Introduction

National improvement on standardized tests seems a goal just out of reach. The lack of improvement in overall school performance is evident both in the research literature and in the media (Good & McCaslin, 2008). But this is not the full story. In Illinois, California, and Nebraska; in Hawaii, Ohio, and Idaho; in New York, Calgary, and many other settings, urban and rural, rich and poor, some schools are making a difference for students. The difference is measured in unusual progress on standardized tests, improved attendance, higher graduation rates, and the exuberant smiles of students being pressed and supported in their learning and play.

What dynamics have enabled some schools to become these islands of optimism? The answers are neither simple nor easy. For schools to succeed in improving student learning requires leaders' attention to a mutually supportive, multilayered, nonlinear, extraordinarily complex, often competitive association of interrelated factors (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2010). In these schools are teams of teachers with shared values and goals, able to clearly identify a problem and come together to improve student learning. These teams share a collective sense of responsibility and accountability for student achievement. Teachers use authentic assessments as essential tools to improve learning. They practice self-directed reflection based on their own and student needs. The schools are stable settings—collaborative work cannot occur in dysfunctional environments. These are schools in which strong

leaders build cultures of openness and trust, empower teams to make decisions that improve student learning, and apply pressure when necessary.

Improving curriculum, often in the face of overwhelming difficulties, remains a central goal in improving schools. Yet, as Kruse and Louis (2009) assert, leaders of moving schools are stretching past the immediate pressure to focus just on curriculum. They also concentrate on integrating the fragmented subcultures that exist in every school as a means to improving instruction, and thus, achievement. These leaders create a vision of what the school might be, offer encouragement, obtain resources, provide constant feedback, and monitor improvement. Groups at many system levels bring together the elements that produce student learning and a culture of shared work. In moving schools, collaboration is a key to success.

It has become self-evident that schools in which faculty members feel a collective responsibility for student learning produce greater learning gains than do schools in which teachers work as isolated practitioners (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996). Louis's research found school-based, professional communities have greater potential to create teacher empowerment, personal dignity, and collective responsibility for student learning. Work on collective efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk, 2000), on academic optimism, (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006), and trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2004; Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, 2004) are adjunct to and extend Louis' findings.

I propose that to develop world-class educational systems—school by school—we learn from this research and focus on creating cultures in schools that foster the development of groups capable of creating rich and sustained student achievement. Working with culture is efficient; changes in culture impact sets of teachers, not just one teacher at a time. In this book, I define principles and practices of group work that have been demonstrated to be effective in a wide range of settings. Leadership practices in schools that support and reinforce accountable cultures make a difference in student learning.

I argue that an important goal of leadership and professional development is to create a culture in which the potential of groups and the individuals involved is unleashed for the betterment of our students.

Expert groups are made, not born. In moving schools, in contrast to stuck schools, working groups grow, develop, learn from experience, and become smarter and more effective at their work. In less effective schools, things stay the same, the group's learning is episodic and disjointed, and members' capacity to work together and teach may remain relatively static.

All groups work at less than full potential. The best groups regard this fact not as a deficiency, but as a healthy dissatisfaction with current performance. They consistently commit resources to working more effectively. Research teams get better with experience, baseball teams practice, and theater casts review their last performance. All groups improve at their tasks when they reflect on their work, acquire new knowledge and skills, and practice the fundamentals of their craft.

Underlying discussion about collaborative teams that impact student learning are several realities. First, each group is unique. The group's history, members' cognitive styles, the school setting, individuals' mental models, and the group's tasks each contribute to a group personality. Each group is not only unlike other groups but different from the sum of the individuals comprising the group. These differences can occur within a single school. For example, the English chair in one high school I know brokered, magnified, and leveraged district resources to benefit professional learning for teachers within that department. The social studies teaching team, with an external locus of control, had none of the same resources.

Some groups mature. Some mature along a continuum from novice toward expert performance. But not all groups make this journey, just as not all teachers achieve the level of expert. Researcher David Berliner (1988) speculated that the novice stage in teaching might last 1 year and that most teachers would reach the third stage (competence) in 3 or 4 years.

Only a modest proportion of teachers move to the next stage of proficiency, and even fewer, he said, to the expert stage. The same seems to be true of group development.

