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## Stronger Together: A Case for Team Teaching in the Elementary School Setting

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**Stronger Together: A Case for Team Teaching in the Elementary School Setting**

by

Jenna Christine Degan

A culminating thesis submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

San Rafael, CA

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## **Abstract**

The focus of this study was to determine the impact of team teaching on teacher efficacy, burnout, and student engagement in an elementary school setting. Few if any studies have examined the relationship between team teaching and feelings of efficacy and burnout with elementary school teachers. The purpose of this study was to determine if team teaching was a viable and workable approach for teachers in the elementary school settings to develop teacher efficacy, avoid burnout, and increase student engagement. This study utilized a qualitative methodology to collect data from three participants who were team teaching at the same elementary school who were interviewed twice. Participants were also observed during a team teaching lesson. As a result of team teaching, whereby they modeled collaboration, demonstrated how to build and maintain relationships, and learned together, teachers felt more effective, energized, and excited to teach their students, thereby curbing burnout and increasing student engagement. This study found that team teaching at this site increased school wide collaboration and led to a stronger school community.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Can elementary school teachers ever feel like they are caught up, like they have a handle on everything that is required of them? New strategies and curriculum are frequently added to their list of things to do. On top of that, they are required to be experts in every subject, from science and math, to social studies and teaching students to read, to social and emotional learning and physical education. It is daunting and at times overwhelming. In fact, the California Teachers Association (2018) reports that 20% of new teachers leave the profession within their first three years of teaching.

The workload of an elementary school teacher can be crushing. In an interview, participant Ashley spoke about how her workload had her reconsidering her career choice to be a teacher. She went on to explain that she did not know how much longer she could sustain teaching on her own because of the workload. She never felt like she was caught up, there was always something hanging over her head.

How might elementary educators confront these many responsibilities laid upon them while maintaining feelings of efficacy and avoiding burnout? Social Capital Theory has some insights. For the purpose of this research, Social Capital is defined as the positive relationships between members of a group that enables those members to trust each other, share resources, and collaborate. (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bakker, Leenders, Gabbay, Kratzer, & Van Engelen, 2006; Johnson, 2013; Koniordos, 2016; Moolenaar, Slegers, & Daly, 2012) Social capital at a school site is required to develop and maintain a collaborative culture.



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A collaborative culture is facilitated by the administration of a school site. In order to be successful, however, administration must provide yearlong professional development on collaboration, as well as the time for teachers to collaborate (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2011; Magiera, 2006). They must also allow teachers to choose to collaborate so that they have buy in, rather than creating a top-down mandate that forces everyone to work together (Cook & Friend, 1991; Magiera, 2006; Shakenova, 2017; Sutton & Shouse, 2016; Van Droogenbroeck, 2014). Without collaborative culture, which is made possible by strong social capital, team teaching would not be a viable strategy for educators looking to increase self-efficacy, curb burnout, or increase student engagement.

Much of scholarship generally reports positively on the process of collaboration. According to Shakenova (2017), however, collaboration in education could lead to complacency and conformism among educators. Collaboration can also be disadvantageous when it is mandated by administration, and if teachers are not given time to actually collaborate (Cook & Friend, 1991; Dutta & Shaney, 2016; Haghghi & Abdollahi, 2014; Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2011; Magiera et al., 2006; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Shakenova, 2017; Sutton & Shouse, 2016). Teachers must be given the power to choose to collaborate in order for collaboration to be successful. Furthermore, teachers may also have feelings of nervousness or anxiety if made to work with a colleague whom they do not respect or trust (Damore & Murray 2009). For these reasons, strong social capital at a school site is a prerequisite to collaboration.

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While collaboration is a heavily researched topic, research on team teaching in elementary schools has primarily focused on partnering general education and special education teachers. Reeves, Wik Hung Pun, and Kyung Sun Chung (2017) found that when working together, teachers are more likely to take risks in the classroom and that collaboration between teachers increases student achievement (Friend, 2015; Friend, Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Research has also shown that when teachers collaborate, it curbs feelings of isolation thereby deterring burnout. This collaboration therefore creates feelings of self-efficacy among these educators (Moolenaar et al. 2012; Reeves et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Although research on team teaching involving two general education teachers in elementary schools has been limited, different types of team teaching strategies have been thoroughly explored. There are many teaching strategies that fall under the umbrella of collaborative teaching. They are team teaching, one teach/one observe, one teach/one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, and alternative teaching (Friend 2015; Friend et al., 2010; Mavropalias, 2016). For the purpose of this study, team teaching is defined as two general education teachers who bring their classes together to teach curriculum, whole class, and simultaneously.

While existing research has explored types of team teaching, its effects on students, and effective collaborative practices, few if any studies have thoroughly examined the elementary-level general education team teaching. This study explores, through the lens of social capital and collaborative culture, the experience of general education teachers at one school site who currently bring their classrooms together to

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team teach curriculum, and how that might affect teacher efficacy, burnout, and perceived student engagement.

### **Significance of the Study**

Team teaching is something that is new for many teachers. Some teachers and the general public may feel apprehensive to try team teaching in the elementary classroom for a variety of reasons. First, finding a fitting partner to team teach with could create anxiety for some. What if someone whom I do not trust or feel comfortable with asks to be my partner? What if someone I ask to team teach with turns me down? These are valid questions and concerns. That being said, if there is a strong collaborative culture and social capital at a school site, those concerns may not be as abundant (Moolenaar et al., 2012). Further, education has gone through many drastic changes recently. Teachers are just now feeling comfortable with Common Core. Why would they want to try something new when they have just gotten used to the new standards and the expectations that go along with them? This “something new” (team teaching) may be a strategy that will help them share the load of all the other new responsibilities placed upon them. Studies show that when teachers collaborate, they are less overwhelmed by their workload (Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend et al., 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Another key factor that could make or break the transition to team teaching for educators is the presence of continual professional development centered around collaborative practices at school sites. Many teachers report that they do not feel confident in their collaboration skills (Damore & Murray, 2009). For this reason,

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professional development in this area is beneficial. Who wants to try something in which they do not feel they could be successful? Further, research has found that teachers respond to professional development more when their trusted colleagues lead it (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Sutton & Shouse, 2016). To make this professional development more meaningful, administration could invite staff members who do feel confident in their collaboration skills to lead the professional development for their school site and peers.

My goals for this study are educational. I want to show my colleagues a different instructional strategy so that they may try it. I do not want this research on team teaching to turn into something that my colleagues are mandated to do by the administration as top-down mandates are generally not responded to well (Sutton & Shouse, 2016). I hope to make it an intriguing option for them to explore in their classrooms together, when they deem it is convenient for them to try. If they are given the power to choose to try team teaching themselves, it will be a more meaningful experience (Cook & Friend, 1991; Dutta & Shaney, 2016; Magiera et al., 2006; Shakenova, 2017; and Sutton & Shouse, 2016), and hopefully, a more successful process.

This study is also significant for teachers and administrators at other school sites who would like to implement a team teaching program at their school. There is no research on team teaching between general education elementary school teachers for the purpose of exploring its connection to efficacy and burnout. As the aim of this study is to explore a possible strategy for teachers to use that may curb burnout and increase

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self-efficacy, it is relevant to the administration, as administrators are central to the success of the team teaching strategy. If an administrator is interested in increasing collaboration at his or her school site, this research provides relevant information for implementation. This research benefits the school site as it provides the principal of an elementary school in a suburb of San Francisco with insight into the effects of a teaching strategy through the perspective of her staff. Further, it provides the staff at that same school, who has not yet attempted to team teach, with an insight into the experiences of their colleagues and their opinions and perceptions of the teaching strategy.

This study is also meaningful for students. When there are two teachers who have different teaching styles and strengths in different curriculum areas, more students are likely to benefit (Witcher & Feng, 2010). This makes the classroom a more equitable learning environment for students with different learning needs, as different teaching styles and strategies lend themselves to certain intelligences. When there is more than one teaching style or strategy, more students can be reached. Furthermore, with two teachers in the classroom, it is possible to deliver explicit individualized instruction to students with specific learning needs (IEP, ELL, Gifted, or students who exhibit limited understanding of the curriculum), while still delivering instruction to the class as a whole. One teacher could pull a small group of students to deliver the necessary explicit instruction needed, while the other can continue to teach to the whole group. The team teaching method is a strategy that can allow teachers to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms.

