"Who Is Going to Be Able to Do What I Do?" Dynamic Expressions of Social Capital Among Teachers

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Abstract: Relationships between colleagues form a central part of the workplace experience. For teachers, social capital is influenced by obligations, information channels, and social norms operating within local schools. As part of a larger ethnographic study examining teachers' work in rural New York State, data from 27 structured interviews provided insights into formal and informal systems of social capital in K-12 schools, including mentoring, the ability to express concerns to colleagues, and the extent to which teachers at different phases of their career desire to receive help at work. Teachers should be encouraged to grow as people and professionals via informal collegiality and participation in formal, purposeful opportunities for collaboration as a natural outgrowth of working together.

From parents to taxpaying community members to political pundits and so-called educational experts, there are many opinions about how to fix education. Issues connected to student achievement, behaviors, staff shortages (Berkovich, 2023; Edsall, 2022) and burnout (Karalis-Noel & Finnochio, 2022; Newberry & Allsop, 2017) are part of the mainstream news cycle. These negative narratives of K-12 education are reinforced by a public perception of experienced educators being "promotion-blocked teachers in mid-to-late career who are losing energy and enthusiasm," juxtaposed against a view of "new teachers struggling to survive alone in their classrooms" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 14). Supposed remedies, such as establishing national curriculum standards or making teacher preparation programs more rigorous, have not brought about the systemic change desired in education. Perhaps the answer to these reform dilemmas lies within the very ones who work in schools: the teachers.

Colleagues play an important role in daily workplace experience. Teacher interactions produce a network of purposeful and beneficial relationships which must be successfully navigated in the workplace. This network of relationships among colleagues is social capital, an active resource for teachers to utilize, leverage, and cultivate throughout their career (Coleman, 1988). Ingersoll (2003, p. 12) asserts that the social aspect of teacher interaction is "among the most crucial, most highly controlled, most highly consequential, and most overlooked aspects of schooling." By dismissing the power of informal collegiality and formal collaboration, the role of teachers' social capital as a vital component of the internal systems of schooling is ignored. Faculty members are in touch with the needs of their building/district, have developed successful instructional techniques for use with students in their schools and classes, and know the expectations of their building and community. In terms of workplace obligations and expectations, information channels within an institution, and perpetuation of professional norms, gaining social capital is required for a successful teaching career. However, teachers' social capital remains underexamined.

Social Capital

The concept of social capital is a tool used in many fields of study (Kilgore, 2016). Developed by Coleman (1986), a sociologist with a particular interest in high schools, adolescence, and school desegregation (Kahlenberg, 2001; Marsden, 2005), social capital can be difficult to measure and, at times, inappropriate to apply as a panacea for a variety of complex or intricate social and interpersonal situations (Engbers et al., 2017). Nonetheless, as complicated as

it may be, social capital can provide insights into myriads of connections between communities and individuals in ways that elicit hopeful opportunities for the future (Emery & Flora, 2006). Social capital is more than socializing in a professional setting. Shared social capital connects individuals by building stable relationships and clarifying norms/roles within an organization, thus raising "the stability and technical knowledge of all its members" (Leana & Van Buren, 1999, p. 543). Both individual and large-scale organizational social capital (Coppe et al., 2022b) are simultaneously elevated through "collective goal orientation and shared trust, which create value by facilitating successful collective action" (Leana & Van Buren, 1999, p. 538).

Social capital's broad appeal has led to some criticisms. Portes (1998) states that social capital fails to delineate the relationship between the individual and the group. Additionally, Portes (2000) notes that Coleman's (1988) theory does not take different cultures into account. Caldas et al. (2007) found policy shifts resulting in school desegregation in the American South in the early 2000's led teachers in middle class white schools to have a negative perception of their social capital. Opp (2018) believes there is a need to add layers to Coleman's original theory. Coleman's work possesses a certain naivete in the eyes of some, who prefer to use Bourdieu's (1997) economically-framed theories on networks and the complicated nuances of such interactions (Gillies & Edwards, 2006).

