help researchers obtain an idea of the issues that affect their connections with general education and other special education teachers. As such, it allows for a detailed understanding of the connections between special education and general education teachers. Nevertheless, there are some limitations that must be acknowledged.

Data were collected through one-time interviews, and there were no observations. The findings look at the perceptions of the interactions with the special education teachers, recollections, and current thoughts about their social networks, and these thoughts and recollections may not be completely accurate. Thus, the findings do not necessarily address all of the informal social connections of the special education teachers, which could have been observed through teacher interactions. Moreover, because the research was focused on understanding the meaningful social connections
from the perspective of special education teachers and their social networks, general education teachers were not included in the study. Thus, the descriptions of the social networks presented in subsequent chapters are one-sided, from the perspective of special education teachers only.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell (2012) discussed how ethical considerations arise not only during the data collection phase. They arise during several phases of the research process, and they are ever expanding in scope as inquirers become more sensitive to the needs of participants, sites, stakeholders, and publishers of research. This knowledge helped to provide me a clearer awareness of the various individuals who can be involved in a research study, and how the ethical considerations are made throughout and not just during the teacher interviews. As noted above, I was concerned about my role as an outsider to the participants and assessing issues that teachers might be fearful of disclosing. One way I was sensitive to the individuals in my study was by a developing supportive and respectful relationship with them (Maxwell, 2012). Relationships are key in research, and I did not to get too personal, so as not to hamper with the data collection.

In my role as a researcher, I also reflected on potential biases. My ethical obligation in this qualitative study was to be sensitive to an imbalance in the power relationship, which could place participants at risk. Minimizing risk to my participants and ensuring confidentiality was a critical component in this research project. To this
end, the data collected were transcribed and coded using pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

Because my research study involved human subjects, I sought approval from the UCSD Human Research Protections Program and the school district’s research review board. As soon as IRB and district approval were granted, I approached the teachers regarding participation in the study. I clearly explained the purpose of the study and all the confidentiality measures that were in place. Furthermore, I explained that the research was not an evaluation of their work as teachers. Each teacher was given time to consider the risks, pose any questions, and decide if he or she would like to participate. As noted earlier, before participating, teachers signed informed consent forms to be interviewed and audio recorded (Appendix B and Appendix E, respectively). Teachers received a gift card for their participation at the end of the interview.
Chapter 4:

Special Education Teachers’ Social Networks

This chapter presents findings on the social connections of special education teachers. As I established in the previous chapters, it is important to understand how special education teachers connect with each other and to uncover how these networks impact their professional lives, knowledge, and classroom practice. The overarching research question guiding this study was, What characterizes the social networks of special education teachers? The current chapter addresses the first subquestion. Specifically, in Chapter 4, I explore how special education teachers perceive their formal and informal social networks as impacting their professional interactions and personal satisfaction. In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, I describe findings related to the other two subquestions, which focused on the perceived effects of social networks on curriculum and instruction and the conditions that support and constrain the development of such networks.

As discussed in the previous chapter, I analyzed qualitative data derived from interviews to determine common themes and patterns. Quantitative measures were used with ego network analysis (ENA) to see how special education teachers’ ties affected each other. The special education teachers’ networks are an important resource for support, information, social norms, and influence. Given the current literature on the importance of resources like support from coaches, information and influence on several measures were evaluated including types and strength of relationship, frequency of interaction, and density of social network connections were
evaluated. The interviews and ENA provided rich detail concerning the social connections and the relationships of the teachers in the school community.

As a reminder, data were collected from 15 special education teachers. Teachers of students with mild/moderate disabilities (whom I refer to as “MM teachers”) were implementing a co-teaching model, while teachers of students with moderate/severe disabilities (MS teachers) were focused on a special day class. This program focused on the students with moderate/severe disabilities, and they moved through the various special day classes for instruction. The MS teachers specialized in one subject area such as math, English, science, or history, and the special education students rotated among these classrooms.

Special Education Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Formal Role

The interview findings revealed that MM teachers felt connected with the general education teachers via their co-teaching roles. However, they did not primarily see themselves sharing the role of teaching with the general education teachers. They saw themselves as ambassadors, glorified aides, and behavioral managers, often simultaneously. I discuss each of these roles in turn.

Ambassadors

MM teachers viewed themselves as “ambassadors” in their formal relationships. Maintaining diplomatic relationships with general education teachers was important because special education teachers are responsible for bridging the instruction of the special education students to help them be successful within the general education environment. For instance, Harold explained that in his relationship
with his co-teacher, “I got to make you [feel] comfortable ‘cause to me I am an ambassador….If you don’t get along with me then my kids are in trouble.” Harold further added, “but politically speaking, I have to maintain my relationships,” which was part of his role in supporting his co-teacher and instruction. Harold further explained that he “really represent[s] special education district-wide…department-wide as the ambassador or representative for the linkage, you know, in that classroom.” He saw his role as representing special education and as maintaining the connection between special and general education.

Another MM teacher named Lisa discussed her relationship with the general education teachers with whom she co-taught: “I’m a very outgoing person, so I think it’s good that I make a connection with them and they know that I’m not in there to upset their applecart, and that I’m in there to support them and the kids.” The common thread was maintaining a respectful relationship with the general education teacher. Special education teachers understood the importance of the collaborative relationship linking them to the general education teachers and the inclusive instruction provided for special education students. They were aware that this relationship was vital in demonstrating their commitment to inclusive instructional practices and knew to avoid potential pitfalls with administration and parents of both general and special education students.

Another MM teacher, Tom, explained, “I like the camaraderie with the coworkers and just being a team….That’s really important to me. Being able to support each other and then being able to share our resources, so we can be more fluid
and work better.” The team aspect of working as a special educator that Tom referred to was about bridging special education knowledge of differentiated instruction, not just for special education students, but also for general education students who could be at risk or who might need additional scaffolds to help with their learning. Tom also highlighted that, “It’s building rapport and knowing…the connecting part of with the community, and knowing…I’m going to be a part of something that I create to give support, and hopefully these kids will be able to use this support back to influence the community with what we live with/learn.” Tom viewed the students and staff in the school community as learning to support one another in co-taught classes and understanding individual learning styles.

**Glorified Aides**

Whereas MM teachers viewed themselves as ambassadors, they also viewed themselves as glorified aides whose role was to support general education teachers. Lisa explained, “I think one of the qualities is—I don’t like is the word—subordinate, but I think working in the classroom is kind of a subordinate position.” Paula, an MM teacher, shared, “I think that [special education teachers] see themselves as aides…that’s certainly how I felt.” She added, “I don’t think the general education teachers are very accountable for including them in teaching per se, and the other part of it is too, that even with the teachers of the mild/moderate there’s always some kind of crisis that requires your attention. It’s hard to always go.” Paula did not place the blame entirely on general education teachers, noting, “I don’t think that the mild/moderate teachers are doing enough to include themselves in the classroom.”
The success of the relationship between a general education teacher and a special education teacher relied heavily on how well connected the two teachers were to one another. Both were responsible for the success of all students, and communicating about the role of co-teaching was key in their networks. For instance, Juan explained, “So you’re really not a co-teacher because a co-teacher name means your either each doing half or you’re the same…. You know we’re technically the same. But I mean, you know, I didn’t know anything (about) how to teach English.” Juan added, “You’re not really a co-teacher, so there’s always this sort—I don’t know [the] expectation—you know, like, what our roles are?” The special education teacher’s role in the classroom was to learn the curriculum, but this took time and commitment. The collaboration and time spent together became the foundation on which to build the knowledge base for special education teachers, but a special dance occurred between the general and special education teachers to create fluidity of instruction.

Co-teaching was not a new concept at WHS, and in fact the district had implemented a co-teaching model for the previous 10 years. However, there was still uncertainty among the special education teachers about their roles, others’ expectations, and meeting the needs of the special education students. According to Tom, “It can be both ways—there are teachers who understand what our job is, and there are teachers who don’t know what are our needs/job or understand what needs the students have.” Tom further explained, “I understand, but the general education teachers have more than one student with an IEP in their class and they’re focused on
the general education students primarily, and there will be times when they are frustrated because they won’t know what to do with them….Over time they’ll contact me to get the student out of there.” There are misconceptions about special education students and their instructional focus. The perception is that special education teachers are primarily responsible for the special education students, rather than sharing in the concerns all the students.

**Behavioral Managers**

Special education teachers also perceive their support role as primarily related to behavioral management. Tom explained, “there would be times where I would have to step away from it, because I’ve become a part of it. So, you know, there’s this balance. So it’s tough.” Tom was referring to how general education teachers expected the special education teachers to be in charge of the students’ behavior and of insuring completion of assignments. Tom described feeling forced to make a special education student finish work or risk being removed from the general education class; he was frustrated at being strong-armed into an action rather that having the chance to collaborate on alternative methods.

Juan also explained, “We had a few conversations about it [classroom rules], but you know…my role becomes behavior management….You know, you’re the aide and behavior person…but they’re not my rules.” The key in a collaborative relationship is communicating, because misunderstandings over roles can occur. Concerning behavior problems, Juan added, “they were just regular education kids…
that have behavior problems. I would say the majority of my time was spent with regular education kids.”

To some extent, teachers had a high degree of autonomy and individual decision making with lessons plans and instructional practices, so clearly defining roles in a co-teaching model was important. In particular, they faced issues dealing with behavior, attendance, and failing to understand instructional concepts. Special education teachers wanted to instruct and problem solve collaboratively to create resolutions together.

**MM Teachers’ Perceptions of Collaboration**

Sometimes the special education teachers felt general education teachers were not receptive to collaboration. Isaac, an MM teacher, explained how he attempted to collaborate with his co-teacher: “I would like to have more collaboration, more conversation, you know, discuss what we do, because that’s helpful….It helps a lot when [we talk about] what do we do in that situation, what would be the best thing to do?” Isaac was new to WHS, but not new to co-teaching and the importance of having collaborative conversations with other teachers. He explained that he had tried to engage: “You want to build a real relationship or collaboration with your co-teacher, but the teacher is busy and doesn’t have time to do it. Then what? You are limited.”

Sometimes administration needs to play a role influencing and shaping the collaboration when challenges arise. Isaac explained he tried creating a collaborative relationship with his co-teacher, but for reasons out of his control was unable to do so. Thus, part of the school leader’s role, especially at the beginning of the year, should be
to develop and support collaborative conversations with both special and general education teachers. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

**MS Teachers’ Perceptions of Collaboration**

MS teachers were not as connected to the general education teachers as the MM teachers, perhaps because they were not involved in co-teaching situations. Rich explained, “The moderate/severe, they are the exact opposite [of being connected].” He added, “Everyone loves their kids….like, WHS is pretty accepting….I think everybody is getting way more accepting.” The problem seemed to be a lack of inclusive activities for the moderate/severe students. Rich pointed out that the general education teachers “don’t even know their names [moderate/severe teachers]….They don’t come to other teachers…Part of the problem for their lack of connectedness stems from ‘what we do is so different and you wouldn’t understand.’”

Importantly, the IDEA clarifies that students with special needs have the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and the presumptive right to be in an integrated setting. Schools are responsible for providing a continuum of services to meet individual students’ needs. Thus, coordinating and implementing an inclusive program requires teachers to collaborate in order to meet the individual needs of moderate/severe students. Lisa, an MM teacher, explained; “I think they (students with moderate/severe disability) are viewed differently, I think it’s human nature. The mild/moderate look normal, talk normal, and they look like everyone else and you can’t always pick it out. And the moderate/severe, you can pick it out easily, and people just do that and at this school.” Creating a culture of inclusion for
moderate/severe students is law; special education teachers and leaders need to work with the school community to educate and train colleagues to develop inclusion for students with moderate/severe disabilities.

MS teachers did not feel equal because their academic focus was different from their general education counterparts. They described viewing themselves as more disconnected since their students were non-diploma bound, and they were not on track for college. Diane explained, “I haven’t felt as much of a priority or as much as the general education population. Our students are not going to graduate with a diploma, so I don’t feel equal, you know?” In addition, Paula, an MS teacher, discussed how there was a misunderstanding about students with moderate/severe disabilities: “It’s like if you have a person who has autism and they lose control, then it’s the kid’s fault. So there’s not a lot of understanding, I don’t feel, by the [general education] teachers of their disability.” General education teachers reportedly viewed behavior problems as resulting from the direct intentions of the students, rather than from a cognitive or communication disorder.

Carol, another MS teacher, explained her feelings of disconnect: “I was far away from them [general education teachers], and basically didn’t have time with general education teachers.” She also discussed how, most of the year, her special day class role and case management work hindered her from connecting with general education teachers. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, special education classes were often located in the back of the school, hidden away from the main
campus, making connections and opportunities for integration a challenge, not only for special education students but special education teachers as well.