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The research site for this study was a public elementary school located in a wealthy suburb of the San Francisco school district. There were approximately 700 students enrolled in the TK-4th grade elementary school. Class sizes typically averaged between 18-24 students. Teachers at the school site were predominantly Caucasian women (Ed-Data, 2018).

### **Summary of Methodology**

Interviews and observations were used as the primary modes for data collection in this study. One third grade teacher, one second grade teacher, and the art teacher took part in two hour long interviews. All teachers who were interviewed have experienced team teaching and were currently team teaching during this study. Teachers in a second grade classroom and a third grade classroom were observed as team teaching was occurring in order to set up context for the second interview.

Throughout this study, I collaborated with the members of my third grade team who were participating in this research with me by attempting team teaching with the science curriculum this year. I also collaborated with the art teacher who is interested in integrating arts into the third grade curriculum, and second grade teachers who were using the team teaching strategy in their classrooms. These relationships have been established at our school site as I see these women daily during the workweek. Power dynamics in the research relationship and subjectivity were discussed with participants as a part of this process. I made clear to the participants that it was okay if they decided team teaching was not a strategy that they would like to continue with. I did not want

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them to feel pressure from me to continue this instructional strategy if it did not work for them.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study found that team teaching at one school site created a stronger collaborative school community within that site. Through the process of team teaching, teachers modeled collaboration to their colleagues and students, demonstrated how to establish and maintain relationships with their colleagues as well as learn from their colleagues. Although a collaborative community is needed to support team teaching, this study found that team teaching can also help maintain and grow a collaborative community. There is a reciprocal relationship between the two. Team teaching and a school site having a strong collaborative community rely upon each other to be effective.

The implications of this study are significant for elementary educators. Team teaching allows teachers to share the workload of administrative tasks, planning, and the delivery of curriculum. Though, those who do not team teach could argue that the shared workload that comes with team teaching makes working conditions between teachers at the same school site inequitable. To rectify this imbalance, school site could allow teacher to opt in or out of this teaching strategy. School sites could also provide extra aide time for teachers who choose to opt out of team teaching.

Team teaching as a strategy to deliver curriculum also comes with some needs. Teachers who are team teaching need shared planning time embedded in their schedules as well as a shared space to teach. Further, professional development that

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focuses on collaboration would be advantageous so that teachers' collaborative skills continue to grow.



## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Collaboration between teachers can curb burnout by eliminating physical and psychological isolation (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Vanroelen, 2014). Further, when collaboration is focused on students' learning needs, it increases student achievement (Witcher & Feng, 2010), thereby increasing self- and collective efficacy among teachers (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Team teaching is a method of collaboration between teachers that can curb burnout, boost teacher efficacy, and increased perceived student achievement. However, in order for team teaching to work, teachers need strong social capital in order to facilitate a collaborative culture.

In what follows, I will first detail the types of collaborative teaching that presently are used in schools so that team teaching can be defined. Second, I will explore Social Capital Theory in order to identify its elements that are crucial for teachers to successfully team teach. Third, I will examine collaborative culture to provide the reader with an insight into how to create and maintain collaborative culture as well as an understanding of its importance at school sites. Finally, I will review prior research on teacher efficacy to explain the connection between teacher efficacy, strong social capital, and student engagement.

### **Types of Collaborative Teaching**

Historically, in the 1950's, team teaching looked different from what it is today. It was a strategy used in the college setting. The expert teacher from a department

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would teach all students in a lecture format. Then, students would break into groups, led by other teachers in the department, for discussions and classwork based on the lesson. Now, team teaching has evolved to be two teachers bringing two classes together and delivering instruction simultaneously (Friend et al., 2010).

The research thus far on collaborative teaching has focused on differentiation for special needs students and collaboration between special education and general education teachers. Within these studies, many types of collaborative teaching strategies between special education and general education teachers have been examined. Those strategies are team teaching, one teach/one observe, one teach/one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and (Friend, 2015; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; and Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016).

One teach/one observe is a strategy where two teachers are in one classroom. As one teacher delivers instruction, the other observes the students. The observer gathers data on the students in regards to behavior, academics, and social interactions. The observer can focus on the whole group, or selected students. (Friend et al., 2010). This method allows the observer to manage students who might be off task, identify students who are struggling or need a challenge, and determine how engaging the lesson may be.

One teach/one assist is a strategy where one teacher delivers the instruction to the whole group. As the instruction is delivered, the second teacher walks about the room to offer individualized help to the students to present the need (Friend et al., 2010).

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Station teaching is very similar to classrooms that use centers for instruction. The difference is that there are two credentialed teachers who lead the stations. The class is broken up into three groups. Two of those groups are delivered instruction by teachers. The third group works independently (Friend et al., 2010).

Parallel teaching involves splitting a class in half, based on their students' academic needs. Each of the two teachers takes one of the groups and delivers instruction simultaneously. It is a way to differentiate for the students in the classroom (Friend et al., 2010).

Alternative teaching is another method of instruction that differentiates for students in a classroom. With this strategy, one teacher delivers instruction to a majority of the class. The second teacher takes a small group to teach. This small group may be learning the same material as the rest of their class, or they could experience pre-teaching, re-teaching, or delivering enrichment.

This study will focus on the collaborative teaching strategy called team teaching. For the purpose of this study, team teaching is defined as two credentialed teachers who bring their two classrooms together to deliver instruction simultaneously. The team teachers work together as they each interject to add more detail, and manage the classroom and behavior. Delivering instruction is a balancing act where both educators take the lead. According to Haghghi and Abdollahi (2014), in order for team teaching to be effective, teachers need shared responsibility, time to plan with each other, trust and respect between partners, support from administration, and strong behavior management skills.

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### **Social Capital Theory**

For the purpose of this research, Social Capital is defined as the positive relationships between members of a group that facilitates those members trusting each other, sharing resources, and collaborating. (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bakker, Leenders, Gabbay, Kratzer, & Van Engelen, 2006; Johnson, 2013; Koniordos, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Research suggests that strong social capital positively affects interpersonal relationships and facilitates trust and support, which leads to collective- and self-efficacy.

To teach collaboratively, there must be a strong sense of social capital at a school site in order for it to be successful. Strong social capital helps facilitate the collaborative culture needed for teachers to have the desire to work together, openly share their resources, and trust each other enough to open up their classrooms, share their students, and be in the vulnerable position of being watched by a colleague as they teach (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bakker et al., 2006; Haghighi & Abdollahi, 2014; Johnson, 2013; Koniordos, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012). These positive relationships are required in order to work well collaborating with colleagues, and in order to support each other inside the classroom.

Positive relationships and peer support are true consequences of social capital. According to previous research, when there is strong social capital amongst colleagues, they are more likely to have positive relationships, support each other, and share resources. (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bakker et al., 2006; Koniordos, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Bakker et al. (2006) argue that social capital is central to a group's ability to work

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towards a common goal. Adler and Kwon (2002) define social capital as “good will that is engendered by the fabric of social relations and that can be mobilized to facilitate action.” For the purpose of this research, that “action” is educators in the elementary school setting trusting each other, sharing resources, and collaborating. Adler and Kwon (2002) argue that strong social capital creates positive relationships and creates solidarity between members of a group.

Trust is deeply connected to maintaining strong social capital within a group. “[It] is a strong prediction of cooperation.” (Johnson, 2013). Social capital within a group is required in order to have trust between members of that group, which will lead to cooperation between those members (Johnson, 2013 and Koniordos, 2016). For teachers to be willing to share their resources, cooperate in teaching, and open up their classrooms to each other, trust between them is compulsory (Haghighi & Abdollahi, 2014).

Without trust, the cooperation and sharing of resources that are necessary for team teaching to be successful does not exist. This lack of trust and social capital not only makes team teaching ineffective, but it could lead to adversity in the workplace. If a teacher is made to team teach with a colleague that they do not trust or get along with (a strong sense of social capital), the team is bound for failure.

