

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SAN MARCOS

Teachers' Experiences in Collaborative Settings: A Comparison of How Two Teacher  
Teams Develop Relationships

A dissertation proposal submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Beth A. Cameron

Committee in charge:

University of California, San Diego

Professor Amanda Datnow, Chair

California State University, San Marcos

Professor Jennifer Jeffries  
Professor Carol Van Vooren

2014

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Chair

University of California, San Diego  
California State University, San Marcos

2014

## **DEDICATION**

To my family, for always being there to encourage and cheer me on. To my two wonderful children, Elliott and Madeline who give me reason to be. And to my partner in all things, Steve, who is always there to support me.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge and thank my incredibly supportive dissertation chair, Dr. Amanda Datnow. I would not have written this dissertation without her support. She has patiently guided me through the process by encouraging me to push myself and keep writing when I didn't think I could. I would also like to thank and acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Jennifer Jeffries and Dr. Carol Van Vooren for supporting my efforts to become a researcher and scholarly writer. They all epitomize what leadership is and I have grown so much through their example.

Next, I would like to acknowledge and thank Toni Olivas, my cohort colleague, who rescued me in my first year and helped me successfully complete my qualifying paper. I couldn't have made it through without her generous support.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to Cohort VII for being there to support, encourage, and guide me through the course work by modeling excellence. I feel honored to have been in the company of such amazing leaders.

## VITA

### EDUCATION:

- 1987 University of Minnesota  
Bachelors of Arts
- 2000 National University  
Master's in Education Administration
- 2014 California State University, San Marcos, CA  
University of California, San Diego, CA  
Doctor of Education

### CREDENTIALS:

- 1996 National University  
California CLAD Teaching Credential,

### EXPERIENCE:

- 1987-1995 Merrill Lynch Diocese of San Diego  
Real Estate Investment
- 1996-2008 Vista Unified School District  
Teacher, Program Coordinator, Summer School Principal
- 2008-2009 Encinitas Union School District  
Assistant Principal
- 2009-Present Encinitas Union School District  
Principal

## **ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION**

Teachers' Experiences in Collaborative Settings: A Comparison of How Two Teacher Teams Develop Relationships

by

Beth A. Cameron

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California, San Diego, 2014  
California State University, San Marcos, 2014

Professor Amanda Datnow, Chair

Teachers are central to student learning. Without improving teacher practice, it will be difficult for schools to meet the goals of the Common Core State Standards and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning competencies we are faced with in our rapidly changing educational environment. School reform initiatives often focus on school structures and programs, but give less attention to helping teachers develop the capacity for effective collaborative practice. Most recently, a growing body of literature has emerged on the benefits of teacher collaboration as a key ingredient in school improvement, especially in underperforming schools. Collaborative reform initiatives have resulted in a variety of outcomes including: improving teacher relationships, building capacity, strengthening teacher efficacy and increasing achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. However, we know less about the effects of teacher collaboration in schools that are not underperforming, but where rapid change is taking place.

This study was about the nature of relationships that exist between teachers who regularly engage in weekly collaboration. The purpose of this case study was to better understand the nature of how relationships among elementary teachers in grade level teams developed. The two teams (Team A and Team B) compared in this study developed relationships differently, as one team had stronger relationships while the other experienced challenges in relationship development. Interviews and observations were conducted to compare and contrast the teams regarding their characteristics and belief systems, how they use their collaborative time, and the structures and cultures that shape their work. Team A developed differently from Team B by spending more time on relationship building. The implications of this research provide information to assist leaders in supporting collaborative efforts in schools.

## **CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT OF STUDY**

### **Introduction**

Imagine a school as a large box with many smaller boxes inside. Each day teachers go into their boxes (classrooms) and begin teaching. With limited contact with colleagues, classroom teachers leave their boxes for lunch, recess and to go home (Hensley, 2000). For decades, teaching has been identified as an isolated and self-reliant profession void of collaboration. This is mainly due to the internal organizational structure of the public school system. Traditional schedules and assignments do not allow significant time or settings for teachers to engage in professional dialogue. Teachers simply have little time or incentive to work together to develop and improve practice (Harris, 2010). DuFour (2002) describes a traditional school as functioning as a collection of independent contractors tied only by a common parking lot. The fundamental shift is for these independent contractors to strive to create a culture of collaboration. Once collaboration is embedded into a schools' culture, school personnel will take on increased roles with a greater sense of efficacy to work towards the common goals. Many teachers cope by remaining inside their boxes and teaching the best they can. While this way of working might have been appropriate a decade or so ago, in the current climate of rapid and technological change there is a need for collective knowledge creation and information sharing at the classroom, school, and district level (Chapman, Lindsay, Muijs, Harris, Arweck, & Goodall, 2010).

## **The Context**

As politics dictate, raising the standards of learning through accountability, reform, and restructuring in our public schools is an important national priority. For decades, public educators have worked tirelessly to ensure high levels of learning for all students. Many improvement initiatives and interventions have been preoccupied with school level change and improvement (Harris & Chrispeels, 2008). In the past decade since the advent of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, educators have been focused not only on improving schools, but also close the achievement gap for children. NCLB attempted to reform processes to not only improve schools, but to close the achievement gap for children who are identified as underperforming. Educators have been working diligently toward the ultimate goal of all students meeting achievement benchmarks at or above their grade level. NCLB focused on the performance of subgroups within the student population. Students of economically disadvantaged background, limited English proficiency, minority status, and with disabilities requiring special education are also expected to improve their performance to 100% in both reading and math by the year 2014. Educators are under more pressure than ever to meet these benchmarks of student achievement, as sanctions exist for schools that do not meet these expectations. Such demands have led to increased research to identify practice that results in improving schools and student achievement. The methodology of collaborative practice among teachers is seen as a promising vehicle for increasing student achievement.

The 2003 Educational Research Service (ERS) published *A Practical Guide to School Improvement: Meeting the Challenges of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* which

examined common characteristics of schools nationwide making most progress.

According to the report, the high-achieving schools had developed structures that provided time for teachers to work together and support for teachers and other staff members as they engaged in the process of change. Research by Protheroe, Shellard, and Turner (2003) also recognized the need to change the structure of schools, how they are managed and organized, and how to accommodate for collaborative teacher learning. In fact, the growing body of research on improving educational learning organizations indicates a collaborative environment as an important factor and the first order of business for successful improvement (Senge, 1990).

Current research focuses on a variety of aspects of how teacher collaboration can produce better instructional practice, improve student achievement, decrease isolation in educational settings, and improve relationships within the school. For example, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2002) and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2004) urge administrators to cultivate school improvement and student-level outcomes through the development of collaborative leadership and learning communities. Likewise, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2003), the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (2004), and the American Federation of Teachers (2004) all claim that for schools to work effectively, teachers must work collaboratively with their colleagues in learning communities and declare that educators should be engaged in a continuous process of individual and collective examination that promotes improvement of practice.

The current educational context is one of rapid and unrelenting change. Particularly with the move towards Common Core Standards in the United States, the

pressure on schools to improve and to raise standards of achievement are unlikely to recede in the next few years. The conversation is also shifting from “how to improve” to “how to sustain improvement” (Harris, 2010).

Today’s teachers face a complexity of demands. There are expectations to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of a diverse level of learners. Teachers are also expected to provide students with skills that promote 21<sup>st</sup> Century competencies. The pedagogical shift in instructional practice with the new standards will require teachers to make changes in the current practices. These demands are further complicated by increased class sizes and unprecedented budgetary constraints. Additionally, classrooms are becoming more and more culturally, economically, and linguistically diverse. It is clear that the current context of schooling is rapidly shifting. The current teaching environment of isolation is an inadequate model to address the complexity of needs within the classroom. With these obstacles in education, it is imperative for educators to work together to address the multifaceted challenges of improving schools in the future.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Though a variety of models set the expectation for collaboration, few provide the necessary support or scaffolds to develop the skills for effective collaboration. In other words, these models presuppose that teachers, when provided opportunities and guidelines for collaboration, will naturally engage in team learning to improve and/or change their practice. The available literature reveals a growing list of protocols and processes for teacher collaboration for building professional learning communities, but these tools often lack a specific procedure for teachers to develop the habits of mind and communication skills necessary for effective and sustainable collaboration (Little, 1990).



School personnel need both training and scaffolds of support to be effective collaborators. Providing teachers with time for collaboration does not ensure that they will engage in deep discourse about how they are teaching and how students are learning. In fact, without proper training, much of what happens in schools in the name of collaboration can be counterproductive. DuFour and Eaker (1998) summarize, “The challenge of sustaining the change process is the challenge of creating a critical mass of educators within the school who are willing and able to function as change agents...the importance of communication has emerged from research on innovation. Inattention to communication is a leading cause of the failure of change efforts” (p.129).

The discipline of team learning starts and ends with dialogue and the capacity of team members to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine process of inquiry, discourse, and communication as they collaborate. It also involves learning how to recognize and address the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning (Senge, 1990). Removing the barriers for teacher learning and collaboration can be best understood by examining the scaffolds that exist in collaborative settings.

In order to improve the productivity and adaptability of schools, time and structures that facilitate collaboration among teachers must be incorporated into teachers' schedules. To move teachers from an environment of self-containment and expect them to naturally engage in collaborative work to improve professional practice is unrealistic without specific scaffolds in place. Teachers must also view collaboration as a valuable endeavor.

In recent years, collaborative practice models such as learning communities have emerged to address educational reform initiatives and have shown promise.

Underperforming schools that have initiated such collaborative practice have seen positive outcomes including gains in student achievement. As a result learning more about the constructs needed for effective and sustainable collaboration is necessary for schools to develop collaborative processes. Discovering what characterizes the development of healthy relationships and commitment among teachers versus those relationships that do not have these characteristics could play a valuable role informing school leaders how to develop sustainable collaborative practice models. Successful implementation requires an in depth look into the structures that define meaningful and sustainable collaboration. Sustaining the momentum of these models was the impetus for this case study. This research study intended to further understand teachers' experiences with collaboration by conducting interviews with teachers engaged in the process. The goal of this case study was to better understand teachers' varied experiences with collaboration and why some teacher teams work well together and others do not. Investigating specific constructs that are needed to promote building internal capacity, collective efficacy and improved collegiality will enable leaders to create sustainable structures which could become a permanent part of teachers' professional discourse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In order to better understand the relationships in collaborative settings, this case study was informed by social capital and social network theories. Social capital theory states that the network of interpersonal relationships, which exist in all organizations, is a valuable resource that has potential to improve organizational performance (Daly, 2010; Kobiba & Gajda, 2009; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Social network theory and analysis offers a conceptual framework and accompanying methods for analyzing the structure of

a social system in an effort to understand how relationships support and constrain collaborative practice. Recent studies imply network-related concepts to have influence of social processes (Daly, 2010), which provided the lens of this case study. A network theory approach provided insights into the motives associated to educational change. One of the foundations of social networks is the concept of social capital. Social capital is defined as the resources that are embedded in social relations and social structures, which was a key factor in this study. The study sought to examine the experience of teachers as they participated in collaborative settings. The emphasis was placed on the interactions of individual teachers engaged in grade level meetings. The foundational theory of social networks was the lens in exploring the concept of how relationships are developed and sustained. The research in this study aimed to analyze the social relations, interactions, and flows of resources between teacher teams collected through interviews and observations (Scott, 2000).

### **Research Questions**

The main research question guiding this case study was “What is the nature of the relationships among grade-level teacher teams that appear to have strong versus weak relationships?”

The following sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What are each team's characteristics?
2. How do the teams use collaborative time differently?
3. How do school level structures and cultures shape the teams' work?

Using qualitative case study methods, this research addressed these questions by comparing and contrasting teacher teams (i.e., those that develop strong vs. weak relationships) in an elementary school setting.

### **Significance**

What can we learn about collaborative relationships that will help us develop models of collaboration in schools? This study focused on experiences of teachers engaged in weekly collaboration. The results could assist administrators in encouraging collaborative structures in their schools, which could lead the development of relationships that could promote teacher efficacy, build capacity, and lead to increased student academic achievement.

Across the United States, teachers work in demanding high-stakes reform-minded public school environments where there is a constant and unrelenting focus on improving student achievement. Studying successful collaborative models may play a role in better understanding how teachers could maintain these efforts.

This study could help fill gaps in research by adding to our knowledge about what makes some teams work more successfully than others. This growing body of literature has emerged on the benefits of teacher collaboration as a key ingredient in school improvement, especially in underperforming schools. Collaborative reform initiatives have resulted in a variety of outcomes including: improving teacher relationships, building capacity, strengthening teacher efficacy and increasing achievement of students from diverse backgrounds. While a great body of research emphasizes the importance of teacher collaboration, less is known about the constructs necessary for sustainable

relationships to be developed and maintained, which was the premise for further investigation.

### **Limitations**

This case study had limitations. It was limited to one school and focused on seven teachers representing two grade levels. The teachers at this school have been engaged in collaboration for the past three years and the results might not be representative of the teachers who have been engaged in collaborative settings for more or less time or use a different model. This study was also limited in the amount of time available to conduct such research. The interview and observation data was collected over a short period of time. The time constraints limit the understanding of what factors play a role in sustainability of teacher relationships, which could be a topic for further study. Student achievement data was not considered in this study, which could play an important role for further investigation.

### **Key terms**

**Capacity:** “The ability of leaders, organizations, coalitions, and society at large to catalyze institutional change to achieve development goals” (Pradhan, 2010)

**Collaboration:** “A systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results. In a professional learning community, collaboration focuses on the critical questions of learning: What is it we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? How will we enrich and extend the

learning for students who are proficient?” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 214).

**Collective Efficacy:** “The perceptions of teachers in a specific school that the faculty as a whole can execute courses of action required to positively affect student achievement or successfully implement the desired goals” (Goddard, 2002, p. 98).

**Collegiality:** The cooperative relationship of colleagues

**Learning Organization:** “Organizations where people continually expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p.3).

**Professional Learning Communities (PLC):** “Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job- embedded learning for educators” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 217; Hord, 1997).

