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# Preface

All students deserve an education where they are appropriately challenged in an environment where teaching and learning are visible. They come to us, however, with a variety of diverse learning needs, readiness levels, background knowledge, learning preferences, and dispositions making it difficult for teachers to positively affect their learning. Together, educators can ensure greater success for *all* students by developing their knowledge, skills, and competencies based on identified student learning needs. Collaboratively, educators can learn about different approaches, identify strategies to test, assess their impact, and adjust their practices accordingly. Collaborative inquiry provides a structure for professional learning in which teachers and administrators come together to inquire, seek and share learning, collect and reflect on evidence, and act on what they have learned.

Stoll (2010) described collaborative inquiry as a means in which learning communities “deconstruct knowledge through joint reflection and analysis, re-constructing it through collaborative action, and co-constructing it through collective learning from their experiences” (p. 474). Collaborative inquiry is a process that engages educators in examining and reflecting on the link between the actions of teachers and school leaders and the outcomes of students. The four-stage model outlined in this book includes framing a problem, collecting evidence, analyzing evidence, and documenting, sharing, and celebrating. As teams cycle through the stages, they develop competencies and shared understandings of new practices. Together, they consider the impact of their actions as they examine evidence of student learning and alter instruction appropriately.

To achieve success for *all* students, there needs to be a concerted move from individual to collaborative learning. This book has been designed to support facilitators in leading school teams through a formal process of collaborative inquiry. The role of facilitator can be assumed by those in informal or formal leadership positions. It does not matter whether the facilitator is an administrator, teacher, staff developer, or coach. What does matter is that the facilitator takes deliberate action in leading teams through the process. Intentional facilitation is required to ensure that the work is purposeful,

productive, and impactful. By following the systematic approach outlined in this resource, facilitators will gain a better understanding of the stages of collaborative inquiry and how to implement it as a powerful design for professional learning and a high-leverage strategy for school improvement.

In this book, facilitators will find activities that are designed to do the following:

- Ensure that teams focus on the *right work* by identifying common issues that stem from current student learning needs and that are aligned with larger school improvement efforts
- Elicit action through the identification and implementation of evidence-based practices that address issues directly related to improving the learning for students in schools
- Develop teachers' competencies and shared understandings of new practices
- Initiate and support productive conversations that challenge beliefs in respectful ways
- Lead to continuous improvement, self-sustaining teams, and changes in existing practice

This book also provides vignettes and examples throughout.

As the process unfolds, the critical role of reflection in enabling participants to adapt to changes will become apparent to facilitators. As such, facilitators are encouraged to reflect on their practice as well as they guide teams through each stage of collaborative inquiry. Looking inward and reflecting on the practice of facilitation will help facilitators to sharpen their personal capacity to lead change. At the end of each stage, facilitators will find a list of skills and approaches for effective facilitation and are encouraged to self-assess in an effort to identify strengths and consider areas for development.

For systemic change to occur, opportunities for teachers to lead and to learn from one another need to be provided. Collaborative inquiry is a powerful design as it recognizes the role of teachers in ongoing school improvement. Facilitators of professional learning can use this resource as a guide to employing structured collaborative learning experiences for educators that are grounded in their current problems of practice. Introducing collaborative inquiry into the work of professional learning communities will help to ingrain a culture of inquiry and reflection within the school. When educators learn from one another, solutions to problems are generated through collaborative discussions and personal reflections. These learning opportunities help build leadership and spread good ideas and practices throughout the system.