Reflection, it turns out, is key to growth. A dilemma dogs each group. In practically every meeting, working groups have more tasks than time. While it seems logical to invest all available meeting time in working, doing so results in negligible learning about how to work most effectively and little likelihood that the group will progress to the next stages of maturity. This universal truth holds: Any group too busy to reflect about its work is too busy to improve. Effective teams are conscious of what makes them effective. They possess knowledge about being a productive group.

Because so much of professional work occurs during meetings, teams must consider how to ensure that meetings are successful. For more than 20 years, my colleagues and I at the Center for Adaptive Schools have been amazed at how applying eight principles has liberated leaders and faculties to have more productive and satisfying meetings. While we have not articulated them before, it's my sense that these principles should be baseline knowledge for all groups and are important enough to be taught in leadership courses, as well as courses in curriculum development and school finance. The principles that follow are not rules and are subject to a group's wise adaptation to meet members' circumstances. Adapting these principles before applying them, however, is counterproductive and tends to leave groups with faulty premises and tools. The wheel has already been developed. Use it.

Eight Principles on Which This Book Is Based

1. Social capital is important. Research finds that groups are smarter when members have social sensitivity and turn-taking norms, and that they are more successful when there is more positivity than negativity, more inquiry than advocacy, and more focus on others than on self (Losada & Heaphy, 2004; Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, & Malone, 2010).

When groups learn sound norms of group behavior, their levels of group understanding deepen, and shared accountability for thinking and doing increases. The group moves toward unconscious competence and heightened inquiry. As a result, for example, when given a daunting task like allocating $20,000 before the end of the week, a skillful group resists the urge to mindlessly brainstorm possibilities and instead attends to ways of talking that lead to thoughtful, data-based decisions.

Groups in which members attend to others' social messages are better able to solve cognitively complex problems than groups in which the social messages are mixed. Simultaneous levels operate in any communication. When the social level message (usually in words) says one thing and the psychological message (usually reflected in voice tone, use of gesture, or emphasis) indicates something else, the psychological message, outside of awareness, will be the determinant of the outcome (Lankton & Lankton, 1983).

This is why the seven norms of collaboration described in Chapter 6, with their nonverbal components, are such a powerful resource for groups. It is also why facilitator trust and rapport with a group is so important and why facilitators' nonverbal skills are as important, if not more so, than verbal skills.

2. The quality of a facilitator matters; the quality of the group matters more (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Workplace culture informs what teachers do more than their skills, education, or experience do (Frymier, 1987; Kruse & Louis, 2009; Rosenholtz, 1989). This principle is the reason we must work to develop groups, not just facilitators. The best facilitator in the world is unable to help members of a group unwilling to work together to achieve successes. A more modestly skilled facilitator, on the other hand, can achieve successes with a group whose members are willing to adjust their personal and collective goals to achieve an end. The more knowledge members have about how to work as a group, the greater success they can have, even without outside facilitation. Chapter 2 describes

the role of a *citizen facilitator*, a member of a small team who both facilitates and contributes to the group's deliberations.

Developing skills as a group member is essential. Since behavior stems from inner drives, skillful group members must have self-awareness and self-monitoring skills to be the best advocates for students that they can be. Self-awareness and self-monitoring require a metacognitive array of skills explored in this book.

3. Groups move toward expediency. *Satisfice* is a word coined by Herbert Simon (Simon, 1982). The word blends *satisfy* with *suffice.* Satisficing means accepting what is satisfactory rather than working to find the best possible outcome; it is a decision-making mindset that seeks a good enough, although not necessarily perfect, course of action. Making a *satisficient* decision means comparing a few alternatives and choosing the best course from this limited range of options.

Simon pointed out that human beings lack the cognitive resources to consider the potential outcomes of all options. So we take shortcuts and accept options that seem to satisfy the criteria of "good enough."

Satisficing is part of the human condition, reports Gary Klein in *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (1999). Klein studied naturalistic decision making: how people make high-stakes decisions in real settings with time pressure, vague goals, limited information, and changing conditions.

Klein's team of observers studied field commanders at fire scenes with the generally accepted model of rational decision-making: faced with a problem, a person gathers information, identifies the possible solutions, and chooses the best one. As it turned out, the fire commanders didn't compare *any* options. They took the first reasonable plan that came to mind and did a quick mental test for problems. If they didn't find any, they had their plan of action (Syed, 2010).

Group members need to recognize when satisficing is not providing an optimal solution, and facilitators should press groups to look beyond the first easy answer.