Diane, also an MS teacher, described misperceptions about her and her colleagues. She noted, “I think some...some high school general education teachers think I teach second grade...versus understanding all the little nuances going into what we do.” Diane was referring to how MS teachers modified the curriculum to the individual academic levels of her students; in some cases, students were developmentally at a six- to eight-year-old level. Students with moderate to severe needs work on IEP goals that include key concepts based on a multi-sensory learning style. Hence, the modified work for the moderate/severe student may at first glance appear remedial in comparison their general education peers’ work, but it is important to understand that their learning outcomes will look different based on their needs.

**Seating During Meetings**

One of the questions asked of the participants in order to understand their formal connections was about where they sat during faculty meetings. All four MS teachers tended to sit with the special education group, which included the MM and MS teachers. The MM teachers had a more diverse response—four said they sat with general education teachers, another four sat with the special education group, and the remaining three sat with either general or special education teachers, depending on their mood or the need to collaborate with certain staff members. Table 4 shows a summary of where participants reported sitting during meetings.
Table 5. Special Education Teachers’ Seating During Formal Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special education program</th>
<th>General education teachers</th>
<th>Special education teachers</th>
<th>General and/or special education teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild/moderate (n = 11)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate/severe (n = 4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fact that MS teachers sat mostly within the special education department could imply a lack of connection with the general education staff. As discussed in an earlier section, all four MS teachers felt unequal to general education teachers in part because they had students who were non-diploma bound and because they used a modified curriculum. Carol also talked about her feelings of disconnect because her bungalow was located far away from most general education classes. The MS teachers felt challenged because of their case management work and because they were so busy teaching their special day classes, and their prep period was used for modifying curriculum and planning and writing IEPs.

While MM teachers varied in their connections in the formal community and with respect to where they chose to sit, they were motivated to connect with general education teachers based on the need to collaborate. MM teachers also said they wanted to sit with other staff members to get to know them for casual social connections to associate with the broader school community. Katy, an MM teacher, explained, “It’s a time to socialize in the sense that you’re with this person and you can kind of catch up on them. I try to sit with other teachers, particularly the ones I interact with in IEP meetings, because collegiality is really important to me.” Peter,
also an MM teacher, explained, “I sit with anyone, and its varies…anyone, so I can meet other teachers who I don’t know.” He further discussed how he liked to have contact with a variety of people at the faculty, PLC, and special education meetings. Another MM teacher, Tiffany, explained, “I just sit with whoever I feel like siting with. Sometimes I’ll sit with my friend in the English department…other times I’ll sit with the special educators, the school psychologist…If I see someone I have to connect with about a certain student, I’ll sit next to them so I can talk to them.” For the special education teachers, seating choices were sometimes based on building rapport to support their practice, and other times on being more connected with different individuals in the school community.

Sometimes teachers bonded with one another because they shared common experiences that help to build their rapport and connections. For example, some built relationships with new teachers, and/or with teachers working in the same subject area. Much like Juan’s connections with his department, Rich, another MM teacher, explained, “I don’t tend to sit with anyone [in particular]….Like I said, we all know each other and get along. I usually sit with general education teachers….I either sit with my co-teacher. We kind go everywhere together.”

The findings concerning where special education teachers sat in the formal community helps to characterize their social connections. Those who co-taught tended to associate more with general education teachers, implying there was more of social connection with general education staff. Special education teachers who tended to sit
with each other also tended to connect primarily with the special education group, which implies a limited connection to the school community at large.

**Formal Connections for Special Education Teachers**

The special education teachers were connected to the community through WHS monthly meetings and events planned by the school site. These formal interactions included faculty meetings, professional learning community (PLC) department meetings, special education department meetings, and professional development prep period meetings. The special education teachers were responsible for attending all of these meetings. In addition, WHS has two annual open houses—in fall and spring—where all teachers have a chance to meet the parents/guardians.

The special education department also organized an event to provide information about special education students and their accommodations, called IEP day. IEP day was described as a formal meeting during prep period when general education teachers were able to obtain a one-page IEP summary on each special education student placed into their classes. They could collaborate with the entire special education staff in one location, and in particular connect with certain case managers. The case managers provided snacks as well as unstructured time to collaborate with the team of special education teachers.

During IEP day, general education teachers learned about the special education students and how to accommodate their needs based on their IEP goals. The law requires that for all special education students placed in general education classes, case managers provide a copy of the students’ IEP paperwork or a summary of their goals.
and accommodations, as well as a description of their needs. The WHS special education department fulfilled this requirement through IEP day. They were also able to use the event to reach out and connect with the staff.

**Ego Network Findings On Formal Interactions**

Ego network questions asking whom the teachers went to for guidance related to work provided data on their formal connections. Their answers offered insight into their personal views and the choices they have made about whom to connect with on work-related matters. They also shed light on whether special education teachers were connecting to a mixture of special and general education teachers or predominantly to other special education teachers. Finally, this question looked at the quality of connections as special education teachers navigated their choices.

Each ego network question focused on three levels. At Level 1, teachers described closer social connections—the people they turn to first, or with whom they are closest; their go to person(s). Level 2 looked at less frequent interactions, for example every month or every other month. Level 3 addressed occasional connections with others, such as every six months or once a year. The network data for each level were split into two categories, one for MM teachers and the other for MS teachers, to provide a truer measure of connections within each group. Another reason for splitting the data into two categories was to average the number of connections.

The results for Level 1 revealed the teachers’ closest connections—i.e., those they sought first for guidance with work-related concerns. At this level, the 11 MM teachers ranged from a high of nine individuals mentioned to a low of two. The four
MS teachers ranged from a high of six to a low of one connection. The MM teachers had an average of 4.64 connections where the MS teachers had an average of 3.25—a difference of 1.39.

The MM teachers’ connections included general education teachers, counselors, and support staff (e.g., school secretary, parent center), and the dean of students—basically more resources related to the school community. In Level 1 connections, MS teachers named MM and MS teachers, lead teachers, the speech therapist, and aides; one individual mentioned a personal friendship not involved with education. The difference in the connections of MS teachers involved mostly teachers from the special education department or personal relationships unrelated to work.

At Level 2, ego network connections reflected the individuals teachers connected with frequently (once or twice a month) when they needed guidance on work-related concerns. The MM teachers named a high of seven individuals and a low of one, whereas the MS teachers named a high of three individuals and a low of zero. For MM teachers, the average number of people named in this level was 2.27; for MS teachers, the average was 1.00, with an overall difference of 1.27.

MM teachers at this level mentioned the health office, the registrar’s office (for student records and special education files), the attendance office, informational technology support, the school nurse/health center, administration, special education teachers from other school sites, and the school site’s custodian. MS teachers primarily named resources related to special education, such as other special education
teachers, speech therapists, the school psychologist, or lead teachers in special education; one person mentioned the school secretary.

The MM teachers tended to have more connections at Level 2 than the MS teachers. For example, the MM teachers discussed how they utilized the guidance of the support staff in the school community as an additional support for the special education students. However, four out of the 11 MM teachers did not mention any connections. The MS teachers tended to stay within the special education department and did little branching out to the whole school community at this level. Only two of the four MS teachers responded with connections to individuals at Level 2.

For Level 3, which described occasional connections (once every six months or once a year), MM teachers had a high of three individuals named, and a low of one person. MS teachers named a high of three individuals compared to a low of zero people. MM teachers averaged .64 connections and MS teachers averaged 1.00, which amounted to a small difference of .36 in connections between the two.

Interestingly, at this level, the difference was in the quality of connections. The ego network mapping showed that MM teachers were more connected to various resources in the school community while MS teachers were connected mostly to special education teachers and other special education-related services. In addition, only five out of the 11 MM teachers named a connection at this level, while two out of the four MS teachers did so.

An analysis of the interview responses and ego network mapping reveals that the MM teachers had more connections, a greater involvement with more people, and
a broader network of connections within the school community at the first, deepest level. MM and MS teachers all listed connections in Level 1, but after this level, the responses varied—at Level 2 and Level 3, not all special education teachers could name connections. It is possible that guidance at Level 1 is sufficient, or perhaps connections in Levels 2 and 3—which are, by definition, less frequent—are not as necessary or relevant for guidance on work issues. Figure 1 summarizes the ego network mapping related to whom these special education teachers said they go to for guidance on work-related concerns.

Figure 1. Summary of ego network findings at levels 1, 2, and 3, for MM and MS teachers, for the question, “Whom do you go to for personal guidance for work-related concerns?”

Overall, the evidence indicates that the co-teaching model and inclusive practices in the MM teachers’ classrooms resulted in broader connections within the
school community for these teachers. MS teachers were in a more restrictive setting as special day class teachers, and, perhaps as a result, their interview responses and ego network mapping showed how limited their social networks were.

**Informal Connections**

Informal social networks can play a role in supporting teachers’ personal satisfaction and professional interactions; opportunities to connect through informal events can bridge personal and professional relationships. There were a variety of different informal community events that the participants described as opportunities to create connections. These included happy hours, major school events (e.g., parties, homecoming football games), staff versus students sporting events, and even community baseball games organized by the principal.

In general, most of the special education teachers attended the main informal school events such as the Christmas party and end-of-the-school-year party. Only two said they attended happy hour, school sporting events, and/or other school-sponsored informal activities. These two teachers explained that they enjoyed connecting outside of school with other teachers in an informal and fun way. The other special education teachers explained that connecting with people outside of work was not a priority and also shared their personal preference not to associate business with pleasure.

A majority of the special education teachers described lunch as their primary way to get together informally, either with their co-teachers or with other special education teachers. Lunch was an opportunity to connect with coworkers conveniently while at work. In fact, during school-wide professional development day, special
education teachers described spending lunch together as a way to connect and team-build.

The special education department had a few of their own events such as birthday celebrations, baby showers, and retirement parties. Other informal interactions occurred by the special education teachers’ rooms. For example, Diane, an MM teacher, explained, “I have developed friendships with teachers on either side of various rooms I’ve had….A few years ago I had an extremely violent student and actually that led to developing some relationships and some friendships out of necessity of teachers around me that I’ve maintained, that have been familiar faces.” She connected with her neighboring teachers because she needed to explain why the student was having behavior problems. On the other hand, teachers assigned to classrooms that were tucked in the back of the campus, far away from general education classes, were hindered in their abilities to connect with one another on the main campus. The impact of location is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Teachers made connections for other reasons too—for instance, if they shared common traits, had children the same age, enjoyed the same sports, or liked the same hobbies. In describing these connections, Paula said, “It just seems to be kind of a natural alliance…and that’s where all my friends were.” Common traits were one way for individuals to connect with each other, which has a natural way of linking people into building relationships.

Rich, an MM teacher, talked about a hybrid form of communication, which combined formal connections through informal methods of communication—for
example, text messages when there were questions or announcements. Teachers who had texted each other felt a certain personal connection, and were comfortable communicating in this fashion. Rich also explained how connecting to teachers through social media was another informal method of communication. For example, Facebook allowed teachers on campus to informally maintain personal connections.

**Ego Network Findings On Informal Interactions**

The special education teachers were asked to identify whom they spent their free time with. This question helped to provide findings on teachers’ informal interactions and connections, specifically to see if teachers had connections outside of school, since free time often related to activities away from work. In addition, through SNA, this question looked at the quality of connections with work-related individuals. Thus, when teachers mentioned spending free time with co-workers it implied a closer connection and therefore the ability to be more collaborative and to make program changes together.

At Level 1, I asked the teachers to describe their closest connections in their free time. MM teachers responded by naming from eight to two individuals with whom they spend free time. The MS teachers’ responses ranged from four to one person. The average for MM teachers at Level 1 was 4.27; MS teachers averaged 2.50 individuals with whom they connected in their free time—a difference of 2.07 individuals.

Both MM and MS teachers named common personal relationships outside of work at Level 1, such as their spouse, children, and neighbors, as well as other family
relationships. However, the MM teachers also mentioned spending free time with individuals in the school community such as an administrator, a co-teacher, the librarian, ESL support staff, a pupil advocate, professional development teachers, other teachers within the school district, and school counselors; none of these were mentioned by the MS teachers. One of the MS teachers described spending free time with her classroom assistant and discussed connections with another special education teacher within the district. In addition, MS teachers said most of their personal connections were through family and friends.

Four MM teachers said that they preferred to spend time alone and mentioned somewhat reclusive. Three of the MM teachers described connections with general education teachers and did not mention spending time with their special education peers.

At Level 2, participants described free-time connections that occurred once or twice a month. Eight out of the 11 MM teachers named individuals with whom they spend free time at this level. Two out of the four of the MS teachers described connections here as well. The MM teachers described a high of eight connections and a low of zero; the MS teachers’ range was from two to zero individuals. The average number of connections at Level 2 was 1.18 for the MM teachers and .75 for the MS teachers, for a minor difference of .43.