### **Organization of the Study**

Following Chapter 1, there are four additional chapters, a bibliography, and appendices to this study. Chapter 1 provides a broad overview of the study including the problem statement, historic and current context, theoretical framework, purpose statement, research questions, the significance of the study, limitations, assumptions,

definition of terms, and finally the organization of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature on the effects of teacher collaboration. This review of literature provides a foundational understanding that collaborative models not only have shown promise and have merit in reform efforts, but also addresses challenges encountered during implementation. Chapter 3 delineates the research design and methodology of this qualitative case study. This study was empirical in that I was collecting data through interviews and observations. Chapter 4 reports the findings of the research data. Chapter 5 concludes with relating the findings to the existing research, implications to leadership and further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

The literature on school improvement and professional development emphasizes the building of organizational capacity through collegial interactions in school settings (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). This literature review reveals the need for teacher collaboration by showing how developing relationships, creating communities of learning, building capacity, and strengthening efficacy leads to improved professional practice and ultimately increased student achievement. This review examines how collaboration can have a positive impact on improving schools, which is important because it addresses a knowledge gap in the area of school reform efforts. This review also cites challenges that have been experienced in collaborative settings. There is a breadth of research on teacher collaboration that provides educators with practical guidance; however, many schools continue to allow teachers to remain isolated. The aim is to uncover essential characteristics of effective collaboration and what specific constructs need to be developed in order for meaningful work to take place in the classroom. Although the literature reviewed shows positive results, there are challenges in developing structures that are manageable and sustainable. Examining positive outcomes and challenges could lead to a stronger understanding of what constructs can lead to sustainable practice.

This chapter begins by providing a context for forming learning communities among teachers, which is the current state of public education under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The literature review examines a variety of positive



outcomes and supports the argument that implementation of collaborative practice is an essential ingredient in school reform. The review focuses attention on the investigation of recent studies to provide insight on the different purposes for teacher collaboration. The available literature reveals a growing list of models and protocols for teachers to use as they engage in collaborative learning procedures to develop the habits of mind and communication necessary for effective collaboration. The research also focuses on implications of teacher collaboration associated with increased student achievement for English learners and students from diverse backgrounds. These collaborative initiatives have positively impacted underperforming schools' ability to level the playing field for disadvantaged students in several studies (Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Reid, 2009; Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore, 2009; York-Barr, Ghore, and Sommeress, 2007). This chapter also addresses the challenges that collaborative initiatives face as teachers move from isolated environments to developing relationships and engaging in meaningful dialogue.

### **Professional Learning Communities in the Era of NCLB**

The reform initiatives of NCLB promoted improving learning environments utilizing the teacher collaboration model of learning communities (DuFour, 2004; Harris & Jones, 2010; Sharrat & Fullan, 2009; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). The premise of NCLB is to ensure student success by providing the additional layer of support of multiple teachers analyzing student data, planning interventions and monitoring progress. The work of Dufour, Eaker, & Dufour (2005) popularized the collaborative process of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) as a critical component for increasing student

learning. The PLCs provide insight on structures for teachers as they engage in collaborative team learning. Protheroe (2004) points out that these explicit structures of teacher study groups capitalize on the collective strengths and talents of its staff. PLCs ensure that students learn, foster a culture of teacher collaboration, and focus on results (DuFour, 2004). As a vehicle to improve students' learning, the PLC focuses its work on the following three questions: What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker 1998)? The correctly implemented model utilizing PLCs will always respond to these questions collaboratively. According to DuFour (2004), collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been an isolated and private decision-making process. These discussions give teachers someone to turn to and offer a structure to improve the classroom practice of teachers both individually and collectively. Working together, PLCs judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Teachers develop common formative assessments throughout the school year and reflect collectively on how their students are learning. They share ideas, materials, strategies, and talents with the team to maximize opportunities for all students (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Protheroe, 2004).

The literature on learning communities of Stoll and Louis (2007) similarly emphasizes how '*professional networks*' can create the infrastructure for new knowledge and new learning, which can no longer be left to individuals. To be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world, it is suggested that school communities work

and learn together in networks of practice. A parallel idea of '*co-construction*' Sharrat and Fullan (2009) focuses on individual teachers' professional learning, and also on the co-construction of knowledge within a community of learners. The primary emphasis is on professionals working together collaboratively, with an absolute focus on improving learning outcomes. This type of interdependent practice is being nurtured and developed in Wales through a model of professional learning communities (PLC) within, between and across schools/local authorities (Harris & Jones 2010). To be most effective, PLCs need to focus on the 'real work' of improving learning and teaching (Harris & Jones 2010). Improvement through professional learning communities means addressing the hard questions about classroom practice and actively seeking to change learning outcomes. At best, PLCs should be 'cultures for learning' where professionals learn together (Fullan, 2009). The model of professional learning communities being implemented in Wales is characterized by joint decision-making, a clear sense of purpose and collaborative inquiry. It is based on the simple but powerful idea that in order to meet learner needs, there must be opportunities for professionals to innovate, develop and learn together (Harris & Jones, 2010).

The evidence supporting this position is quite unequivocal. Research findings show that PLCs have the potential to improve achievement and raise performance (Goldenberg 2004; Saunders et al. 2009; Stoll & Seashore Louis 2007). They are powerful vehicles for changing professional practice and improving student learning outcomes. A number of studies have documented the effect of collective efficacy and professional learning communities on student achievement (Goddard et al. 2000; Hipp,

1996; Hord, 1997; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1996; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Louis & Marks, 1998; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). These studies have helped to establish the significance of professional learning communities, which have become a major strategy for improving schools. DuFour and Eaker (1998) have popularized the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) and have been the leading proponents and disseminators of a PLC model. Teachers who are part of a learning community tend to be more effective in the classroom and achieve better student outcomes (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

### **Building Capacity**

Not only do PLCs and collaborative practice maximize the educational opportunities for students, they also create capacity for teachers by developing professional instructional practice. PLCs are already proving to be a powerful catalyst for change and capacity building (Harris & Jones, 2010). The core idea is to build '*collective capacity*' within the system through professionals working together in a disciplined way with the main aim of generating new knowledge and new practices. The PLC model is one way of creating collective capacity through deep collaboration and mutual inquiry (Katz & Earl, 2010). Effective practice is becoming more widely available, accessible and replicable, and working together in this way generates a collective commitment among professionals to get things done. Collective accountability as well as collective responsibility plays a vital role in developing new professional practice.

Collective capacity, which is the result of teachers working together to achieve common goals, serves to provide a high quality education for students (Brownell, Adams,

Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). Brownell et al's study examined how teachers in Teacher Learning Cohorts (TLC) adopted strategies acquired as a result of collaboration. The research found that teachers' ability to reflect simultaneously on the needs of the group and individual students played an important role in adoption of the TLC model resulting in a collective capacity. Similarly, Dee, Henkin, and Singleton (2006) examined the effects of four team teaching structures and the organizational commitment of elementary teachers in urban school settings. This study focuses on organizational commitment, teacher empowerment, school communication, and work autonomy. The team teaching model had both direct and indirect effects on commitment levels within these schools. Teamwork in the area of curriculum, governance, and community-relations each contributed to higher levels of teacher commitment. These research results suggest the need for organizational designs and procedures to increase teacher capacity within the school organization. This range of capacity and implementation of professional practice among teachers suggests there is a need to know more about how different collaborative structures affect groups of teachers and to understand how these collaborative structures provide opportunities for teacher learning.

Additionally, Doppelt, Schunn, Silk, Mehalik, Reynolds and Ward (2009) focused their research on evaluating the impact of teacher professional development on student achievement as it pertained to building capacity. This study was conducted over two years with three different groups of teachers. One group did not participate in any professional development, but implemented new curriculum; one group received professional development before implementation and the third group implemented the curriculum with a collaborative approach to professional development. The group that

received the professional development engaging in collaborative planning throughout the entire process proved to have powerful results in building capacity. The evidence in these studies provides schools with a context of how capacity is built through professional development.

### **Strengthening**

In addition to building capacity through learning communities and teacher cohorts, research on collaborative practice has found that effective teacher collaboration efforts decrease isolation. The literature points out that a significant number of teachers spend nearly all their time with students or alone planning and grading papers. According to Wilms (2003), teachers have little time or incentive to work together as professionals in the service of student learning and remain isolated. Wilms' (2003) study examined the organizational structure of schools that fostered collegial interactions. These structures included planned time for teacher interaction and planning which produced positive outcomes including an improvement in teacher feedback for one another. The feedback included more frequent giving credit and praise for one another's knowledge, skill, and judgment. Research by Fallon and Barnett (2009) also focused attention on collegiality as an important purpose for collaborative reform by studying the organizational structure of isolation. Fallon and Barnett asserted that purposeful and meaningful collaboration addressed the social and emotional demands of teaching. This case study addressed the perceived problem of teacher isolation by transforming the organization of a school into a more collaborative environment and developed more collegial practices. Teachers accomplished more and were able to provide more effective instruction when they spent time working together rather than in isolation.

Hindin, Morocco, Mott, and Aguilar (2007) corroborate these findings and claim that teaching is often characterized as an isolated activity; however, opportunities for teachers working and learning together in schools is increasing. Their findings showed teachers were able to provide a variety of perspectives, different teaching styles and experiences, and were also able to challenge each other. This case study analyzed teacher meetings, classroom observations and interviews that described how each group developed instructional practice. The results showed that over time teachers increased the level of sharing their teaching successes and challenges with their groups, improving collegiality.

### **Teacher Efficacy**

There is evidence to suggest that collaborative practice also increases teacher efficacy. Bandura (1997) defines '*self efficacy*' as the belief that teachers hold about their personal capabilities to perform their duties in the classroom. When teachers collaborate they create a '*collective efficacy*,' which refers to the beliefs teachers possess in their collective capacities to influence the lives of their students (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Teachers learn from each other through collective responsibility, support, communication, relationship building, observation, and modeling (Bandura, 1986).

As seen in a study by James, Dunning, Connolly, and Elliott (2007) collaboration amongst teachers creates a '*collective efficacy*,' a sense that together teachers achieve more. Their research analyzed the concepts of collaborative practice for purposes of teacher efficacy, reflective practice, and commitment to professional development for those who regularly engaged in collaboration. They concluded that collaboration enriches and transforms teachers' knowledge base.

Similarly, Klassen, Usher, and Bong (2010) examined how teachers' collective efficacy (TCE) underlines the importance of 'collective motivation' as a source of individual job satisfaction, which leads to improved efficacy. The schools involved in both James et al (2007) and Klassen et al's (2010) studies identified the constructs of efficacy in collaborative practice as a highly developed and inclusive way to work on a clearly defined task. James et al. (2007) assert that the element of motivation must be present for collaborative practice to be successful because it provides a secure foundation on which to base successful practice for teachers. Similarly, Little (1990) states that effective collaboration creates an arena in which teachers can receive acknowledgement from peers and increased efficacy. Collaboration provides opportunities to enjoy the social and professional satisfactions of the collective effort (Little, 1990; Fullan & Steigelbaur, 1991; and Schmoker, 1999).

Finally, Henkin, Park and Singleton (2007) study how empowerment is a component of efficacy, and suggests that there is an important correlation between teacher empowerment and efficacy and school revitalization and reform. Empowerment is a critical element in redefining schools as collaborative environments. The authors' inquiry focuses on the association between teamwork skills and teacher team empowerment.

Continued research is recommended to explore how leaders can develop the teamwork skills in teachers that lead to increased empowerment. With this constant and necessary focus on improving student achievement, prior research suggests that teacher efficacy may be critical to improving student learning (Anderson, Green, & Loewen,



1998; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Ross, 1992; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Gray, 2003); and at the same time, collective efficacy may be difficult to maintain especially in the face of increased demands for individual teacher accountability (Mintrop, 2004; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007).

### **Student Achievement**

As a result of increased efficacy of teachers through collaborative practice, students of diverse populations have experienced increased academic achievement gains (Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Reid, 2009; Saunders, Goldenberg & Gallimore, 2009; York-Barr, Ghere & Sommeress, 2007). Several empirical studies have shown that teacher collaborative initiatives have directly impacted student achievement. Of great importance, Reid's (2009) investigation tested the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement. The data for this study were obtained from teachers and students through surveys assessing teacher collaboration. Results of analyses indicated that students who attended schools where teachers engaged in collaboration had higher achievement in mathematics and reading. Reid (2009) suggests that the results provide preliminary support for efforts to improve student achievement by providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and professional development.

Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore's (2009) five-year study revealed that by providing teachers with collaborative structural opportunities and skills to more frequently and consistently focus on improving classroom instruction will significantly increase student achievement. The authors assert that there was increased average

achievement over time in nine schools that implemented teacher teams which focused on improving student learning at Title I schools. Academic Performance Index (API) scores and ranking data of the treatment schools significantly increased. Key factors found in the improvement of treatment schools were stable school-based settings, distributed leadership, and explicit protocols for effective teacher teams. Collaborative practice brought about substantial benefits in terms of student attainment in these schools. Saunders et al (2009) stated that, “When teachers collaborate, there is an increased potential for students to be exposed to rich instruction and, in turn, achieve to new levels” (p.1028).

Addressing how collaboration efforts relate to English learners, Davison’s (2006) study focused on developing more collaborative relationships between English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and core content classroom teachers in a large culturally and linguistically diverse elementary school. The research began with an analysis of some of the underlying assumptions of effective collaboration between ESL support teachers and classroom teachers. This study presents a framework that draws ‘teacher talk’ and ‘critical discourse’ analysis to describe and evaluate the stages of collaboration and the different levels of its effectiveness. The focus is how to judge if and when collaborative teaching is effective, and the implications of this for professional development and administrative support. This is important to establish clear expectations for teachers by identifying specific indicators on how successful partnerships work and develop.

With a similar focus, York-Barr, Ghere, and Sommeress (2007) three-year case

study of first and second graders offered further examples of how instructional resources aligned to support English language learners (ELL) and diverse learners increased achievement. The findings indicate that mixed ability groups of students benefited socially and academically through collaborative instructional models. Collaborative learning and practice among teachers provided multiple levels of expertise and was a means to advancing student learning. According to the study, improvement results were from changes in teaching and learning that emerge within a collaborative school culture (York et al., 2007). The primary goal of this co-teaching instructional model was to support ELL students in elementary general education classrooms. Throughout this study, ELL and general education teachers collaborated in planning, teaching, and reflecting on their instruction. The significance of the study was the evidence of increased ELL student achievement. Important implications include a clearer understanding how collaborative opportunities for teachers can impact improved learning for English learners.

Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran's (2007) study involved the review of literature and existing research and test measures of teacher collaboration to determine impact on school improvement and the achievement of socio-economically disadvantaged students. The population for this study came from elementary schools in one large mid-western school district. Results indicated that fourth-grade students had higher achievement in mathematics and reading when they attended schools engaged in high levels of teacher collaboration for school improvement. The authors suggest that the results provide preliminary support for efforts to improve student achievement by providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum,

instruction, and professional development.