Certainly, social capital cannot be mandated and regulated in educational settings. Formalized mentoring programs produce stress for both mentor and mentee, impose external solutions on unique situations, and do not "prepare younger teachers for future leadership roles" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 12). Tensions among school stakeholders and broad mentoring relationships, both failures of social capital, were two themes which emerged from interviews with former public-school teachers (Karalis-Noel & Finnochio, 2022). Likewise, negative relationships, anti-collegiality, lack of connection, and isolation were identified as contributing factors to teacher attrition (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). On the other hand, social capital in the form of routine interaction with colleagues strengthens connections among colleagues (Rostila, 2011; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998) and helps retain teachers. Sharing frustrations, commiserating or problem solving together on debriefing days, asking for advice, serving as a sounding board, and preparing for new classroom activities all happen with colleagues and are a critical part of what it means to work in a school. Social capital extends to families, as well, for parents and communities have social capital which can serve to elevate disenfranchised groups (Khattab, 2003; Rogošić & Baranović, 2016).

Collaboration

Of course, simply working together as colleagues does not mean that there is a positive "congenial" relationship between individuals (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Larger faculties have fewer opportunities for collaboration than counterparts who are located in smaller, more intimate professional structures (Keuning et al., 2016). Teachers of color seek out help less than their white colleagues, but are consulted for advice at the same rate as their white colleagues, except when it comes to math (Bristol & Shirrell, 2019). Specialty subject area teachers, such as music educators, are often isolated and do not have their unique professional development needs met (West, 2019). Colleagues within one school building can be products of different generations (Portela Pruaño et al., 2022). When new teachers return to their *alma maters* to work, a common occurrence in rural school districts, they often do not fulfill the expectations that experienced teachers have of them (Huysman, 2007).

But collaboration positively affects overall school culture (Peterson, 2016). Student achievement increases when colleagues work well together, particularly those who have worked together for a long time in the same school (Daly et al., 2014). Collegiality, or work socialization, is a vital component of a successful transition to a career in education for second career teachers (Coppe et al., 2022a). Teachers who have informal contextual bonds, understand the organization, and display individual traits in concert with the broader school culture enjoy lasting collegial ties and greater access to social capital (Birdwell & Cooc, 2016). Venting with colleagues not only reduces stress, but increases collegial bonds (Garrick et al., 2017).

Phases of Career

Educators at all career stages can benefit from collaboration. For example, "positioning a struggling new teacher alongside an experienced professional, rather than placing him or her out in a portable hut where no one else wants to teach" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013, p. 39) breeds both collegiality and collaboration. Pairing veterans and neophytes may also serve as a means of "squeezing out poor performers as teaching becomes less private and more collaborative. These results occur because the day-to-day pressure and support is built into the work. It is social capital leveraging human capital" (Fullan, 2011, p. 12). Senge's (2006) research in the business world translates to schools, for he discovered "just the act of getting people together and talking with one another created a whole set of possibilities that led to a better business" (p. 259). As school leadership fosters social capital through collaboration, teachers will become less competitive with one another and "consider their instruction from other points of view" (Bohen, 2014, p. 2). Collaborative relationships take time to build, but the teachers can speak to each other's personal and professional lives more effectively than an administrator or outside consultant can.

While length of teachers' experience in the field is just one factor affecting their purview, — for "teaching is bound up with their lives, their biographies, with the kinds of people they have become" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 25) — researchers have devised ways to measure the seasons of one's teaching career and the requisite skillfulness honed at each stage (Booth et al., 2021; Day & Gu, 2007; Dreyfus, 2004; Eros, 2011; Huberman, 1989; Katz, 1972). One study suggests that newer teachers are more committed to their local school than their more seasoned colleagues (deJong et al., 2016). The extent to which a new teacher is able to be innovative in their role is a predictor of satisfaction and burnout (Goodard et al., 2006). Mid-career is depicted as a time of tiring, monotonous work (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), yet overlooked by research (Booth et al, 2021). Many high achieving educators leave the field well into their careers (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Perhaps enlisting mid-career teachers into action research as a form of professional development would aid in mid-career teacher retention (Mertler, 2013). Mid-career teachers who have worked in a particular school building the longest are the most sought out by their peers for support and insight. They are important parts of the *de facto* community of colleagues (Birdwell-Mitchell & Fried, 2020). How teachers handle working conditions and workplace stressors may depend on their career phase. The disconnect between teacher education programs and realities of the classroom demonstrate the need for highly contextualized institutional knowledge attuned to one's local school building and the working conditions there (Rust, 1994). Over time, teachers adjust their workload to "cope with the bureaucratic milieu of schooling" (McCarthy et al., 2016, p. 595) in sustainable ways. Collaborative structures focused on targeted interventions for students can help reduce teacher stress (Lhospital & Gregory 2009).