It is the responsibility of administration to give teachers the power to choose if they would like to collaboratively teach, and if so, who they would like to teach with (Sutton & Shouse, 2016). Many teachers may feel vulnerable or apprehensive at the

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thought of inviting their colleagues into their classroom while they teach. This could be because according to Damore and Murray (2009), “teachers perceive themselves to be slightly below average in terms of their competence in collaboration skills.” (p. 235).

Teachers are already their own hardest critics, so inviting others into their classroom can be scary. This is why a strong sense of social capital, creating trust, is so crucial to collaborative teaching to be an option for teachers.

**Isolation.** Social capital is directly linked to successful collaboration and team teaching. Teaching can be an isolating profession. Teachers who work at a site without strong social capital are at risk of feelings of isolation. Researchers have found that in the United States, teachers felt stronger job satisfaction when they visited colleagues’ classrooms and when they planned instruction together. It is also argued that collaboration can rectify feelings of isolation amongst teachers which increases job satisfactions and can lead to less turnover (Reeves, Hung Pun, & Sun Chung, 2017). Teaching is a physically isolating profession. Teachers are cornered off into their own classrooms and often do not have the daily opportunity to check in or collaborate with their colleagues. Furthermore, at many sites, there is not time scheduled into the school day for teachers to check in or plan with each other (McCarthy et al., 2009). Without that check in time, isolation can occur.

Isolation can lead to feelings of depersonalization which can contribute to burnout (McCarthy et al., 2009). For the purpose of this research, depersonalization is defined as “the development of negative, unfeeling, callous, and cynical attitudes toward students and the school environment.” (McCarthy et al., 2009). When there is

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strong social capital at a school site, teachers are more likely to reach out to each other during the school day, leading to less isolation in the profession. Not only that, but if teachers at school sites choose to teach collaboratively, this requires them to spend more time together as they need to plan and reflect. Furthermore, it eliminates physical isolation from the equation. Teaching collaboratively facilitates connection with colleagues thereby regulating any feelings of depersonalization.

### **Collaborative Culture**

Collaborative culture at a school site is made possible by a strong social capital. For the purpose of this research, collaboration is defined as “direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal.” (Cook & Friend, 1991, p. 6).

The idea of collaborative culture is similar to voluntary interaction in collaboration for the purpose of working toward a common goal using shared decision-making, and applies it to an entire school site, including administration and staff. Previous research shows that a collaborative culture requires administrative support so that time to collaborate is built into teachers’ schedules and the tools to collaborate are readily available for teachers. Planning time, minimal scheduling conflicts, administrative support, and professional development in collaboration are all crucial components of a school site developing and maintaining a collaborative culture (Damore & Murray, 2009 and Walther-Thomas, 1997). Further, collaborative culture is necessary for team teaching to occur.

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There are several requirements that must be in place to create a collaborative culture at a school site. First, it is imperative that teachers have administrative support that actively fosters teacher collaboration. Many teachers admit that they believe their collaborative skills are lacking (Damore & Murray, 2009). Therefore, it is the responsibility of administrators to provide professional development on collaboration that continues throughout the school year in order to develop and maintain a collaborative culture at their school site (Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Madigan, 2011; Sutton & Shouse, 2016). Teachers are more likely to feel confident in collaborating if they have access to the support needed to hone in on those skills.

One way to ensure that teachers have buy-in during professional development in collaboration is for administration to ask a well-respected staff member(s) who is an expert in the subject to lead the charge. Sutton and Shouse (2016) argue that schools should utilize staff who are experts in different areas, like collaboration, to run professional development and trainings. Teachers are more likely to apply what they learn from their colleagues in the classroom, rather than a paid outsider, because it feels more meaningful. Furthermore, when administrators encourage their staff to lead professional development, it involves teachers in the decision-making processes for their school site. This is a clear example of collaborative culture.

It is critical that administration involve teachers in the decision-making processes for their schools. Teachers need the ability to choose to collaborate rather than being told to. It creates a feeling of buy-in. (Cook & Friend, 1991; Magiera et al., 2006; Shakenova, 2017; Sutton & Shouse, 2016; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). Additionally,



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involving teachers in the decision-making process at a school site, rather than creating top-down mandates, facilitates collaborative culture. Teachers are more likely to collaborate when they have made the decision to do so themselves (Magiera et al., 2006). Sutton and Shouse (2016) argue that teachers find “top-down mandates” from administrators “irrelevant” and “inauthentic.” The best way to foster a collaborative culture is to involve teachers in curriculum planning and school improvement. This means that teachers must have the power to choose to team teach in order for them to put their best effort into it.

Another requirement necessary to create a collaborative culture at a school is time. Time must be built into teachers’ schedules so that team teachers are able to plan and prep lessons and reflect on those lessons together (Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2011 and Magiera et al., 2006). That built in time is the responsibility of the administration at a school site. It is yet another way that administrative support is crucial in developing and maintaining a collaborative culture.

In the existing research on teacher collaboration, one of the most common complaints for teachers who attempt to collaborate or team teach is lack of time. Lack of time to plan with each other, lack of time to reflect on the lessons together, and lack of time built into their work day schedules in order to meet and collaborate (Damore & Murray, 2009 and Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Collaborative teaching requires teachers to spend more purposeful planning time with their colleagues than they would traditionally. To successfully teach a lesson as a team, teachers must have time to plan together (Haghighi & Abdollahi, 2014). They

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must discuss how to best meet the needs of their students, what standards they want to teach and how. Significant planning goes into lessons when there is one teacher delivering curriculum to their own classroom. The same goes for collaborative teaching, but a new element is added. Who will deliver what instruction and how? Extra time is needed to decide this. Furthermore, time is required to reflect upon lessons after delivery. Teachers must ask themselves which students demonstrated understanding and which didn't. They should ask themselves about the level of student engagement and how they felt about the lesson as well. In order to successfully teach collaboratively, time is a crucial factor for teachers.

### **Teacher Efficacy**

Previous research shows that teacher efficacy is increased when teachers collaborate as it rectifies feelings of isolation. Consequently, collaboration curbs burnout as isolation is a key contributing factor. Studies have also found that when teachers use collaboration, there is a direct and positive link to student achievement (Witcher & Feng, 2010). Student achievement also leads to self and collective efficacy. (Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012; Reeves et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997). This is because of collaboration. Collaboration between teachers can lead to collective efficacy which affects student achievement in a positive way. Moolenaar et al. (2012) found that when teachers work collaboratively, they feel like they are doing their job well, and they feel like they are meeting the needs of their students effectively. Moreover, when teachers feel like they are being effective, students are more likely to do well in school.

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Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) describe self-efficacy as how successful a teacher feels individually at their job. They define collective efficacy as how successful the staff as a whole feel about their job. Their research finds that the school context is a significant driving factor in self and collective efficacy. Discipline problems, lack of time, relationships with parents, limited administrative support, and lack of autonomy all lead to low feelings of efficacy. These are also factors in social capital. These low feelings of self and collective efficacy can lead to burnout. Teaching collaboratively is a viable strategy for teachers that can increase self and collective efficacy, leading to benefits for all who are touched by this collaboration.

**Burnout.** Burnout is a real threat in the teaching profession. Educators can feel burnout both psychologically and physically. The intense workload can affect self- and collective- efficacy, and energy levels. This stress can exhibit itself as muscle pain and headaches, among other symptoms (Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). The ever-increasing demands of a teacher are in the control of administration and policy makers, and out of the control of the very people who are directly affected by those decisions. How can teachers navigate through all of these policy changes and constant increases in workloads without burning out?

Burnout can occur for many reasons. The expectations of what teachers have to do are ever increasing. These growing responsibilities combined with lack of control over those responsibilities growing, can lead to teacher burnout (Damore & Murray, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2009; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) argue that teacher burnout can also be caused by intensification. That is,

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teachers' actions are controlled by policy that they are unable to control themselves.

This leads to an "ever-expanding teacher role." Not only have the standards changed to Common Core, but teachers are also expected to educate students on subjects that used to lay with the parents. For example, teachers must solve social problems and talk about drug prevention. Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) argue that while teachers' responsibilities are increasing, their control over change is limited. This lack of control over constant changes in how teachers have to do their jobs leads to low feelings of efficacy and lower job satisfaction.