Finally, with regards to the teaching and learning process, achievement for all students must begin with teachers effectively collaborating about their teaching processes and the results of their efforts in terms of student achievement and mastery levels. When teachers begin to disaggregate the data into student “like-groups”, they can begin to visualize what curricular areas need to be readdressed as well as what students need to focus on (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997). When teachers complete a critical analysis of student performance levels, they will hopefully make adjustments in their teaching to address the learning levels of the students who are at-risk (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Professional learning communities focused on student learning for all students may address the achievement gap by leveling the educational “playing field” for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, or social status.

### **Challenges**

There are numerous challenges to collaboration that have been noted in the literature. These challenges include teachers who are resistant to change, school structures and schedules, differences in pedagogy, differences in culture, and the general nature in which relationships develop. Providing teachers with time for collaboration does not ensure that they will engage in deep discourse about how they are teaching and how students are learning. In fact, without proper training, much of what happens in schools in the name of collaboration can be counterproductive (Little, 1990). According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), the discipline of team learning starts and ends with dialogue, the capacity of team members to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine

process of inquiry, discourse, and communication as they collaborate. It also involves learning how to recognize and address the patterns of interaction in teams that undermine learning. Senge (1990) revealed differences in knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, student management, and student-centered instruction as challenges to collaboration, as well as differences in ability to reflect on and adapt instruction as areas to consider.

Once time for collaboration has been built into both the school day and year, the purpose of collaboration must be made explicit. Forming collaborative teams is a means to an end, not the end itself (DuFour, 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). A team is a group of people that comes together to accomplish a shared goal or objective. They are most effective when they are clear about the results they are to achieve. Sarason (1996) states that in order to improve the climate and outcomes of learning for both students and teachers, there are features of the school culture that must be changed. The current features of school culture are characterized, to a great degree, by teacher isolation. It is important to remember that team collaboration is not a natural act in the traditional culture of American education in which teachers have traditionally worked in isolation. School personnel need training and support to develop cultures that promote effective and sustainable collaboration (DuFour, 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Teaching and learning about teaching are cultural activities and as a result there can be resistance to change. In fact, the barriers that exist between teacher learning and improving teaching are largely cultural, so change in culture is critical in order to achieve significant and sustainable improvement (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Changing the structure of schools without altering teachers' belief system will not produce fundamental changes. Historically schools have not developed a culture in which teachers can safely

take risks and engage in dialogue about assumptions, beliefs, and practices have shown limited success (Langer & Colton, 2005). Experience to date has shown that embedding professional learning communities is far from straightforward or easy (Harris & Jones 2010). First, there are some structural and cultural challenges. School structures can resist efforts to build professional learning communities. For some schools, this way of working is not welcomed. In other schools, the culture is one that is not conducive to change; there is professional mistrust, which militates against collaboration (Harris, 2010). Second, the external environment can be turbulent and present a disruption for schools. In the face of unpredictable change, it is difficult for teachers to think about embedding new approaches with competing demands and other priorities. This distraction can cause tension as the collaborative work develops (Harris, 2010). Third, the lack of time is a significant issue for teachers who wish to work together collegially, and it has been cited as a barrier (Harris & Jones, 2010). Finally, engaging others in change requires will, skill but ultimately persistence as there will be periods where performance may be flat and where progress may be slow. The main challenge then is one of maintaining focus over time; continuing on despite setbacks and disappointments; to be resilient to criticism; and not to be discouraged when progress is slow (Levin, 2009).

The nature of relationships among teacher teams has a great influence on the character and the quality of a school and on student accomplishments. Developing relationships in schools fosters and strengthens teachers' ability to meet these challenges together resulting in improved professional practice. Relationships among teachers can range from vigorous and healthy to competitive and dysfunctional (Hargreaves, 1994). It is necessary to focus on the specific constructs that promote healthy relationship building.

Effective team learning and collaboration in schools requires teachers to do collectively what they have traditionally done alone: that is, look at student work and think about students' performance. The purpose of collaborative efforts is to foster teacher learning and produce collective gains (Little, Gearhart, Curry, & Kafka, 2003; Protheroe, 2004; Schmoker, 1999; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Thus, although many current reform initiatives include teacher collaboration as a critical element (Fallon et al., 2009), the findings of Brownell et al. (2006) and James et al. (2007) revealed that because of differences in knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, student management, and student-centered instruction, as well as differences in ability to reflect on and adapt instruction, collaboration or 'collective capacity' has limitations. These studies concluded teachers would benefit from meeting with peers and a skilled facilitator over time to explore problems and to learn how to implement new strategies. Another common aspect of effective collaboration evident in these articles was the consistent finding that reflective practice is one of the key elements necessary for successful implementation. This element of reflection in regards to collaboration seems to improve instructional practice and broaden opportunities for student learning. Once the structures are in place, it is critical to develop protocols and establish norms for teachers to build relationships that promote collegial practice. In order for teachers to rise to the challenge of adapting their teaching practices to meet these changing expectations, they must engage in reflective practice and have opportunities to develop relationships that promote productive and healthy dialogue with their peers that are supportive and helpful to one another. In Brownell et al.'s study, teachers were classified in categories of high, moderate and low adopters. The low adopters were less knowledgeable about

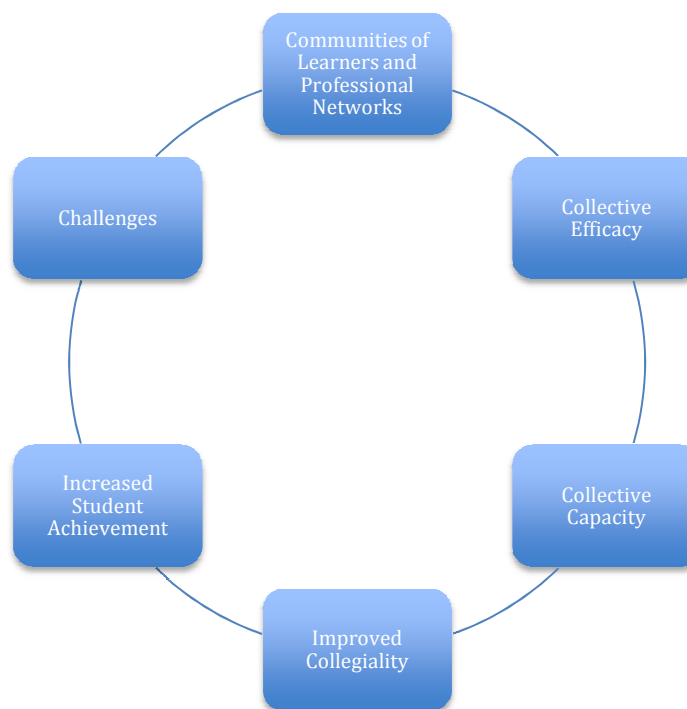
pedagogy, took longer to grasp ideas and did not always implement them well.

In order for collaborative reform to be more than a mandate there must be a collaborative ethic that is valued and supported by all team members. The findings from Grove (2006) and Fallon (2009) suggests that teachers need a clear goal or vision along with instructional supports to build the capacity needed for a sustainable model. Specific preparation for effective interaction must be developed over time. Collaboration must move from a forced or contrived ritual to a valued and authentic practice (Grove, 2006). Fallon's (2009) study of teacher interactions during grade level models found that tougher questions about individual's work habits were never on the agenda. Problems were discussed in terms of time, schedules and financial restraints, rather than in terms of teaching practices. The teachers involved in Fallon's study tended to maintain harmony rather than engaging in the more difficult task of critical reflection about teaching practices. Deep discussions and critiques were limited in grade level team meetings Fallon observed. Instead, comfortable collegiality predominated suggesting the difficulty of overcoming years of professional isolation. Educators tended to make choices to maintain a certain degree of isolation. The findings in this study corroborated with the literature on the dominance of comfortable kinds of collegiality with teacher teams as contrived and surface level interactions which keep the tougher questioning at bay (Barth,1990; Fullan, 1991, 2007: Little, 1990).

Additionally, Grove's (2006) study noted challenges with respect to developing shared goals and values when teachers engaged in collaborative work. Teachers struggled with finding the time to manage new curriculum, work with underprepared students and then find time in the day to work together. Time management seemed to be the main



challenge. Teachers were overwhelmed with obligations and pressures. This is consistent with the findings by Huberman's (1993) study, which found that collegiality may be resisted simply because of the time it takes away from instructional practice. The literature builds on collaborative efforts in stable environments, but challenges persist in an atmosphere of constant change or instability. The literature in this review builds a framework for the benefits of implementing collaborative teacher processes. The authors analyze the current state of collaboration providing a conceptual framework for drawing conclusions and future research on collaboration. The literature also addresses challenges that occur when developing collaborative models. School leaders who wish to improve teacher capacity, efficacy, collegiality, inclusion and equity for minorities or overall student achievement need to utilize a collaborative reform model, but must consider factors that inhibit successful implementation. Understanding the theories associated with relationship building could also assist in the further understanding of how relationships develop. The figure below represents the focus of literature reviewed for this study.



**Figure 1**

### **Social Capital and Social Network Theory**

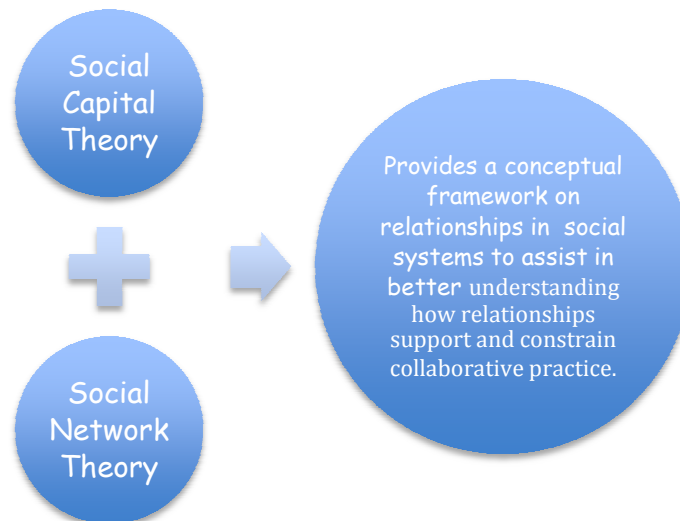
As noted in Chapter 1, this study was informed by social capital and social network theories. These theories are a natural fit for this study as both focus on examining the nature and impact of relationships between individuals. Social Network Theory focuses on the importance of relations in social systems in organizational change (Daly, 2010). A network is defined as a group of actors who are connected to one another through a set of different relations or ties (Daly, 2010). The focus of social capital theory has been to uncover how individuals invest in social relations and capture resources within relations to generate benefits. Other researchers have applied these theories to studies of teachers and educational change (Daly, 2010; Kobiba & Gajda, 2009; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). For example, Daly's (2010) review bridges social network theory and

instructional practice, which includes the relationships among teachers. The review builds a case between relationships and the quality of teacher interactions and offers a guide to future direction for educational change. Recent research using social network theory suggests that relationships and collegial support are central to the depth of engagement of educators (Daly, 2010). Teachers that are required to engage in relationships based on their grade level assignment are connected to one another. Interactions are valuable resources that are embedded in the development of relationships (Daly, 2010). It also provides insights into the motives of resisters of change, spheres of social influence and the social world of education that must be negotiated in order to enact change (Daly, 2010).

Social capital theory, which helps us understand the benefits accrued from social relations, also provides insights into the motives of resisters of change, spheres of social influence and the social world of education that must be negotiated in order to enact change (Daly, 2010). Earlier scholars, such as Loury (1977), pointed out this phenomenon of resources or capital developed through social relations. This phenomenon was explained as an investment, which can be made by individuals with an expected benefit or return to the individual. These individual returns can also be used collectively. Lin (1982) argued that both personal and social resources can be used to gain access. According to Lin (2001), individuals need to engage other individuals in order to access resources for the purpose of gaining better outcomes. These resources that are embedded in social relations result in better outcomes. These structures can bring about opportunities, but can also result in constraints, depending on the behavior of individuals.

Lin (2001) offers four explanations as to why resources in social networks enhance the outcome of actions. They include the flow of information, the exertion of influence, the accessibility of information, and social credentials, which provides reinforcement within the network.

Taken together, social capital and social network theories provide a framework for developing a context for understanding the perceptions, involvement and experiences of teachers as they engage in collaboration. The social relations and social structures that take place during teacher collaboration may provide support to produce collective gains. The social capital of teacher teams may provide support and structure for the development of professional practice impacting student outcomes. Figure 2 illustrates the framework for the study.



**Figure 2**

## **Conclusion**

This review of the literature has shown a need for teachers to form collaborative

and collegial teams in order to effectively conduct the work necessary to optimally and efficaciously perform as effective contributors in a professional learning community. Student achievement has been linked to research in the area of collaboration showing that when teachers believe they can make a positive impact on student achievement as individual teachers (high individual efficacy) in conjunction with the collective feelings of grade-level teams (high collective efficacy) a belief exists that as a learning organizational team, they can make a difference together (Goddard, 2002).

According to the authors cited in this review almost all current school reform efforts rely on some form of teacher collaboration. In fact, each of the articles attributes collaboration as a necessary part of the process for improving educational learning organizations. The research indicates a collaborative environment is an important component for improving achievement for students from diverse backgrounds. These authors also discuss the need for more research on the effective implementation of collaborative principles and practice required by school leaders.

The review of literature revealed the need for teacher collaboration by showing how developing relationships, creating communities of learning, building capacity, and strengthening efficacy leads to improved professional practice and ultimately increased student achievement. These ideas on collaboration give rise to a number of issues and questions for consideration. Further investigation is needed to determine what characterizes teacher teams' relationships and how they develop. Studying the nature of relationships, belief systems, and school culture to determine if collaborative practice take on different forms in different settings, and if so what are they and how might they

be characterized?

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how teacher teams develop relationships in collaborative settings. The aim was to examine the experiences and patterns of interaction among teachers in team settings in order to construct meaning from the experiences of teachers who actively engage in collaborative practice. In order to better understand what shapes valuable collaboration and the conditions that must be present for meaningful work to take place, this study involved observing teacher teams and interviewing teachers individually who engage in collaborative practice. The participants for this study were chosen based on strengths and challenges observed during implementation of the collaborative model. Specifically, this case study investigated the experiences of teachers in strong versus weak collaborative teams as they engage in weekly collaboration meetings.

To reiterate, the main research question guiding this case study was “What is the nature of the relationships among grade-level teacher teams that appear to have strong versus weak relationships?”