Conceptual Framework and Methodology

Exploring the ideas of teacher collaboration in the workplace and the various phases one progresses through during their teaching career are vital to setting the scene for examination of how teachers' social capital is manifested between and among colleagues. The present study is framed by Coleman's theory of social capital. Coleman asserts that there are three manifestations of social capital between parties: obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms. Obligations require trust and reciprocation. The longer a person is a part of a specific social structure, they "at any time have more social capital on which they can draw" (Coleman, 1988, p. S103.) Coleman urges us to ask: To whom are teachers obligated and what is the cost of their obligations? Information gathering can be urgent in a workplace situation. It takes time and effort to acquire the "information that facilitates action" (Coleman, 1988, p. S104) needed for teachers to fulfill their responsibilities. Finally, workplace norms may make some tasks easier than others. Acting according to social norms demonstrates a collective mentality instead of an individualistic mindset, ensuring universal benefit to the workplace. The teacher who does not engage in building their social capital will, simply put, not be successful at school, both within and outside of the traditional classroom environment. Here, I explore both positive and negative examples of social capital among new, mid-career, and experienced teachers in a K-12 environment.

Data for this study emerged from 27 structured interview sessions with teachers who also serve as extracurricular advisors throughout the rural Northern Appalachian region of New York State. All interviews were conducted from June through August 2023 and took place in a one-on-one setting or in small groups at teachers' homes, empty school buildings, booths at restaurants, and outside in farm fields. A transcript was made from a digital recording of each interview and member checked (Miles et al., 2014) for clarifications, omissions, and additions (Thomas, 1993). Interviews ranged from 35 minutes to four hours. No monetary compensation was offered for participation.

Multiple iterations of coding extracted granular (Buckley, 2022) data from the interviews. Based on results of the initial coding of themes and trends, re-coding and sub-coding occurred in multiple cycles (Hatch, 2002; Saldaña, 2021). Teachers' relationships with their coworkers emerged as one of the strongest themes in the data. I then conducted *a priori* coding based on Coleman's (1988) three types of social capital. As part of a larger critical ethnographic study (Burawoy et al., 1991; Corbett, 2020; Edmondson, 2001; Porter, 1995; Reed-Danahay, 1996; Seaton, 2007), this data contributes to a greater understanding of the culture of rural school communities by exploring teachers' experiences leading extracurricular activities. New understandings about teachers' social capital and internal school relationship dynamics are revealed, answering Jadhav's (2021, p. 568) call for research "to unveil and disarticulate these unspoken narratives, occluded histories, and hidden practices."

Participants were categorized as new teachers (one-ten years), mid-career teachers (11-20 years), or experienced (21+ years). These categorizations are appropriate to this sample as participants in this study have a notable average 15.4 years and a collective 417 years of teaching experience. The rural northeast has the highest teacher retention rate in the US (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), making it an important place to examine the perspective of these committed individuals. Mirroring the female-dominated teaching ranks, 20 participants were female and seven were male. Eight participants were alumni of where they now teach and 19 attended school elsewhere. Heavily skewed toward the secondary level, only 6 participants

taught at the elementary level (general education, special education, and physical education). I employed purposive and snowball sampling (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018) through my professional network to enlist participants. After nearly two decades as a high school teacher and administrator in various socioeconomic contexts, most recently in the rural Northern Appalachian region of New York, this study occurred one year after I resigned from a principalship to complete my doctorate. Typically, "educational sociologists can sound the alarm and recognize the problems, but we are considered incapable of offering solutions that can be demonstrated to 'work'" (Corbett, 2015, p. 266). Uniquely, perhaps, I am positioned to offer novel insights and workable solutions through my in-depth knowledge and access to the internal systems of teachers' work in high-poverty rural school contexts.