To combine the ideas of Van Droogenbroeck et al. (2014) and McCarthy et al. (2009), elementary teachers often experience feelings of powerlessness and emotional exhaustion due to their "ever-expanding teacher role." They often feel that expectations for them are inconsistent. Many feel strong depersonalization. In the school setting, depersonalization is characterized as negative feelings towards students, the school, and colleagues (McCarthy et al., 2009). This is leading to teacher burnout.

When teachers collaborate, they are more likely to feel successful at their job. This feeling of efficacy curbs teacher burnout as it rectifies feelings of isolation in the profession (Moolenaar et al., 2012; Reeves et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Reeves et al. (2017) found that in the United States, teachers felt stronger job satisfaction when they visited colleagues' classrooms, and when they planned instruction together. This study also argues that collaboration can rectify feelings of isolation amongst teachers, which increases job satisfaction and can lead to less turnover.

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**Special education and general education collaboration.** Until now, the vast majority of research on team teaching at the elementary level has focused on collaboration between special and general education teachers for the purpose of differentiating instruction for students with special needs. Research finds that collaborative teaching between special and general education teachers is an effective strategy to differentiate instruction in order to meet the diverse needs of students in a general education classroom (Friend, 2015 and Friend et al., 2010). Since all classrooms have diverse learning needs, team teaching can also be effective for the partnership of two general education teachers.

Research also shows that collaborative teaching strategies between special and general education teachers lead to an increase in student achievement. An increase in student achievement leads to self and collective efficacy among teachers (Moolenaar et al., 2012). In some models, students can even have an increased amount of instructional time with their teacher, which leads to stronger student achievement. (Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012; Reeves et al., 2017; Walther-Thomas, 1997). When teachers participate in collaboration that explicitly focuses on instruction and students' needs, there is a direct and positive link to student achievement (Dutta & Sahney, 2016).

Dugan and Letterman (2008) found that there are higher retention rates, achievement levels, and displayed interpersonal skills when students are in a team teaching environment. Moreover, they found that most students preferred the team

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teaching method where two instructors are in the same room delivering instruction simultaneously.

**Student Benefits.** Friend (2015) notes that collaborative teaching is “redefining the professional relationship.” Teachers become equals who each have different strengths to bring to the classroom. When teachers teach collaboratively, they do not need to mirror the others’ strengths or styles. Rather, when teachers teach in this way, they can take advantage of their individual strengths to contribute to lessons. If one teacher is strong in math, and the other is strong in language arts, that’s the curriculum area in which they can take the lead in a team teaching classroom.

In addition to being strong in a subject area, teachers can also be more effective teaching to different intelligences because of their teaching styles (Witcher & Feng, 2010). Gardner’s Theory of multiple intelligences states that students learn in multiple ways. According to Gardner, students (or people in general) can have these types of strengths of intelligence: bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, visual-spatial, intrapersonal, naturalistic, logical-mathematical, and verbal-linguistic. Different teaching styles lend themselves to better teach to certain intelligences, making content more accessible to students. Having more than one teaching style in a classroom can meet the stylistic learning needs of more students than when there is the traditional one teacher in a classroom.

When teachers with different subject strengths and teaching styles teacher together students benefit greatly. Furthermore, as students see each teacher take the lead back and forth, they are seeing a successful model of collaboration in action. This

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can be referred to as students navigate through collaboration on projects together (Friend, 2015).

When students are in a team teaching classroom with teachers who have strong communication skills, students are more likely to develop those same skills, as they are seeing them modeled in real time. In addition to this benefit, two teachers can also offer two different perspectives or opinions on a single idea. This is extremely beneficial for students, as being exposed to multiple perspectives can further develop their critical thinking skills (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). When these opposing perspectives are presented in a respectful manner between the two teachers, it further models collaboration and how to respectfully approach others with opposing ideas.

**Learning from each other.** According to Reeves et al. (2017), teachers are more likely to take risks by trying something new in the classroom when they are collaboratively teaching. Furthermore, Bakker et al, (2006) and Cook and Friend (1991) found that teachers who have strong social capital in their group and collaborate together are more likely to share their knowledge and resources with each other. That sharing of resources, because of social capital, facilitates more learning between collaborative educators. In order to be open to learning from each other while team teaching, teachers must also share common goals, feel that their contributions are valuable and valued by their peers, and trust each other. Teachers must also share responsibility, accountability, and resources with their fellow collaborators (Cook & Friend, 1991).

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### **Conclusion**

There are many different types of collaborative teaching. Team teaching is the focus of this study. (Friend, 2015; Friend et al., 2010; Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). For the purpose of this study, team teaching is defined as two teachers bringing their classes together and delivering instruction to the group simultaneously.

In order to ensure successful team teaching, a school site must have strong social capital. Teachers must have positive relationships with each other as well as trust to be able to support each other and work with each other closely (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Bakker et al., 2006; Johnson, 2013; Koniordos, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012). If all of these elements are in play, teachers are more likely to feel job satisfaction and avoid feelings of isolation (McCarthy et al., 2009).

Creating and maintaining a collaborative culture is key to successful team teaching. Administrative support is crucial in this endeavor. Administration must provide continued professional development on collaboration, give decision making power to their staff, and embed time in teachers' schedules to plan and reflect on their lessons. (Cook & Friend, 1991; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Madigan, 2011; Magiera 2006, Shakenova, 2017; Sutton & Shouse, 2016; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014).

Collaboration between teachers leads to self-efficacy (Moolenaar et al., 2012; Reeves et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997). For this reason, collaboration should be practiced consistently. As teachers' responsibilities continue to grow, teachers begin to feel overwhelmed, isolated, and can burn out (Damore & Murray, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2009; Van Droogenbroeck et al., 2014). Team teaching is



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a strategy that can help share the load of responsibilities between colleagues.

Furthermore, team teaching facilitates teachers sharing their knowledge and trying new strategies in the classroom (Bakker et al., 2006; Cook & Friend, 1991; Reeves et al., 2017). This kind of collaboration, that has occurred mainly between special education and general education teachers, not only leads to self-efficacy and reduced teacher burnout, but also has a direct link to higher student achievement (Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Dutta & Sahney, 2016; Moolenaar et al., 2012; Reeves et al., 2017; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Witcher & Feng, 2010).

The overwhelming majority of research on Social Capital Theory, collaborative culture, and teacher efficacy supports the central premise of this research that team teaching is an excellent strategy that has many benefits for teachers and students. When there is strong social capital, then a collaborative culture can be created and maintained. Furthermore, findings from the research suggest that when team teaching is implemented successfully, that will lead to teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Overall, critiques of team teaching in the literature are few. Shakenova (2017) argues that collaboration could lead to teachers being complacent or becoming conformists. Collaboration could also be detrimental to teachers if it is led by administration, and if goals are set by someone other than the collaborators. Teachers do not respond positively to top-down mandates. They require some power over their decisions as so many choices are out of their hands.

Shakenova's (2017) research also argues that in a true, effective collaborative culture, you should be able to see collaboration daily, across activities. Collaboration

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shouldn't happen in isolation, rather it should be seen across subjects. This doesn't mean that team teaching must occur throughout all curriculum areas. Rather, this means that planning, sharing resources, and bouncing ideas off of colleagues is important for collaboration to truly be effective in the classroom and for the teacher.

Damore and Murray (2009) discuss the importance of trusting and respecting your teacher partner. Teachers with personalities that clash would not make a successful team teaching partnership. Thus, a second premise of this study is that social capital is essential to effective team teaching. Mutual respect, and trust that your partner knows what they are doing, and will not judge your teaching, management, classroom, or students is crucial. Without social capital, a team teaching partnership will not work.

Until now, research on team teaching in an elementary school setting has been limited to partnerships between general education and special education teachers for the purpose of differentiating for special education students. In this study, however, I explore partnerships between two general education teachers who bring both of their classrooms together to teach curriculum simultaneously. This study also adds to the existing body of research on team teaching by considering how team teaching affects teacher efficacy, curbs teacher burnout, and leads to increased student achievement. My hope is to encourage teachers at my school site to try team teaching the next school year. I believe that it will help teachers share responsibilities and take risks in the

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classroom, leading to self-efficacy, curbing burnout, and increasing teacher perceived student achievement.