Overall, the special education teachers had fewer connections at this level. This finding makes sense because it is based on the quality of those relationships, and the closer you are connected, the more time you would spend with those individuals
named in Level 1. Level 2 pertained to connections where less time was spent, which resulted in fewer opportunities for individuals to connect.

Level 3 reflected connections during free time that occurred only once in a while. Only three of the 11 MM teachers responded with connections at this level, with a high of six to a low of zero individuals. Only one MS teacher named a single connection at this level. Thus, the average for MM teachers was 1.18 and the average for MS teachers was .25. The difference between the MM and MS teachers was .93. As such, at Level 3, the data revealed even fewer personal interactions in free time for both MM and MS teachers.

**Summary of Informal Interactions**

The results described in the preceding sections indicate that the co-teaching model and inclusive practices may have resulted in broader connections within the school community for MM teachers. Interview responses and ego network mapping show that MS teachers’ social networks have been limited because they work in a more restrictive setting as special day class teachers. Many of the special education teachers also said they prefer to keep their informal connections with co-workers separate from their personal lives.

Ego network mapping indicated that special education teachers spent more free time together and had closer ties at Level 1. Findings at Levels 2 and 3 showed fewer incidences of teachers getting together in their free time. The results also indicate that the special education teachers had more quality relationships at Level 1, since these
were their primary connections. Figure 2 summarizes the findings at all levels for MM and MS teachers.

![Figure 2](image.png)

**Figure 2.** Summary of ego network findings at Levels 1, 2, and 3, for MM and MS teachers, for the question, “With whom do you like to spend your free time?”

**Conclusion**

Compared to MS teachers, MM teachers had more connections and greater involvement with general education teachers. They also had a broader network of connections within the school community, both formally and informally. However, MM teachers tended to feel like subordinates or glorified aides rather than as true co-teachers sharing in the responsibilities of teaching, as they provided support with instruction or behaviors in the classroom.

MS teachers had fewer connections, both formally and informally, and these connections were mostly related to individuals in special education. MS teachers did
not have the same opportunities as MM teachers to connect with general education teachers, and they explained that their work was separate or even “a world apart.” Their time was spent managing and teaching in a special day class model, which did not lend itself to working and connecting with other classroom teachers.

Concerning the ego network analysis, both MM and MS teachers had the majority of their connections at Level 1 for both work-related guidance and for getting together in their free time. At Levels 2 and 3, the responses varied. It is possible that Level 1 connections were sufficient in both respects. Overall, the evidence suggests that the co-teaching model and inclusive practices result in broader connections for special education teachers within the school community, both formally and informally.
Chapter 5:

Effects of Social Connections on Curriculum and Instruction

In this chapter, I address findings related to the second research subquestion guiding this study—specifically, how the social connections of special education teachers impact their curriculum and instruction. I gathered qualitative and ego network data to explore this topic. In general, I found that MM teachers had more connections than MS teachers in their social networks, and these connections affected their curriculum and instruction to a greater degree.

Ego Network Analysis

The second ego network question asked whom teachers turn to for curriculum advice. At Level 1, MM teachers turned to as many as 10 people and as few as one, with an average of 5.91 connections. For MS teachers, responses ranged from a high of five individuals to a low of two. On average, the MS teachers named 3.25 individuals in their connections, for a difference of 2.65 individuals between MM and MS teachers.

One reason for fewer connections among MS teachers is that they described their work differently; they felt that general education teachers did not understand the adaptations and modifications necessary for the students they taught. At the same time, the ego network analysis suggested that their counterparts, the MM teachers, had more social connections due their involvement with inclusive instruction and their co-teaching role in general education classrooms. These ego network findings are consistent with the interview data, discussed in a later section.
At Level 2, the ego network map focused on less frequent connections (once or twice a month). The MM teachers named a high of nine people and a low of one person, which averaged to 2.27 connections. The MS teachers ranged from a high of five to zero people mentioned, which averaged to 3.00 individual connections mentioned for curriculum advice. Thus, the MS teachers had a slightly higher average than the MS teachers (a difference of .73).

The MM teachers described connections at Level 2 that included general education teachers in math, English, earth science, physics, and biology, as well as school counselors and the school psychologist. The inclusion of other discipline areas within the school community provided a more expanded knowledge base when it came to curriculum support for students with special needs. MS teachers named individuals connected to the special education department for curriculum advice such as the MM teachers, the speech therapist, lead teachers in special education, and special education assistants. Interestingly, MS teachers also mentioned personal connections such as a sister-in-law, a student’s former teachers, and their own children or spouses as important for curriculum advice.

At Level 3, the ego network question focused on less frequent connections (once or twice a year). At this level, the number of individuals that special education teachers turned to for curriculum support decreased, but related more to school community support. The MM teachers named a high of nine people and a low of one, giving an average of 2.18 in connections. MS teachers had a high of three individuals
and a low of zero, for an average of 1.00. The difference between the two averages is 1.18.

The MM teachers’ connections at this level included school counselors, a parent center resource teacher, the librarian, the school psychologist, physical education teachers, campus security, the dean of students, MS teachers, the lead special education teacher, and family members. Nearly all the MM teachers had connections with general education teachers and other staff within the WHS school community, as well as connections either inside or outside the district for resources. In contrast, MS teachers turned to Internet searches, religious leaders, parents of children with disabilities, and family members for curriculum support. Regarding curriculum support, the MS teachers had more connections with individuals within the special education department and with those in their personal networks than with general education teachers.

Across the levels, the data reveal that MM teachers were more connected than MS teachers when it came to advice on curriculum and instruction. MM teachers co-taught with their general education partners, and also had students on their caseload who were included in other general education courses. Thus, the MM teachers needed to be connected to general education teachers and to the school community to support these mild/moderate students. By contrast, MS teachers had few connections with general education teachers. More inclusive opportunities would create collaborative conversations for MS teachers and general education teachers.
Figure 3 below provides a summary of the ego network findings for MM and MS teachers regarding where these teachers turned for curriculum advice at Levels 1, 2, and 3. The figure shows that there were more connections at Level 1 than at other levels for both MM and MS teachers. Nevertheless, MM teachers had more connections at Level 1 than MS teachers, and overall, MM teachers had a higher average number of connections.

**Effect of Collaboration on Standards and Curriculum**

With this knowledge of network patterns among MM and MS teachers vis-à-vis curriculum, I now to turn my attention to how the teachers worked together regarding the implementation of standards and assessments. In theory, all educators should be working collaboratively with the Common Core Standards and supporting
one another with the new standardized assessments. In fact, as discussed in earlier chapters, laws were developed to ensure that special education students have access to the same education as their nondisabled peers. In this section, I discuss the collaborative role of special education teachers with regards to the impact of standards and curriculum on special education students.

**Policy Context**

Before turning to the findings, it is important to understand the historical impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) on special education students. The law requires that students with disabilities have access to grade-level, standards-based curricula, and be included in a statewide system of assessment and accountability. As a result, the United States Department of Education enacted regulations in April 2007 for alternate assessments that are based on modified achievement standards (Cahill & Mitra, 2008).

The online assessment contains the Smarter Balanced (geared for general education students) and the California Alternate Assessments (CAAs, geared for moderate/severe students), which include English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics. The paper-and-pencil component includes the California State Test (CST), California Modified Assessment (CMA, geared towards students with mild/moderate disabilities), and the California Alternative Placement Assessment (CAPA, geared towards students with moderate/severe disabilities) science tests. These assessments ultimately influence the curriculum and instructional focus for both
general and special education students, which in turn can impact the collaboration between special and general educators.

The majority of students with disabilities who are tested take the CST assessment. However, students who receive special education services have a wide range of abilities, which can also influence the type of assessment taken. Special education students’ scores on standards-based assessments can be affected by how closely connected special and general education are. All special education students need to participate in state assessments, but some require alternate forms of assessment to make full participation possible and meaningful. As a result of the assessment regulations, the CMA, CAA, and CAPA were designed so that the education and assessment of students with significant cognitive disabilities could be linked to grade-level standards, as they relate to the other assessments used with general education students (Cahill & Mitra, 2008).

Most importantly, with the implementation of the grade-level, standards-based assessment instruments comes the assurance that all students with disabilities will have access to the same curriculum as their general education peers, as guided by the IDEA and the LRE. The law and the assessments allow students with disabilities to demonstrate mastery in a way that is appropriate and accessible based on their individual needs. Thus, the impact of the social networks of special education teachers can be significant, and their connections to co-teaching and/or instruction in special day classes can be a vital link. Special education teachers need to work collaboratively
with general education teachers to ensure access to the same academic standards for all students.

**MS Teachers’ Views on Modified Standards and Assessments**

There are modified standards for moderately/severely disabled students. The MS teachers explained that their curriculum is driven by the district’s special education program office, and tied to the state’s CAA and CAPA assessment. The CAA and CAPA standardized tests were designed to assess students with moderate/severe disabilities who are unable to participate in the general education standardized assessment even with accommodations or modifications. The components of the CAA and CAPA comply with the requirements to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA; California Department of Education, 2016b). These assessments link directly to the California academic content standards at each grade level. The components have been developed to accurately reflect the portions of the content standards from kindergarten through high school that are made accessible to students with moderate/severe disabilities.

At WHS, however, the MS teachers were more focused on the CAA and CAPA, which are parallel standards, to drive their instruction. For instance, Stephanie was accessing the standards and curriculum in the general education earth science class. She was able to utilize the general education standards, which provided her access to science standards that she could use to support the students in her special day class:

I don’t collaborate with the science and social studies teacher, but I did push [include a student] into a science class. We tried something a couple
of years ago where I was able to push in, and we just ended up not having enough staff to do that. It was too bad because I went into an earth science class, and actually got to pull the science from that and follow that model towards what I was doing.

MS teachers also talked about how the faculty and special education department meetings tended to be more focused on the general education curriculum and the topics did not pertain to them. However, their role was to differentiate curriculum, and this meant reaching out to general education teachers for assistance in following the curriculum and the Common Core Standards.

The MS teachers felt they were not utilizing their time effectively as a teacher team during special education meetings. Stephanie explained, “There’s only four of us teaching students with moderate/severe disabilities, and the mild/moderate teachers would talk about a lot of things that didn’t relate. And we had our own things we needed to talk about.” Thus, the MS teachers decided to ask the principal if they could meet within their own group. The principal approved the MS teachers meeting with their specialty group twice a month. On alternating weeks, all special education teachers met in a department meeting. Stephanie said “that’s been working out, and that’s really helpful.” She continued:

We all voiced that it’s not that we don’t care about [it]. We want to be part of a department that’s good, but maybe stuff that they’re pulling out that has nothing to do with us on their case loads or whatever….Their co-teaching stuff, you know, is a waste of time for us.

Diane, an MS teacher likewise explained, “Some of it is actually the Common Core piece, and we are not Common Core yet; were still CAPA [standards-based], so some of it is that piece.”
Compounding these challenges, some of the MS teachers also believed that the messages from the special education office at the district could be unclear and lack in support regarding Common Core and new standardized assessment. Paula discussed this issue, saying, “I think it’s all about the numbers. It becomes all business. This school district is all business now. It’s not about coming in with programs that’ll help the kids.” Although she acknowledged there had been some positive support, she qualified her response:

They did change over to having site-based coordinators, which I like. They come visit and we’ve got more program resource teachers, and I think that that helps. But once again, that’s only as good as the person is who is doing the job.

Here, Paula was talking about how the special education program office was attempting to provide support to the school sites directly, but the type of support and collaboration varied depending on the individual’s strength and the number of schools the resource teacher was responsible for.

Overall, the MS teachers viewed their curriculum and instruction as separate and different, and this perception contributed to a lack of social connections with the general education teachers, the school community, and even the MM teachers. In fact, MS teachers felt that much of the information communicated at many meetings—including special education department meetings, department PLC meetings, and core curriculum meetings—was not relevant to them. However, there were opportunities opening up for the MS teachers to meet as a PLC group with enrichment course teachers (e.g., music, art, or homemaking).
The perception of moderate/severe students’ abilities and learning with individualized curriculum modifications also had an impact on inclusive opportunities. The MS teachers were more inclined to keep students in special day class settings, avoiding the general education community, because it was sometimes daunting to plan and organize inclusive opportunities (e.g., for modifications and aide or peer support), and because of a fear concerning a lack of cooperation on the part of general education teachers. Paula talked about patterns of habits that are difficult to change:

[Moderate/severe] students have just largely hung out in their room, and they’ve always been separated from everything because they were down in the bungalows….They always hung out back in their rooms and never really participated in whole school activities.