The following sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What are each team's characteristics?
2. How do the teams use collaborative time differently?
3. How do school level structures and cultures shape the teams' work?

This chapter provides an explanation of the qualitative methods, the methodological approach, the design of the case study, the data analysis, and ethical considerations.

### **Research Design**

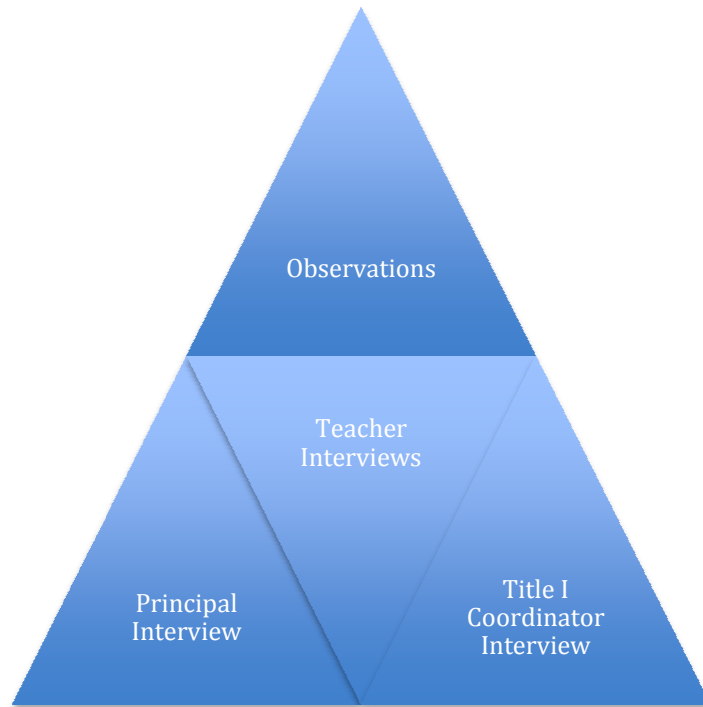
This project used a qualitative case study research. Qualitative methods provide educational and other social researchers with alternatives for describing, interpreting and explaining the social world and the operation of educational phenomena. A qualitative study seeks to provide diverse perspective toward education and contributes to the authentic portrayal of a complex, multifaceted human society (LeCompte, 2005). The social world in which we live in is intertwined with complexities and interpretations that can be explained, enhanced, and validated by those who live it every day. In the naturalist tradition, observational studies are conducted by gathering data through observing interaction in a particular location. The inductive nature of this qualitative inquiry is also important since the case study seeks to better understand the social world of classroom teachers (Esterberg, 2002). Thus, qualitative methods are appropriate when examining the interactions of teachers in collaborative settings.

Case study research methodology was chosen for this study because it focused on understanding a phenomenon, teacher collaboration within its real life context of the school (Yin, 2009). Using case study methods allows a researcher to understand a real life phenomenon in-depth: having such an understanding requires the researcher to comprehend the investigation's context because it is highly important to understanding the phenomenon itself (Yin, 2009). The phenomenon and the context are intertwined in these real life interactions.



A case study is an in-depth exploration of an activity, process or individuals based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2007). More specifically, this was a comparative case study (Stake, 1995) because two grade level teams were described and compared to provide insight on the nature of relationships in different collaborative settings. As a case study researcher, I was interested in describing the activities of two different grade level teams with in-depth exploration. The case study procedure for multiple cases was to first analyze each case separately and then conduct a cross-case analysis (Stake, 1995) to identify common and different themes among the grade level teams.

This case study utilized the approach of triangulation design integrating a combination of participant observation and in-depth interview techniques. Using a triangulation approach provided the researcher with multiple strategies, which tends to yield stronger results (Esterberg, 2002). The triangulation of data across these sources provided insight and enables the researcher to better explain the empirical world of collaboration. Figure 3 visually demonstrates the approach used for this study.



**Figure 3**

### **Setting**

This case study was conducted at a suburban elementary school in San Diego. The school is part of a relatively small school district. The district has a reputation of providing high quality educational experiences. It is an espoused value of the district to engage in collaboration at the grade level, the site level and the district level. The school boundaries include a section of low-income housing. There is a wide range in family socio-economic status in the community. There are approximately 700 students currently enrolled in the school. The population of the school is made up of 30% Hispanic, 65% Caucasian, and 5% Asian. Over 30 percent of the population is considered socioeconomically disadvantaged and therefore qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The Title I status qualifies the school for additional funding to support the disadvantaged

students. There are additional reading teachers hired to support the classroom teachers.

Teachers at each grade level meet weekly to plan appropriate instructional practice, plan interventions for underperforming students, review data, develop assessments, and plan enrichment activities for students who have already mastered grade level standards. The teachers are released once a week to engage in collaborative meetings. During this time, students are provided with a variety of enrichment activities. . The students rotate through activities and remain out of their classroom for several hours, so the teachers have dedicated and uninterrupted time to work as a team to plan with their grade level team.

### **Participants**

Two collaborative teacher teams were selected for this case study to be observed and interviewed. Teachers from two different teams were identified to be studied because they each team appeared to have developed relationships differently. One team (Team A) appeared to have stronger relationships while the second team (Team B) experienced challenges developing relationships. One team displayed characteristics that have been cited in the literature as successful, while the second team has experienced challenges throughout implementation based on differences in culture, pedagogy and experience. I chose these particular teams because one team has very strong collaborative relationships and the other does not. Moreover, the particular teachers in these teams represented a variety of backgrounds and experiences. These seven participants for this case study provided a grade level range in the elementary school setting to broaden the scope of perspectives.

The teachers meet once a week for two hours in learning communities also called grade level teams. The teachers at each grade level share the instruction of all students at their grade level. As the researcher, I observed these two grades' weekly meetings. The teachers on both teams followed a weekly agenda that was mandated by the administration to focus on student learning, curriculum, assessment development, and data analysis of student achievement as measured on formative and summative assessments. One goal of these meetings was to also develop lessons that meet the needs of the diverse levels of learners. Due to the complexity of collaborating under these circumstances, the participants engage in difficult discussions. In addition to the teachers, the school principal and a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) at the school also were asked to participate in interviews for the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Approval for the research study and use of human subjects was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UCSD. I complied with all regulations and required restrictions and was aware of the sensitive nature of information shared. Every precaution was taken to ensure the research participant's identity was and will be protected. I also worked with the school and district administration to ensure the IRB procedures were properly followed and district guidelines were also adhered to. All participants were ensured that their data would be held in confidence and any personal information would be separated from the case study data. To ensure this all participants were provided with pseudonyms. In addition, all the data was password protected and secured in a locked office.

### **Recruitment**

Following IRB approval, teachers and administrators were recruited through a request in the form of a letter. The letter described the proposed research and asked permission to document teacher team meetings and conduct a one-on-one interview for the research. I assured the participants that the information they share would remain confidential. The recruitment letter that was sent to each teacher can be found in Appendix A and B. Prior to the interviews and observations, all participants were required to complete the consent form found in Appendix C, which authorized the audiotaping during the interviews and observations.

### **Data Collection**

My research sought to develop understanding utilizing multiple forms of data which include: Individual interviews with each teacher (N=7), a principal interview, an interview with the TOSA, who is a site leader and regularly attends the team meetings, and a total of two observations of collaboration time for each team. The data was collected from interviews and observations from April to June of 2013. It is important to compare how different forms of data converged in themes and similarities. The use of triangulation aided in gaining an understanding of the experiences of these two teams of teachers as they engaged in collaboration.

Interview methods were used to identify the benefits and challenges of collaboration and the overall experiences of teachers working with a team. The instrument for these interviews included a short demographic survey and semi-structured interview questions. The demographic survey can be found in Appendix D and the interview questions can be found in Appendix E. The interview protocol outlined by Esterberg (2002) served as a guide to assist in the data collection. See Appendix F for a

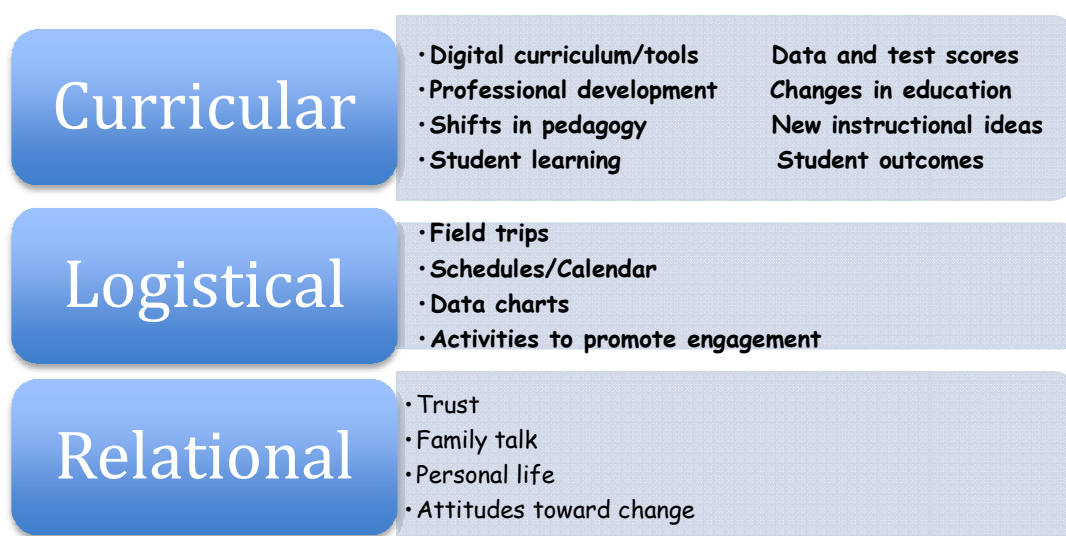
list of interview questions that were used in the interviews with the principal and the TOSA. The interviews were audiotaped. I used semi-structured interview questions to explore the topic more openly and allowed the interviewees to express their opinions more openly. The interviews were transcribed for data analysis.

I also utilized observation methods as part of the data collection process. Observations provided another source of data on teacher collaboration that could be analyzed along with the interview data. The observations assisted in identifying specific characteristics and behaviors during the weekly meetings. The observations played a valuable role in understanding each participant's role within their grade level team. The observations took place over two months with two observations per grade level. The grade level meetings were approximately two hours in length. I did not participate in the discussions and served only as an observer. I recorded data from the observations in the form of field notes and this protocol can be found in Appendix G. The method of audiotaping provided a detailed insight into the conversations of the teacher teams. It was important to access the nuances of the interactions of teachers, such as intonation. Though the tapes were not transcribed, audiotaping also helped validate the accuracy and completeness of the field notes I collected. It also reduced the potential for error of recording data incorrectly. The field notes were reviewed after each session to record additional comments and were used for the data analysis. The recordings also included frequency of participants' interactions logged utilizing a meeting observation protocol.

### **Data Analysis**

Each participant interview was transcribed and reviewed to determine authenticity and to check for discrepancies. As noted above, observation notes were verified for

accuracy by listening to audio-recordings of the meetings. Once the data was verified then the data analysis proceeded. The analysis, synthesis and evaluation of data included the coding of observation notes and the interview transcripts from each teacher. The purpose of the coding of the data was to establish themes. Guided by the knowledge of the literature review and conceptual framework undergirding this study, I used open coding methods, which enabled me to organize the data, code and retrieve text and create the structure to manipulate and annotate the data. The data was explored from a number of perspectives to see the different meanings that it could create. The figure below categorizes the codes that emerged and collapsed into themes.



**Figure 4**

During the coding process, 16 specific codes were identified. These codes included digital curriculum, professional development, student behavior, changes in education, shifts in pedagogy, new ideas, family and personal talk, attitudes toward change, trust, schedules, data and test scores, taking risks, student learning, lesson planning, projects, field trips and activities that promoted engagement among students.

These categories were then collapsed into three themes for further analysis. For example, information pertaining to classroom instruction, digital learning tools and lessons were collapsed into one theme. All discussions related to planning, field trips and schedules were categorized together and any topic involving emotions, personal life and attitudes were grouped as a theme. The three overarching themes that emerged from the analysis are presented as curricular, logistical, and relational. These will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4. The study focused on each grade level team as they met as a team and through individual teacher interviews. The two teams chosen were selected due to their history of interactions during their meetings. Team A had been determined to be a strong team with healthy relationships while Team B has experienced challenges while collaborating.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this case study was to further understand the nature of the relationships among teachers in grade level teams that appeared to have strong relationships and experienced benefits during collaboration versus those who have had challenges in relationship building and experienced barriers while engaged in collaboration relationships. It was also a focus to further understand what characterizes the relationships and belief systems of teacher teams. The research provided insight on how grade level teams use collaborative time differently. School leaders who wish to improve teacher capacity; efficacy, collegiality, inclusion and equity for minorities may choose to use the results to guide them in developing a collaborative model.



## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings from interviews and observations collected from two teacher teams and two site administrators. The data from semi-structured research questions and meeting observation notes were analyzed for this comparative case study on the development of relationships among two grade level teams in a collaborative setting at an elementary school. The purpose of this study was to explore the development of relationships of two grade level teams in collaborative settings. The study had two principle objectives:

1. To observe and discuss the experiences of teachers as they engaged in collaboration.
2. To better understand the nature of how relationships develop in collaborative settings.

The goal was to investigate what constructs support and constrain the development of relationships from the two teams chosen for this study. The analysis of data focused on what was similar and what was different between the two teams. To provide a context about those who were interviewed, a brief description of the participants on the two teams is provided. The two teacher teams are referred to as Team A and Team B. Findings are then presented according to themes in the data from observations of the teams and interviews with principal, the TOSA and the teachers. A summary of findings will close this chapter.

## **Overview of the Teacher Teams**

A total of seven teachers were interviewed and observed in team meetings. The participants in this study included two teacher teams (Team A and Team B). The teams had a majority of female teachers. The teachers on both teams are from a variety of backgrounds with varying years of experience. These teacher teams have been working in collaborative teams together for three years. The protocols the teachers followed in their meetings were developed on site. Weekly agenda topics were mandated by the administration for all grade level discussions. The teachers attended a one-day district workshop on team building prior to school-wide implementation of weekly grade level collaboration. The professional development focused on team building activities such as problem solving as a team. One such activity included each grade level building a tower together. Each grade level was given autonomy in how they structured their meetings and team directed and development-oriented approaches were promoted.