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

The purpose of this study was to inquire into the team teaching experience(s) of a selected sample of teachers in an elementary school setting. This study sought to inquire into two main questions as follows: 1) How does team teaching affect teacher efficacy and mitigate teacher burnout in one elementary school site? 2) How do team teaching practices contribute to student engagement, as perceived by the teacher?

#### **Description and Rationale**

This phenomenological study used interviews and observations to collect qualitative data. A phenomenological study examines the shared experiences of participants as described by the participants (Seidman, 2013). The primary purpose of this study was to inquire into the lived experiences of a select sample of teachers who utilized team teaching in their classrooms. A phenomenological approach was best suited for this study since it enabled the collection and examination of detailed data obtained through a qualitative interviews and observations. Phenomenological inquiry permits the in depth interviewing of participants in order to understand the meaning of their experience as represented in their own words (Seidman, 2013). Semi-structured interviews also provided the opportunity to ask follow up questions of the participants, thus providing a deeper and more valid understanding of their experience. Participant observations of team teaching were used to provide more contextual data to complement the semi-structured interviews.

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### **Data Collection Procedures**

This is a qualitative study involving in depth interviews and observations. Qualitative methods were best for this study as the researcher aimed to explore the lived experiences of elementary school teachers who use team teaching as an instructional method.

Pseudonyms were used to protect the identities of the participants in this study. This site is a public school in what is known as a wealthy area in a suburb of San Francisco. There are approximately 700 students enrolled in the TK-fourth grade elementary school. Class sizes average from 18-24 students. According to the site [ed-data.org](https://data.org), during the 2016-2017 school year, 6.3% of students received Free and Reduced Lunch, and 8.1% of students qualified as English Language Learners. Teachers at the school site are predominantly Caucasian women.

The researcher is also a teacher at this elementary school, which provided familiar entry and access to a community of teachers who could be interviewed and observed while team teaching. At this site, the participants included two third grade teachers and two second grade teachers who were observed as they were team teaching. These observations took place in the classrooms of the teachers during an already scheduled team teaching lesson so they did not disrupt regularly scheduled instruction. Observations of the participants who team taught in second and third grade classrooms occurred during the winter 2018 trimester. Interviews were conducted off site, at a time and place of the participants' choosing.

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The participants who were interviewed for this study were teachers from the second grade, third grade, and one specialist teacher who teaches students ranging from TK-4<sup>th</sup> grade. Participants engaged in two, one hour long, interviews which consisted of open-ended research questions. The first set of questions were created to establish context of the participants' experiences as an elementary educator. They were also formed to begin probing into their experiences team teaching (Seidman, 2013). The second set of questions were developed to more deeply explore the details of their experiences team teaching and to "reflect on the meaning of their experience[s]." (Seidman, 2013, p.21).

Interviews were not audio-recorded, rather, the researcher took notes during throughout the interviews. Participants were interviewed twice for a few reasons. The first set of interviews provided a context for their lived history as teachers and served to establish their views on collaboration and team teaching (Seidman, 2013). The second interview was to discuss the details of their team teaching experience and to reflect on their experiences while team teaching (Seidman 2013).

The same participants were also observed during a team teaching lesson at a date and time of their choosing, and in a classroom and in a subject of their choice. Observation notes were taken at this time.

### **Research Positionality**

Six teacher colleagues including the researcher decided to try team teaching the science curriculum, during the 2017-2018 school year as a way to share the responsibilities of the new Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and curriculum.

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Due to the overwhelming responsibilities of an elementary school teacher, that I experience firsthand every day, I elected to study team teaching as a possible strategy to increase teacher efficacy and curb burnout. Thus, I inhabit the positionality of a participant-observer for this study. Therefore, as a researcher, I am mindful that my close involvement in team teaching and my relationship with the participants could potentially shape my interpretation of the research data.

While conducting interviews, I needed to be mindful of asking for clarifications from the interviewees, rather than making assumptions of their meaning because I know them well. Moreover, I made it clear to interviewees that they could feel comfortable being truthful in their answers to me. I did not want them to feel like they had to speak highly of team teaching because I like the strategy, or that I would identify them and their feelings or ideas to our administration.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data from the interviews were collected using an interview protocol template. Interview questions were placed into a table using a word processor. Each interview question was placed in its own row. As participants answered interview questions, the researcher took notes in the corresponding section within the protocol template.

During interviews, the researcher made comments in the margins of her notes, beginning the process of coding the interview data. Interview notes were stored on a computer and were analyzed and coded as such. After the interviews were complete, the researcher read through the notes, looking for common themes and ideas.

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Interview notes were then chunked together based on the code that was applied to them. In order to keep the analysis of the data and codes reliable, a second reader was given the interview data to interpret themselves. Their interpretation was aligned with the researcher's. This shows that the researcher's initial interpretation of the data was accurate and valid. Then, the researcher went through the coded notes and wrote a narrative description of the interviews and themes. Finally, the data was interpreted by looking at the themes to determine whether or not team teaching is a viable strategy to increase teacher efficacy, curb burnout, and enhance student engagement.

During observations, notes were typed describing the interactions and strategies participants used while team teaching. An observation protocol was used to take notes. The categories for note taking in the observation were: teaching strategies, collaboration, relationships, teacher to teacher interaction, and classroom management.

As the researcher took notes using the observation protocol format, comments were made in the margins, analyzing data as it was collected. Then, off site, field notes were re-read, looking for possible codes and themes. Similar themes and ideas from observations in classrooms were grouped together and assigned a code for analyzing. The researcher then went through the coded field notes and wrote a narrative description of the observations and themes. Finally, the data was interpreted using the themes to answer the research questions.



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### **Validity and Reliability**

Qualitative data was collected via two interviews and an in-classroom observation from the participants. This provided valuable context of the participants for the researcher. The two interviews combined with observations also allowed the researcher to look for consistency in the participants' answers. Particularly, the second interview provided validity to the data. It allowed the participants to expand on their experiences and explore the meaning of those experiences (Seidman, 2013). This increases the reliability and validity of the data collected as the first interview provides context into the participants lived experience, giving the second interview more meaning (Seidman, 2013). Further reliability was added when a second reader read and interpreted the interview data to ensure that the researcher's codes were on track and true.

As the researcher interviewed and observed her colleagues for this study, it also means that she thoroughly understands the context and setting in which the participants are working. Interviews are the most valid way to explore the experience of teachers during team teaching as it allows the teachers to make meaning of their own experiences. Interviews also allow for follow up questions and provide the researcher with the chance to ask for clarification. Furthermore, the observations provide more context for the interviews, increasing the reliability and validity of the data.

Throughout interviews and observations, the researcher checked-in with the participants of this study. As the participants are colleagues of the researcher, the relationships between them were established; the participants knew that the researcher

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enjoys team teaching. To that end, before every interview and observation, the researcher brought up the balance of power with the participants in order to keep the research humanized and valid. It was explained to participants that although the researcher does enjoy team teaching, the aim of this study was to find out if team teaching is a strategy that the participants find useful. The participants were encouraged to express their team teaching experiences, positive or negative, throughout this research process.

Member checking was also used in order to expand the validity of this study. Participants were given a summary of the findings of this study and asked if their voices and ideas were accurately portrayed. Each participant found that their voices were characterized authentically in this study, thereby increasing the validity of these findings.

### **Chapter 4: Findings**

This study found that team teaching as an instructional strategy has benefits not only for teachers, but for the school community in which it is utilized. Participants in this study found that they felt more effective, more energized, and that their students' engagement increased as they team taught curriculum. As participant Ashley put it, "You have some strengths and so does your partner, same with weaknesses. Together you are stronger than apart." Team teaching means that you have a partner with you to bounce ideas back and forth, and to back you up if you need it.

Team teaching creates a school wide collaborative community which leads to a stronger school community. This is because teachers model collaboration, demonstrate how to maintain and build relationships, and learn together through the process of team teaching.

