Collective Efficacy & Student Learning: A Tale of Two Teaching Teams

Accomplishing the maximum impact on student learning depends on teams of teachers working together.
John Hattie

Almost A Perfect Score…

It was the end of another very busy school year. The semester 2 results were in and it was time to celebrate!

Students were flourishing! Academic data showed continued student improvement – academic growth had risen increasingly higher as the year progressed - amidst ongoing positive trends in student attendance and behaviour.

Staff were flourishing! Teaching team pulse data showed improved collective teacher efficacy across the school. Measures of job satisfaction, performance feedback, peer support and work/life and wellbeing were all very positive across the teaching teams.

It was time to celebrate - a perfect score! Well almost …. except in one teaching team where CTE was still below average and student achievement had gone backwards! What had gone wrong?

A Tale of Two Teaching Teams

In this article we want to compare and contrast two teaching teams – very similar in so many aspects yet winding up with such radically different outcomes. We want to explore the question: '***What are the specific factors that make or break the performance of teaching teams?'*** We'll use a comparison method with matched pairs of teaching teams – reducing the risk of confounding factors to get deeper into examining what the real underlying success factors may be.

We've previously discussed that Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) - *created by quality time in teams*- is the single largest factor that influences student achievement. In doing so, we have identified the Activity Cycle that teams of teachers engage in to create the environment for high CTE (see below). We've also unpacked the best way for teaching teams to monitor their own CTE so that they can support each other as they grow.
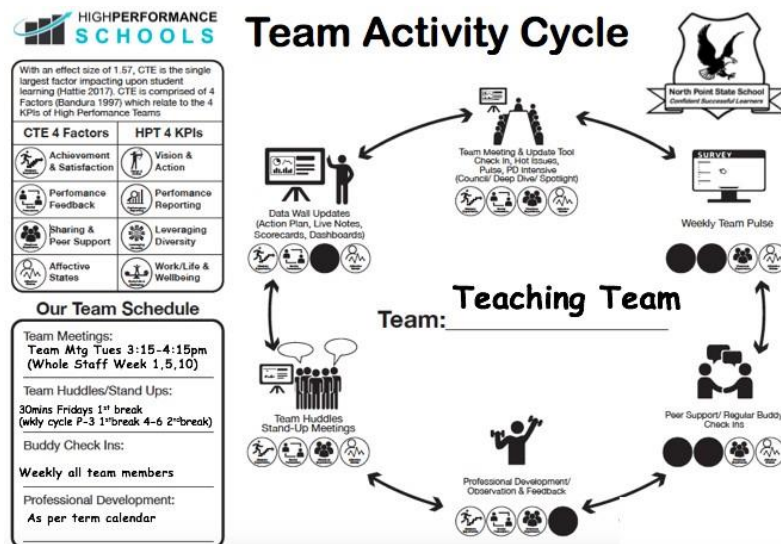
Meet Our Two Teaching Teams

Team Characteristics: Same - Same

Our case study teams (Team A, and Team B) are both from the same primary school. As you can see in the table below, the two teaching teams are matched quite evenly on a range of characteristics.

Teaching Team Characteristics	Team A	Team B
Size	7 including TAs and line manager	7 including TAs and line manager
Student Population	Middle Childhood (age range 9-11)	Middle Childhood (age range 9-11)
Team Turnover	Low - 2 transfers within same school	Low - 2 transfers within same school
Student Behaviour/ Attendance	Within School Norms	Within School Norms
Team Meeting Time	3:1 Team Mtgs to General Staff	3:1 Team Mtgs to General Staff
Team Profile	Comparable Mix of Personality Types	Comparable Mix of Personality Types
Team Establishment	PD Session start of Term 1 - all members present	PD Session start of Term 1 - all members present

Both teams are working with students in the middle childhood age group (ages 9-11). Student behaviour incidences are within school norms for both teams meaning that they are dealing with a similar type, and frequency of behavioural issues. Both teams have 7 members compromised of Teachers, Teacher Aids, and their Line Manager. When comparing the personality mix between each team using standardised team profiling, there was a similar pattern of diversity in both teams. Operationally, both teams were timetabled to complete the same teaching team activity cycles. Finally, at the beginning of semester 1 all members both teams completed the same series of professional development activities to optimise the quality of their team activity cycle for the year.