## **The Nature of Teacher Team Meetings**

Both Team A and Team B meet weekly for two hours in the morning. During my observations, I found the structure of each team meeting to be similar. They both gathered around a table in one of the teacher's classrooms. Both teams also had agendas and laptops with them. However, apart from these basic similarities, there were some differences in their patterns of interaction and in their relationships.

The conversations on Team A were more informal in nature and discussions of personal matters were taking place while the teachers were having breakfast. The team members talked about their children and grandchildren. They shared stories about what was happening in their personal lives. On the other hand, there was no mention of

personal or family life during my observation of Team B. Team A had breakfast items in the middle that they were all sharing, while Team B did not have any food.

Both team meetings had structure with an agenda with one teacher on each team acting as facilitator. The agendas were reviewed and teachers on both teams added new agenda items throughout the meeting. Conversations varied in formality, but similar themes emerged from the observations. Team A moved in and out of informal and formal discussions while Team B was more business like and formal throughout. Different teachers on each team volunteered to handle the tasks that needed to be taken care of. There appeared to be a smooth form of duty delegation by both teams. Also, both teams used their laptops for scheduling and looking up information on the Internet. Team B had a lengthy discussion about student behavior, whereas behavior never came up during the other Team A's meeting. Both teams focused on student learning goals, but the teachers on Team B used their grade books and made decisions on student lessons to address specific needs. Both teams discussed and planned field trips. They both spent time finalizing dates, organizing transportation needs, permission slips, and supervision. The conversations were very similar in nature, due to school-wide protocols. Both meetings were productive because they followed their agendas and distributed their time on task efficiently. During observations, both teams' facilitator redirected the teams when they were off task or spending too much time on one given agenda item. Both teams ended their meetings by distributing work among the group.

In sum, each team was different in how it functioned in formality during their collaborative time together. Team A spent a significant amount of time talking about their families and personal life. This distinct difference in behaviors toward each other was

seen with Team A's informalities of laughter and friendly conversations intertwined throughout, while Team B was more business like and serious in purpose regarding their objectives and time together. This significant difference of formalities in interactions indicated that Team A had developed socially while Team B teachers were not engaged socially.

### **Administrator Insights on Teacher Teams**

The insights of the administrators brought another perspective that provided clarity on how the teams functioned within the school setting. The TOSA, has worked on this campus for a significant amount of time years and has a important historical perspective while the principal of has spent less time at the site brought a fresh lens in the analysis of each teams' dynamics. The TOSA explained that the meetings were divided up between her and the principal and she didn't attend all of them. Both stated there are certain grade levels that are stronger than others at working together, but they all seem to be primarily focused on instruction and certain ones get along very well.

**Benefits of Collaboration** The questions that guided the study focused on what the two administrators perceived to have school-wide implications on collaboration. The TOSA generalized her depiction of teaming by saying:

I see a lot of support, a lot of sharing of materials and a lot of divvying up responsibilities. I think some of the grade levels are really, really great at that and then others ... I don't know, there seems to be maybe more friction and you don't see that collaboration in the same way. I think everybody here is professional and I think they work together to a certain degree but the thing that stands out is when you go to a meeting where they really do have that ... care for each other and that cohesion.

The principal had a similar perception of what was happening when she was in attendance of the grade level meetings and concurred:

I would say in some of the teams that do have very good camaraderie or very good collaboration, they're not necessarily friends. Some of them are friends outside of school. I would say some of them have ... some of them probably never see each other or talk but they have a very professional and a happy working relationship. I think they definitely some teams have developed trust, they've developed a sharing of responsibility.

The TOSA focused on the benefits for students that are accrued when teachers work together to share knowledge:

Really, it is hard to be the end-all to students by yourself, so if you're not collaborating, I don't see how people cannot collaborate. How could you not collaborate? Because really, what you're doing is you're doing what the kids deserve, which is to be able to share responsibilities and share ... you share what your expertise is with your colleague and with your students and then they share what theirs is. In all that, the kids are the ones that win because you can't do it all. You can be teacher of the world but if you're not ... if you think you can do this all by yourself, it would be deceiving. You can't. You can be a good teacher but without sharing, I guess, but you're even going to be better or stronger by collaborating.

The principal elaborated on the benefits with a more global perspective of the impact of collaboration on the school as a whole; "I think having the collaborative time is the benefit to the school culture." In sum, the principal and TOSA both saw the benefits of collaboration to the teacher teams and to the school as a whole, but noted that not all teams functioned in collaborative ways.

**Trust as Key Factor in Collaboration.** The principal and the TOSA both believed that trust was critical in order for the benefits of collaboration to occur. They both emphasized the need for structure, the establishment of norms and protocols such as an agenda, time for discussions on curricular matters, and team building opportunities to develop relationships. However even with these supports in place, the administrators acknowledged that the development of relationships takes time and if there is a level of trust, then there is the willingness for teachers to share more.

They believed that when teachers were willing to take risks and share their ideas, they were able to be vulnerable with each other. Teachers share ideas, experiences, struggles and data, which requires them to open up and risk judgment. They believed that when teachers have developed a relationship, they would be more able to have those more difficult conversations. The TOSA described:

What I've seen is that when that trust isn't there, then .... it doesn't mean that the teachers aren't still good teachers but it's a sad thing because they lose their ... the grade or the ... I think the kids lose out in a way because they're not seeing ... they're not getting everybody's best.

Like I said, everybody here, I feel, is very professional and they all get along to some degree but you can feel it, you can feel it when you go to the different meetings. I think the biggest thing is trust. If they don't have trust in who they're working with, because really, it's sharing students. It's not always sharing students but it is ... you have to be able to trust who you're working with to even ... even when you're developing ideas on curriculum or where your heading, whatever your vision is for your grade level.

The principal elaborated on the notion of trust:

The biggest thing is, to me, is trust and it's not just comfort, is it? Because sometimes you might not be comfortable with somebody but I feel like you do have to trust them. If there is a level of trust, then I think with that comes the willingness to share more. That is when I think people are more willing to take risks and share their ideas. They are able to be vulnerable with each other and share also ... because when you are sharing data and when you are really talking about things, you kind of open yourself up to: What do they think about me?

The differences in trust levels also led to different levels of depth in team collaboration. The principal explained: "I think that some teams have different group dynamics that allow for deeper sharing and planning, so that it is a lot more impactful to their instruction. Other teams that may not quite be at that point, then their planning might look a little more superficial in the sense that they are dealing with more logistical

things; like if they're planning generally, kind of scheduling things, but less about the actual strategies or ideas." Overall, trust was a key factor in collaboration, and the site administrators acknowledged that not all teams showed evidence of it.

**Differences Between Team A and Team B.** The principal and the TOSA concentrated on general issues regarding collaboration. However, when asked if they felt that any team stood out in their mind as being stronger than other teams both answered quickly that Team A had developed in a healthy and productive manner. The TOSA definitively stated:

It's obvious Team A here, I've gone to those meetings a lot and they're very different in terms of pedagogy. As individuals, I think they're all very different teachers but they are a model team, a model team as far as a collaboration model because even though they have these diverse educational philosophies, they come together and they somehow get on the same page, they develop, for example, a writing rubric, even though, not everybody agrees with ... I don't know, I've seen some amazing conversations and decisions made within those meetings.

The principal had a similar position:

With Team A, where you really do see people that are coming from all over the place, as far as their philosophies. Believe me, they're not on the same page philosophically. They all love kids but they all have different beliefs as far as how hard to push, how fast to push, if you should push, that kind of thing, where they come together and then they agree on things and it's very healthy. All the people involved trust each other. They all respect each other. They trust and respect each other.

She had a different perspective when talking about Team B and noted that the teachers did not appear to feel as positively about their interpersonal interactions.

When asking the administrators how they went about promoting team work among struggling teams, the TOSA stated: "I wish we could do some kind of team building or ... and I want to say that it would work but I think some of these things are so

ingrained unfortunately that with some of the personalities, I'm not sure it would." She added:

Yeah, I think you have to feel safe enough to be able to say that and then you have to feel safe enough to trust that the person that you may share your kids with is ... because ultimately, maybe your roster doesn't show, it shows that you're responsible for your kids but if you're sharing your kids, you have to be able to trust the person your kids are going to. That's the level of trust you have to have because ultimately, you're the one responsible for that subject area or for that content area.

The principal was more resolute in her support role:

I believe that my role is to try to support them and in facilitating what comes out of their meetings. Ultimately, I think the benefits are student growth. What that means to me is that when they get together, they are planning together and sharing ideas, best practices, best strategies. They're planning lessons together. They are looking at data together. I think in doing so they are able to share their ideas on that and then they alter instruction based on those conversations. Ultimately the benefit is the students are growing and learning.

According to the administrators, teachers develop relationships when they are working toward a common goal, so that if people truly can get in touch with that common goal, then it eventually leads to those conversations happening. One barrier of collaboration ultimately is time, and relationships need time to develop. The absence of time can inhibit the kind of risk taking that is required for deeper conversations. The principal believed that teachers learn best and change happens through learning, and that happens through the connections and the social interactions, resulting in optimal time for learning. She said, "If you have a connection that you want changed, well then you need to learn about how to truly implement that change, go from there. Learning happens through collaboration and interactions."



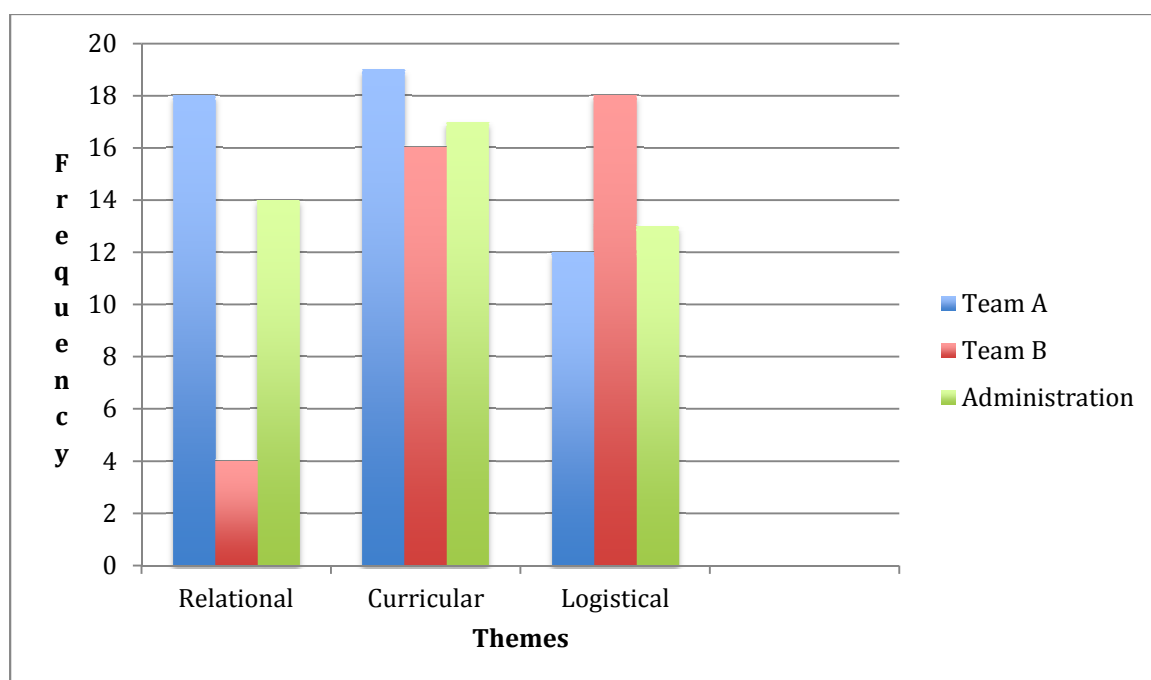
### **Themes in the Collaborative Process**

The above sections describing the teacher teams and the administrator perceptions lay the groundwork for a more in depth investigation of the themes that emerged in the study. The analysis of the data identified some similarities of the benefits of the collaborative process, but it also uncovered differences in teachers' perceptions regarding teacher collaboration. Although teachers were interviewed separately, some comments were often common not only among teammates, but also amongst the two teams. There were differences in perceptions, philosophies, pedagogy, and instructional practices when compared. In relation to the research questions, three specific themes emerged from the analysis data. These themes were logistical, curricular and relational focal points of collaboration.

The first theme *curricular* refers to the time spent on pedagogical discussions, instructional practice, grading, assessment and rubrics, and standards based content projects. Although there was a difference in philosophies between to two teams, both teams concentrated a significant amount of time discussing curricular matters. The second theme that was identified from the analysis of the data was *logistical*, which refers to the meeting elements that involved planning, scheduling and coordinating students. Both teams engaged in discussions related to timelines and coordination. During teacher meetings the following items were the focus of attention: field trips, schedules and calendaring, student groupings, assemblies and performances, and grade level projects. Finally, the most significant theme identifying the differences between the two teams was *relational*. This theme refers to the time the teachers spent discussing personal matters.

These were seen as informal interactions, discussions regarding emotional topics, and general feelings the teachers felt toward one another.

Data collected from the two teams showed that they both spent a majority of their time concentrating on logistical planning and curriculum development. Team A and Team B were consistent with the primary focus on planning and instruction. The data was clear, however, that Team A spent more time than Team B talking about relational topics. Figure 5 below shows the frequency in which each theme came up in the transcripts.



**Figure 5. Frequency of themes in transcripts**

### **Curricular**

The main focus for the teachers' meetings was to discuss curricular matters and plan lessons. Integrating content standards into projects was a common theme among both teams, however it dominated the conversation with Team A. Team A allocated a

large percentage of their instructional time having students work on projects. Team B stated that they would be doing one project during the grading period. The difference in pedagogical approaches was distinct. Team A appeared to be quite passionate when engaged in project conversations. One teacher stated, “When I'm thinking about what's really preparing kids to be successful, I really think it's more of those 21st century skills, with kids working in teams. It's so important for them to experience struggles through that stuff by creating a project or solving a problem. That kind of stuff is what's going to make them actually successful.” Teachers on Team A expressed that knowing what each other was doing helped connect them and fine tune their own class's progress during project work.

Another teacher on Team A stated she really liked talking about their grade's programs and projects, “I am able to work collaboratively with the project-based learning we were planning together. When my kids did the projects, I would know what we were doing and what my teammates were doing in their classrooms.” When discussing new curricular ideas, a Team B teacher expressed enjoyment about doing projects, but felt there wasn't flexibility and willingness by his team to try new things, which was important to change. The teacher expressed that “people who don't get offended very easily, people who are not afraid to mess up like experiment and try new things are the kind of people seem to do well with collaboration especially when it has to do with changing pedagogy.” The teacher continued:

People with more of an open mind tend to be more willing to meet and try these things, whereas people who are kind of set in their ways, that doesn't work so well with collaboration. I think it's basically like if you've been doing the same thing for 20 or more years and it worked, so why should I change it kind of attitude. But what I found is there are people that just

don't want to bother with it. It's extra work. It's hard to put in extra work.