Findings

Obligations/Expectations: Three obligations and expectations emerged from the data. First is the idea that teachers ought to be thankful for their job. Secondly, participants were unable to communicate professional concerns at work, especially issues with co-workers. Finally, an obligation toward extracurricular work was often expressed through an "If not me, then who?" mentality.

An experienced teacher noted that in the past even from the onset of the job interview process, teachers would be "armed with what you could bring and what you would do… busting your tail to prove yourself to be good enough to do whatever was asked, to volunteer." Citing a difference in hiring practices that developed over time, she continued, "Now, there's no competition for the jobs. We're begging people to come. It was different in 1997." A teacher who was hired a decade later in the mid-2000s expressed that she and her peers at the time "would take whatever job you can find... I'm gonna do a good job and I'm gonna stick with it." But now she sees the obligation to one's rural school community in the form of being thankful for the job is being usurped by new career teachers who "have a mentality that they'll just go somewhere else or do something else. I don't know if people care as much because they have that thought of the work life balance." Here, a teacher presents the dichotomy of caring for oneself and caring for one's career, that is, the students and community members in a rural district, at opposite ends of a spectrum of job commitment.

Issues connected to money were one area where it was difficult for colleagues to conduct productive conversations with one another. A new teacher shared a poignant story about her interactions with another coach in her sport. The new teacher is unable to fundraise. Instead, "all of our purchasing has to go through varsity soccer. That can get annoying because I need new gear and it doesn't happen. We get the hand me downs." In an area of decreasing population, like Northern Appalachian New York, school districts may merge together in order to have enough students to field a team. This teacher's district has merged for other sports; however, she recounts, "it's been explained to me that our soccer coach does not want to merge. She retires after next year." Here, an experienced teacher is fundamentally dictating school practices for her own benefit. While a merger may provide greater opportunities for students and be more financially feasible for a cash-strapped school, these benefits do not outweigh the potential wrath of upsetting this experienced teacher! It is easier to wait for her to retire than to make the financially wise and student-minded decision to merge. Note that there is no direct communication or conversations between the new and experienced teacher, either. Some new coaches were, on paper, for the JV or modified levels, but, in reality, were "working with

students of all levels and attending all the meets, but the varsity coaches get paid substantially more for the season. I'm still expected to be there." A new teacher surmised that what this issue came down to is that "the politics are seniority based." An experienced teacher expressed concerns over the demands on his younger colleagues' time. While discussing the various extracurricular responsibilities associated with their school, he concluded, "There's no way a young teacher that has to get their master's degree can do it."

Concerns about colleagues go in multiple directions. A mid-career teacher who teaches at the school she graduated from was worried about some of her role models, the teachers whom she had as a student when she was in school. She was disillusioned because "There's a handful of us that are really struggling and some of the younger ones just don't get it." An experienced teacher nearing retirement considers the future of his program as he plans for succession while understanding the commitments of new teachers. Looking back over a recent large-scale event, he states, "It's a lot of hours and weekend time. My kids are out in the workforce so I'm not missing things at home. If I didn't do 30 free hours of work, this event wouldn't have happened. But, in the future, I don't think a new teacher will do it." Another experienced teacher looks at the new teachers as "young enough to be my kid. Some folks have burnt out and have had health problems psychologically, physically… but once you do something really well, then it becomes your job forever." Hers is a cautionary tale to those beginning their careers as teachers in rural school communities. After concluding a weeklong senior trip, numerous fundraisers, and a musical production, an experienced teacher found himself in the hospital. His blood pressure was so high, protocols for stroke prevention were done all night on him. I interviewed him shortly after his health scare and when I asked about plans for the musical next year, he said that no one had fulfilled his vacancy. Then, he went on "You definitely can fall into the trap of thinking if you don't do it, no one else will. I'm going to leave it and see. If it came down to it with no show, I would definitely do it again. That group of kids needs their day in the sun. It wouldn't be fair." He is eschewing his own personal health needs for his students and community expectations of a performance.