Team Behaviour Patterns: Different Journeys

While these two teaching teams are remarkably similar in their underlying characteristics, there were some significant differences evident in their behaviour patterns over the course of the year (see table below).

Teaching Team Behaviour Pattern	Team A	Team B
Use of Timetabled Team Huddle	*Accepted*	*Declined*
Team Meeting Quality	*Very high*	*Low*
Use of Team Pulse & Scorecards	*Very High*	*Low*
System of Buddy Check Ins	*Yes - weekly cycle*	*No - Ad hoc*
Line Manager Attendance/ Participation	*Yes - Every Meeting & Active Participant*	*No - Only Upon Request & Passive Role*

1.   Extra Time: Teaching Team A agreed to make use of an optional extra short team meeting (aka huddle) timeslot provided by the school while Teaching Team B declined the same opportunity.

2.   Meeting Quality: The quality of Teaching Team A's Meetings was very high compared to Teaching Team B (as evidenced by anecdotal reports from school leaders and the level of detail in team's meeting notes saved on the school's SharePoint system).

3.   Team Pulse: All members of Team A consistently completed the Team Pulse to monitor their CTE and documented their solution focused discussions on how to maximise their support and feedback in their monthly scorecards. Contrasting this, whilst Team B also completed the Team Pulse, there was no evidence of any solution focused discussions a to maximise support and feedback documented in their monthly scorecards.

4.   Buddy Check-In Frequency: Team A implemented a weekly buddy check-in cycle which they systematically adhered to whilst Team B opted for a monthly check-in cycle which they engaged in on an ad-hoc basis – a much lower frequency individual support compared to Team A.

5.   Line Manager Participation: At every team meeting Team A's Line Manager would attend, provide leadership updates as needed, actively role model best practices for meeting participation, and complete chair and moderator roles when rostered in the cycle. Meanwhile Team B's Line Manager would only attend team

meetings when requested, and when at the meetings played a much more passive role – sitting back observing unless asked directly for input.

Results: Collective Teacher Efficacy & Student Achievement

Let's return to our big question - ***"What are the specific factors that make or break the performance of teaching teams?***' and have a look at the collective teacher efficacy (CTE) and student achievement data from teaching team A and B over the course of the year.

Semester x Semester Cohort Comparisons: Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE) & A-C Data (English & Maths)									
Teaching Team	CTE S1 %	CTE S2 %	GAIN %	Student Cohort	ENG S1 %	ENG S2 %	GAIN %	MATHS S1	MATHS S2	GAIN %
Teaching Team A	72	80	8	Student Group A	67%	83%	16.00	77%	94%	17.00
Teaching Team B	61	65	4	Student Group B	89%	76%	-13.00	89%	81%	-8.00
Key:	Yellow - Below Australian CTE Teaching Team Average					Red - Negative Growth			
	Green - Above Australian CTE Teaching Team Average					Blue - Positive Growth			

Firstly, looking at average CTE scores we see that between Semester 1 and Semester 2 Team A increased by 8%, with both Semester 1 and 2 above the Australian CTE Teaching Team Average. Meanwhile although CTE improved 4% from Semester 1 to Semester 2 for Team B, scores remained below the Australian CTE Teaching Team Average. Turning to Student Achievement, we can see that relative gain for both English and Maths improved from Semester 1 to Semester 2 for Team A's students by a massive 16% and 17% respectively. At the same time the relative gain for Team B's students worryingly declined by 13% and 8% respectively.

