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## Finding the Connectors and Catalysts: A Book Review of The Networked Teacher: How New Teachers Build Social Networks for Professional Support by Kira J. Baker-Doyle

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## An On-line Journal for Teacher Research

Finding the Connectors and Catalysts: A Book Review of *The Networked Teacher: How New Teachers Build Social Networks for Professional Support* by Kira J. Baker-Doyle

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Baker-Doyle, K.J. (2011). *The networked teacher: How new teachers build social networks for professional support*. New York: Economic Policy Institute and Teachers College.

Kira J. Baker-Doyle opens an important conversation about the support new teachers need to thrive in their first years of teaching with her book *The Networked Teacher: How New Teachers Build Social Networks for Professional Support*. Few would argue that the first years of teaching are the most stressful, with statistics indicate that about 50% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Some schools and districts provide mentoring programs or new teacher professional development, but Baker-Doyle argues that these traditional programs fail to support new teachers, and especially new teachers of the millennial generation (people who were children between 1990-2000). Traditional support programs tend to re-enforce teacher isolation and the assigned, inflexible curriculum and authoritative policies of the school. Taking a reformed perspective, Baker-Doyle argues that teachers' work is social and their praxis evolves through interaction with their colleagues and when teachers' own questions and professional agency are valued. In her words, "To be a Networked Teacher is to be a person who understands the theory and research behind social networks and puts this knowledge into action" (p. 1). Although many tend to think of social networks as something on the internet, the focus of this study is mostly on the face-to-face networks that new teachers develop. It is Baker-Doyle's aim that this book will "help new teachers take active, informed stances in developing support networks" (p. 78).

Based on case studies of four new teachers, the first three chapters set up the study with a basic literature review of social network research and social capital. In addition, Baker-Doyle describes her two frameworks of analysis: The continuum of teacher support, which flows from a traditional perspective to a reformed perspective; and a social network perspective on new teachers' personal networks of support including intentional professional networks and diverse professional allies. Most new teachers seek help during their first year from other teachers in the building, often for lesson planning, classroom management issues, or collaborative projects. The group of professionals the new teacher *chooses* to collaborate and interact with to solve professional problems, according to Baker-Doyle, is the teachers' intentional professional networks. However, new teachers may also find support from non-teachers, such as parents, students, volunteers or community members, which Baker-Doyle calls

diverse professional allies. In this study, particular classroom students were often the catalysts for the teachers' re-examination of their practices and a development of connections to the broader community provided a sense of understanding and support for the new teachers. The author also believes the needs of millennial new teachers are different than new teachers in the past. In brief, millennial new teachers need support with a reformed perspective that includes continuing, collaborative work focused on their individualized particular needs and a balanced and strategic use of both intentional professional networks and diverse professional allies.

The cases of the four new teachers are the focus of chapters four through six. First, Baker-Doyle uses the continuum of teacher support to analyze the culture of each of the schools. Although the support for new teachers ranges from nearly none to assigned mentors, co-teaching and organized professional development meetings, each school was focused on raising test scores and had a lack of genuine teacher inquiry, which locates these schools in the traditional perspective for new teacher support. This frustrates each of the four teachers to various degrees. However, some of the new teachers overcame the frustration of the traditional supports through their use of their intentional professional networks (chapter five) and the development of diverse professional allies (chapter six). In reading the cases of Michael, Maria, Susan and Steven, I was reminded of my own first years and observing the initiations of new faculty at schools where I've taught. A lack of time, curriculum pacing and planning, the pressures of testing, and administrative demands are all part of the profession, but some teachers handle these challenges better than others. The reason for their prosperity, according to Baker-Doyle, are the support networks that new teachers cultivate with administrators, teachers, parents, volunteers, students, and community members.

Cultivation of professional networks is key, but few schools of education help pre-service teachers identify and construct their own networks. In chapter seven, Baker-Doyle provides several recommendations to help new teachers become active and conscious about the development of their networks. Some are directed specifically at new teachers, such as identifying professional needs, mapping possible networks, taking action to reach out to people, and identifying the connectors within

the networks who will provide the most access. Others are directed at school leaders and teacher educators who have a role in supporting new teacher networking through providing models and access to various networks, time to collaborate, and providing improved mentoring opportunities.

Recognizing that new teachers are notoriously short of time, Baker-Doyle has written a short book of about 90 pages. The introductory chapters may alienate new teachers, with a choppy literature review of social network research, social capital and her frameworks, but these same features will appeal to teacher educators and academics. For new teachers, the case studies of the four teacher will resonate and chapter seven will offer hope. For new teachers looking for support in developing their networks, the appendices contain valuable tools providing strategies, mapping tools and diagrams, and a

very brief description of collaborative technologies. In addition, throughout the book there are "Networking Tips" that provide activities through <http://www.thenetworkedteacher.com/>. However, the website is not easy to navigate and the graphing program is difficult to use, features that I hope will be strengthened in the future. Recently, the website had also added links to Facebook and Twitter (#networkedteacherchat). Although Baker-Doyle's focus is on new teachers, there are many relevant lessons for veteran teachers. In addition, this book should be required reading for school leaders who are supporting new teachers.

#### References:

Smith, T. M. & Ingersoll, R.M. (2004). What are the effects of induction and mentoring on beginning teacher turnover? *American Educational Research Journal*, 41 (3), 682-714