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Teaching-focused social networks among college faculty : exploring conditions for the development of social capital / Ross J. Benbow ; Changhee Lee

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Abstract

Scholars have long recognized that teachers' social interactions play an important role in their learning and professional development. Still, while a growing body of research shows that teaching-focused social ties can give precollege educators access to valuable information, knowledge, and advice—or “social capital”—that improves professional practice and student learning, empirical, mixed methods studies on the phenomenon in the higher education sector are rare, and few investigate what conditions are necessary for these social ties to develop among college instructors. Focusing on college faculty in 17 associate- and baccalaureate-level institutions in one U.S. city, this study uses survey and interview data to explore the connections between structural and positional educator characteristics and the “social networks,” or compilations of social ties, in which faculty reported discussing teaching. Regression analyses of survey responses (n=?244) indicate that fewer years of teaching experience, the time faculty take preparing to teach, discipline, and institution type are correlated with social network dimensions linked to improved professional practice. An inductive

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analysis of interview data from a subset of faculty (n=?22) supplements survey findings with descriptions of how teaching experience, organizational support, and other factors constrain and reinforce the development of teaching-focused social ties. Results confirm and extend prior research indicating that the development of teaching-focused social networks and the accrual of ties linked to social capital demand faculty and organizational investment. Findings also suggest that leaders hoping to foster beneficial ties should tailor instructional initiatives to more closely align with faculty experience and time commitments. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Benbow, Ross J., E-Mail: rjbenbow@wisc.edu