Teachers at both ends of the continuum of years of experience shared a time when a colleague answered the "if not me" question with their name. A new teacher stated that an experienced teacher was persuasive to get him to coach even though he lived 55 minutes away from work. Qualifying his choice by stating "it was a pretty short season," this new teacher referred to his colleague by saying, "I mean, he got me to coach." The teacher went on to say how valuable coaching was in building relationships with students, even those he did not teach. Looking back on how she got involved in extracurriculars, a now experienced teacher stated that a colleague came into her classroom and said to her, "'You're doing this with me.' I was like, 'OK.'" Over twenty years later, the cycle continues with this teacher recruiting new colleagues to assist with the many extracurricular traditions that are important components of life in a rural school community.

Information Channels: Collegiality is the informal sense of belonging that comes from working with those who become "extended family" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 400). These relationships are "a valuable resource" (Leana, 2011, p. 34). As professionals, "circles keep us grounded in our connectedness and create community day by day as we confront whatever we have to confront together" (Senge, 2006, p. 266). While formalized mentoring is one mechanism for developing social capital, it is essential that "we do not want to limit our definition of 'act' to such conscious behavior" (French & Raven, 1959). Throughout their careers, teachers glean

information through various mechanisms. While formal faculty meetings, administrative memos, and district handbooks play a role, collegial relationships are perhaps the most utilized way that information, particularly localized, institutional knowledge, is disseminated throughout a school's staff over time. Mentoring, physical proximity during the workday and extracurricular co-advisership were ways that study participants gained knowledge about their workplace.

One year of mentoring is required for new teachers in New York State (NYSED, 2023). Participants, especially if they are the only teacher in their subject area for a school, often reported a mismatch of mentors, dependent on mentees' needs — some appreciated a mentor's insights into overall school culture, but some needed specific content area help. A now mid-career teacher looked back on his experience being mentored, recalling, "When I was first hired, the Superintendent said, 'Well, here's your keys. Here's your room. That's your team leader, across the hallway. If you got any questions, ask her. That's what she gets the stipend for.'" He felt as if he was "thrown in," a sentiment echoed by a current new teacher. She recounted things that she had to "figure out" on her own, despite her mentor "asking what I needed help with." Both of these teachers are in specialized subject areas (such as art, languages other than English, or technology) where they were one of the only people teaching that subject in their district. Their mentors were not familiar with their mentee's content area.

After describing the physical layout of his school, a new teacher commented on the "family" mentality among colleagues in his district, something many rural school communities pride themselves on, "Every single person in the school was helpful or nice to me or there when I needed them." An experienced agriculture teacher described a strategic placement of a music and art teacher near her classroom. The physical proximity between these teachers created relationships where new teachers would "ask a lot of questions. Those discussions after school really helped because they get nervous. They don't want to ask for help because then it looks like they can't do certain things." The teacher's comment toward her new colleagues also had a familial spirit, as she passionately described them as "little puppies" that she wanted to take home and reassure that it was all going to be okay.

Working with colleagues in extracurricular settings can help new teachers grow as professionals. One experienced teacher who coaches with a number of new teachers recalled a powerful conversation with them, "The guys told me, 'You showed us there's more to it. At first, we thought you were just criticizing us, but you were making sure we knew the bigger picture.'" The experienced teacher went on to describe creating an environment on the team where students could share their struggles at home with the coaches. He was proud that the new coaches have become "incredible with that stuff." Colleagues can keep each other accountable to maintain a perspective of holistic student support, especially in a challenging educational environment.

At some schools, co-advising purposefully creates a rotation of experience with new individuals, ensuring the perpetuation of a tradition of the school as a community and the passing down of informal institutional knowledge. Junior class advisor is an important extracurricular position, ensuring funds are raised for the prom and graduation. An experienced teacher shared that she handpicked her co-advisor for junior class advisor. Not only did this person live locally, which is convenient for late night after school events, but, the experienced teacher stated, "I knew she was super organized… In the years that I don't feel like being the 11th grade advisor, she could potentially get her own co-advisor in." Here, she is setting up her colleague for future success in her extracurricular task.

A guaranteed extracurricular task also means an additional guaranteed income, adding to base salaries and useful for retirement purposes. Information about the monetary value of extracurricular work is sometimes only realized by those doing the work. One teacher described seeing a change in the contract at her school: “For years we never addressed extracurriculars. But then when you got people who are on the negotiating team doing extracurriculars it became a priority and they raised the pay.” Interestingly, this teacher saw a link between teacher retention and extracurricular pay, “We have longevity pay built into our extracurriculars. Those are things as an administrator, when you're hiring a person, you need to give them reasons to stay here, to know you can make a decent living here.”