From the MM teacher perspective, some of the problem could be the MS teachers themselves. When asked what caused MS teachers’ perceptions of separateness, Rich, an MM teacher, responded, “I think a lot of it is, they—the teachers make it that way.” He continued:

We have reached out and we have had so many things going on for them. They are always invited. They have so many PLCs they can go to. You know, we try to set them up with their elective PLCs because their electives, art or whatever, and given them a chance to give positive information about their kids [at the meetings]….They wouldn’t go.

When asked why the MS teachers had few conversations with general education teachers, Rich responded, “I think part of it is that they have gotten into this place where what we do is so different and you wouldn’t understand.” Opportunities for more involvement in the school community were available for MS teachers, but the benefits for students may be masked by teachers’ views and their hesitation to pursue inclusive participation.
**Common Core Collaboration**

Special education teachers were asked to describe how collaboration on the Common Core State Standards influenced how special and general education teachers worked together. During the period of this study, WHS staff was in its second year of implementation of the Common Core. The rollout had been slow according to the special education staff because WHS was working collaboratively with a local university to support their educational strategies and to prepare students for college readiness, which took a priority over Common Core. In return, the local university agreed to work with students at WHS who had admission access after meeting requirements.

The professional development staff worked collaboratively with the local university to introduce Common Core to the faculty in the summer of 2014. Most of the special education teachers explained how the main impact was mostly within general education. Some special education teachers did not feel the critical thinking strategies were a good fit for special education students. Other issues included that special education teachers did not attend professional development to learn Common Core, the pacing of Common Core was too fast for special education students, and there appears to be more of an impact with math than with English. Some of the special education teachers felt that the new way of demonstrating understanding of math concepts with written explanation was too challenging for special education students. Some special education teachers had noticed very little impact of the Common Core, as it had already been infused into what teachers were doing.
Inclusion in rollout. Paula, an MM teacher, explained her views: “I don’t think that the mild/moderate teachers and myself in the last couple of years have had any input. It’s just what the teachers want to do, and it didn’t go into the curriculum.” Paula also noted that she thought the administration was not necessarily pushing Common Core in the classroom, nor were they making teachers accountable for the instruction, so this could have been impacting the rollout. She discussed how special education teachers had had little input because administration had not included them in the rollout; although the administration had planned for all teachers to attend the training, not all special education teachers were attending. Mike, an MM teacher, explained, “There are PLC meetings once a month for English and math, and I think that’s where they get the Common Core. But again, that’s a struggle to get the special education teachers involved in those pull-out days.”

Another MM teacher, Lisa, felt that she was dependent on her co-teacher to learn the material, and to work on the Common Core curriculum together. Lisa explained, “We’re always working together, we’re always on the same page for the Common Core.” She talked about attending the meetings with her co-teacher by explaining, “The meetings are good, the trainings, the department meetings, and for the English meetings we go together and do the same stuff.” However, Lisa revealed that there were times when she got pulled into various professional development meetings, and pulled in other directions because of special education department meetings and IEP meetings. Lisa said, “We are not together for [all] these things. As a result, she explained, “What is happening is that the special education teachers depend
on the general education teacher to fill them in on a lot of stuff that is going on. And it depends on [if] the general education teacher has time, and if they are a good communicator.”

**Lack of perceived relevance.** Common Core training was intended for all teachers—both special and general education staff. However, the special education teachers did not perceive that they had to take personal responsibility for the knowledge of the new standards. Mike explained, “It’s more impacting the general education teachers. Special education teachers are kind of getting it, but it’s more of, I think, a thought process of the special education teachers.” Mike added, “The general education teacher will get that information and then [my role is] I’ll help in any way I can, or I’ll change a lesson plan a little bit so it’s more user-friendly for the special education students.”

Harold, an MM teacher, described how the Common Core is a collaborative process for special and general educators. He saw his role as differentiating the curriculum and instruction for students with special needs:

How do we put it all together, and what does it mean, you know, in terms of their disability and what they’ve learned based on what were teaching, what challenges there might be…So, I scaffold it, break it down and make it more accessible, what things to look for or avoid, [presentation of] teaching styles, what to teach, where this kid’s strengths are going to be versus weakness based on his [or her] disabilities. You know.

Some teachers believed that the Common Core standards did not lend themselves to the particular strengths of special education students. Tiffany, an MM teacher, discussed how the math problems were challenging for special education students who must be prepared to explain their answers in multiple ways. A special
education student may be a visual learner, with a strength that lies in the ability to describe how to solve a problem through diagrams. Thus, when the student is required to present and explain how he or she solved a math problem, communicative or written skills may not be as strong. Tiffany explained:

So, I’m surprised that the kids do have to explain it [their math answer] in multiple ways. Some kids can do that, but I think if you have special needs [students], we all have our strong points. Why can’t they explain it using their strengths?

Tiffany also pointed out that collaboration with a co-teacher was important so that teachers could develop other strategies and supports for special education students to demonstrate learning in multiple ways.

Other teachers related problems of Common Core implementation to broader issues. Paula, an MS teacher, believed that teachers needed to get to the root of a problem first to find out why students were not successful with their coursework. She added that many students were not turning in homework and most of the teachers have said they “blame the kids”:

The teachers, they don’t ask themselves, “Do these kids actually have access to the internet at home? Do they actually live in a situation where they could do any homework?”…So it’s just thrown out there, to see if it sticks, and some kids are able to manage [but] this is where the system fails.

Paula also added, “I think the tutoring center is getting better, and I think they’re helping kids through a lot more, but the Common Core for our population is not relevant.” She particularly noted that special education students struggle with the Common Core emphasis on analysis and critical thinking.
Tom, an MM teacher, explained that he doesn’t agree with Common Core, “just because it’s an open-ended style, and it just doesn’t work for me.” He also pointed to the technical language, which he saw as a challenge for English learner students. Further, Tom confessed:

I just sort of tune out with it because there is so much dialogue with it. There were no clean-cut problems to put on the board. So with special education, or with me, it was difficult for me to transcribe whatever the general education teacher was teaching to the kids, especially word problems. And for me trying to reformulate the problems for the kids…especially if I was having problems.

Tom described the difficulties he saw on behalf of the students, especially if the teacher pacing was too fast. He argued that the students did not have time to process what they were learning, and he was having the same challenges understanding the concepts. He admitted that maybe it was not so much the Common Core, but how the teacher was delivering the lesson and pacing of it.

Lisa, who was also an MM teacher, said she thinks that special education students are “very dependent on teachers feeding the information….Special education teachers are providing too much information for them.” She added, “I do that too, so I’m catching myself. The Common Core platform pulls them away from that, so they have to start thinking on their own.” Instead, Lisa said, “You have to throw ideas and throw questions at them and they have to come up with some answers, and they have to get into collaborative groups to think and talk between each other.” Lisa said that she sees the Common Core standards as a positive change to provide opportunities for students to think and learn in different ways without having to be so reliant on teacher support.
**Parallel standards.** In general, the MS teachers felt that their involvement in Common Core implementation was not important relative to general education teachers’ involvement, and their own focus was on parallel standards. In fact, leadership had to step in to ask the special education program office for support, since the MS teachers felt learning the new standards was not necessary. The program office suggested hiring a company specializing in modified standards for the Common Core. Although the program office and the leadership team attempted to work together to provide the curriculum, there were hesitations. The lack of buy-in from the MS teachers continued to perpetuate a view of segregation and disconnect from general education teachers.

Instead, the MS teachers discussed the need for the parallel standards. They viewed this as a collaborative task where educators helped to simplify the standards to meet the needs of the moderate/severe population. MS teachers felt they were not necessary stakeholders in the Common Core, and did not feel they needed to participate in the trainings and rollout. Of course the goal was for all teachers to work with the standards and develop modifications and scaffolds to match the individual needs of mildly/moderately disabled or moderately/severely-disabled students. Indeed, a critical part to implementing the Common Core is the dialogues and collaboration that teachers need to have about implementation to insure that accommodations are applied and appropriately met.
Conclusion

This chapter examined special education teachers’ perceptions of how their formal and informal social networks affected their curriculum and instruction, and vice versa. The ego network findings showed that MM teachers had more connections than MS teachers. Both MM and MS teachers had more connections at Level 1, which implies that special education teachers had stronger connections with people they saw regularly versus occasionally.

Most of the MM special education teachers explained that the new Common Core Standards did not necessarily impact their practice. The rollout was primarily the responsibility of the general education teachers, and special education teachers discussed how their role was to provide accommodations and modifications to the new standards. MS teachers felt their students’ needs were different, and that no one else understood their curriculum or the modifications and adaptations required to teach students with moderate/severe disabilities. As a result, the special education teachers did not necessarily feel they needed to be connected with the new policy changes in curriculum.
Chapter 6:  

Social Network Supports and Constraints  

This chapter addresses the third research subquestion that guided the study, concerning the factors that support and constrain the social networks of special education teachers. First and foremost, I discovered that leadership plays a key role in supporting and guiding the working conditions of teachers via their communication and efforts to promote collaboration. Leaders can empower teachers and support professional growth, but they can also constrain the school community and networking among teachers.  

One of the main challenges the special education teachers at WHS discussed was how their administration team was new, and much of the leadership role with respect to special education was delegated to the lead teachers. Specifically, the new administration created a chain of command to support the special education department, and the first level of support started with one of the two lead teachers. If the lead teachers could not resolve an issue, then the next level of assistance was the vice principal. Ultimately, if the issue was not resolved with the vice principal, the next step would be to speak to the principal. Most of this took place through the lead teachers, but in some cases the special education teachers would override the lead teachers and go directly to the vice principal or, if still unresolved, directly to the principal. The delegation of special education into the various levels of the chain of
command seemed to muddle the division of responsibility, impact the connections of support with administration, and potentially cause issues with resolving problems.\textsuperscript{2}

In general, this structure caused the special education teachers to feel that the administrative staff placed a higher priority on collaborating with general education teachers. They also believed that the administration had little experience dealing with special education matters and did not understand the nuances of the moderate/severe population. These perceptions impacted the teachers’ ability to voice concerns and feel their input was valued. They also complained that lead teachers were not communicating in a timely manner about special education department meetings, that the content of the team meetings was unorganized, and that lead teachers were too busy to collaborate because they were juggling their own caseloads.

Another challenge resulted from the arrangement of space. Special education teachers’ classrooms and offices were too spread out across other areas of campus. Special day classrooms were placed on the outer fringes of the campus, hindering opportunities for relationships and connections. The special education teachers discussed how they felt constrained by not having enough time in the day to juggle professional development trainings or staff meetings and team planning with co-teachers, all while trying to focus on their students’ needs and their case management role. Each of these issues is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

\textsuperscript{2} A few years ago, the district hired special education administrators to provide direct leadership, but due to budgetary reasons those positions were cut. The responsibilities were incorporated back into the vice principal’s job.
Delegation of Leadership

One of the recurring themes in the data was the special education teachers’ perception that the new administration lacked experience with special education, and thus delegated responsibilities to the lead teachers. This delegation hindered collaboration with the administration leaving teachers feeling a lack of cohesive in their networks. Alice, an MM teacher, explained:

There was a whole administration turnover. So the principal is new, and then one vice principal was hired, and then another vice principal was hired, so it was all brand new administrators last year….So they’re kind of doing their own learning curve at the school and people….So there’s been a lot of transition….I think both the vice principals are first time administrators.

Alice also described, “they have no previous administrative experience, so I think they’re just kind of overwhelmed with figuring out, ‘What does this position entail?’ Or just being a vice principal and then figuring out the campus too.” Essentially, the new administrative team was trying to learn about the school, and this understandably affected the level of support they could provide to the special education team.

Stephanie, an MS teacher, shared similar thoughts. She explained, “I’ve been at WHS [for 4 years and] we’re on our second principal. And we’ve been through several assistant principals….So we’ve had like a fluctuating administration, and so a lot of different perspectives on how our moderate/severe program should be run.” She said it has been “a little bit difficult” because so many changes meant changes in perspective: “So we’re hoping that we’re set with some good people and we can all work together and not have any people leave, and coming and going.” As Stephanie described, administrators with different viewpoints can affect the way the special
education team is supported, and “it makes it hard to keep a solid foundation.”

Rapport between teaching staff and new administrations evolves with time. There are more than likely hurdles to overcome and bridges to build, as staff and administrators construct connections and ties with each other.

The leadership structure described at the start of the chapter—where lead teachers were the first in the chain of command—created some challenges for the special education teachers. For example, Carol, an MS teacher, discussed a problem she had that eventually turned into a union issue: “I told the department head [both lead special education teachers]….I told the vice principal. Nothing happened….I ended up having to contact the union and they brought it up to the workload committee.” When the issue was brought up to the union, it was finally resolved.