Another teacher from Team B concurred:

We've had a member of our team who just really enjoys doing the things that have been done for the past 15 years and we're feeling like there's a pretty rapid change right now in education and we want to keep up and try new things, try project-based learning. I wish this teacher could really start to see that collaborating with each other does help the students because you're getting new ideas, you're doing things a different way, you're learning something new. Maybe you're learning about a piece of technology that you had never even known about. You can bring that into your classroom and share that with your students.

Another teacher on Team B spoke about curricular decisions, describing him/herself as someone who had done things a certain way and understood the needs of their students at that level and stated,

Now that I've been teaching for a while, there are things that I don't budge on. There are things that I feel I have to do with my kids because it works, and the next year's teachers appreciate it. But there are other things that I'm willing to try and experiment with or join up with others to try.

The differences in beliefs among teachers in Team B proved to be a stumbling block in collaboration. In contrast, Team A seemed to be able to work through these differences. A teacher from Team A stated,

I think on my team we kind of know what everybody's beliefs are, and we respect everybody for their different beliefs, and we know that this person is going to take it back and do it kind of this way, and this person is going to take it back and do it their way. But we all respect each other. It never turns into a big argument about changing things up, but I know there are different philosophical beliefs, but we don't let it affect our teammate really.

Whereas, a seemingly frustrated Team B teacher said, "Everyone goes back and does their own thing in their classroom the way they're going to do it. They are just pretty

much set in their ways.”

The teams differed in their approaches to curriculum, which may have also been in part a function of the fact that they taught divergent grade levels. A teacher on Team B talked about how her grade level used mostly the adopted curriculum and stayed on course while teachers from Team A said they didn’t follow a pacing guide, but moved on when the students were ready. A Team A teacher stated:

We don’t do a lot of worksheets and things from the adopted textbooks. We make up most of our own curriculum. We try to make the characters come to life and do activities that promote engagement. We need to change things every year, so for example, there’s a good chance that our project-based learning project this year won’t work next year because we can’t just say this is what we’re going to do because we have it in place because then we’re not listening to the driving question of what the kids are interested in learning.

Although they differed in their instructional approaches, both teams spent quite a bit of time discussing assessments and how assessment data might influence instruction. Another Team B teacher spoke at length about assessing students stating “We’ve spent a lot of time at our grade level meetings developing assessments. We use our curriculum map and pacing guide a lot to make decisions and make sure all the students at our grade level and are making gains in the same areas. We do spend much more time on our struggling students though. I think for the most part we target these students because we’re a program improvement school.” Team A and Team B teachers both spoke about looking at individual student progress. A teacher from Team A stated, “I think that’s a strength for our team that we look at all kids and we see how we can help them and we brainstorm ideas and get suggestions for ways to help them.”

## **Logistical**

Both teams were very good about creating agendas and had many items to discuss at their weekly meetings. According to several teachers, teams were given assignments by the principal on certain agenda items, such as focusing on target students each year. Both teams spoke about the requests from the principal and how an email would request that teams work on certain items or topics. Team A teacher gave an example, “our principal this week asked us to spend time discussing the Common Core and to start thinking about writing rubrics.”

Apart from these topics, a teacher from Team B stated that, “Everyone sort of brings their own kind of business that needs to get covered, for example if an individual is in charge of a field trip or a performance. We had to do a lot of collaborating and organizing as to whom was going where, what we were going to do with each group.” A teacher from Team A also concurred by saying that,

Field trips and things like that are some of the things that we work on when we’re in our meetings. We have gotten used to how to use the time and how to divide things out, make assignments and come back and report or share or whatever the case may be. We have to organize our field trips and prepping materials for our projects. We have also organized our team time when we do our English Language Development.”

A teacher from Team B had a similar experience while planning, but with a different outcome stating, “My team partners have been nice in trying to help, sharing, making me copies, and things like that, but we don’t do a lot of across the grade level activities. We meet weekly, so we don’t spend much time on field trips, but more time on which kids will switch for groupings.” Another teacher on Team B reported,

Our team typically only collaborates on topics where we share students. Another thing we plan is rotations and who will take which students for

science. We talk about the schedules a lot, but we don't spend much time on what we actually are teaching when the students rotate to our classes."

A teacher on Team B discussed how their meetings were conducted, "One time I would be the recorder, one time I would be the timekeeper and we are a bit more formal than I would like. On the contrary, a Team A teacher reported, "at times we do get off task and spend time on our personal lives and talk about, Oh, well....'what did you do this weekend? Then we would get side tracked. We work hard staying on task," she laughed. All of the teacher on Team A talked about spending time on helping the kids and their projects, but knew that coordinating schedules and planning had to get done during their meetings during their interviews. They all thought that creating a common calendar was important to get out of the way so as to get on with the more important decision-making. Team B all agreed that they needed to give themselves a lot of time for discussing student behavior, which was important, since they all shared the students for different subjects.

Both teams also stated they always scheduled time during their meetings for discussing the kids at risk and ways to support them. They also commented on the fact that they always seemed to have too many items on their agenda. The agendas on both teams had time limits, but throughout the interviews it became clear that both teams felt limitations even with two hours per week together. Both teams seem stressed about finding enough time to discuss and work on common core standards and the digital curriculum tools that the district had just adopted, in addition to all the other planning they needed to take care of. One Team A teacher commented that, "Some people say, how can you be together for so long? But to me it doesn't seem like we ever get caught

up.” The teachers reported that part of the time spent on agenda building was a request from their principal. Both teams felt that was the most productive way to get the most accomplished. Team A teachers stated that they always sent their agenda and notes afterwards to the principal even though it wasn’t required.

All the teachers interviewed reflected on their experiences over the course of three years and one Team A teacher stated “I feel like we're getting a lot tighter in our collaborations. We feel like we don't want to abuse that time. We really want to make sure we're super focused in that time period we have together.” And another teammate stated:

We just feel so blessed to have that time every week and we really want to make sure that we take advantage of every single minute of that time. We try to come up with our agenda beforehand and that's a process that has developed over the last few years. The first year, we didn't do that so much or sometimes, we'd come in, we'd just make a list of what we want to talk about. Now we try to get that list. We even talk about it at the end of our meetings, so for next meeting, what are we going to do, what do we want people to bring, what is everybody going to type or bring to the meetings, so that we're all set.

Team A teachers also reported that they used their entire two hour collaborative time together while Team B set aside some time for themselves. A Team B teacher explained, “We usually meet for about half the time and then use the rest of the time in our classroom grading papers and prepping.”

In sum, all teachers interviewed agreed that having an agenda, getting things done and an outcome of having successful students is the reason they continue to meet and make grade level decisions. There was a significant amount of time during interviews with both teams on scheduling, planning and organizing what they needed to do and it



was clear that the collaborative time together enabled both teams to accomplish more together than they would on their own. This was a consistent theme across the interviews.

### **Relational**

The primary way in which the teams differed was in their interpersonal relationships. As stated earlier, teacher connectedness was seen as a benefit to the teachers of Team A while it did not come up very often during discussions with Team B. One teacher on Team A shared that there was a sense of job satisfaction as a result of spending time with colleagues. She stated, “Whenever all of us get together, we always say, we need to get together, we need to socialize, talk a bit.” Another shared, “Maybe if it was possible, we should first have a social time because I do think it's important. It's just hard to get it all done.” A Team B teacher provided this perspective:

Some teams like it and do it because they love it, and some teams do it because they love collaborating. People that don't love working together, they just want to go in their room and close the door and do what they want to do. They don't like this model because they're forced into meeting, and they don't want to meet, and they have better things to do, and they want to prep their own rooms. And they think it's a burden on them to have to meet, and not a lot gets done and that's how I honestly feel with my team.

A teacher from Team B felt frustrated and complained that her time was so valuable and stated “Okay, let's talk about this... and they just want to talk, but my style is more to the point and then move on. Or... there's an agenda of 25 things and we can't get through it all and it makes thing worse.” When asking a teacher on Team A how they thought their team viewed the time together she expressed, “

I think it kind of depends on the willingness of the people involved whether or not they want to do it. I think people who are friends just team better. I know that this year in particular our team has discovered the

group text message. It can go on for an hour or two about any kind of project that we're doing.”

Another Team A teacher shared “they're my friends and they're my support system. They are like my family. I definitely am a person that totally believes in the benefit of it. I hugely support this time, both personally and philosophically.” A teammate corroborated, “I really like collaboration because I believe in sharing the work and that, through sharing the work, you make closer ties, developing that collegiality, and then also you lift a burden. I mean, why should people have to do the same thing and do it alone? In contrast a Team B teacher suggested, “Why not just have one person do it and pass it out to the others, kind of thing?”

In developing relationships, the teachers on Team A talked about sharing food several times throughout the interviews. One said, “We always have snacks at our meetings. We always have some kind of fun sharing time, just you know, and then it builds that trust, which then you're willing to assess new ideas and allow people to do things for you.” Another stated, “We began to see each other outside of school to have lunch or go out for happy hour. We have become true friends with our grade. We actually get together with our spouses now too.”

Another focus of conversation of Team A was their own children. As expressed by one of the Team A teachers, “I think that it helps that we formed a friendship outside of that, like we had barbeques, go to each others kid functions and I even had a baby shower for one of my teammate's daughters.” She continued by saying “and we would ... you know what I'm saying, we formed friendships outside of work because I really like the people I work with.”

A common theme about Team A's conversations became clear and was summed up by one of teachers who said, "you're working with people everyday and you have a relationship with, you're going to get a lot more productivity out of them because they're going to enjoy working with each other. An analogy was used to explain the importance of collaboration which a Team A teacher shared, "I used to say with Little League, when our team was doing bad, "We need more pizza parties, we need more beach parties, because when you socialize you establish trust, so when you go to throw that ball to first base, you know someone is going to catch it. Trust is huge."

On the contrary a Team B teacher expressed "I don't feel like I'm part of a team because I don't feel like my team trusts me, so how can I be part of a team?" Team B spoke of relational challenges frequently. One team member expressed, "I think that the biggest challenge for me is that I'm willing to take the risks I'm being asked to take, but there is no enthusiasm whatsoever from my team to do anything different. I want to work with people who are willing to grow, change, and learn because there are so many new things to learn. That's not a healthy thing to always do things the same way."

This contradicted the responses of Team A as they discussed how teachers should interact. "To be in this profession knowing that they're life-long learners and that they need to continually learn new things," is what one member expressed about her teammates. Team A talked a lot about respect. As one team member stated, "I think for one thing we all respect each other, even the people that maybe don't collaborate as well or are maybe more stuck in their pedagogy or their way of teaching, we still respect everybody, and I think that's why, even though it's tough sometimes we are so close. It always seems to go back to respect and trust." Another Team A teacher shared:

We don't always get along. We get upset with each other, but conflict is definitely necessary. You don't need to be rude about it. We definitely try to be respectful. I think it really helps when you get to know and respect the people that you're working with. You don't always get to know what someone is going through or what they've gone through before that gives them the perspectives that they have, and the reason that they are the way that they are. If you sit down and you have lunch with somebody, and you start hearing about a story about what happened to them when they were four years old, it can explain a lot.

In a similar vein, another Team A teacher said, "People just have a different perspective of how it could go, but I definitely think if you're not respectful to one another and you're having these conflicts, which are necessary ... I do think they are necessary for collaboration ... you can get stuck and inflexible, and it can affect the whole team."

In contrast, a Team B teacher perceived a member of the team as being set in their ways, "when you're putting your foot down and you're really trying to defend your beliefs then how can you explore new possibilities in instructional practice." The team member expressed that innovation and change were the catalyst for his need to meet with his colleagues, but that wasn't a common feeling among this team and frustration was evident. Although the team was well established and set in their pedagogy and practice, the conflict was notable when discussions regarding change were introduced. The tone of voice really told the story between two teams.

The patterns of communication that took place between these teacher teams when they were together and when they were interviewed separately was distinctive in relational terms. Even the simple interactions showed signs of how the relationships had

developed differently and also how each team approached teaching and their own learning. Examples of enthusiasm summed up Team A with responses such as:

I love our collaboration. I know it's changed my teaching. When you are in your own classroom and you are doing your own thing...it's very easy to get stuck. When we have these meetings and you hear about other things that other people are trying. Just that they're taking that risk, and it's working. Or that they took that risk, and it didn't...but it kind of, allows you, almost gives you permission to take that risk and give it up and try, I think it's worth all the effort.

Comments about relationships from Team B were expressed as one teacher put it:

It's all friendly and we keep it cordial and everything. But if I'm being totally honest, I don't really feel like we ever get anywhere. I mean there isn't a lot of trust right from the beginning. It's as if my team is just not willing to do something different or not wanting to take risks and try something new and work with other people, for the improvement of the school, or the climate. Maybe people are scared to just get out of their comfort zone.

These comments provided distinct insights on the differences in how each team viewed their relationships. While the administrators were aware of the challenges that Team B faced, they struggled to find ways to help the team move forward in developing more positive relationships. The lack of positive relations inhibited them from having some deeper discussions. Team B completed their meetings by successfully accomplishing their agenda tasks, but seemed to want to return to their isolated environments as quickly as possible. Whereas Team A stayed together longer and enjoyed their time together which led to extended meetings and richer discussions. The development of personal relationships and interactions of Team A seemed to provide an atmosphere of comfort, which had been built on trust through the sharing of personal matters over time.

## Summary

This chapter presented the findings on the collaboration of two teacher teams in one elementary school. This comparative case study saw both the benefits and constraints in the analysis of experiences of the two teacher teams engaged in collaborative work. The teachers who participated in the study had a clear understanding of the framework for teacher collaboration at their school. Members of both teams reflected on and described their experiences with weekly collaboration within the context of their grade level. Through the analysis of the data, a descriptive narrative emerged which expresses the feelings, thoughts, and hopes of each teacher as it related to experiences with weekly teacher collaboration. Teachers identified the benefits and the barriers that affect the weekly meetings.