Social Norms: Whether a district is composed of 30 teachers or 3,000 teachers, “imagine that you would become a better teacher just by virtue of the fact that you are on the staff of a particular school… that is the power of social capital” (Fullan, 2011, p. 11). Those educators possessing personal mastery “often… can be found right within your own building” (Bohen, 2014, p. 3). Social capital attaches to the professional expertise of teachers within a school. The social norms perpetuated by the actions of teachers maintain school culture, community traditions, and come to serve as a component of daily life in the workplace. Just as there are norms for student behavior, there are norms for teachers’ actions, as well. Three themes that strongly emerged as rural school norms of teacher behavior are phrased in the voice of participants: “help me when I need it,” “leave me alone when things are fine,” and “avoid drama.” Norms are most often passed down from experienced teachers, for “veteran teachers are grossly underutilized. Cynicism retires, but so does wisdom” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 10). These themes were very strong across all participants, indicating the necessity of understanding how things work at one’s local school.

When a now-experienced teacher first got a position at a rural school, it came tied to a new extracurricular. The retiree whom she replaced took it on as her personal mission to support the teacher, “All I had to do was text her and she would help me.” Conversely, an experienced teacher recalled not being helped as a new teacher when she needed it. She was hired in the middle of the year and spent a few days shadowing the teacher whom she was replacing. “She told me she was retiring because she didn’t like the principal. I just smiled and nodded. The principal told me she didn’t like him, either. I remember the going away party and she was like ‘This is all an act!’ Again, smile and nod, I have no idea what I’m doing, this is my first job.” Certainly, that has shaped how this now-seasoned educator has supported her new colleagues in that same district.

Though formal mentoring structures were often viewed as a negative by participants, one new teacher gave her mentor credit for helping support her in a situation involving student safety. Thankful for the experienced teacher’s support, the new teacher said, “She really backed me up on that.” Here, the mentor did not provide novel knowledge or generate new ideas, but served to reinforce the new teacher’s belief about a situation. When a teaching staff operates under the norm of assisting each other, even after retirement, it elevates the entire staff.

A new teacher who is the only teacher in her department resented being put together with other “elective” departments for professional development. She, as was the case with the majority of participants, did not feel isolated in a smaller school, but enjoyed how these schools “give you a little autonomy and control. We don't have to do the same thing. There's no competition. I’m glad that is not a thing.” It is important to note that while this teacher did not feel isolated, she did enjoy independence. Teachers at rural schools often do not have to share

their classrooms. One new teacher even disclosed, “I kind of have my own wing, so if I don't want to see anybody, I don't really have to. I stay away from the teacher’s lounge — not good!”

Across the career spectrum, a desire to avoid drama and intrigue characterized these 27 rural teachers. An experienced teacher reflected on the current tensions in his school where new teachers are asking, “Why should I have to walk? Why don’t I have a parking spot?” If they could know how we had it 31 years ago! Now I look at it as… one hand washes the other. The new teachers, I don't think they get that, and I think it's more than just… [sigh…]”. This teacher does not approve of the battles new teachers are taking on.

A new teacher coaches a girls’ sports team. One of the athletes on her team is a colleague’s daughter. Drama has manifested for this new teacher in many ways, “The girls will just come into my room anytime and I tell them, No! I’m in the middle of teaching...’ the main problem is one of the other teacher’s daughters. That’s why I’m not coaching next year.” The hassle of the athletes interrupting her instructional time and the inability effectively to manage a situation with a colleague’s daughter has presented her with an untenable situation. What is the responsibility of the administration in this situation? I wonder if this teacher will ever step back into a coaching role. If not, this young professional is missing out on a positive part of the rural school experience, for every teacher is a necessary part of the rural school community. I fear this district may have forever lost this individual in terms of extracurricular advisement.