#### **Collaboration**

Team teaching is collaboration in action. The participants of this study all relied heavily on collaborating with their team teacher in order to build and prepare successful lessons, deliver instruction, manage student behavior, and meet students' needs. Team teaching as a mode of collaboration, allowed participants to model successful collaboration for their students. A participant in this study, Ashley, stated, "Kids are seeing how to be a good partner. We are working toward the same goal of teaching them. When I am missing something, my partner steps in. We are modeling collaboration."

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**Playing to strengths.** When two teachers in a classroom have different strengths, and take advantage of those differences as they plan and deliver instruction, they are modeling collaboration and teamwork for their students. While team teaching, participant Danielle discovered, “It’s cool to see what she teaches that I never thought to do.” Participants noted that having a second teacher in the classroom who is stronger than they are in a certain academic area is a positive thing. Participant Morgan believes, “[w]orking with a partner that is similar in some ways but is also the yin to your yang works well.” Playing to each other’s academic strengths also allowed team teachers to reach more students at once. Ashley found that the following was true:

*If someone feels more comfortable teaching a subject, they might take the lead, then the other [will take the lead]. We do a dance where we support each other and take the lead, switching. We are able to reach more kids than before because the other teacher is able to circle and check in with kids, or write things on the board. Managing behavior is easier.*

Not only does having a stronger academic background in certain areas benefit students, but when there are two different teaching styles in the classroom there are benefits for the students as well. Teaching style is how instruction is delivered to students. Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences states that people learn best when instruction is delivered to them in a manner that compliments their intelligence. Therefore, when there are two different styles within a classroom, students with varying intelligences are more likely to comprehend instruction. As Ashley claimed, “Because we

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have different styles, we hit more kids with that and are able to meet the needs of more kids.”

**Shared Control.** Team Teaching as a mode of collaboration means that teachers within a team must be willing to share control of lesson plans, delivery of instruction, classroom management, and the classroom itself. Shared control can also mean shared credit as well as responsibility.

Ashley states:

*Without collaboration, there is only one side and perspective. Sometimes teachers don't collaborate as much as they say they do – they want all the credit. There isn't a teacher Olympics. Sometimes we lose sight of what we are doing and why we are here.*

While team teaching, teachers may not get all of the credit for students' learning, but there are benefits to the teachers if members of the team are able to fully share control. Sharing control allows teachers to share the burden of being “on stage,” thereby curbing burnout.

Morgan maintains:

*If you're not on, you're observing, side managing. That is where the dance comes in. [Team teaching] makes you less tired because you have a time where you can give up being on stage. That's what wears us out, constantly trying to be engaging. If you let that go when you're by yourself, the student engagement drops.*

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Another advantage to, as Morgan puts it, “observing” and “side managing” the students is that teachers are then able to share the responsibility of student behavior management and engagement. When this is shared, the delivery of instruction is more easily accomplished. To connect to Morgan’s observation, Danielle found that “Because she [her co teacher] is there helping me with behavior, I can focus on the lesson more, so there are less interruptions from my behavior kids.” Team teaching facilitates the idea you don’t have to always “do it all.” When team teachers collaborate throughout lessons, sharing control, it allows them to share their workload as well.

**Shared Workload.** Sharing control through the process of team teaching means that you are also able to share the work it takes to plan and implement instruction. Ashley found it to be a relief that she and her team teacher are “both responsible for all curriculum.” Further, while team teaching, Morgan noticed, “To have two teachers, it is more hands on and one-to-one. In [my classroom], it is now 25 versus 2, so the work is divided up.”

The shared workload of team teachers is not limited to the planning and implementation of lessons. It can also extend to shared responsibility of communication with parents and families. Morgan found that working with a team teacher meant that she can “...help tag team with a difficult parent.” Being able to take on work with a trusted colleague mitigates the isolation factor in teaching. When teachers collaborate, they are no longer on their own. Consequently, sharing work with a team teacher through the process of collaboration curbs feelings of burnout.

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Sharing the workload can also lead to more engaging lessons for students.

During a particular lesson, Ashley explained that she read a book about landforms to the class. As she was reading the book, her team teacher was able to create a poster of those landforms in real time. Her team teacher drew the mountains, valleys, and plateaus as Ashley read about each of their features. Ashley found that collaborating throughout this lesson provided a “deeper experience for the students.” She also concludes that as she team teaches, “[students] watch [us] more because we play off of each other. It is more engaging, so they are more attentive overall.”

Along with lessons becoming more engaging, students also receive more direct and intentional instruction when two teachers deliver instruction simultaneously. Danielle found, “There’s more chances for a teacher to interact with kids. We can each go to different groups, by myself, it’s hard for me to see what everyone is doing.”

Ashley’s observations align with Danielle’s. She asserts that sharing instruction with a team teacher means that there are two sets of hands sharing the same amount of work, allowing for more meaningful instruction. “Although I did small groups before, having two credentialed teachers, we are able to hit more students and meet their needs. They receive more instruction.” Creating deep, engaging, and intentional learning experiences for students as a result of collaborating with a team teacher increases how effective teachers feel.

### **Team Teaching Relationships**

Team teaching partners must have positive and established relationships in order to be an effective team. The process of collaboration requires trust, mutual

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respect, and flexibility among many other features. These aforementioned requirements are not created instantly, they take time to foster. This is why positive and pre-established relationships are crucial to the success of a team teaching partnership. It allows for collaboration.

When describing characteristics that participants look for in a team teachers, all participants spoke about flexibility and strong communication skills. Other characteristics mentioned were: creativity, a sense of humor, risk taking, and someone who chooses to team teach (rather than being told they must team teach). The ability to identify these characteristics in a colleague comes from a previously established relationship. You need to know someone well and spend time with them in order to know if they do indeed have these characteristics.

**Established relationships.** The participants interviewed for this study all chose to team teach and chose their team teaching partner. During a conversation with Morgan in the beginning stages of this study, she spoke on the importance of choice and personality. She expressed that an important attribute to a team teaching partner is working with “[s]omeone who doesn’t take it personal when your partner wants to change something.” She discerned that choosing a partner whose personality fits with yours, whom you trust and get along with is a key factor to the success of a team teaching partnership.

During our first interview, Ashly also admitted, “[t]eaching is so personal, your partner needs to fit with your personality.” Thus, the importance of an established relationship is a key factor to the success of a team teaching partnership.



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Ashley confided that “[b]ecause we [Ashley and her team teaching partner] are friends, I feel more comfortable [teaching in front of a colleague].” She went on to explain that “[t]hey [students] like seeing that their teachers are friends.” Because Ashley and her team teacher chose to work together and were friends prior to team teaching, she and her team teacher are able to model how to maintain positive relationships to their students.

**Communication.** Honest and open communication between team teaching partners is another crucial element for the success of team teaching, as well as another consequence of positive and previously established relationships. Communication is required while planning lessons, during the implementation of lessons, and for reflection after a lesson is concluded.

Morgan raised the following questions when speaking about the importance of communication between team teachers: “If you are truly in a team teaching situation, how do you break up assessment and report cards? How do you talk to parents when there is a problem?” The responsibilities that typically lay with one teacher are split when team teaching. These responsibilities and the expectations that team teaching partners have for each other must be communicated and agreed upon.

Further, team teachers may not always agree with each other regarding classroom management, how to split responsibilities, how to deliver curriculum, and on the many other intricacies that are involved with teaching. However, when you have an established relationship that includes mutual respect, trust, and honesty, those disagreements can be easier to navigate. As Ashley demonstrates, you need to be open

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to hearing what your team teacher has to say when you do disagree. ““I want my teammate to be my friend, if I did something to tick her off, I want her to tell me.” She views team teaching as “an opportunity to extend yourself and learn from someone else and share ideas. It builds relationships.” When you have a positive established relationship with your team teacher, you are more likely to be open to their ideas. When you are more open to their ideas, the relationship is more likely to be maintained.

**Supporting Each Other.** Team teaching facilitates support between teachers thereby maintaining positive relationships between team teachers. Danielle found that the support she felt from her team teacher relieved some of her stress while delivering instruction to students. “This year, it’s nice to have the extra person to support - if I’m worried I’ll forget something.”