The challenge for Carol was the delegation of responsibilities, the lack of knowledge of special education caseload numbers from the new administration team, and having to follow a chain of command in communicating her needs. She believed that the administration was not listening to her needs and that they were “not communicating with us. Basically, they really didn’t know what was going on. I tried to reach out to the principal, but he was too busy.” The safety issue in her classroom lasted for about a month, making her caseload difficult to manage. Carol was frustrated, as she felt the administration was too busy to support her needs, and the lead teacher did not have enough authority to help her with this problem. The chain of command proved to be a hassle.
Harold, an MM teacher, offered a similar complaint: “General education administration has difficulty with truly understanding the nature of needs of special education. I think a lot of them still see it as an enigma, and so they’d rather delegate it rather than try to understand it.” Harold explained that administration needs to understand how special education works in order to better to support the program. Delegating the work of special education does not make the problem go away or lessen the severity of any issues. Rather, it can impact the trust and integrity of the relationship between leaders and special education teachers.

Stephanie, an MS teacher, discussed how the lack of collaboration with a new administrative team, coupled with the leadership’s inexperience with special education, created a problematic mix that impacted support of the special education department. She explained, “The principal obviously has the whole umbrella, to deal with the school. So then we end up working with the vice principal who doesn’t know much [about] special education.” She added, “It’s just frustrating for, I think, teachers….You know, ‘We want your support, but we also need to be able to not have to explain everything or be micromanaged.”’ As an MS teacher, Stephanie discussed how she was content with the new administration team, but also admitted, “I think it’s going to just take some time for administration to learn our world, so to speak.”

Lead teachers were co-teaching, managing their own caseloads, and having to complete their students’ IEPs. As a result, it was an overwhelming task to also assume the role of leadership for the special education program—something Juan, an MM teacher, acknowledged was a “thankless task.” Juan discussed how the lead teachers
were never available for collaboration, which impacted their ability to support the
department—the lead teacher “was never in the office, you know? I mean, they [were]
always co-teaching….To me, it’s like, take away the co-teaching, put the lead in an
office, and make [them] as a resource [support].” Juan believed this would free up the
lead teacher to support in other ways:

I understand the amount of work the lead teacher had, and I was like,
“Why are you co-teaching? It just doesn’t make sense to me. That three
hours of work, you could be doing something to facilitate my job that
would be easier, all our jobs would be easier.” And then obviously too,
you know, the end result is to help the kids.

**Perceptions of Administration’s Priorities**

The principal had multiple roles and responsibilities, and the two vice
principal were new. Both of these factors can impact the effectiveness of the school
community and social networks of general and special education teachers. The
interconnections of the school community play a role in whether teachers feel valued
and like they are effective members of a school team. According to the teachers, the
special education team felt they were not viewed as a priority when the management
of special education was delegated and thus potentially impacting connections with
other teachers due to leaderships disconnect.

Lisa, an MM teacher, explained that she believed the administration viewed
special education as a low priority: “We are always at the tail of the wagon and we are
being towed along.” She talked specifically about the push for students to attend
college: “Everybody has swallowed the pill go to college. I don’t think everybody’s
going to college. I don’t think we can all go to college, and I don’t think everybody
needs to go to college.” With such a mentality, Lisa did not feel that her special education students were taken into account, saying she felt like “those children get lost in the sweep. And the people that represent those children, we get lost and pushed aside—we are less important.” There is limited networking occurring with administration and the special education team on post high school opportunities or career/transition alternatives. The lack of collaboration impacts the educational outcomes of special education students.

The administration had a directive from the district office to focus on graduation rates. So, as Lisa said, “I understand it’s a numbers game…the need to have high graduation entrance rates, high college entrance rates. I just think our education system is in a turmoil right now, and I think when you’re in areas like this—in very large cities and schools in Title I—I think we need to look at what exactly would target our kids and how to help them.”

In describing collaboration with leadership, Stephanie said, “I think that administration wants us to be the best special education team that we can. I think the negative side…[is] that our administration right now puts us on the bottom of priority.” She noted that administration was too focused on the learning academies, and on students graduating and being college-bound. Stephanie was especially frustrated with the lack of support from administration in her efforts to start a program to implement services to assist special education students. She admitted, “A little more leadership support with starting the program would have been nice.”
Diane shared a similar opinion: “I’m thinking…well, the principal has only been here a year, and I know he came in with a lot on his plate….Us being a Title I school, being in this socioeconomic area. We are having so many English language learners.” Clearly, the special education teachers felt that the principal had so many things to learn about the school and had to deal with an assortment of programs while also handling directives from this district program office. Moreover, the teachers believed that because the district was focused on college readiness, the administration team was focused on the bigger the picture of the general education students, without recognizing the need for special education students to be included as full members of the community.

Communication Barriers

Delegating the leadership responsibility for special education to the lead teachers blurred the lines of communication between administration, the lead teachers, and other special educators. Special education teachers at WHS were unclear to whom they should communicate issues regarding their work and students, leading them to feel they were not valued.

For instance, Harold, an MM teacher, explained how the lack of knowledge of administrators in special education impacted communication: “I think what undermines the professional, the teaching staff, the certificated, is the way in which they communicate.” The leadership’s communication could be “very counterproductive.” Harold explained that there were occasions when the administration implemented a significant procedural change or condoned an action,
and that those instances “undermine[d] persons in the department from really wanting a team and [to] come together and work in the best interest of the students.” The trust levels and the way people communicated and addressed issues caused teachers to be disconnected from each other and administration. Administration lack of communication with the special education teachers on school policy issues caused feelings that made both the MM and MS teachers to be viewed as unimportant and misunderstood. As a result of a lack of trust from teachers, Harold said, “Important issues just grow, fester, without being addressed, and so direction becomes fragmented.” This led some teachers to feel a lack of integrity in the guidance of the administrative team in work with special education.

Juan, also an MM teacher, discussed his challenges communicating support when multiple people were in charge: “It took me about halfway through the year. I was like, ‘Okay, I’m not going to ask those people anymore.’…If you really want to know, the lead teacher was my peer—my department chair, but my peer.” He added, “If I want to know a rule or something, maybe I go to the vice principal. I wouldn’t bother the principal with it, but at WHS, for the peers, there really wasn’t a vice principal, or we had a brand new vice principal.” Most of Juan’s leadership support with special education matters came from the vice principal, and the multiple layers of leadership were very confusing for him. In general, the chain of command and the delegation of leadership roles caused the special education teachers to feel unclear about how and to whom they should communicate their needs.
Another MM teacher, Alice, added that the lack of communication created issues with lead teachers: “Typically, last year, we would get an email from our department chair[s] the day of or sometimes an hour before….‘We have a special education meeting today in this room, or go to your [co-teaching subject] PLC.’ So, not really a lot of forward planning or calendaring.” The lack of communication had a trickle down effect where the special education department did not appear organized. Alice explained, “When I was co-teaching and I had the colleagues…you know, our general education colleagues feel like, ‘When are you going to be here [for PLC meetings]?’ So meaningful planning is kind of lost by the lack of organization, in my opinion.” Special education teachers felt the leadership team was still getting structures in place. This contributed to their perceptions of collaboration in less than positive ways.

**Time Constraints**

Special education teachers felt overwhelmed with time constraint issues that inhibited their ability to successfully collaborate with general education teachers. They were managing multiple roles of teaching and case management while dealing with behavioral issues and trying to connect with families. They described feeling inhibited by their multiple roles and said it was difficult to find time to connect with the other teachers. Indeed, time management came up repeatedly in interviews. Special education teachers discussed having to balance time for handling crises occurring with students, needing more collaborative time with co-teachers, and juggling PLC and special education meetings. They also had to find time to see students on their
caseloads who were not in their co-taught classes. The MM teachers found it challenging to connect with students in meaningful ways while juggling the responsibilities of their multiple roles.

Special education teachers expressed that they needed an additional prep period. Peter explained, “In reality we need more flexibility to work with the co-teacher, students, parents.” He also said, “Most people do not understand what a special education teacher’s workload is like, and oftentimes special education teachers need to have some flexibility with their schedule and to have an understanding of why the students need extra support services.” Tiffany, an MM teacher, expressed similar thoughts: “You know, it’s just busy. You have a lot of kids that you want to help within the classroom and it’s a juggle.” She felt that in order to properly support students there were times “I literally [had] to pull them out of the class to help them.” However, she felt conflicted by this: “So you’re taking them away from their instructional time and somebody like the math teacher who seems like he really knows the material really well and [has the ability to] explain it really well, so I’m reluctant to pull the kids out.” At the same time, however, she felt the small group instruction was “very meaningful for them because they are away from the distractions within the classroom.” Given more time, special education teachers might be less constrained in their ability to effectively collaborate with teachers, service providers, and other school community members.

Many of the special education teachers discussed how their caseload management responsibilities constrained their collaboration. There seemed to be an
endless amount of paperwork related to the IEP process. They dealt with initial placements as well as annual and triennial reviews (which include assessment reports from the school psychologist, nurse, physical therapist, occupational therapist, vision service teacher, and speech pathologist, as well as an academic report and a report on adaptive physical education).

When dealing with an IEP and the various components, special education teachers are required to collaborate with both general and special education services, and they are constrained by their case management responsibilities. They must monitor progress on students’ IEP goals in their areas of weakness, in part through daily or weekly data logs. If students do not make progress in adequate time, case managers must revise goals through a supplemental IEP.

The maximum number of students an MM special education teacher can have is 28. MS teachers can have a caseload maximum of 12, but their students require more intensive support plans, usually with a variety of related service providers. The collaborative conversations special education teachers need for case management can be overwhelming as they try to manage their various responsibilities.

The California Department of Education routinely monitors the school district’s IEPs for timeliness and compliance in completing the paperwork. If the district were to be found out of compliance, a corrective action plan would be required. The district’s special education program would remain under scrutiny until the issues were addressed, which would mean staff training on new procedures, and demonstration and documentation that a corrected action plan had occurred. With all
of these issues combined, special education teachers are challenged with their case management role to collaborate with teachers and constrained in their work abilities.

Harold, an MM teacher, described the paperwork challenges as, “just [a] necessary evil that comes with any job. There’s going to be aspects that you’d rather not do, such as writing IEPs….You know, it’s kind of mundane. It’s perfunctory.” He admitted the paperwork was important, but also said he would rather focus on the meaningful part of teaching. Numerous other teachers also confessed that the special education paperwork was challenging to juggle, leaving them little time for collaboration. Paula said, “I have to do IEPs at home. There’s no time to write them at school.” Lisa noted, “We’re asked to do a lot, and the other thing that I don’t like [that is] happening more and more is the amount of paperwork that the IEPs require.”

**Location Issues**

Another constraint on collaboration with which the special education teachers contended was the large size of the physical plant. Paula said, “In a smaller school, I think you might have more of an opportunity to be around the general education teachers and that kind of thing.” Juan similarly noted, “Our school is a huge place—many buildings and, you know, it’s just hard to get information.” The size of the campus made it difficult to collaborate with colleagues. Because it was so spread out, teachers found themselves wasting time searching for people who turned out not to be in their classrooms or offices.

Table 5 shows the connections of MM and MS teachers, both on campus and based on personal and other professional relationships within and outside the district.
The MM teachers had more diverse connections with the school community (English learner teachers, teachers from other subject areas, counselors, attendance office, etc.) and with their professional connections. They had connections to teachers that correlated with their co-teaching locations. MS teachers described having more personal and professional connections and fewer campus connections. Three out of the four MS teachers showed fewer connections within the school community. Table 5 demonstrates commonalities between the findings from the teacher interviews and the ego network mapping data.

Table 6. MM and MS Teacher Connections by Location and by Personal and Professional Connections

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<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Office location</th>
<th>Co-teaching location</th>
<th>Total connections</th>
<th>Locations of connections</th>
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Note. “Other campus” refers to generalized locations on campus. “Personal connections” refers to non-work related connections with family members, roommates, friends, and religious leaders. “Professional connections” refers to connections both in and outside of the school district.
Environmental settings impacted the work of the special education teachers as well. According to Lisa, “The conditions that we work under—meaning the physical conditions, the old school houses, the lack of air-conditioning—I’ve been in for the last seven years.” She admitted, “It’s not a pleasant building to work in, and that’s been really hard. It’s like a hotbox.” Furthermore, Lisa saw how these conditions affected her students: “It really diminishes the kids’ abilities to focus and my ability to teach everything.”