Related to the idea of satisficience is a human tendency to work on what is urgent rather than what is important. Teachers, like administrators, are often beset with figurative fires to extinguish. If they remain inflexible, they become firemen and lose leadership capacity. To counter this tendency, a principal in Sunnyvale, California, preempted the problem. He gathered key staff around him—secretaries, a resource teacher, a special education teacher, and a mentor teacher. The group defined "an emergency" and discovered the principal was not essential to resolving most of the crises that appeared on their list. This principal's flexibility came from his sense of identity. Rather than being a fireman, he believed himself to be an instructional leader and organized resources around him so he could behave like one. We explore this principle in Chapters 3 and 7.

4. People make the best choices available to them. Human nature is quick to make judgments, and the brain is wired to look for negative intentions. This is hardly ever the case. Choices serve needs as people see them and may not always be productive; in fact, sometimes they are counterproductive. To advocate an idea, a person raises his voice. While there is nothing wrong with the intention, the loud voice is counterproductive. The word *available* in this principle implies that choices outside a person's or group's perspective may represent additional options. The person who raises his voice, for instance, may not know that pausing before speaking would have the effect of underscoring the importance of the statement. Had he known, he likely would have selected a pause before speaking rather than a louder voice to make his point.

"What could the possible benefit of that be?" is a useful question for group members to ask when confronted with puzzling behavior. Assign the most generous interpretation to the person's or group's actions. This principle serves facilitators as well as group members as it helps them remain nonjudgmental. Judging closes the choices one has for perceiving and behaving. Research in dynamic teams finds that

groups with more positivity than negativity are significantly more effective. More on this finding is presented in Chapter 5.

5. Facilitation takes practice. Several authors, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) among them, have been pointing out that in any field, expertise is not a matter of talent but of practice. As they were awarded Kennedy Center Honors in 2010, Merle Haggard and Paul McCartney both were described as geniuses. A misnomer, Matthew Syed (2010) would say. While talent was certainly a factor in these two men's careers, the overriding source of their expertise was intense interest and almost daily practice beginning in their teen years. Tennis champs Venus and Serena Williams began learning to play tennis at ages 4 1/2 years and 3 years old respectively. Later in their development, their father would fill a shopping cart with 550 balls and feed them across the net to the girls one at a time. When they were finished, he would pick up the balls and start again. Charise Pempengo was in singing contests at age 7 to support her family. Olympic short track speed skating gold medalist Apolo Anton Ohno did his first skating at age 6. He says about his all-out effort at everything he attempts, "If I have given my all and still do not win, I haven't lost. Others might remember winning or losing; I remember the journey." Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team. "What will you do?" asked his mother. Michael said, "I will practice."

Expertise in any field, as noted above, takes learning and practice. Since teacher leaders, and even principals and staff developers, have limited time to practice collaborative work or facilitation, none can approach the 10,000 hours that Gladwell suggests (2008). Educator facilitators can rely on three aspects to develop their facilitation chops. One area is teaching, for many of the patterns in teaching are similar to what one does when working with groups. Secondly, they can study the craft by reading books such as this, attending workshops, or observing colleagues. Reflection is a third resource. This includes careful planning and reflection after the fact. What went well? What surprises were there? What

might have been done differently? The deep learning of immediate reflection invites us to pause and reinvent ourselves as practitioners. The four chapters of Section IV address developing facilitation skills.

6. Wait not for trust; practice trusting behaviors. Trust is essential to improving schools (Forsyth, Adams, & Hoy, 2011). Several dispositions working in concert lead to trust. These include integrity, concern, competence, and reliability (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Trust among teachers is linked to higher student achievement (Tschannen-Moran, 2004), and principal behavior sets a foundation for creating trusting relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2004). Hargreaves and Shirley (2011) report community organizing to be related to higher levels of teacher-parent trust, a stronger sense of school community, a more achievement-oriented culture, and a greater degree of parent involvement in school when compared with schools with less involvement. Groups sometimes believe they can't do important work until trust is present. Yet waiting for trust is like waiting for Godot. In the absurdist play by Samuel Beckett, two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait endlessly and in vain for someone named Godot, who never appears. One doesn't wait for trust; one identifies trusting behaviors and begins to practice them. Problems like trust and communication can never be solved, but identifying and practicing the behaviors of each will lead to effective working conditions. Thus, groups develop by using inclusion activities that provide needed opportunities for trust building. Starting each meeting by answering for oneself the question "Who am I in relationship to this group?" becomes crucial to bringing everyone into the physical and emotional space. Mylene Keipp, a colleague of mine in the Los Angeles Unified School District, shared with me that at a meeting at which multiple districts were represented, a principal asked her, "How is it that your group seems to gel, even with different ages, backgrounds, perspectives, etc?" She replied, "We start every meeting with group development. Last week, we learned about our first jobs. Today we shared a partial bucket list."