Morgan spoke on the benefits of the support that team teaching provides saying, “[i]f we have a bad day, the other [team teacher] can take over. It’s another person to be there with you and go through this.” This kind of support also relieves feelings of isolation and can help curb burnout. She also found that “because there are two people, you can energize each other more. It helps us stay fresh and current.”

### **Learning from Each Other**

Participants in this study all noted how team teaching with their partners made them grow as professionals. Openness to learn from their team teaching partners led the participants to feel more effective moving forward as educators. Ashley explains: “It

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[team teaching] has made me a better teacher because I have learned from my colleague. You just have to be open to learning.”

Morgan discovered that when she is team teaching with her partner, she gets the opportunity to step back and observe lessons in action. She takes this opportunity to learn from her team teaching partner.

She explained:

*You are an observer and trying to learn from other people. You get to watch someone else teach and learn what and how they do it. How they walk, their expressions, what they say, how they use their bodies. How can you not compare yourself to the other person?*

**Efficacy.** Collaboration by way of team teaching allowed participants to make their lessons more effective, leading to their own feels of efficacy as educators. This is because they were open to changing their usual lessons, lessons they had been implementing for years, for the purpose of making them more accessible and effective for students. They did this by combining their ideas together. Danielle said that when she collaborates in this way, “[y]ou share your ideas and you come together and make [your lessons] even better.”

When speaking on collaborating with and learning from your team teaching partner, Ashley pointed out the importance of perspective:

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*[Collaboration] opens you up to so many more possibilities, it makes you see things from a different perspective. It is only going to make you better because it gives you a different lens. It is a sounding board.*

Ashley went on to speak on how team teaching with her partner specifically makes their students stronger:

*There are strategies that my kids are using now that [my team teaching partner] taught them. She is showing them how to show their thinking more intentionally, and they are. I could deliver instruction, but [I] had a hard time showing them what their work should look like. She really models it for them. My class is getting stronger because of her.*

What Ashley shows through her explanation above is the importance of acknowledging her own limitations and weaknesses in different curricular areas. By acknowledging that her team teacher was better able to teach their students how to “show their thinking more intentionally,” Ashley opens herself up to learning how to effectively deliver that type of instruction in the future. This self-reflection is key to growth and feelings of efficacy as an educator.

**Self-Reflection and accountability.** A major element to teaching in general is self-reflection. This is also true when it comes to team teaching. Morgan commented that “[self-reflection] is very important. I think teaching in general is all about self-reflection. It is healthy to do.” Morgan maintained that self-reflection is “healthy to do”

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because it allows her to let go of mistakes and leave them in the classroom, rather than taking them home with her. When she reflects on lessons, it allows her to see what she could do differently in the future. This ability to reflect on what went well and what could have gone better in a lesson leads to more effective future lessons when the teacher decides *how* to rectify what could have gone better.

In order to be open to learning from your team teacher, self-reflection must be a part of a teacher's process. Ashley expressed, "There is a little bit of grace that has to come from this. You have to ask yourself, what can I learn from this if they do it differently than me?"

Ashley also pointed out the importance of reflecting on learning experiences with their students. "We point out when things go well, and talk about why with the class. We really point out the good times." When Ashley and her team teaching partner choose to "point out the good times" and talk about why something went well, they are modeling self-reflection and stressing its importance to their students. This gives their students the tools to do the same and learn from each other like their teachers do, creating a positive learning environment.

Although team teaching has its benefits, it also comes with responsibility. Danielle explained how team teaching keeps her on her toes. She explained, "I don't want to let my partner down, so I probably prepare a little bit better than if it was just me." Being held accountable and better prepared for lessons not only enhances the

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learning experience for students, but it increases how effective teachers feel themselves.

### **Needs**

This study lays out many benefits to teachers and students as a result of the team teaching process. That being said, there are also limitations to the process if certain structural needs are not met. With the exception of one participant, participants of this study brought their two classrooms together to teach in one room. This made up to 44 students in a classroom designed to hold half of that amount. Furthermore, participants' schedules did not fully align with their team teaching partners' schedules. Space and time both presented their own obstacles to the team teaching process.

**Space.** Shared space can physically remove isolation from the typical teaching process. However, the participants in this study did not have a consistent shared space for themselves or their students. Ashley and her team teaching partner have classrooms that are next to each other and share a door. During an observation of their Reader's Workshop lesson, I noted that they are able to open the door between their classrooms so that students could easily move between the two classrooms. The lesson was delivered to the whole class, who sat on the carpet facing their two teachers. Once the instruction was delivered students were instructed to work with their groups and moved between the two classrooms.

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Students are not in both classrooms all day; the two classes can be separated depending on their different schedules. Ashley spoke on the difficulty of not sharing one space with her team teaching partner and their students. “Space is hard. Two different classrooms means that we have to make two charts for every lesson so they are displayed in both classrooms.” The obstacle of not sharing the same space can actually create more work for educators who choose to team teach.

Morgan team teaches with guest teachers who are more like visitors in her classroom. She stressed the importance of each teacher having their own space within a shared classroom so that they both have ownership over the space:

*When you do share a room or space it is important that each teacher has their own designated space -you can put a plant or a photo of your family, or where do your files go? So that person feels moved in to the classroom.*

**Time.** Having the time to plan with your team teaching partner increases collaboration, resulting in a decrease of feeling isolated. However, if time to plan together is not embedded within a teacher’s schedule, it can become more of a burden than a benefit. Participants were asked what they would change about their team teaching experiences thus far. Danielle and Ashley both advocated for more shared time with their team teaching partners.

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Danielle answered:

*[We need] more time to collaborate with each other. Right now, we plan in the afternoons the day before the lesson.*

Ashley answered:

*Ideally, we'd have the same schedule so that our team teaching would be more consistent and we could really get into our routines. [Right now] our schedules don't totally align, we have to be really flexible. We have some common times and we talk after school, but we need to be intentional with our time.*

The need for schedules to be aligned and embedded within the school day means that administrative support for team teaching is compulsory to its success. Team teaching also needs a collaborative school culture in order for it work. Yet, team teaching also helps create and maintain a collaborative school culture. When educators teach together and willingly open themselves up to learn from each other, they model successful collaboration and how to maintain positive working relationships to their students, colleagues, and administration. This makes for a stronger school community overall.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This study found that at one school site, team teaching is a strategy that curbs burnout and contributes to a stronger collaborative community. Participants reported that the process of team teaching “reenergized” them, pushed them to reflect on their teaching practices, and led to an increase in their effort while planning lessons. These effects from team teaching, according to participants, led to a higher student engagement level, thereby increasing the participants’ feelings of efficacy.

### **Implications for the Literature**

The findings in this study aligned with prior research on collaboration in several ways. This study acknowledges that in order for collaboration to be successful, teachers must choose to collaborate, rather than being told to in a top-down mandate. Further, it supports the idea that collaboration physically eliminates isolation in the teaching profession. As isolation is a major contributing factor to teacher burnout, team teaching can rectify that problem.

This study also found a similar relationship between teacher efficacy and student engagement as prior research. As student engagement increases, teachers feel more effective. According to the participants of this study, team teaching did increase student engagement, leading to the participants’ increased feelings of efficacy.

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Finally, this study affirms the findings in the literature that state social capital is required for true and successful collaboration. Participants in this study reported that their team teaching partner needed to be someone they respected and were friends with. They found that in order to feel comfortable and safe sharing a classroom with someone else, that their relationship needed to be previously established.

Although this study aligns with much of the existing literature, there are some differences from what has been said before. The findings extend the literature in that team teaching, at one school site, led to a stronger and more collaborative school community that is synergistic. What the researcher found surprising was the reciprocity of the relationship between team teaching and that stronger and more collaborative community. To explain, prior research has demonstrated that you need a collaborative community established via social capital in order to successfully collaborate. What this study found is that while you do need both a collaborative community and strong social capital to team teach effectively, team teaching also makes that collaborative community and social capital stronger at a school site.