Peter also felt the conditions were uncomfortable, but explained that he was “getting used to not having air conditioning at a school site.” Likewise, Katy explained that the special education unit used to be housed on various parts of the campus, but the principal moved everyone to a central area. However, they “all moved to the rooms that unfortunately, they were not air-conditioned. Can you imagine having an office here?” Katy noted that their prior offices were “air conditioned, and you’d come here and you’re like, ‘Oh great, I’m right next to the 200 building [co-taught class], so it’s easy.” But then reality set in and “It’s stifling…we don’t want to be in there.” The silver lining, however, was that the proximity to each other provided opportunities for the special education teachers to collaborate and for general education teachers to locate the entire special education team. The move to one central location, as Katy remarked, supported teacher collaboration: “Now we talk to each other, and that is so important.”
School Culture and Partnerships

The challenges described above notwithstanding, the special education teachers discussed how the school community and its collaborative connections with the broader community and local university had created a supportive atmosphere among teachers. The teachers built rapport, made connections, and formed friendships with each other in the school community. Some of the MM teachers talked about how many of the general education teachers hung out informally and connected with each other and formed personal friendships. These connections occurred as they shared in the responsibility of educating students with special needs and worked together side by side with the best interest of all students in mind.

Although contradictory to some of the findings discussed above, the special education teachers discussed the positive vibe they felt working at the school site, particularly as they educated staff about how to help kids with special needs. This feeling could be the result of the collaborative work efforts coordinated with the local community and the systems of support created with their higher education partners. The teachers explained that overall that there was a supportive school culture because the school was oriented towards improvement and student achievement. However, as special education teachers, they still felt disregarded because they were viewed as a lower priority than the general education program.

The school was also receiving extra support through its connection to the local university, which collaborated with and educated the staff at WHS on best practices. In general, the presence of the university offered another layer of support by training
and bringing in new teachers to train the staff who were familiar with the school’s vision. The teachers at WHS appreciated and knew that the referenced practices were current and fresh from the field of education. The support from the university in turn helped the teachers strategize on how to solve problems associated with their challenging population of students.

While there were challenges related to the administration delegating some of their work to the special education lead teachers, there were also some benefits. The lead teachers, although busy with their leadership role, had the opportunity to collaborate with the general education program to work on matching special education teachers with co-teachers in subject areas aligned with their background in education, scheduling common prep periods with co-teachers, and planning for special education teachers to be placed in co-taught classes. The lead teachers were also able to collaborate on professional development activities from the special education office and provide on-site training. In most cases, the lead teachers simplified complex memos and instructions from the special education program office in terms that the special education teachers could quickly grasp.

Special education teachers also received support because of the learning academies offered at the school, which aligned closely with the general education curriculum and the PLC groups, and provided communication on curriculum and supported co-teaching. The special education teachers talked about the deep layers of support for students, which they felt made this school site unique and a generally positive place to work.
Each of the learning academies consisted of a tightly woven group of teachers dedicated to the support and academic outcomes of the students. There were additional supports for the school community, including partnerships with agencies that provided health and human services for all of the students and families. All WHS students qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, so these additional services helped to connect the school with the families. In addition, there was a social work center within each of the academies that followed a community school-based model. These centers partnered with local institutions of higher education to supervise interns at schools and expand the services provided to the students and the families.

Although the administration team was new, they were providing additional instructional support to MS and MM teachers. Special education teachers were able to attend professional development and the district’s special education trainings. They learned specialized and innovative approaches, with in-class support and pullouts to promote reading and writing on campus. These trainings were unique to this school community as a result of its partnerships with various universities. The MS teachers had also received funds to remodel their classrooms, and the team had the opportunity for one-on-one training from the special education program office through the program resource teachers in the district. The combined support from the administration and the program office was a specialized arrangement for the site in an effort to better support the special education teachers.

While there was evidence that the special education teachers were not as connected to general education teachers, there was also a general climate of
collegiality at the site. The system of supports from outside resources was a large contributor to these feelings. Unique to this school site were the types of student supports. This helped the teachers create a community of professionals dedicated to the education outcomes of the students.

**Summary**

MM and MS teachers discussed how their connections with leadership were inhibited because of the way management and support roles were delegated. They described how their ability to collaborate was constrained by their case management role and paperwork related to the IEP process. Other factors that challenged their ability to collaborate included the physical location of their classrooms, the size of the campus, and an uncomfortable environmental setting. While the special education staff discussed how there were some constraints on their supports, there was an overall positive feeling about their work at the school. This feeling was due to the system of specialized student supports unique to the school and the neighboring community.
Chapter 7:

Conclusion

This study examined the social networks of special education teachers and what characterizes these networks. Daly (2010) discussed how “relationships matter,” meaning the connections among people have an important impact on their work. Coburn, Choi, and Mata (2009) also underscored that “the nature and quality of social networks are associated with a range of outcomes that are central to school improvement, including increased human capital, diffusion of innovation, transfer of complex information, and increased problem solving” (p. 2).

In my experience as a special education teacher, I have witnessed pockets of innovative programs and resourceful caseload supports for special education students. However, a major hurdle that special education programs and teachers continuously battle is collaborative planning conversations with general education teachers. Thus, understanding the social connections of those who work in special education is vital to a thriving program. To achieve this understanding, this study was informed by the constructs of social network theory and communities of practice theory. I employed a parallel mixed-methods approach that included semi-structured interviews with 15 special education teachers and an ego network mapping analysis. My findings illuminate the social networks of special education teachers, and specifically how their formal and informal networks impact their ability to collaborate with colleagues and can shed light their professional and personal job satisfaction.
More specifically, the results of this study contribute to an understanding of what characterizes the social networks of special education teachers, how these educators are connected formally and informally, what the impact of these connections is on their instruction and practice, and what constrains their networks. Additionally, through ego network analysis, the findings provide information about the level of special education teacher ties as they pertain to curriculum, personal guidance, and personal time outside of work.

Together, the findings show how the connections of teachers in social networks are important for successful co-teaching relationships, for access to and creation of modifications in the general education curriculum and with Common Core State Standards implementation. Using the theoretical framework of social networks and CoP allowed for a better understanding of how social capital transactions are guided through collaboration on curriculum as well as access to expertise knowledge on subject matter to support learning. Findings on the limited connections between some special education teachers and their general education peers also point to how we can better support special education teachers in co-teaching and in special day class settings.

Summary of Findings

The Social Networks of Special Education Teachers

**Formal connections.** With respect to formal connections, teachers of students with mild/moderate disabilities (the MM teachers) talked about maintaining the peace with general education teachers and avoiding conflicts. Most discussed how their
formal relationships with general education teachers were more about support than about sharing in the responsibility of teaching. They explained how they felt their primary role was to accommodate or supply modifications to scaffold lessons. This finding is significant because MM teachers were not directly involved with instruction or sharing in the responsibilities with classroom teachers. They had opportunities to take part in general education professional development, which provided additional opportunities to connect formally, but they faced challenges juggling their schedules to access this training.

Teachers of students with moderate/severe disabilities (the MS teachers) had fewer connections with general education teachers because their students were primarily instructed in special day class settings, rather than in co-teaching environments. MS teachers describe feeling that their work is viewed differently. This resulted in fewer connections with – and even isolation from -- general education teachers and added to the widespread belief that general education teachers did not understand the work of MS teachers. This finding is significant because MS teachers need to provide opportunities for their students to be educated and socialized with peers, but their social networks at the school site were limited. The MS teachers also described how personal relationships (with roommates, family members, or religious leaders) had more of an impact on their practice than relationships within the school.

**Informal connections.** The special education teachers had limited informal connections with their general education peers as well. Most said they connected with other individuals during school social activities, but did so less often outside of school
due to personal commitments. The special education teachers talked specifically about the location of their classrooms and offices as influencing their social connections.

MM teachers tended to have more informal connections with general education teachers than did MS teachers. The MM teachers’ connections with the general education teachers supported their inclusive practice in the school community, and these informal connections could help support their work. However, while MM teachers described themselves as being connected, they also described their roles as ambassadors, subordinate, and glorified aides, which implies they may have viewed their connections in a negative way with respect to their practice.

MS teachers tended to spend their informal time with other MS special education teachers and other related service providers in special education. MS teachers also mostly had free time connections with people outside of work and with family members. They found that gathering with other teachers in the staff lounge was a more convenient way to informally connect. Moreover, teaching in a special day class model limited their ability to connect with other teachers on campus.

These findings with informal and formal social networks connects with Moolenaar et al. (2012) study which examined collaborative initiatives and how they are shaped by the type of social interaction among educators. When teachers spend time both in formal and informal networks there is more leverage to structure the networks to impact the speed and simplicity with which policy initiatives is conveyed through its different networks. Thus, the deep connections both informally and
formally means that these networks may serve to support knowledge, expertise, social support, teaching materials and other resources valuable to educational change.

**Impact on Curriculum and Instruction**

MM teachers did not perceive their role as true co-teachers alongside general education teachers; rather, they viewed their role as mostly to provide support. It is likely that the lack of connections between special education teachers and their co-teachers impacted the curriculum and instruction of special education students as well as their academic achievement, although that was not investigated in this study. The lack of ownership and responsibility with the MM teachers’ network and the Common Core Standards can compromise the faculty’s educational role with policy.

The Common Core Standards were written to be adaptable to various learners, whether general education, special education, or English language learners (Rose, 2014). Because MM teachers viewed their role as one primarily of support, and they saw the new standards as general education responsibility, their instructional approach to the implementation of the Common Core was limited. However, special education teachers still have a responsibility to learn and to be a part of the policy reform, as Rose explained: “While all students deserve the same opportunities to meet high standards, they do not all have to reach those high standards in standardized ways. Multiple approaches, paths, and supports are needed to reach the highest standards for all students” (p. 5).

MS teachers shared similar views. They felt they did not need to be involved with the Common Core Standards because the curriculum for moderately/severely
disabled students was separate as a result of modifications and adaptations. As noted above, MS teachers were also less connected with general education teachers, which likely impacted access to and understanding of the Common Core standards and this created a separation for MS students as well. This is concerning because, as Ross (2014) discussed, “learning environments that are not flexible in this way are themselves disabled: they cannot successfully provide students with the equal access to learning that those students rightly and legally deserve” (p. 5).

**Constraints and Supports**

Teachers noted several constraints and supports related to their work and, in particular, their ability to collaborate. One of the main issues discussed was the fact that WHS had a new administration. This resulted in a learning curve for the special education team to identify the best means to communicate and collaborate with the new administration, who lacked knowledge about special education at the school. Two lead teachers were identified as the primary liaisons, and this resulted in tiered support for the entire team. These lead teachers were elevated to an administrator’s role and struggled to manage the workload. The tiered management was frustrating at times for both MM and MS teachers, as it created delays and challenges when they sought to address special education policies and laws.

Another constraint on collaboration was time, as special education teachers struggled to manage IEP paperwork and caseload responsibilities. The political bureaucracy has created mounds of paperwork and requires teachers to put in extra
hours beyond their contract time to make sure students are properly serviced. This has left special education teachers little time to nurture relationships with their peers.

Physical location and environmental setting conditions also created challenges for special education teachers. Some of the MS teachers’ classrooms were away from the main part of campus, which further segregated the teachers and students from their colleagues and peers, respectively. This is especially troubling, as students with moderate/severe disabilities need to be exposed to the general education population to dispel stigmas about their special needs. Special education teachers should be afforded the same rights and treated equally as their general education peers in environmental conditions that are comfortable and centrally located, so that teachers have uncomplicated access to special educators for collaboration and networking.

These challenges notwithstanding, the special education team discussed how collaborative connections with the school community and local university had created a generally supportive atmosphere among the teachers. They were able to build rapport as they assisted each other and focused on the common goal of supporting students, particularly with the structure of the learning academies that the school housed. The result of this bond was a general sense of collegiality within the school and among the teachers. The special education teachers discussed how the deep layers of support made this school a positive place to work. However, despite the positive atmosphere of the school site, they also perceived a lack of support in special education because general education students’ graduation rates were the focus.
While the teachers noted challenges with the administrative structure, the special education team also indicated there were some benefits resulting from the leadership model. The lead teachers had the opportunity to collaborate with the general education program to work on matching special education teachers with co-teachers, scheduling common prep periods with co-teachers, and planning for classes for special education to be placed in co-taught classes. Other areas of support included specialized training and innovative approaches to ongoing professional development through the school site and with the program office. The trainings offered by the school were unique and specialized to this school community due to partnerships with various universities designed to foster best practices and support the social welfare of the students and families.

**Connections with Research and Theory**

In this section I summarize the connections between the study’s key findings and extant theory and research. First and foremost, there is currently little research on the social networks of special education teachers. This study provides key information that can ultimately help better support the collaboration and practice of special education teachers. Most education reforms are designed around general education policy and around building capacity with general education teachers; these reforms tend to be peripheral to special education teachers. Moreover, most studies using social network theory focus on general education teachers and not how teachers in special roles are impacted when there are limited connections. One exception is work by Hopkins, Lowenhaupt, and Sweet (2015), who conducted a social network study of
teachers of English learners. The current study—as well as Hopkins, Lowenhaupt, and Sweet’s study—shows how specialized educational programs are often not viewed as a priority in policy and reform efforts, as this affects teachers’ social connections.

