Title: Social Network Analysis for Educational Research and School Administration

Period: 4-day workshop

Guest Lecturer: Rebecca H. Woodland, Ph.D. Associate Professor of Educational Leadership & Associate Director Center for Educational Policy, University of Massachusetts Amherst

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a methodological approach that enables the mathematical examination of relationships between people, organizations, and/or other actors. It has emerged as an important tool for empirically examining and improving teacher and administrator networks and diffusion of innovation in a range of educational settings. Up to date, SNA training in the German Speaking countries is mostly focused on political and social studies. This workshop highlights new opportunities of applying SNA in educational research and investigating more traditional social science research questions by combining SNA data with models of statistical inference. Through SNA educational leaders can better understand how the relationships between actors (e.g. students, teachers, administrators, specialists, organizations) support and restrain instructional innovation and the quality and pace of school reform, and educational initiatives.

Most of us intuitively recognize the value and role that relationships play in our lives. Certainly, we sense that the direction, speed and depth of desired educational change are somehow mediated by the structure of the social ties between people and groups. Educators tacitly recognize that educational change initiatives and how children fare in school rest to a great degree on the patterns and dynamics of communication between people. However, to more fully understand how ties between people correlate with instructional innovation and student learning, sophisticated methods for examining the dynamics of social networks are needed.

In this course we will investigate the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of SNA, how SNA has been used in a range of educational contexts to examine formal and advice-seeking networks among teachers, staff, and administrators, and how SNA findings have been used by educational leaders to reduce teacher isolationism, promote efficient communication, and increase system capacity for instructional innovation. Challenges associated with SNA for educational evaluation and school improvement are also discussed. Students will devise and carry out a small-scale research project through which they examine social networks of interest using SNA data collection and analysis techniques using such tools as ©NodeExcel, ©Socioworks and ©Visualyzer.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to...

- understand the methods and interpret the findings of peer-reviewed SNA educational research
- recognize the key differences between SNA and more predominant forms of social science research that tend to consider individuals as independent and astructural and treat their distinguishing attributes (e.g. gender, race, age, social class, etc.) with causational or correlational power
- understand social capital theory and how networks constrain and support an individual’s access to the resources that a person does not own, but to which she/he has access to through one or more networks
- understand diffusion of innovation theory and how networks constrain and support the pace, direction, and speed of school reform
- devise and carry out a small-scale research project through which they examine how one or more networks constrain and/or support diffusion of innovation or social capital in an educational setting
- collect, generate, and analysis SNA data using software programs such as ©NodeExcel, ©Socioworks and ©Visualyzer.
- understand and investigate different network types such as ego- and whole networks
- recognize ways that SNA data can be used in conjunction with traditional statistical analyses to examine correlations and relationships between network measures and other variables of interest.

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