
Preface

Collaborative inquiry is a powerful design for professional learning that supports the notion of teacher leadership as it recognizes the role of teachers in ongoing school improvement. It provides a systematic approach for educators to identify professional dilemmas and determine resolutions through shared inquiry, problem-solving, and reflection. As educators uncover and negotiate differences and similarities in beliefs about what constitutes deep learning and effective practice, they learn new ways of working together and develop collective efficacy. Rather than being merely consumers of research and the professional knowledge that accompanies it, educators who engage in collaborative inquiry become producers and disseminators of knowledge.

By utilizing collaborative inquiry as an approach to professional learning, educators develop the adaptive capacity to address and overcome difficult challenges they face everyday. The ability to address student-learning needs no longer depends on individuals but on the collective wisdom brought by a team of educators with diverse experiences and expertise. Challenges are addressed through a coordinated and collective effort, which helps to ensure greater success for *all* students. Inquiry becomes a broader strategy to transform the culture of a school and school district.

There are ongoing challenges however, in moving collaborative inquiry from theory to practice. This book provides insights for educators who are interested in supporting and/or facilitating an inquiry approach to system learning by exploring the benefits and hurdles and implications for administrators, teachers, and students. It identifies and addresses the conditions needed to bring about a wider and deeper adoption of collaborative inquiry and contains observations to help prevent collaborative inquiry from being adopted superficially. In addressing how to bring collaborative inquiry to scale, lessons learned from the field are included so that school leaders can learn from each other's experiences.

This book does not provide step-by-step instructions for engaging in an inquiry cycle. Rather, it moves beyond a focus on how to *do* inquiry. In examining the conditions necessary to support collaborative inquiry, insights for strengthening the work are provided. In this book, readers will find

- A rationale and framework for engaging in inquiry
- A description of the conditions that are vital to ensuring collaborative inquiry reaches scale
- A needs-based focus defined
- Ways to strengthen theories of action
- Ideas to provoke thinking to assess impact
- Ways to strategically build a professional learning culture

Theories of action are used to explain specific changes intended to improve professional practice. They serve to help understand behavior, expose thinking and reasons behind actions, and are essential in clarifying strategies for change. We have borrowed Bushe's (2010) "Cardwork Strategy" in order to gain clarity about our theories of action and to make them more explicit to the reader. A cardwork is a way of capturing a theory of action and contains a title, a subtitle, and three or four phrases connected by a spinning propeller (Bushe, 2010, p. 166). While the title describes what the theory is about, the subtitle articulates the outcomes of successful actions, and the phrases indicate a complete theory of how to reach that outcome. The purpose of the spinning propeller is to show that the critical aspects are not necessarily accomplished in a step-by-step sequence but rather they "spin" to demonstrate a more fluid approach.

Readers will find the following cardwork maps that describe our theories of action at the start of each chapter:

- Collaborative Inquiry as Transformative Professional Learning: Realizing Change in Schools and Classrooms
- Wider and Deeper Adoption of Collaborative Inquiry: Bringing Collaborative Inquiry to Scale
- Determining and Maintaining a Focus: Teams Invest in What Matters the Most
- Provoking Thinking to Assess Impact: Educators Have a Clear Understanding of How their Actions Impact Student Outcomes
- Shaping the Development of a Professional Learning Culture: Inquiry and Collaboration Are Habits of Mind

Our purpose in writing this book was to refine the knowledge base of collaborative inquiry. Our hope is that educators take the stance of professional inquirers, embody the qualities of lifelong learners, and foster professional learning cultures where engagement in deep and impactful problem-solving is a habit of mind. Educators will find this book helpful as they navigate the hurdles that surface as they come together to learn in new and different ways. Our intention is to help leaders “stay the course,” so that collaborative inquiry can live up to what it promises—transformations in learning, leading, and teaching.

Copyright Corwin 2016