Discussion, Implications, Conclusions

Manifestations of social capital (Coleman, 1988) shared by participants in this study present an opportunity to consider long-standing educational practices that, in fact, may stymie teachers’ development of social capital and serve to weaken the profession overall. Institutional-based rituals to express appreciation can enhance school culture. Participant stories revealed a lack of mechanisms to communicate their concerns either to supervisors or co-workers. The ability to speak about shared responsibilities in extracurricular co-advising situations can be extended to inclusion and other classroom formats when multiple educators are in a room at the same time. Annual attention is given to updating handbooks in schools, but more informal ways of information dissemination must be attended to, as well, including classroom placement and free periods held in common among colleagues. Formalized mentoring systems warrant scrutiny for their complicity in sustaining systems that are unresponsive to the specialized needs of new teachers. Encouraging and cultivating a culture of assistance and cooperation, rather than competition among colleagues will provide a rich harvest of social capital for both individual and large-group structures. Reconfiguring practices that force mentoring interactions into a system of sharing concerns with more experienced colleagues is a way schools may endorse the value of, in the words of this study’s participants, being “left alone.” Certainly, some teachers may seek this alone time as an act of resistance against workplace drama and intrigue; but interrogating the practices of our institutions can serve to ensure our schools are places where teachers at all phases of their careers are growing in both their pedagogical capacity and their social capital.

The potential of teachers’ social capital has far-reaching impacts in both the policy arena and higher education. Currently, half of teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017), demonstrating the insufficiency of existing systems of support for current practices. Talk of teacher burnout and turnover should be replaced in the policy arena by methods that harness social capital. As new teachers are prepared for the workplace, attention must be given to fostering at all stages of their career a coalition

mentality with their future colleagues. New teachers will have extensive interactions with experienced teachers, many of whom are formidable fixtures in the power structure of their schools, as seen in the data presented here. Fostering a coalition mentality also helps teachers view their profession and the social capital they gain as something to "benefit all those who are part of such a structure" (Coleman, 1988, p. S116), for the greater good of the school and its students.

In the K-12 workplace, there are actions that can be taken to strengthen social capital. Classroom placement should be considered. Are there opportunities for a grassroots examination of the building's layout by teachers? Are there changes that need to be made as the individuals and the spaces within the building are "defined, redefined, and altered" (Abowitz, 2000, p.95) throughout their careers? While mentoring is mandated for new teachers, veteran teachers also can benefit from mentoring (Danielson, 2002), especially with incorporating new technologies into their instruction. Classroom coaching by experienced teachers can be a valuable part of the training of new teachers. Having an experienced teacher available for real-time assistance, similar to an "office hours" situation throughout the school day may give new teachers regular access to timely support. Increased oversight, particularly for extracurricular duties, including check-ins and monitoring for accountability (especially in co-advising situations) would have remedied some of the situations presented in the data. Professional development that permits the use of collegial "affinity groups" around shared, non-educational interests would also build social capital among teachers.

Specifically in rural New York, this study piques the sociological imagination for different types of mentoring. Perhaps a regional mentorship structure through BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) would be responsive to content-area needs, while in-district mentoring would transmit information specific to a district's institutional knowledge and localized norms. Finally, supporting teachers at all stages of their career must be considered. In rural New York State, retirees often stay near where they worked; public service pensions account for 4-6% of county economies (DiNapoli, 2022). K-12 schools should look to utilize the full continuum of teachers' social capital, including that of pre- and post-service teachers. By bringing attention to the extant systems that teachers work in and through, we can ensure educators at every stage of their career have the tools and support they need to provide a high-quality education to their students.

Collegial relations affect every aspect of teachers' work. For lasting, effective change in our schools, it is imperative "…that policymakers and schools… enable teachers rather than developing policies that provoke active resistance from the very people who are expected to implement them" (Mehta, 2013, p. 29). Mandates are often "ineffective because they fail to get at changing the day-to-day culture of school systems" (Fullan, 2011, p. 8). The ones who create the daily school culture — the teachers — should be encouraged to grow as people and professionals. They also should enjoy informal collegiality, as well as have a chance to grow from formal, purposeful, carefully designed opportunities for collaboration as a natural outgrowth of working together. Fullan (2011) views social capital as a driver for educational reform. When "there is commonality of purpose, a shared vision, and understanding of how to complement one another's efforts" (Senge, 2006, p. 217) through the obligations and expectations, information channels, and social norms that influence teachers' daily work, then the social capital of teachers will be harnessed and can be used as an ingredient in the recipe for genuine educational reform.

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