Much of the existing scholarship on team teaching has focused on special education and general education teachers coming together to meet the needs of special education students. Previous studies have focused on team teaching as a strategy to increase students' achievement by differentiating. In contrast, this study focused on how the team teaching strategy affected the general education teachers who teamed up together in an elementary school setting. Thereby filling a gap in the literature. This

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study adds to the conversation on team teaching as it found that it is a viable strategy for elementary school educators. Participants reported that team teaching allowed them to share their workload, “reenergized” them, and opened up the possibility of learning from each other. It is the teacher benefits that come from the process of team teaching that adds a new insight into the existing literature.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

Teachers can share the load of prepping, copying, and planning through the process of team teaching. Further, when team teachers plan together, they learn from each other and are reenergized. The mentally taxing work of creating new and engaging lessons becomes less overwhelming and more attainable when two teachers are working together to meet that goal. Teachers are also held more accountable through the process of team teaching as they do not want to let their partner down.

Some may argue that team teaching is not possible at a school *because* of the shared workload it creates. The shared workload between team teaching partners may not align with the equitable working conditions at a school site that are guaranteed within teachers’ contracts. In order to ensure that working conditions are equitable between all teachers, team teaching may need to be approached in a different way. Rather than two teachers who have one class of 35-40 students, teachers could choose to bring their two classes together for part of the day. This would mean that teachers who choose to team teach would pick which curriculum to deliver via team teaching.

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Team teaching for only part of the day could rectify scheduling problems as well. Rather than having totally aligned schedules, team teachers could look for a block or two of shared time in the schedules in which they could team teach.

Another option to ensure equitable working conditions between teachers at a school site is to allow teachers to opt-in or opt-out of team teaching. Studies show that collaborating in this way needs to be the choice of the collaborator in order for it to be successful. Not every teacher is interested in team teaching, many prefer to have their own classrooms. If teachers were allowed to opt-in or opt-out, that may solve any contractual issues that arise.

In order for team teaching to be a true option for elementary teachers, the school site must meet some needs first. Schools should embed shared prep time within team teachers' schedules so that there is a set and regular time for them to plan together. Schools should also provide some professional development time that is devoted to developing collaborative skills. Studies show that teachers respond more positively to professional development that is led by a respected colleague, so a school might consider asking a staff member to lead this. This can help maintain a collaborative culture.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study are site-specific, limiting the ability to apply these findings more generally across many elementary school sites. Further research would

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help contribute to the findings to see what team teaching looks like across other school sites in the area or throughout the state of California.

The school at which this study was conducted has a very well-developed collaborative culture. This did come up during an interview. Participant Morgan considered why the school feels more collaborative than other schools she has worked at. She said, “Having six people teaching the same grade is not typical. And having our parent population – it forces us to be on the same page. People don’t like it when someone won’t work with you.” More research is needed to determine if this school site the exception or the rule when it comes to the benefits to teachers and students that arise from the process of team teaching.

The school site for this study further limits this study as the participants of this were all Caucasian women, which provides a limited perspective. This study is missing the perspective of people of color as well as men. This study focused on the perspective of teachers, so it is missing the perspective of administration, parents, and students.

### **Directions for Future Research**

As this study was site-specific, future research on the effects of team teaching for teachers could be expanded to multiple school sites. Specifically, future research could focus on school sites that have a more diverse population. Teachers need to know if team teaching works with different student populations. This study was conducted in a wealthy suburb of San Francisco. Future research could explore team teaching in a

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different kind of community to determine if the same benefits apply to teachers and students.

Further, it would be advantageous for future research to conduct a study on team teaching at a site where teachers do not consider their place of work to have a strong collaborative community. This study found that the process of team teaching helped the collaborative community grow at the studied school site. It found that there is a reciprocal relationship between team teaching and a collaborative community. However, this is a school site that began with a strong collaborative community. Future research could determine what aspects of a collaborative community are crucial to the success of team teaching. Additional research is needed to determine whether or not team teaching can enhance a weak collaborative community at a school site.

Future research could also focus on what teachers need to know how to rectify unmet needs so that they can team teach. If there is no embedded time to plan in their schedules, no shared space, and a weak collaborative community at their school site, how can they effectively move forward with team teaching?

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Team teaching is a strategy that can be employed in order to curb burnout, increase teacher efficacy, and increase teacher perceived student engagement. According to The California Teachers Association (2018), 20% of new teachers leave the profession within their first three years. With turnover at that rate, it may be time for educators and society to look at education through a different lens. Perhaps the traditional one teacher to a classroom is not the most effective way for every educator to work or every student to learn.

Educators often report feeling overwhelmed with the many responsibilities that come with teaching in elementary school. These overwhelming responsibilities coupled with the teaching profession being physically isolating leads to teacher burnout and turnover. As an elementary school teacher who felt the weight of the many responsibilities and the impending isolation in her own classroom, this researcher thought that team teaching might be a way to share the load and see her colleagues more often. As a response, this research sought out to find how team teaching might affect teacher burnout, teacher efficacy, and teacher perceived student engagement in the elementary school setting.

The process of team teaching “reenergizes” teachers, curbing burnout, and holds them accountable for their work, making teachers feel that their students were more engaged as a result of their more in-depth planning. Team teaching provides the opportunity for professional growth as team teachers found that they were able to learn from one another as they taught and planned together, increasing feelings of efficacy.

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Team teaching creates a school wide collaborative community which leads to a stronger school community. This is because teachers model collaboration, demonstrate how to maintain and build relationships, and learn together through the process of team teaching.

Collaboration by way of team teaching physically eliminates isolation from the teaching profession which contributes to curbing teacher burnout. Team teaching can also mitigate feelings of isolation for teachers. When teachers are team teaching with a partner whom they trust, they feel supported. Participants found that when they were having an off day, or were unsure of how to deliver a lesson on a challenging subject, they were able to look to their team teacher to take the lead, or for some advice. This left participants feeling less isolated and more supported thereby curbing burnout.

Furthermore, team teaching curbs burnout as it allows for the responsibilities of a classroom to be shared between two teachers, rather than those responsibilities lying on one. Team teachers share the prep and planning for lessons, the delivery of curriculum, behavior management, parent communication, scheduling, grading, and administrative tasks. Participants found that this shared workload was a relief to their typical burdens and even “reenergized” them. If a shared workload is a byproduct of team teaching, then so is vigor for the job.

Team teaching partnerships often are created between educators who have established a positive relationship with one another. Thus, there is a strong sense of social capital between partners, which opens them up to learning from each other. Participants reported that team teaching presented an ongoing opportunity for learning



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between partners, which allowed each participant to grow professionally. This growth increased their feelings of efficacy.

Participants also found that their students were more engaged as a result of the team teaching strategy because they took more time to plan their lessons, and because instruction was delivered to students using multiple teacher styles, thereby reaching more students at once. Being able to reach more students also further increased participants' feelings of efficacy.

Not only are team teachers able to reach more students with their different styles, but they are able to deliver more intentional instruction to students who are struggling or require a challenge. Team teaching allows teachers to more easily pull students for small group or one-on-one instruction because there are two credentialed educators in the room. While one teacher oversees the whole group, the other is able to pull students and differentiate for those who need it

These findings indicate that schools should provide the opportunity for teachers to choose to team teach. In order for that to be successful, there should professional development in collaborative skills, or at least a mentor teacher to turn to that has experience in collaborative teaching practices. If education is looked at as a more collaborative and fluid profession, and if teachers feel supported as they teach collaboratively, perhaps teacher burnout can decrease, and teacher efficacy and teacher perceived student engagement will increase.

This study found that team teaching not only requires a collaborative community, but it facilitates its growth as teachers model collaboration and build strong

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relationships through the process of team teaching. Both team teaching and a collaborative community rely on each other for success. The relationship between the two is synergistic.

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**Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter**

December 1, 2017

Jenna Degan  
50 Acacia Ave.  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Dear Jenna:

I have reviewed your proposal entitled *Add it to the List: Team Teaching as a Strategy to Curb Burnout* submitted to the Dominican University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRBPHP Application, #10629). I am approving it as having met the requirements for minimizing risk and protecting the rights of the participants in your research.

In your final report or paper please indicate that your project was approved by the IRBPHP and indicate the identification number.

I wish you well in your very interesting research effort.

Sincerely,

Randall Hall, Ph.D.  
Chair, IRBPHP

Cc: Jennifer Lucko