Awestruck, the principal responded, "Every meeting?" With a beaming smile, Mylene said, "Yes. That's how we learn more about who we are as a team." Although her group had clashing personalities, they overcame their personal idiosyncrasies to meet the collective needs of their schools and district. These skills are probed in Section III.

7. Simple and less are better than complicated and more. Groups develop with facilitators' help. Groups and facilitators first master a few sound strategies and use them frequently until they are comfortable with them. A description of 150 strategies can be found in Appendix A of *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* (2009). An administrator in Lincoln, Nebraska, used the same strategy, the Focusing Four, 17 times with 17 different groups to generate data for a strategic plan. She could have varied her strategy, but finding one that worked, she repeated it. Expect that some groups may transform into owners of their learning and ask self-directed questions such as, "We are pretty comfortable with First Turn/Last Turn. Could we try Text Rendering today?"

8. Attend to energy. Margaret Wheatley observes that the quality of human relationships is the energy source for work in organizations (2006). Daniel Pink (2011) observes that humans don't become engaged by being controlled, threatened, or motivated by external sources, but that these motivations are within each of us and are the sources of our actions and values. Physics has explained invisible energy sources with which humans interact. Some of the more obvious are gravitational pull, electrostatic fields, inertia, and centrifugal forces. While they cannot be observed directly, they are known through their effects. The ball falls from our hand; we label gravity as a cause. Five such human fields, or states of mind, are *efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship, consciousness,* and *interdependence* (Costa & Garmston, 2002). High-performing groups find ways to maintain their energy in order to reach high-level goals. The process of continuous self-improvement

requires forces that fuel learning and action. These five forces are needed to power through obstacles and effectively resolve conflicts. Group members are only able to absorb new learning and meet new challenges by maintaining high levels of collaborative energy. We see the effects of the levels of energy in group members' attitudes, language, and actions.

Ways to Use This Book

This book has been designed with flexibility in mind. Your own learning style and interests should determine how best you use it. If you have picked it up because of a general interest in working with groups, you may wish to start at the beginning and read it all the way through. If you are seeking inspiration and validation that collaboration is the right work and it is working in real schools, you may want to begin your reading with Chapter 1, Building Effective Groups, and Chapter 5, Forming Smarter Groups. If you are trying to solve a particular dilemma or to figure out how to improve an aspect of facilitation or group development, the table of contents may guide you to sections of most value. If you are using it as text in a course to inform school leaders, teacher leaders, and others about ways to get the most out of groups, you may wish to develop a course outline based on this content.

Section I explains the nuts and bolts of getting the work done. At successful meetings, a maximum amount of work is completed in minimum time with a maximum amount of member satisfaction. The work requires a clear understanding of group members' roles, the group's and others' decision-making authority, and what constitutes an effective agenda. This section gets specific about the tasks involved in group work and offers some simple strategies for improving how the group accomplishes these goals.

Section II explores the concept of collective intelligence in groups and the factors that bring about a group that is greater than the sum of its parts. Group members must understand

that the way individuals talk with one another matters greatly to the group's effectiveness. Groups whose members are careful to distinguish between discussion and dialogue will find it easier to seek solutions and make decisions. Group members who are willing to reflect and assess their own thinking will be able to surface hidden assumptions that can hinder their own growth and that of the group, and will be able to help colleagues move forward. Understanding members' mental models and hidden assumptions enhances the group's ability to approach work in ways that are more likely to result in success. Finally, effective groups understand the value and benefits in constructive rather than destructive conflict.

In Section III, I discuss the understandings that characterize the work of groups that are working for or moving into a more mature stage. Becoming a self-directed group requires self-managing, self-monitoring, and self-modifying. Effective groups are able to develop the five sources of energy to sustain their work and keep them moving forward. Mature groups also have a deep sense of collective efficacy.

Finally, in Section IV, I present some ideas for teacher leaders and others who wish to develop skills as citizen facilitators. Facilitation is a learned skill that takes practice. Attention to particular aspects of facilitation, choosing language to use, knowing when to intervene, and setting the stage for maximum impact all lead to a greater comfort level and improved productivity.