

Preface

A principal who reviewed this book wrote,

There is a tremendous amount of school reform research circulating in the schools now that speaks to the need for teachers to move from a solitary to a collaborative experience in the classroom. We are also being told that we must teach our students how to work effectively as team members. However, what principals are discovering is that educators are not “schooled” in the skills necessary to work in true collaboration with colleagues. We put people into groups and expect them to figure out how to get work done . . . and many times this is setting them up for failure. Teachers who are not able to engage with their colleagues are also unable to teach collaboration skills to their students.

In addition to appreciating these comments, I believe that they describe the current situation in U.S. schools and schools around the world. Educators are being asked to make fundamental changes in the educational process and in the way they relate to their colleagues, with little help, resources, or “schooling” in how groups function and how to create high-performance work groups whose members get things done well and always keep student learning as their primary goal. I wrote *Faculty Groups: From Frustration to Collaboration* to help remedy this situation.

This book is for all professional educators who are members of school-based work groups and teams. All of you create the environment that supports student learning. No one person is responsible for creating a collaborative school. Everyone involved with a particular school helps to create its culture. Everyone has a role to play in the establishment of effective and productive work

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groups, which collectively generate a cooperative and collegial culture. How we work with each other makes a significant difference in the educational environment, student learning, and student performance. At this point in time, creating collaborative, productive, school-based teams must be priority number one.

I am passionate about the educational process and have been a teacher all my life. It started when I was very young and played school with my friends after the real school day was done. I progressed to teaching English grammar to a boy in the neighborhood whose parents spoke little English. I continue to counsel young restaurant workers about the value of returning to college, much to the embarrassment of my dinner companions. Professionally, I've been teaching for over three decades, and I'm not done yet. My students have been in elementary school, college, graduate school, and the workplace. Educators are the backbone of society. We do, as the advertisement says, "touch the future."

For centuries, teachers have been soloists. We planned alone, taught alone, and became great, competent, or mediocre educators alone. Now, we are being asked to change all that and to interact with other educators to enhance the education process. But many of us are not sure how to work with others effectively.

I believe that I can be helpful to my colleagues in this area because I have spent more than two decades studying how work groups function and what educators can do to create effective and productive faculty groups and teams. This book begins by stating the case for faculty teamwork. Next, how groups develop and how some groups get stuck is discussed. What members and leaders can do to help their groups become productive and how to design, facilitate, and participate in effective meetings are the topics of several chapters. How multiple groups working in the same school can work together to create a collaborative school culture also is outlined. The kinds of support, resources, and professional development activities that are needed to make this happen are detailed as well.

The contents of this book are based in research. References to that research appear at the end of the book and are arranged in numbered sections. When you want to explore a topic further, go to the section of the Bibliography with the same number.

Faculty Groups: From Frustration to Collaboration is filled with stories told to me by teachers and administrators from across the country. The stories describe both negative and positive group

experiences. Undoubtedly, you will relate to many of the stories. There also are lots of suggestions about how to turn negative stories into positive ones as well as suggestions about how to keep positive work groups and teams going for as long as possible.

I hope that you will use this book as a road map to develop high-performing faculty and administrative teams in your school, which collectively will create a learning environment that is second to none. Of course, this book can be read alone, but it won't be of much use unless you discuss its contents with your colleagues in the school-based groups to which you belong. It would be difficult to learn the skills necessary to work collaboratively by taking an independent study course.

The contents of this book are not just for educational leaders. Groups don't work that way. Every member and the leader need to understand how groups work. Every member and the leader need to learn how to contribute to the development, and maintenance, of a high-performance team. In short, everybody's oar needs to be in the water, and everyone needs to be rowing in the same direction.

By the way, creating high-performance teams has positive effects not only on student learning, but also on educators. There's nothing more exhilarating than being part of a winning team. There's also no goal more important than educating the next generation. Working collaboratively is good for students and educators alike. Everybody wins.