Collective Teacher Efficacy Sub-Scales

We can also go deeper than just examining the overall ratings of collective teacher efficacy and explore the similarities and differences across the 4 subscales. As you can see in the table below Team A rated higher across all 4 subscales compared to Team B.
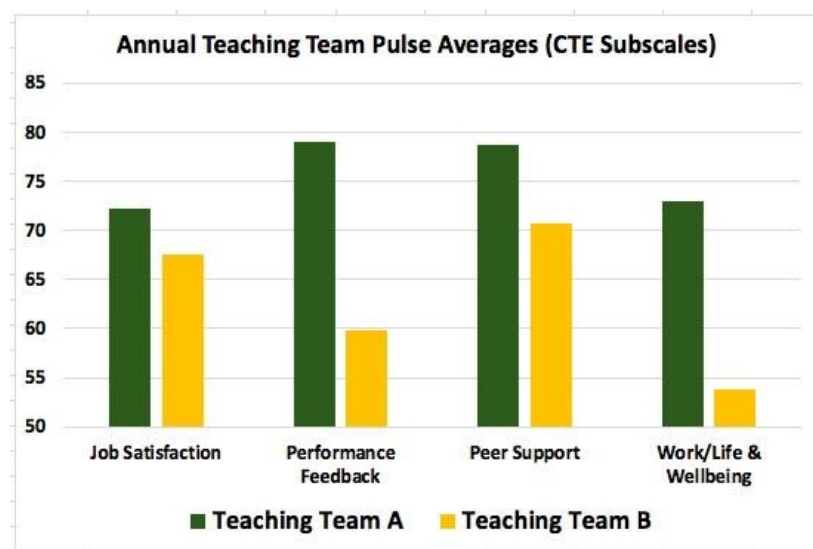
There were comparatively smaller differences in levels of job satisfaction and peer support between teams. The larger differences were in Performance Feedback & Work/Life and Wellbeing. These elements of collective teacher efficacy rely heavily on active and frequent communication between team members. As such these differences may well be related to the reduced amount of team activity and support occurring in the behaviour pattern of Team B (compared to Team A).

Analysis: Time, Quality & Leadership

Overall, the results show a strong relationship between CTE and Student Achievement. Given so many of the background factors about both the teaching teams and the student populations were so similar we believe the explanation for the massive difference in results is largely attributed to the subsequent team behaviour patterns – in particular the differences in Time, Quality and Leadership.

1.   Time – As we can see in the comparisons between Team A and B, despite both teams being timetabled for the same amount of team time, Team A consistently spent higher amounts of time together on a more frequent basis than Team B.

Reflective Question For Teaching Teams: Is the time we have agreed to invest with each other across the activity cycle (team meetings, buddy check-ins & team huddles) adequate to meet our needs and optimise our performance?

2.   Quality – Not only did Team A maximise their available time together, the quality of their time together (especially in team meetings) was much higher than Team B.

Reflective Question For Teaching Teams: Are we sufficiently skilled and confident with the tools, protocols and process we use to make sure we all feel supported and are growing in our professional capabilities?

3.   Leadership – Finally the role of the team leader in supporting the teaching teams was different between Team A and B with Team A benefitting from a team leader who actively participated in every team meeting and shared chairing and moderator roles amongst team whilst Team B's team leader only attended upon request and adopted a more passive role.

Reflective Question for Teaching Teams: do we consider our line manager as a genuine member of the team and are they working with us in a way that reinforces and encourages our ability to support each other and grow professionally?

Bringing It Together

"Creating a collaborative culture is the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives, the first order of business for those seeking to enhance their school's effectiveness."
Richard Dufour

We know it is 'teams' of teachers working together effectively which creates the maximum impact on student learning. We also know that the High Performance Teaching Teams environment creates the shared experiences necessary for building collective teacher efficacy – the single largest factor influencing student achievement.

The evidence linking teaching team collective efficacy and student outcomes seems pretty clear. How do you help your teaching teams increase their collective efficacy by maximising the amount and quality of their team time? Are you collaborating with your teaching teams to make sure they optimise their team activity cycle or is there room to improve?

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