

Preface

The definition of collaboration in education has evolved. Still today, some might say . . . *In our school, we all get along; we co-operate, discuss, and share resources; we work side by side, help each other out, and support each other. We work together on committees, sports teams, and special events. We're very collaborative . . . aren't we?*

While all of the activities listed above are important in creating a positive school climate, collaboration is not just about individuals cooperating or their sense of collegiality, is it? It is about them purposefully engaging; it is about them developing a culture of *learning together* to best serve students' needs—collaboratively learning. Our profession is charged with improving student achievement; therefore, school systems today require much more than collegial educators. School systems require educators who are willing to co-learn and co-labor in the service of students. **Collaborative Learning** is an approach in which system and school leaders build collective capacity; create new, energizing knowledge together; and move schools from being places of “plans and good intentions” to centers of “purposeful practice” on the part of all teachers who then empower students to do the same. To strengthen classroom practice, teachers' and leaders' learning must result in a greater understanding of how teaching impacts learning. To deliver that, authentic (close to real-life) Collaborative Learning opportunities need to take place in classroom settings as often as possible. And, to successfully grow practice and sustain potential impact on increasing student achievement, Collaborative Learning among teachers requires an atmosphere in which system and school leaders are intentional in demonstrating they are equally committed to continuous learning alongside teachers, students, and each other.

Similarly, skilled practitioners who also use a Collaborative Learning approach in the classroom develop significant academic and

social benefits for students. Collaborative Learning promotes critical thinking, develops confidence, supports oral language and communication skills, and creates an environment of active and involved learning (Panitz, 1997). Teachers who are able to collaborate effectively with peers are more likely to see the value in partnering with students, parents, and the broader community.

We have reasonable clarity now on the characteristics of “good systems” and how lower-performing schools can be transformed through strategic leadership (Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Sharratt & Fullan, 2009, 2012). It has been suggested that change is a mirage to people unless they experience the reality of school improvement (Fullan, 2011). In *Realization: The Change Imperative for Deepening District-Wide Reform* (2009), Sharratt and Fullan report in depth on the learning from one very large district. Their conclusions were entirely consistent with the pursuit of district-wide reform that they reviewed (and have seen since) from across the globe. They researched and discovered 14 Parameters (see page 67) that lead to system, school, and student improvement that suggest an intentional, successful path for other districts seeking to establish a clear focus to build educator capacity (Sharratt & Fullan, 2009). Included in *Realization* was Parameter 1, the notion of shared beliefs and understandings that only comes from collaborative work at the system and school levels. *Putting FACES on the Data: What Great Leaders Do!* illuminated the many benefits of personalizing student data through assessment, instruction, ownership, and leadership practices (Sharratt & Fullan, 2012). We can’t be satisfied with mere “Good” but must move forward from “Great to Innovate” to empower today’s connected elementary and secondary students, K–12 and beyond, to move toward excellence (Sharratt & Harild, 2015).

Building on these foundational texts, we now write that in order to be effective **co-learners**, it is essential that educators at every level consider the issues of **Leading Collaborative Learning** and empowering excellence to strengthen moving forward together and learning from each other. There is much work to do.

Sustainable system-wide student achievement requires ongoing attention to supporting all staff members in setting their personal and their collective **Learning Goals**. Establishing Collaborative

“FACES is not an acronym. FACES is capitalized for emphasis—that is, we all have responsibility to have cognitive insights about and make emotional connections to all learners to be able to put the FACES on our data and take action.”

Sharratt & Fullan,
2012, p. 3

Learning as a process is a valuable goal at all levels of a learning organization. Today, improving schools hinges on growing and sustaining cultures for learning and embedding Collaborative Learning processes—in the classroom, in the staff room, and at tables where leaders make decisions.

Why is embedding this process so critical? While collaboration as a process has long been a part of the life of schools, societal work demands have brought the skills of collaboration and Collaborative Learning to the foreground. As is now commonly reported, workplaces seek employees with collabor-

ative skills to work together to solve critical problems and to find innovative solutions to challenges. It is increasingly important that our educational systems graduate literate graduates who are ready for workplaces where collaboration and interdependence will be a prerequisite (Sharratt & Harild, 2015).

This book is intended for educators at all levels of school systems—in classrooms and in administrative positions—who are interested in learning more about the impact of leading and learning collaboratively. It addresses what is important about leadership as a key element of being able to mobilize and lead collaborative work and Collaborative Learning effectively—including how leaders deal with inhibiting conditions and how they enhance enabling conditions. This book is also for those who are preparing new educators for a changing workplace culture, one which increasingly requires collaborative learners and leaders.

The Foreword by Jim Knight reviews the landscape of collaboration. John Hattie’s thoughtful Introduction reinforces the importance of building collective efficacy through focused collaborative work. Chapter 1 discusses “purpose”—the contextual calls for deeper learning that impacts student achievement as the primary outcome of Collaborative Learning. We offer key definitions and our research findings. In Chapter 2 we discuss our theory of action with its four elements:

- **Assessing to Plan** effectively,
- **Planning to Act** purposely,
- **Acting to Make Sense of Findings** thoughtfully, and
- **Making Sense of Our Impact** continually to **Refine** our practice and to **Learn** collaboratively.

In Chapter 3 we discuss the role that system leaders play in creating the conditions for Collaborative Learning in schools. Chapter 4 is focused on the key leadership behaviors needed at the school level to embed Collaborative Learning. In Chapter 5 we explore powerful forms of collaboration and co-learning for teachers working with their peers. Chapter 6 highlights aspects of collaborative inquiry as a key pedagogy for student engagement and empowerment, especially when students work with teachers and each other as collaborative partners. Throughout, we include observations and reflections about practices that support **Leading Collaborative Learning** in the form of vignettes, case studies, reflections, and personal stories. We include a matrix of expected practices using the Gradual Release Approach at the end of each chapter. Finally, Michael Fullan pulls together the

“Educators need time to think through the concepts related to global learning and leading themselves. . . . As well, educators need to self-assess to ensure they are engaging students in rich tasks that are relevant, authentic and realistic.”

Sharratt & Harild,
2015, p. 196

threads of our discussion of collaborative leadership behaviors in a thought-provoking Afterword.

The Book Study following the Afterword summarizes reflective questions for each chapter that readers can use with staff members at meetings, in learning hubs, or with participants in Networked Learning Communities.

We believe this book will help you to collaboratively create a strategy to move your learning culture forward to benefit students across the globe.