Foreword

Lyn Sharratt and Beate Planche have done us all a great favor by writing this book, *Leading Collaborative Learning: Empowering Excellence*. This well-researched resource provides a useful vocabulary for talking about and understanding Collaborative Learning, describes an incredibly helpful set of tools so that anyone can use them to lead collaborative conversations, and clearly defines a Theory of Action to help us organize and ground our collaborative work. They write what they truly believe and have experienced as researchers and practitioners: "together teachers and leaders who collaborate have positive impact on student outcomes."

For Sharratt and Planche, Collaborative Learning is goal-directed action that empowers teachers and leaders to construct new knowledge together, that builds and shares understanding about practice, and most importantly, that outlines specific strategies for improving the quality of students' lives. The authors stress that Collaborative Learning is a genuine way of interacting and learning together for the mutual benefit of students, teachers, and leaders. Therefore, finding the time to model Collaborative Learning is critically important for everyone in systems and schools. We construct knowledge, they say, by working on processes together, through conversation about co-work. Anyone who is learning in a school—and that should be everyone—needs this comprehensive guidebook!

This book is rich in examples of Collaborative Learning processes at the system, school, and classroom levels. Collaborative Learning takes place in facilitated conversations and emanates from structured inquiries. The most meaningful and productive Collaborative Learning will occur when people communicate effectively. Similarly, in my book, *Better Conversations: Coaching Ourselves and Each Other to Be More Credible, Caring, and Connected* (2015), I write about the same beliefs and habits that make effective communication possible

as Sharratt and Planche describe in *Leading Collaborative Learning: Empowering Excellence.* I believe these shared beliefs and understandings are the lifeblood of Collaborative Learning. I identify six beliefs that are foundational for the kind of conversations that make deeper forms of collaboration possible:

1. I see conversation partners as equals.

2. I want to hear what others have to say.

3. People should have a lot of autonomy.

4. I don't judge others.

5. Conversation should be back and forth.

6. Conversation should be life-giving.

As Sharratt and Planche contend, learning conversations involve respectful listening and insightful presentation of one's own view regarding considered actions as well as learner challenges to the status quo because of the culture of safety and trust. Every teacher should believe that he or she can be more impactful when learning together with other colleagues and with their students.

The four elements of the Sharratt and Planche Theory of Action support deeper learning conversations by building an inquiry process on their bedrock of defined leader- or facilitator-led norms, protocols, vignettes, and case studies. A critical component of this book is the well-researched section in each chapter that makes the strong connection between the impact of Collaborative Learning and increasing all students' achievement. They show us the unique ways to build collective efficacy through planned Collaborative Learning processes.

In *Leading Collaborative Learning: Empowering Excellence*, Sharratt and Planche stress that capacity building is an essential part of system and school improvement that makes a difference. One capacity that must be developed to promote Collaborative Learning is co-learning through effective communication. Systems and schools

where conversations leading to co-work are the norm and settings where the powerful tools, theories, and activities in this book can flourish. And when Collaborative Learning flourishes, growth and achievement will happen for all students, teachers, and leaders.

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