**Ties Related to Instruction and Curriculum**

Daly (2010) explained that strong ties with individuals support joint problem solving in complex situations, whereas weaker connections are better suited for simple or routine information. Thus, the ties in a social system can help to create structure for an organization and opportunities for individuals to access them. The special education teachers in this study lacked strong ties with general education teachers, as they saw themselves primarily as support teachers for the rollout of more complex situations such as the Common Core. Special education teachers saw themselves as glorified aides and ambassadors, and also as there for behavioral support. This explains how their link to general education is weak. Moreover, MS teachers described how they felt their work was different, and general education teachers would not understand it, implying a further lack of connection.

Meanwhile, Daly (2010) described how ties are an important factor in predicting educational change. The lack of formal connections in complex situations between general education teachers and both MM and MS teachers can have an negative impact on special education teachers’ practice and participation in reform. For MS teachers in particular, we can see how stronger ties could help support their work and roles, since the modifications and adaptations are perceived as a world apart from general education. Moolenaar et al. (2012) explained that when school teams are
mutually interdependent on each other, their ties are stronger and education reform is more likely supported. The special education teachers need to be more involved in the process and have a part in contributing to rollouts like the Common Core trainings to support the feelings of interconnectedness and success of new policies.

**Ties within the School Community**

Little (2003) and Moolenaar et al. (2012) explained that understanding the characteristics of the social network of a school community is how teacher work practices comes to be known, shared, and leveraged with policy reform. It is important to understand the school community and the social networks of special and general education teachers who are an integral part of supporting students. In turn, this ultimately helps educators understand the pattern of collaboration that needs to occur at their sites to support teacher connections and collegiality. The closer the ties teachers have with one another—as discussed above, and as evidenced at least in part by the amount of informal time they spend together—the more apt they are to participate in educational reform. MM teachers described some connections with general education teachers, but there was clearly a need to deepen and expand these relationships. In the ego network mapping, the special education teachers described Level 1 (frequent) connections in their free time with mostly other special education staff. Most had fewer connections at Levels 2 and 3, explaining they had less time for connections or that work and personal time were purposely separated.

Moolenaar et al. (2012) explained how the type of social interaction among educators shapes collaborative initiatives. When teachers spend time both in formal
and informal networks the more connected their networks are to impact the quickness and ease with which policy initiatives is conveyed through its different networks. Thus, if special educators could increase the amount of informal connections with general educators, then the deeper connections these networks may serve to support to educational change.

Ties with Administration

Another significant factor in the formal and informal social networks of special education teachers is the influence of administration. Coburn et al. (2013) explained how public school systems are usually highly bureaucratized, with multiple levels of structures that can influence interaction patterns. Special education has notoriously taken a back seat in educational reform issues, and this was true for MM and MS teachers at WHS. For example, the delegation of leadership to lead teachers constrained the practice of special education teachers. They felt disregarded, believing they were not seen as priority in comparison to the general education teachers and through the multi-tier leadership structure.

According to Coburn et al. (2013), understanding how a public school’s organization is situated in complex policy and institutional environments is a way to increase knowledge of how schools influence teachers’ interactions and work towards educational reform. Leadership needs to improve collaboration with special education teachers in order to support their needs. Likewise, successful reform efforts require a shift in the way new policies are enacted in school districts (Daly, 2010; Moolenaar et al., 2012). School site leadership needs to create formal opportunities during policy
initiatives for these networks to grow and to endure efforts of reform, and carefully look into the existing relationships before beginning to implement reform.

Daly and Finnigan (2009) discussed how, when there is little communication between central office staff and site administrators, their ability to properly support the teachers at their work site is affected. Their study reinforced the fact that administrators are at the core of organizational change efforts; a lack of communication from the district office constrained site administrators’ ability to communicate and share work-related knowledge to inform practice at local school sites. In the current study, school site administrators were under pressure from the central office about graduation rates, causing their educational focus to be restricted—or at least to be perceived that way. The lack of special educators’ input and collaboration pushing students towards college readiness left the special education staff voiceless in advocating for their students which can ultimately limit the innovation occurring at the school site.

**Special Educators Networks**

Policies play a role in promoting conditions that support or constrain teacher networks (Coburn & Russell, 2008). Teachers seek out colleagues, share information, solve problems, and learn from one another in their networks during education reform. The findings from the current study suggest that understanding the role of special education teachers’ social relations in individual change, organizational processes, and student outcomes may require greater attention to the ways that social networks are themselves embedded in and affected by the organizational and policy context. Special
education teachers have a unique role; they push the envelope to make changes within special education, and they push laws and policy in order to advocate for students, their families, and the practice of special educators. These layers are deeply rooted, and in order to provide support and connections, the relationships that special educators create both formally and informally with general educators are key to building better practices.

And, according to Westling et al. (2006) there are “several challenges characterizing the special education profession” (p. 136). The literature is full of reports of high levels of stress and teacher burnout, high attrition rates among special educators, a lack of fully qualified teachers, and a gap between research-based effective practices and daily classroom practices of teachers (Fish & Stephens, 2010; Westling et al., 2006). There is a national and widespread shortage of special education teachers because of perceptions of their low social status position, low salaries, poor working conditions, and lack of support, as well as perceptions of diminished student motivation and discipline (Fish & Stephens, 2010). The current study has further shown that special educators are marginalized, since their role is viewed as secondary to general education, and they have limited ties with general education teachers.

MM teachers also discussed their struggle with general educators understanding their role, both with co-teaching and their work as case managers. Kelchtermans (2006) discussed how the success of an educational setting comes from a collaborative culture that views a balance of autonomy and collegiality. As MM
teachers in particular struggled to manage their case management work and their time to collaborate with their co-teachers, it may have appeared to others that their role in the general education classroom was not a priority. Many of the special education teachers discussed how balancing case management (autonomous time) could be constraining and give an appearance that they were not doing their job (collaborating). Kelchtermans explained that stress and burnout can result when the conditions for community and a collaborative culture are created without the balance of individual time. The cultural and structural working conditions in schools can and should help to regulate and mediate teacher collaboration in meaningful ways that match program needs.

Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) explained that the current divide between special and general education stems from how special educators look at effective teaching strategies for students with special needs as a matter of supporting their deficits whereas general educators look at factors, such as poverty and discrimination, play in academic failure. This lack of common underpinning between special and general education contributes to the divide between the two. The view of special education through a medical lens versus the general education social justice lens creates a divide in opinions about how instruction should be handled. Additionally, Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) explain that special education needs more highly qualified teachers, professional development opportunities, and model instruction programs for others to follow and to learn from.
Implications of the Findings

Implications for Research

Social network theory provides a valuable lens through which to examine the role and nature of teacher interactions (Daly, 2010). This study provided a view of the networks of special education teachers and explored how the individual relationships within a community of practice influence teachers’ practice—and actions towards best practices—as they navigate change. Social network theory offers an insightful framework to understand the perceptions of special education teachers in the school community with their faculty’s formal and informal interactions.

Future research studies should include social network analysis and interviews with both special and general educators, as this study included only special education teachers. Moreover, my study was limited by focusing only on one high school and the views of the special educators from this site. As such, it would be useful to include schools at both the elementary and middle school levels in future research. Other methods could include ego network mapping for all teachers at a school site, including general education teachers. Their perspectives on collaboration with special education are also important. Also, it would be worthwhile to conduct research on the social networks of teachers at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year to see whether perceptions have changed, and to look at how locations of teachers on campus can support or impede connections. Mixed-methods case studies would allow the opportunity for deeper analysis by focusing on the impact of special and general education connections on student achievement.
Research should also be conducted on effective co-teaching practices, and how teachers make connections with one another. Each school site is different, so providing a model that supports and matches the needs of the teachers at the site is an approach towards implementing educational reform in the area of special education instruction. And, schools should be provided the opportunity to plan and determine which program model will be successful for them and the individual teachers on the team. Additionally, there is a lack of consistency with co-teaching and inclusive practices, so investigating in more depth what supports or constrains educators’ practices will be important.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study have important implications for policy and practice. As discussed in the first chapter, coursework requirements for preservice teacher training could play an important role in improving collaboration between special education and general education teachers. In many programs, general educators are required to take only one course to cover all areas of special education, but the reality is, this single class is not enough. For first steps, an additional course of study that goes more in-depth on special education would provide opportunities for greater understanding of the concept behind accommodation and modification and for longer lasting relationships and collaborative conversations in a co-teaching or inclusion model.

Preservice teacher education can play an important role as well. According to Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012), there is the potential for “new hybrid
initial teacher education programs that reject old dichotomies and forge new synergies between general and special education” (p. 243). They explained that there are many possibilities for these learning communities to try to work together to offer initial teacher preparation, given their unequaled knowledge resources, their expertise in multiple modes of research and inquiry, and their potential for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary collaborations strategies.

Second, general and special education teachers need practicum experience with both MM and MS special education teachers. This should take place for at least two weeks during their student teaching experience, in order to provide hands-on training. Work with special education teachers during that time frame should include training on case management, collaboration, accommodations and modification, adapted curricula, and participation in and planning of IEP meetings.

Pre-service special education teachers also need opportunities specifically to train in a co-teaching model; this will help both MM and MS teachers with their practice and collaboration. Special education teachers need to develop their understanding and experience in the areas of curriculum planning, training on district curricula (including pacing guides), creating standards-based lessons, grading assignments, having a formal understanding of standardized testing, and teaching general education students. Many MS teachers do not gain any experience in an inclusive setting during their student teaching; incorporating this approach would support inclusive practices. Inclusion is discussed in pre-service coursework, but
hands-on training must be supported in fieldwork so that novice general educators have direct experience learning to collaborate with expert special education teachers.

Third, district and site level leadership needs to plan for professional development to include special education teachers. For example, creating a policy where special educators are integral part of the team for staff trainings, and include time for special and general education planning at the beginning of the school year. For professional development trainings, general educators present their expertise on the subject matter, and special educators present differentiated instruction on subject matter. School leadership—together with curriculum coaches—needs to include special education in professional development trainings and offer a range of differentiated instruction where examples are provided for mild/moderate and moderate/severe students—examples that can be used for all students to support teachers’ practice. A key to facilitating training on the Common Core is having both MM and MS teachers attend trainings where special education teachers provide examples of their modified approaches. District leaders and administrators should play a key role in facilitating the successful relationship between special and general educators. This is important to their community of practice and can help facilitate successful relationships, both formally and informally, for teachers.

Fourth, leadership should consider how classroom and office locations impact teachers’ practice, Special educators classrooms need to be placed in central locations needs with environmental conditions that support the health issues of students such as air conditioning to support the inclusion of students with special needs. Some special
education students have physical impairments and need access to the main part of the campus for accessibility reasons. Federal law requires (FAPE, LRE) that special education need to be included with their general education peers. In addition, special educators require office space needs space that is located on the main part of campus so there is easy access for teachers and all other service providers can collaborate and network with the special education teachers. Special educators deserve the same considerations with their classroom/office space as equally as their general educator counterparts.

Fifth, leadership needs to provide more opportunities for joint meeting time, and learn more about special education. Schools will benefit from curriculum coaches who are familiar with special education, so special education teachers can understand how the trainings can impact their practice. Also, when rolling out new instructional strategies, leadership must include special education in the process so that their role in instruction is seen as priority. Leadership would be wise to recognize that when special education teachers have connections with general education teachers, they may have an important impact on school practices and culture.

Sixth, the teaching practices and case management of special education teachers need to be updated, and state and federal lawmakers need a better understanding of the multiple hats that special educators wear in order to help improve teacher practice and to avoid teacher burn-out. The work of both special and general educators has changed with IDEA, and the expectations for teachers have only gotten broader. We cannot ignore this, nor can we continue to pile more expectations on
special education teachers—this will ultimately have a negative effect on their work with general educators. Special education is the often viewed as the stepchild in education, as evident in my findings. Special educators need policy changes as described above, and this will improve their work and their connections with general educators.

**Final Thoughts**

As a practitioner in the field, I relate to the contentment of teaching students with special needs and to the challenges that can occur in instruction, whether in a co-taught classroom or a special day class setting. Special education programs and teachers struggle with having meaningful connections and being an equal team member along side general education teachers with educational reform. I have the utmost respect for my colleagues and for the work they do in spite of these challenges and in spite of sometimes being misunderstood in their roles. The findings from this study provide insight from the perspective of special education teachers to better support their work in the school community and improve the instruction of special education students. Ultimately, it is through our social network connections and ties that we can, as educators, form a powerful connection to the school community. In doing so, we can open up the possibilities for special education students and their learning.
Appendix A:

Email to Potential Participants

University of California, San Diego
How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special Education Teachers Shape Their Practice

Principal Investigator: Amie Wong

Dear Special Education Teachers,

My name is Amie Wong. I am a Special Education Teacher with the Home/Hospital program, in the [NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT], as well as pursuing my Educational Doctorate at UCSD. Teacher collaboration has long been considered to be a vehicle for educational improvement. As part of my dissertation research, I am looking at the social connections of special education teachers. I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in an interview with me.