The findings of the study that must be considered involve the positive attributes of each team's structure. The main objective in both team meetings was to plan instruction to meet the needs of their students. The dialogue differed with the two teams as the opinions on how things should be done was similar in many ways. The time teachers spent talking about students included specific discussions about student who were struggling and who presented with behavioral challenges. There were many times when the teachers focused their time on individual students and discussed social, emotional and academic details about them.

New ideas were present in both team meetings, but more prevalent with Team A. This team was interested in trying out new approaches and it came up far more often than when I observed with Team B. Team A and one of the teachers in Team B seem focused on class projects. Team A spent far more time discussing the project plans. Team A

teachers discussed project based learning activities a large percentage of their time together. Team B mentioned a project based learning project but spent only a few minutes discussing. The energy towards common goals and sharing work was evident with Team A while Team B shared planning tasks individually.

Curriculum and logistics were discussed in both team meetings and it was a dominant part of the planning during both collaboration meetings. Digital curriculum had recently been implemented school-wide, so discussions by both teams dominated a significant amount of the time together. Several subthemes also emerged that were specific to individual beliefs and philosophy. These included trust, risk taking, respect and understanding. Interpersonal relationships, including talk about family, personal life and non-school conversations varied. These personal connections were the ties between the teachers that can be seen as highly varied between the two teams. Team A spent significantly more time talking about personal matters compared to Team B. According to the principal in this study, “If you have made those personal connections, your chances to affect change are greater. The best learning happens through collaboration and interactions.”

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Introduction

As stated earlier, the main research question guiding this case study was “What is the nature of the relationships among grade-level teacher teams that appear to have strong versus weak relationships?”

The following sub-questions were also addressed:

1. What are each team's characteristics?
2. How do the teams use collaborative time differently?
3. How do school level structures and cultures shape the teams' work?

Culturally and structurally, collaboration was supported at the district and site level. This was apparent with commonalities that emerged in the *curricular* and *logistical* themes. The expectation for teachers to collaborate was clear throughout the interviews and observations of both teams. The time, protocols and supports were clearly in place and the teams interviewed received encouragement by the administration to engage in the collaborative process. Both teams were productive and accomplished the tasks set forth by their weekly agendas. It was clear that even though both teams followed similar protocols, there were different results in the different contexts.

Each collaborative team created its own culture, which was based on the teams beliefs and values. Relationships developed in Team A through a sense of shared vision within the collaborative team's culture. The nature of dialogue with Team A had a more interpersonally connected culture, with a more open dialogue for sharing. Team A created an environment that included the sharing of personal life stories, which enabled them to



develop an understanding of one another, which ultimately built trust among the members. Team A also engaged in personal discussions over breakfast. The time spent together sharing a meal provided time to make personal connections. Team B, while very productive and efficient, viewed their collaborative time together differently. They wanted to accomplish the tasks and work set forth by their agendas, but didn't necessarily feel the need to share their personal life experiences with each other. Both teams used their collaborative time together to address curricular matters and make decisions on logistical planning, but Team A spent some of their time differently, by adding more time to talk informally and share more about themselves. Teachers responded to the culture they were engaged in differently. The social interactions in Team A fostered a stronger desire to spend time together than Team B. The group dynamics of Team A seemed to develop a culture that was not only productive, but also built strong personal connections.

Each collaborative team had its own culture, values and beliefs. When teachers are of like mind, similar in nature and disposition, the chances are greater that sustainable relationships will form. Relationships need to be and collegial in nature. Team A seemed to have stronger personal relationships with a noticeable difference in the level of comfort, openness and trust with each other. A collaborative ethic appeared to be valued and supported by all Team A members.

The purpose of this study was to explore the development of relationships of two grade level teams in collaborative settings and why the teacher teams developed differently. An additional purpose of the study was to compare two teams working in a similar environment and examine the factors that positively or negatively impacted the development of their relationships. By comparing the teams and focusing on how

teachers spent their time and what was the focus of their weekly meetings provided a clear picture that the personal connections is what made the difference. The stronger relationships were formed from a sense of purpose, a sense of community and a shared vision. The two teams who were identified for this study demonstrated commonalities in the areas of logistical planning and curricular decision-making. They were both immersed in a school culture that promoted collaborative work. The data from this study however, identified differences in the personal interactions, which set the two teams apart.

Relationships among Team A grew over time while relationships were not fostered within Team B. The interview and observation data matched the existing literature on the benefits and challenges teachers face in collaborative settings, as I will explain below. It is important to note that although both teams experienced benefits and were productive, accomplishing the work of curricular and logistical planning and both teams experienced challenges described in the literature, such as differences in philosophy and pedagogy, only one team seemed to value the time spent together. Team A appeared committed to the process due to their ability to resolve issues and although there were differences the close relationships enabled them to persevere. Studying the nature of relationships, belief systems, and school cultures revealed that collaborative practice take on different forms in different team settings.

This study provides evidence that collaboration is more likely to be sustained if teams members develop relationships. The challenges that teachers face in the rapidly and ever changing educational landscape, requires collaborative sustainability. The level of collegial support needed cannot be achieved through mandated practice. Teacher must want to work together and when teams connect through personal interactions and develop

relationships the chances of sustaining a collaborative model increases.

The three themes that emerged in this study were curricular, logistical and relational foci of team collaboration. The data collected from both teams showed they both spent a similar amount of time discussing instructional practices and planning, but Team A spent significant more time than Team B discussing things like trust, resolving conflicts, taking risk and sharing stories about their experiences both in the classroom and in their personal lives. These differences are important for administrators to consider when implementing collaborative models. Attention to relationship building could positively impact the success of teamwork.

### **Connections to Prior Research**

The literature presented in Chapter Two identified benefits for teacher collaboration and it also identified the challenges that teacher teams experience. As stated in the reform initiatives of NCLB, improving learning environments utilizing the teacher collaboration model of learning communities was believed to be a necessary ingredient for change (DuFour, 2004; Harris & Jones, 2010; Sharrat & Fullan, 2009; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). According to DuFour (2004), collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been an isolated and private decision-making process. These discussions give teachers someone to turn to, and offer a structure to improve the classroom practice of teachers both individually and collectively. Stoll and Louis (2007) similarly emphasized how '*professional networks*' can create the infrastructure for new knowledge and new learning, which can no longer be left to individuals. To be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world, it is suggested that school communities work and learn together in networks of practice.

Implementing collaborative models is a way to create collective capacity through deep conversation and mutual inquiry (Katz & Earl, 2010). Collective accountability as well as collective responsibility plays a vital role in developing new professional practice. Furthermore, Fallon and Barnett (2009) asserted that purposeful and meaningful collaboration can address the social and emotional demands of teaching.

The school in this study addressed the perceived problem of teacher isolation by transforming their organization into a more collaborative environment. Over the course of three years this school attempted to develop more collegial practices through grade level team weekly meetings. Over time, the teachers on both teams increased the level of sharing their teaching successes and challenges with their groups, improving collegiality. Teachers from Team A and Team B developed professionally through collective responsibility, support, communication, and relationship building (Bandura, 1986). The collaboration from both teams enriched teachers' knowledge base in curricular and logistical planning matters. The depth in which Team A interacted and exchanged ideas underlined the importance of 'collective motivation' as a source of individual job satisfaction and led to improved efficacy as described by the teachers. Collaboration provided Team A opportunities to enjoy the social and professional satisfactions of the collective effort (Little, 1990; Fullan & Steigelbauer, 1991; and Schmoker, 1999).

Reid (2009) suggested that the results from his study provided preliminary support for efforts to improve student achievement by providing teachers with opportunities to collaborate on issues related to curriculum, instruction, and planning. Both teams in this study felt they had similar results through their ability to share knowledge and discuss best practices to improve instruction for students. This study did

not examine achievement data from the two grade levels. Though both teams felt their work together positively impacted their instruction. The teachers on Team A addressed both each others' social and emotional needs they faced as teachers in their complex and demanding environment.

The challenges in the literature matched the challenges the two teams in this study faced. These challenges included teachers resisting change, differences in pedagogy, and differences in culture. The study also revealed that the development of relationships is not a natural act as teachers have traditionally worked in isolation. Team collaboration is not a natural act in the traditional culture of American education in which teachers have traditionally worked in isolation. Teams that have not developed a trusting culture in which teachers can safely take risks and engage in dialogue about assumptions, beliefs, and practices have shown limited success (Langer & Colton, 2005). The findings of Brownell et al. (2006) and James et al. (2007) revealed that, because of differences in knowledge of curriculum, pedagogy, student management, and student-centered instruction, as well as differences in ability to reflect on and adapt instruction, collaboration or 'collective capacity' has limitations. This was evidenced by Team B as the teachers tended to make choices to maintain a certain degree of isolation. The findings in this study corroborated with the literature on the dominance of comfortable kinds of collegiality with teacher teams as contrived and surface level interactions, which keep the tougher questioning at bay. This is consistent with the findings by Huberman's (1993) study, which found that collegiality and relationship building may be resisted simply because of the time it takes away from instructional practice.

While a great body of research emphasizes the importance of teacher collaboration, less is known about what constructs are necessary to build lasting relationships among teacher teams. The goal of this case study was to discover and potentially add to our knowledge about what makes some teams work together more successfully than others. Throughout the interviews and observations, the focus of this research was to learn more about the patterns of interactions among each team and to uncover what characteristics were present. The relationships and personal interactions among the members of Team A were different from the relationships of Team B. Both teams spent similar amounts of time discussing curricular and logistical matters, but Team B did not exhibit the relational characteristics of Team A. The pattern of interactions among Team A included a significant amount of socializing and the discussion of personal life matters while that was not present in the interactions of Team B. Authors from the literature cited in this paper found that well-connected teacher networks were associated with strong teacher collective efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), which in turn supported student achievement. Goddard et al. (2007) study found relationships to play a significant role in teacher collaboration. This study cannot ascertain whether the differences in teachers' interpersonal relationships had an impact on student achievement. However, it does appear that the differences affected teachers' satisfaction with the quality of their time together and their professional interactions.

### **Connections to Theoretical Framework**

In order to better understand the relationships in collaborative settings, this case study was informed by theories in Social Capital and Social Networks (Daly, 2010; Lin,

2001). Social Capital theory played a role in the interpersonal relationships that were forged by Team A. Social network theory and analysis offered a conceptual framework for analyzing the structure of a social system to understand how relationships within the two teams supported and constrained collaborative practice. The concepts that influence social processes provided the lens for this case study (Lin, 2001). A network theory approach provides insights into the motives associated to educational change. As stated earlier, social capital is defined as the resources that are embedded in social relations and social structures, which played a key factor in this study.

Team A placed an emphasis on interactions among the individual teachers as they engaged in weekly grade level meetings. The relationships in Team A were more developed creating a distinct culture. The findings from this study built a case that the quality of teacher interaction was central to the depth of engagement of educators (Daly, 2010). Teachers that are required to engage in relationships based on their grade level assignment are connected to one another. Interactions are valuable resources that are embedded in the development of relationships (Daly, 2010). It also provides insights into the motives of resisters of change, spheres of social influence and the social world of education that must be negotiated in order to enact change (Daly, 2010).

To reiterate, individuals need to engage other individuals in order to access resources for the purpose of gaining better outcomes. These resources that are embedded in social relations result in better outcomes (Lin, 2001). These structures can bring about opportunities, but can also result in constraints as seen in the interactions of Team B. The social relations and social structures that take place during teacher collaboration may

provide support to produce collective gains.

### **Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

There is a need for further research to investigate the development of relationships among teacher teams in collaborative settings, which could shed light on teacher work attitudes on teaming. Researchers should continue observing and interviewing teacher teams to further understand how relationships develop and what can be done to promote the development of positive relationships in collaborative settings. This study was limited to one school and only two teams, and thus further research is needed with a larger sampling of teachers in order to better understand how relationships develop. It will also be necessary to research relationship building professional development opportunities that have shown positive outcomes in providing ways in which teachers can forge authentic relationships. If leaders had concrete ideas on how to develop better relationships, they would be able to implement strategies in both school-wide and in team settings.

Another consideration is that the majority of the teachers in the case study were female. Future research could include study's that focused on mixed gender groupings to determine whether or not gender plays a role in the interactions and development of relationships. Understanding the dispositions of teachers could also play a role on how relationships develop, so further research on personality types should be considered. Future studies should also include the impact that the principal has on encouraging the development of relationships across the school setting. These efforts could enable teachers to forge relationships necessary for successful change initiatives in school



settings and assist in transformational reform. Future research is recommended to explore how leaders can develop the teamwork skills in teachers that lead to increased risk taking and empowerment. Teams that have not developed a culture in which teachers can safely take risk and engage in dialogue about assumptions, beliefs, and practices has shown limited success (Langer & Colton, 2005), so research could play a valuable role informing school leaders on how to develop sustainable collaborative practice models. Additional research should focus on collaborative practice and student learning outcomes. Existing research has shown positive effects on student achievement, so further studies are recommended.

### **Implications for Leadership**

A deeper understanding of how relationships are developed is necessary for schools to establish productive collaborative environments for teacher teams. A productive collaborative environment where social capital is developed enables teachers to share knowledge and plan for student learning, which is critical for success in our rapidly changing educational environment. In order to transform schools, administrators need to support teams in ways that will allow time for relationships to grow. Understanding how relationships grow is key to sustainable collaboration.

There are things that leaders need to consider beyond putting structures in place and mandating meetings. The focus for principals should be to judge whether or not collaborative team time is effective and determine what professional development and administrative support is needed. It is important to establish clear expectations for teachers by identifying specific indicators on how successful partnerships work and

develop. According to Hargreaves (1994) “Collaboration and restructuring can be helpful or harmful, and their meanings and realizations therefore need to be inspected repeatedly to ensure that the educational and social benefits are positive” (p. 248). Hargreaves (1994) work on the importance of teacher collaboration and what he refers to as ‘contrived collegiality’ should also be considered by principals. Collegiality is a necessary ingredient, but it must not be contrived, which he defined as ‘administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable.’(p.193). Efforts to develop and maintain productive collaborative cultures, requires ongoing attention due to the complexities and different forms collaboration takes on. According to Hargreaves, in collaborative cultures, working relationships between teachers tend to be spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, pervasive across time and space, and unpredictable. These cultures are incompatible with “school systems where decisions about curriculum and evaluation are highly centralized” (p. 193). Collaboration among teachers with these characteristics does not generally lead to meaningful or sustainable change. Therefore, it is critical for administrators to balance the amount of mandates and ‘must do’s’ and allow some autonomy for teacher teams to naturally develop their own culture.

