

# Preface to the Second Edition

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**Aims and Audience** This book is about helping schools to become successful organizations, places where both staff and students are active and productive learners. It is designed especially for education professionals who want to take a stimulating journey toward more effective working relationships with their colleagues on behalf of the students they serve. It is for professionals who:

- believe that the “whole” of their collective efforts is infinitely greater than the “sum” of their individual efforts;
- know that students’ learning is enhanced by their own learning;
- want to determine, to a great extent, the content and course of their own development;
- understand that staff development must *embody* new ideas about learning, not just espouse new ideas about learning;
- enjoy challenging themselves by reflecting on tough questions, yet see playfulness as an essential ingredient of professional self-improvement;
- hunger for new ideas and fresh perspectives.

In sum, this book is for those seeking to open themselves to different ways of learning and working with each other and with their students.

The book is mainly for teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff developers engaged in joint development efforts. It also provides opportunities for professional learning in such forums as staff meetings, school improvement team sessions, site-based management group meetings, and curriculum planning sessions.

The principal focus in this new edition remains collective or team learning, on behalf of improved teaching and learning. Yet, I have made a conscious effort, this time, to draw attention to reflective challenges that individual practitioners can take away from group deliberations and address as time allows. This seemed a natural extension, as organizational and individual development are closely linked in the relevant literature discussed in the Introduction.

While the material in the book is most useful for professionals who work side by side in schools or school districts, many of the exercises have value, as well, for those who attend conferences and institutes as individuals. The book

can also meet the needs of citizen leaders and parents who perceive the advantages of collaborative self-development—people who not only want to see the investment in their schools pay off but also seek to become inspired and critical learners themselves.

It is important to note that all the exercises were developed and shaped to serve the special purposes of this book. Some of the activities I learned through association with other facilitators and trainers. Most I devised myself. All are handcrafted to serve the needs of education professionals seeking to enhance their practice.

### **New to the Second Edition**

Several facets and features differentiate this edition from its predecessor:

- The content in Part One, The Power of Reflective Exercises for Staff Development, has been consolidated, with major concepts highlighted, and the language even more accessible than it was in the first edition.
- Part Two, Reflective Exercises, contains the exercise descriptions and is now much more explicitly focused on matters of teaching and learning to complement the existing focus on teambuilding. Specifically, I have reoriented many of the exercise descriptions, particularly the “purpose” and “process” sections. Most of the exercises now have additional questions for reflection, with many focused specifically on teaching and learning concerns. Some of these questions also call for individual reflection to complement the existing emphasis on group reflection. Others invite participants to contemplate action steps that will enrich their professional practice.

Additionally, almost all the exercises can be adapted for classroom use; and now, more so than in the first edition, readers are invited to consider this possibility. Since the exercises are experiential, by definition they intensify students’ emotional connections with course content.

The exercises are collaborative by design, and when adapted, can also promote mutual accountability for classroom learning. With students positioned as learning resources for each other, the teacher is better able to mediate learning as well as direct it.

Gathering data of one sort or another and interpreting it is fundamental to learning, and most of the exercises ask participants to do this. Enterprising teachers can readily adapt some of the exercises to realize this benefit for student learning.

Finally many of the exercises call for the discovery and use of outside resources, such as community perspectives and material from the Web. With relative ease, this method can also be adapted for classroom use and is likely to enrich student learning.

Finally, the chart that serves as a guide to all the exercises now precedes the exercise descriptions.

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- Part III is now entitled Using the Exercises. Here, I have headlined each of the major sections in the explanatory text that precedes the vignettes. I have also added an entirely new section on asking good questions. The intent is to help participants frame and sequence reflective questions that increase their learning from the activities. As many commentators have noted, “Almost all the learning from experiential activities comes from the debriefing, not the activities themselves.”