Please take a look at the attached informed consent form for more information about the safeguarding of your privacy if you choose to volunteer. This interview will last no more than 60 minutes. If you should choose to participate, you will need to provide the best means of contacting you to arrange an interview. To do so, you can email me at amw032@ucsd.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about the overall study, please email me or call me at (619) 246-6718. I would be happy to clarify all areas that you need.

Thank you,
Amie Wong
Appendix B:

Teacher Consent Form

University of California, San Diego
Consent to Act as a Research Subject

How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special and General Education Teachers Shape Their Practice

Principal Investigator: Amie Wong

Amie Wong, under the supervision of Dr. Amanda Datnow, Professor in the Department of Education Studies at UCSD, with the approval of the [NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT], is conducting a research study to find out more about the connections between special education teachers and general education teachers, and specifically to investigate how the informal and formal connections support teacher practice. Ms. Wong is conducting this research for her doctoral dissertation in the UCSD doctoral program in Teaching and Learning. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a special education teacher working at [NAME OF HIGH SCHOOL] in [NAME OF SCHOOL DISTRICT]. There will be approximately 16 participants in this study.

The purpose of this research study is to identify the relationships of special and general education teachers and other special education teachers in the district that support special education students.

If you agree to be in this study, the following will happen to you:

You will participate in an individual interview with the researcher. The interview will involve questions about your connections and collaboration with other teachers. You will be asked whom you turn to for curriculum advice, whom you go to for personal guidance for work related concerns, and whom you socialize with. You will be asked to name the individuals you have connections to and describe the connections and ties between the people named. The interview will be audio recorded, and the researcher will take notes.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and the audio recording will be used for transcription purposes only to assist in improving the accuracy of the researcher’s notes. Interviews will take place at your school site or at another local location of your choosing, and may be scheduled outside of your regular work hours.
Risks:

1. A potential for the loss of confidentiality. Quotes may be used in reports and presentations, but they will not be connected with specific individuals. Any information that could identify you such as your name, grade level, or school name will not be used in any reports. Pseudonyms will be used to refer to individuals and schools. We will use confidential study ID numbers rather than names to record information. Only the interviewer will know which ID number refers to each participant, and only the interviewer and a typist will hear the interviews or see written summaries of the interviews. However, all possible care will be taken to protect the confidentiality of your records including but not limited to keeping data on a password protected server and following standard UCSD security protocols to maintain confidentiality. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. In addition, research records may be reviewed by the UCSD Institutional Review Board.

2. A potential risk of emotional discomfort. You may be asked personal questions about your professional goals and beliefs. There is the possibility that this may lead some participants to feel some mild emotional discomfort or embarrassment. Please be advised that you are under no obligation to discuss any topic which makes you feel uncomfortable. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable and still remain in the study.

3. A potential risk for feelings of frustration, stress, discomfort, fatigue, and boredom. You are under no obligation to participate in or complete the interview. Please be advised that you may stop the interview at any time for any reason and ask to erase any portion or the entire taped recording.

Under California law, we must report information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult, or elder, including physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. If any investigator/researcher has or is given such information, he or she may be required to report such information to the appropriate authorities.

Because this is a research study, there may also be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. You will be informed of any significant new findings.

The alternatives to participation in this study are no participation or limited participation (e.g., a subject might choose to complete some of the interview but not the full interview).

Benefits: There may or may not be any direct benefit to you from participating in this study. The study, however, may help identify the relationships of special and general education teachers and other special education teachers in the district that support
special education students. The findings may inform special and general education teachers about their practices and help leadership in planning and supporting collaborative relationships.

**Participation in research is entirely voluntary:** Participation in research is entirely voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw or refuse to answer specific questions in an interview at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide that you no longer wish to continue in this study, you may contact me by email at amw032@UCSD.edu or by mobile phone at (619) 246-6718. You will be told if any important new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

The researcher may remove you from the study without your consent if she feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study. You may also be withdrawn from the study if you do not follow the instructions given you by the study personnel.

**Compensation:** In compensation for your time and travel, you will receive $50 Visa gift card for participating in this research. There will be no cost to you for participating in this study.

If you are injured as a direct result of participation in this research, the University of California will provide any medical care you need to treat those injuries. The University will not provide any other form of compensation to you if you are injured. You may call the Human Research Protections Program Office at (858) 657-5100 for more information about this, to inquire about your rights as a research subject, or to report research-related problems.

The researcher named above has explained this study to you and answered your questions. If you have other questions or research-related problems you may reach me at (619) 246-6718. You may call the Human Research Protections Office at (858) 657-5100 to inquire about your rights as a research subject or to report research-related problems.

You have received a copy of this consent document.

You agree to participate by signing below.

__________________________________
Print your first and last name

__________________________________
Participant’s signature		Date
Appendix C:

Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Explain the purpose of the interview: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, we are interested in learning about collaboration on your school campus. In this interview I am going to ask you questions about the interactions you have with the people you work with, and this can include both inside and outside (site or other district-related individuals) your school site. Your responses will help me to understand how the collaboration at your school site impacts your practice, the culture of your school community, site initiatives or directives on policy, and how leadership is viewed.

Consent Process:

*In each case, tell the participants:* Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that participating in this study is voluntary and your responses are completely confidential. This interview is by no means intended to evaluate your work. At any point during the interview, if you would like me to turn off the recorder, just tell me to do so. And, if you feel uncomfortable answering a question, please do not hesitate to let me know. Do you have any questions about the interview before we begin?

Start recording after confirming consent to the study.

Thank you (participant’s name) for taking the time to participate in this interview. I am interested in hearing your experiences as a special education teacher. As a special education teacher you work with a variety of people. Social networks deals with interactions of individuals and the regularity with which individuals connect.

I am going to be asking some questions about whom you connect to for work, and the frequency and quality of those interactions. We each interact with individuals for different purposes depending on our needs.

*Note to self:* When additional information is needed from participant, here are some examples of questions to help clarify: tell me more about that, can you clarify what you are explaining with some examples, that sounds interesting and I would like to hear more about that, what is your opinion about this.

Interview Questions:

1) Tell me about yourself:
• How long have you been a special education teacher?

• How long have you been teaching at your current school site?

• How many total years have you taught?

2) School community, formal:

• How often do you meet as a faculty?

• How often do you meet as a special education department?

• How often do you meet with general education departments?

3) School community, informal:

• What activities occur at work where you connect with individuals? Such as potlucks, birthday parties, breaks, or lunches with co-workers?

• How often do social activities like this occur within your department or the school community?

4) School ties:

• How does the professional development at your school and/or at the district level support your work/practice?

• What work practices, events, or resources help to build community or connections?

5) Special and general education views:

• How would you describe the interactions between special and general education teachers?

• How is the special education department viewed, such as special day classes—mild moderate, emotionally disturbed, moderate severe, co-teaching, and inclusion?

• Describe how the accountability for using the new Common Core State Standards influences/impacts how both special and general education teachers work together.
6) Leadership collaboration:

- How would you describe the leadership’s (principal, vice principals, department chair, dean of students) collaboration with teachers?
- How would you describe your principal’s view of special education?
- How does leadership provide independent time and collaborative time?
- What is your view of the district’s support of special education?

Lastly, I am going to ask you a question where you will fill in names on three circle map worksheets. In each of the worksheets, you are in the center of the five circles. I am going to ask you to list names of people you connect to regarding these questions. The names of the individuals can reflect regularity or depth and/or even how close you would consider the person you indicate.

7) Asking advice about curriculum/ego network question #1:

When you are working on curriculum by accommodating or modifying lessons for your students, who is your main go-to person for advice when you need help? For instance, you are trying to modify an English assignment that entails writing an analysis of a book and you need to incorporate references for deeper analysis and you are not sure how to approach this. Or there is an oral presentation requiring a PowerPoint for your student’s history class that you are not sure how to handle for your student. Remember, you are in the center in the first circle, so please write the name(s) of the individual(s) in the second circle whom you seek out first.

- Are there other individuals whom you look to for advice that you would list in the third circle?

- For the last circle, are there any other individuals whom you seek less frequently but still consider important for advice about work guidance? Your answer can include individuals outside the district or teachers from other schools.

8) Discussing work—personal guidance/ego network question #2:

Situations may arise when you need personal advice from someone at work. For example, whom do you turn to when you need to see your principal and you want some advice on how to approach the conversation? Or you want to propose something to the department chair and need some feedback. Or a para-educator is not doing their job and you want to talk about this first before talking to the individual.
• Circle number two is about whom you go to for personal guidance for work-related concerns. Remember, you are in the center of the first circle; name the individual(s) that is (are) your go-to person(s) in this second circle.

• In the third circle, who would be your next choice of contact(s) that you would ask for advice?

• For the last circle, are there any other individuals whom you seek less frequently but still consider important for personal guidance on work matters? Your answer can include individuals outside the district or teachers from other schools.

9) Informal networks/ego network question #3:

Relations at work take on many different shapes and can include friendships outside of work, such as spending time during school breaks, going out for drinks/dinner, spending time with your co-worker and their family, dog sitting a co-worker’s pet, and exercising with a fellow colleague.

• As a reminder, you are in the center of the first circle. So, in the second circle, who is/are the individual(s) you commonly hang out with outside of work for social reasons?

• In the third circle, whom do you hang out with once a month?

• For the last circle, name the individuals you do things with less frequently, but whom you enjoy spending social time with? Your answer can include outside relationships with teachers at the district level or teachers from other schools.

This concludes our interview, is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience working in special education? Are there any other questions you would like to ask me?

Thank you allowing me to have this time to interview you! Your input will help to provide information on the collaboration that occurs at your school site.
Appendix D:

Ego Network Questions

Ego Network Question #1 (Collaboration):

Whom do you turn to for curriculum advice?
Ego Network Question #2 (Work Guidance):

Whom do you go to for personal guidance on work-related concerns?
Ego Network Question #3 (Informal Connections):

With whom do you like to spend your free time?
Appendix E:

Audio Recording Release Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

How the Formal and Informal Social Networks of Special and General Education Teachers Shape Their Practice

Principal Investigator: Amie Wong

As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project. Please indicate below the uses of these audio recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

1. The audio recording can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.
   _______________________________________________________________________
   Initials

2. The audio recording can be used for scientific publications.
   _______________________________________________________________________
   Initials

3. The audio recording can be reviewed at meetings of scientists interested in the study of education and educational practices.
   _______________________________________________________________________
   Initials

4. The audio recording can be reviewed in classrooms by students for educational purposes.
   _______________________________________________________________________
   Initials

You have the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased in full or in part at any time.

You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of audio recording as indicated above.

__________________________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Witness               Date               Signature               Date
### Appendix F:

**List of A Priori Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher background</strong></td>
<td>Background of the teacher, education, experience, roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Positive experiences teaching** | Likes  
| Tatauwequigni | School community  
| | Working in small group |
| **Challenges with teaching** | Dislikes  
| | Environmental conditions  
| | Non-English speakers  
| | Difficulties with parents  
| | Special education academics  
| | Behavior  
| | Case management  
| | Time constraints  
| | Too many meetings  
| | Large campus  
| | General education priority |
| **School community, formal** | School meetings and/or department meetings |
| **School community, informal** | Happy hour, pot-lucks, lunch, connecting outside of school, spending informal time together |
| **School site ties** | What are other ways the school develops a sense of community? |
| **Special and general education views** | How are special and general education viewed on campus?  
| | Connected and how?  
| | Do teachers understand what SE teachers do?  
<p>| | What are the challenges? What needs to be addressed at the |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Common Core views</strong></td>
<td>Common Core views</td>
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<td>How it applies to special education teachers and their practice</td>
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<td><strong>Leadership collaboration</strong></td>
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<td>Roles</td>
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<td>Time constraints</td>
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<td>New teacher challenges</td>
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<td>Delegating role of leadership</td>
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<td>Teacher connections</td>
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<td>Co-teaching: what are the perceptions?</td>
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<td><strong>Parent perspectives</strong></td>
<td>Parent perspectives on school and on special education and support in general</td>
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<td>Professional development</td>
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<td><strong>Students</strong></td>
<td>Views of student perspectives</td>
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<td>Moderate/severe: How are these students supported?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inclusion: What’s the view?</td>
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<td>Educational outcomes: diploma bound, non-diploma bound, college or vocational path</td>
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<td>Special education case management</td>
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<td>Support with work curriculum</td>
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References