The teams in this study developed relationships differently. Both Team A and Team B were productive and generative in their work together. Both teams spent time on curricular matters and attended to logistical tasks, but one team seemed to have developed more congenial and collegial relationships. According to Sergiovanni (1999), congeniality is characterized by friendship, a sense of trust, loyalty and cohesiveness. Sergiovanni also defines collegiality as “the existence of high levels of collaboration

among teachers and is characterized by mutual respect, shared work values, cooperation and specific conversations about teaching and learning. When collegiality is high, a strong professional culture held together by shared work norms emerges in teams ” (p. 138). The nature of team A seemed to have both congeniality and collegiality.

Administrators should foster both. A principal can create conditions for developing both congeniality and collegiality by:

- Creating a schedule and structure that promotes team time
- Provide time for exchange of ideas and development of lessons
- Continually promoting a shared vision for excellence with clear expectations
- Providing positive feedback and recognition to the teams
- Allowing time for both formal and informal opportunities for teams to interact
- Plan activities that are designed to build relationships
- Be available and participate in team meetings to model being part of the team
- Model good listening and promote trust and respect
- Model risk taking

Understanding how trust develops during collaboration could also play an important role in professional development opportunities for teachers to develop personal connections. Providing these opportunities in a more social setting could also be potentially important. Collaboration should provide opportunities to enjoy the social and professional satisfactions of the collective effort (Little, 1990). School personnel need training and support to develop cultures that promote effective and sustainable collaboration (DuFour, 2002; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Principal leadership must clearly define a vision for collaborative work to not only share knowledge, but to impact the

instructional practices for all classrooms. This vision should include opportunities for teachers to engage in relationship building to develop high levels of trust. Trust is a necessary ingredient for risk taking. Risk taking is necessary for moving teams forward in transforming the complex and dramatic changes in education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Guided by the growing evidence in the literature, administrators should concentrate efforts within their educational organizations to develop collaborative opportunities that lead to relationship building amongst teacher teams. These efforts could enable teachers to forge relationships necessary for successful change initiatives in school settings. A further examination on how relationships develop among teachers engaged in professional collaboration could assist in the transformation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century educational reform.

In order for teachers to collaborate effectively, professional socialization needs to occur. This socialization can either promote or inhibit the development of relationships. When teachers work together effectively as learners they develop trust and engage in risk taking. Therefore it is critical to encourage positive team building in order to develop strong professional and personal relationships. If positive relationships form sustained teaming will result. The principal plays an important role in developing and sustaining a positive and productive collaborative culture in the school.

Leadership must also address how teacher collaboration can be supported over time to ensure sustainability. Teacher teams must be supported, monitored and evaluated over time. The support should include coaching and feedback regarding collaborative processes. The process should include developing ways for teams to communicate.

Without support, teachers will resort back to isolation and become individual contractors as seen in past practices. Support should include training, resources and time that is embedded in the professional day. The principal should also promote the norms of collaborative culture throughout the school and dedicate time to developing relationships on a more social level. Time dedicated for socialization could promote both congeniality and collegiality, which could lead to deeper commitment for teams to do the difficult work needed in our ever changing landscape of education. Effective collaboration evolves over time in order for team members to develop cultures that are authentic and sustainable.

### **Closing Remarks**

When developing collaborative models there are many things to consider. The logistics of designing the structure for teachers to be released from students, the establishment of norms and protocols such as agenda, and time for discussions on curricular and logistical matters are essential. In order for teams to engage in transformative work, team-building opportunities are needed to ensure that relationships are developed. The administrators in this study acknowledged that the development of relationships takes time. As relationships develop, levels of trust increase, and then there is a willingness to share more. When teachers are more willing to take risks and share their ideas, they are able to be vulnerable with each other. Teachers who are able to share ideas, experiences, and struggles open up and risk judgment. When teachers have developed relationships they are able to have those more difficult conversations. According to the administrators and teachers in this study, relationships are developed

over time when teams are working toward a common goal. If teachers can get in touch with that common goal, it will eventually lead to deeper conversations to occur.

One barrier of relationship building in collaborative settings is ultimately the lack of time teachers have together. Since relationships develop over time, it is critical to allocate enough time to promote relationship-building opportunities. Lack of time inhibits the kind of risk taking that is required for deeper conversations. The principal in this study believes that teachers learn best by sharing knowledge with their colleagues. Change happens through learning, and that happens through connections and social interactions, resulting in optimal time for learning. As researcher Margaret Wheatley states (Wheatley, 1992), “In organizations, real power and energy is generated through relationships and the capacity to form those relationships is more important than tasks, functions, roles and positions.”

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## APPENDIX A

*University of California, San Diego*

### **Consent to Act as a Research Subject**

#### **Teachers' Experiences in Collaborative Settings: A Case Study Comparing Collaborative Teams'**

Beth A. Cameron, under the supervision of Dr. Amanda Datnow, Professor and Chair, UCSD Education Studies, with approval of the Encinitas Union School District, is conducting a research study to find out more about how relationships develop in grade level teacher team collaborative meetings. You have been asked to participate in this study because you are an elementary teacher currently engaged in weekly teacher team collaborative meetings. There will be two teacher teams participating in this study with approximately three to four teachers on each team. The purpose of this case study is to better understand what supports the development of healthy relationships and what constrains them. This study has two principle objectives:

1. To observe and discuss the experiences of teachers as they engage in collaborative settings.
2. To better understand the beliefs and attitudes of teachers who are engaged in weekly teacher collaboration through one on one interviews and collaborative meeting observations.

#### **Description of Procedures**

There are two parts to this study. You will engage in two individual conversational style interviews regarding your experiences in collaborative settings. You will be interviewed privately in a setting of your choosing and a time that is most convenient for you (before or after school or on the weekend). Each interview will take approximately 30-60 minutes, and you will be audiotaped. The tapes will then be transcribed, coded and analyzed. You will be provided a copy of the transcript of the interview for checking and clarifying any information.

You will also be observed with your grade level team during your dedicated team meeting time during the school day. Your team meeting will be audiotaped as you engage in discussions and dialogue during your grade level collaboration time. These tapes will also be transcribed, coded and analyzed.

If you agree to be in this study, the following will happen to you:

1. You will be interviewed individually twice and you will be audiotaped. The interviews will take between 30-60 minutes each.

2. You will be observed and audiotaped with your teacher team during your collaboration meetings together. The observation will last the duration of the weekly team meeting time, which is approximately 60-90 minutes.

### **Risks**

Because this is an investigational study, there may be some unknown risks that are currently unforeseeable. Some risks could include:

1. There is potential for loss of confidentiality both for hard copy and digital copies of the research information. This is highly unlikely since no teacher names will be used. A transcription software tool will be used to de-identify you. Your results will be coded to ensure anonymity. Research records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Research records may however be reviewed by the UCSD Institutional Review Board.

2. Although the interviews are brief, there is a possibility that you may become fatigued, bored, stressed or uncomfortable. Because the interviews are entirely voluntary, you may skip questions or discontinue at any time. The audiotaping can be stopped or erased at anytime during the interviews and observations.

3. Although the researcher once held a supervisory role at your school, the results are in no way related to any evaluation or judgment of teachers. The results are not a component of anyone's evaluation or grade level placement and will not be shared with the teacher's direct supervisor.

4. There is potential for loss of instructional time.

### **Safeguards**

Safeguards put in place to minimize risk include:

1. You may withdraw from the study at any time. You will only need to provide a brief written request to withdraw from the study for your protection.

2. Interview sessions will be restricted to 1 hour; if it persists longer than this duration, it can be stopped at your request. Interviews will be conducted at your convenience with consideration for loss of instructional or planning time.

3. Your interview data will be kept confidential, available only to the research team for analysis purposes. Only the research team will listen to and transcribe the information you provide. The audiotapes will be destroyed following final analysis. You may also choose to not be audiotaped and handwritten notes will be taken. Audiotaping may be stopped or erased at any time.

4. Pseudonyms for schools, districts, and teachers will be used to minimize the risk of *identification*. You will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interview and

to eliminate any comments or references you feel may be identifiable or have negative connotations with respect to the district or school leadership. Your responses will not be linked to your name or address, and there will be no follow-up sessions

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any time. If the length of the interview becomes inconvenient, you may stop at any time. There are no consequences if you decide not to participate. In particular, your job evaluation will not be affected if you choose not to participate.

### **Benefits**

There may or not be a direct benefits to you from participating in this study. The researcher, however, may learn more about how positive relationships are developed, which may benefit you and your team. You will be informed if any new information is found during the course of this study that may affect your wanting to continue.

The researcher may remove you from the study without your consent if the researcher feels it is in your best interest or the best interest of the study.

### **Questions/Concerns/Contact Information**

If you are injured as a direct result of participation in this research, the University of California will provide any medical care needed to treat those injuries. The University will not provide any other form of compensation if you are injured. You may call UCSD Human Research Protections Program at (858) 657-5100 for more information about this or to report research-related problems.

The University of California, San Diego, Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this study. If you have questions about the study, you may direct those to the researcher, Beth Cameron, beth.cameron@eusd.net (760) 445-9155, or the researcher's advisor/professor, Dr. Amanda Datnow. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the IRB. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

You have received a copy of this consent document.

You agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### **Letter of Consent to Participate (Collaborative team with strong relationships)**

Beth A Cameron, UCSD and CSUSM Joint Doctoral Program Student

[beth.cameron@eusd.net](mailto:beth.cameron@eusd.net) 760-445-9155

Dear Teachers,

I am currently in a doctoral program working on a qualitative research project. I am conducting a study on the experiences of teachers during grade level collaboration meetings. The research study consists of observations and in person interviews. The observations will be ongoing for two month and each interview will last approximately one hour. The main objective of the study is to gain understanding of your experiences in collaborative settings. **As a member of a grade level collaborative team that with strong relationships**, it is important to gain perspective from you and your grade level colleagues. I know you are very busy, but I hope you will consider allowing me to observe you as you work with your team and also spend time with you one on one to better understand the benefits and issues that you experience with your team.

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your information and responses will remain completely confidential and secure. Your name will never be associated with the answers you provide. To ensure your confidentiality all data collected will be stored on password protected computers in a locked office. At the conclusion of this case study all unique identifying information will be deleted and your responses will be stored in a protected file system that will involve coding. Records identifying you will be kept confidential in accordance with research regulations.

**APPENDIX C**

**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO  
AUDIO RECORDING RELEASE CONSENT FORM**

As part of this project, an audio recording will be made of you during your participation in this research project. Please indicate below the uses of these audio recordings to which you are willing to consent. This is completely voluntary and up to you. In any use of the audio recording, your name will not be identified. You may request to stop the recording at any time or to erase any portion of your recording.

1. The audio recording can be studied by the research team for use in the research project.
  
3. The audio recording can be used for scientific publications.
  
3. The audio recording can be reviewed in public presentations to non-scientific groups.

You have the right to request that the recording be stopped or erased in full or in part at any time.

You have read the above description and give your consent for the use of audio recording as indicated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW AND DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Thank the teacher for agreeing to participate in the interview.

1. Review the consent form to clarify confidentiality.
2. Request permission to audiotape.
3. Opportunity for questions from participant.
4. Conduct the demographic survey (years in teaching, length of time in district, grade level assignments).

**a.** Please select the choice, which best represents your age range.

23-28   29-34   35-40   41-46   47-52   53-58   59 or older

**b.** Please indicate your gender.  Male   Female

Please indicate your ethnicity.

Caucasian (white)  African American   Hispanic   Asian   Native American   Multi-racial   Other: Please specify:

**c.** Please select the choice, which best represents the number of years you have taught.

1-5 years   6-10 years   11-15 years   16-20 years   21-25 years   26-30 years   31 years or longer

**d.** Please select the choice, which best represents the number of years you have taught at your current school?

1-5   6-10   11-15   16-20   21-25   26-30   31 years or more

**a.** Please indicate your highest educational level completed.

Bachelor's Degree   Graduate Student   Master's Degree   Doctorate

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Questions

Thank the teacher for agreeing to participate in the interview. Review the consent form to clarify confidentiality. Request permission to audiotape. Provide opportunity for questions from participant. Conduct the demographic survey (years in teaching, length of time in district, grade level assignments).

1. Tell me about the make up of your grade level team.
2. Describe your team's instructional plan.
3. Please describe your experiences with collaboration prior to this school year.
4. Tell me about the weekly collaboration this year.
5. Describe how your experiences affect your classroom instruction.
6. Describe a time when you benefited from collaboration.
7. Describe any challenges you have in weekly meetings.
8. Describe how weekly collaboration has affected student achievement.
9. How would you improve your meetings?
10. How has collaboration affected your professional relationships with your team?
11. What is the role of your principal?
12. Has weekly collaboration affected the culture or school climate?
13. Is there anything that you would like to add or clarify that I did not ask?
14. Describe a time when your collaborative work was taken back in your classroom practice? Were you able to share your experience with your team?

15. How do you share your ideas and how often?
16. Do you use a formal or an informal approach in your meetings?
17. Do you adhere to an agenda or established group norms?
18. How often do you discuss instructional practice with your team?
19. How much time do you spend on social conversation as opposed to teacher talk?

Thank participant for their time.

Once the interviews are complete and field notes are compiled the collection process will be complete and the organization of data will commence.



## **APPENDIX F**

### **Principal and Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) Interview Questions**

1. What is your role in the grade level meetings?
2. How often are you in attendance for grade level collaboration meetings?
3. Do you require protocols for the teachers' to use such as agendas?
4. What effects have you seen on students?
5. Can you describe any benefits you have seen as a result of collaboration time?
6. Has weekly collaboration affected the culture or school climate?
7. What challenges do you see with the different teams?
8. Is there anything that you could share that you think is important for collaboration?

## APPENDIX G

### School Study Team Meeting Observation Protocol Meeting Overview

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Type of data used for discussion:</b>
<b>Time:</b>	
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Materials used/handed out (Describe):</b>
<b>Topic:</b>	
<b>Purpose/Objective:</b>	
<b>Formal Agenda(Y/N):</b>	<b>Format of data presented (Describe):</b>
<b>Participants:</b>	

#### I. Guideline Questions for Observation:

1. What was the nature of the discussion?
2. What were the prompts used to analyze data?
3. How freely is data discussed? Were weaknesses/areas of needs openly shared?
4. Was there evidence of joint-problem solving, sharing strategies for analysis and use of data?
5. Were there any decisions made based on these analyses? What type (instructional, organizational)?
6. Where there short/long term goals or action plans established as result of these analyses?
7. Is there a plan for follow-up on implementation or effectiveness of action plans?

DESCRIPTION	MEMO/COMMENTS