Preface

It is time we had a new kind of accountability in education—one that gets back to the moral basics of caring, serving, empowering and learning.

—Hargreaves & Fullan (1998, p. 46)

Democratic schools in postmodern times require stronger leadership than traditional, top down, autocratic institutions. The nature of that leadership, however, is markedly different, replacing the need to control with the desire to support. Ironically, such leaders exercise much more influence where it counts, creating dynamic relationships between teachers and students in the classroom and resulting in high standards of academic achievement.

—Nadelstern, Price, & Listhaus (2000, p. 275)

The educational buzzwords since the 1990s have been "high academic standards" and "building collaborative learning communities." Most leaders and teachers have become all too aware that in reality, these concepts are very often oxymoronic. The press of national, state, and local accountability standards has placed enormous pressures on leaders, teachers, and students to provide measurable outcomes to meet everyone's standards. The hue and cry from administrators, teachers, parents, and students is increasing. The complaint is this: School is primarily focused on test preparation. Only reading and math count. Other subjects have been relegated to the back burner. A Florida elementary principal recounts how she eliminated the third grade art, music, and physical education programs that she believes are so important for children. She gave her

third graders an extra 50 minutes of reading daily to make sure they wouldn't be retained, despite her disapproval of the state's mandatory retention policy. Scores rose but didn't meet the national standards because of a subgroup of special education students. So the school "failed" (Winerip, 2004a).

How can a collaborative learning community be built in this context? School has often become a race with the clock to become prepared for the next test. Where is the time that is so vital for building collaborative learning communities? Collaboration takes time, and time is a scarce commodity.

The goal of this book is to enable prospective and practicing school and district leaders, teacher and parent leaders, and other educational leaders to learn the skills and dispositions needed to create collaborative learning communities in which high academic standards are achieved for all members of the school community.

We propose a conceptual framework built on a series of assumptions emanating from two major premises. This framework will permit schools to join "high academic standards" with a "collaborative learning community." The centerpiece of this framework is *modeling reflective practice.* What, you might ask, has "modeling reflective practice" to do with "collaborative learning communities" and "high academic standards?" "Everything" is the response.

In this text, we will demonstrate how reflective practice underlies all the strategies and techniques for building learning communities and how the modeling of these practices by the leader(s), the teachers, and the children provides an enduring method for achieving strong academic and moral standards.

This volume offers the two parts of the equation that leaders and aspiring leaders need to build a high-achieving collaborative learning community:

- The tools for adults to understand and reflect on their learning and leading patterns
- The strategies and techniques to model and implement them with their staff and the other members of the learning community

What is unique and important about this text? The first section provides all the materials for leaders and aspiring leaders to learn first about themselves. The reader can choose which materials he or she thinks are suitable for the particular context and culture in which they will be used. These materials are appropriate to share with all adults in a school learning community. Many of these tools have

adaptations for the K–12 classroom, and others can be adapted for classroom use. We believe that this personal knowledge is a prerequisite for acquiring the tools to build a learning community.

The second section presents a multitude of strategies and techniques to build a reflective learning community. Again, the reader can choose those he or she deems appropriate for the particular context. Most of them are adaptable for the K–12 classroom. This user-friendly text includes blank tools and techniques that can be replicated for professional development or in the classroom.

What is also distinctive in this book is the combination of the initial focus on individual development followed by strategies and techniques for group development. Many texts offer an array of communication and group development techniques, and others focus on a specific adult development orientation. None see the integration of personal development as the necessary step before attempting group development. The immersion of both facets in reflective practice seals in the effectiveness of this combination.

We would be remiss if we did not recommend some of the texts that focus entirely on adult and group development and on which we have drawn: *Reflective Practice for Educators* (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004)*; The Constructivist Leader* (Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner, & Szabo, 2003); *Communicating in Small Groups* (Beebe & Masterson, 2000); *The Power of Protocols* (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2003); *Schools That Learn: The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education* (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, & Kleiner, 2000); *Schools as Professional Learning Communities* (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003); *Finding Your Leadership Style* (Glanz, 2002); and *Let Me Learn* (Johnston & Dainton, 1997).

To lay the foundation for the two major sections of this book, an introductory chapter provides an overview of our perspective on constructivism and reflective practice. The first section on leadership and learning styles comprises Chapters 2 and 3. Each chapter begins with a set of reflective questions to begin your thinking about the content (about what you know about yourself and those around you). Reflective questions also follow chapter sections. They can be used as individual prompts, as share pairs, for online or group discussions, or for microlabs (see Chapter 7 for model). These chapters include mini–case studies also followed by reflective questions that draw on what you have learned in each chapter. Suggestions for practice and use in the university classroom and for professional development of the adult and student members of the school community conclude

the two chapters. Every chapter closes with suggested readings to further and deepen knowledge.

Chapter 2, "Leadership and Self-Knowledge," focuses on the importance of self-knowledge for those engaged in leadership activities. Awareness of our identities helps determine how we understand and practice leadership and engage in relationships that are integral to it. Knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses, our personality preferences, what drives and motivates us, and the impact we have on others can influence our actions. Thus this chapter guides you in finding your personal leadership style. An emphasis on ethical and moral leadership distinguishes it from most leadership surveys. The chapter includes reflective activities that will assist you in sharing this guide to leadership and self-knowledge with your colleagues and even your students.

Chapter 3, "Let Us Learn," addresses the need for *all* learners to understand their internalized learning behaviors, the learner's actions, and the necessity of building a common vocabulary to communicate these learning processes. The author presents the *Let Me Learn* process that Christine Johnston developed from the interactive learning model. Johnston derived four patterned operations from Philip's (1936) work: Sequence, Precision, Technical Reasoning, and Confluence. Samples from the Learning Connections Inventory reveal how this inventory provides a framework for understanding one's learning behavior and responses in learning situations. Suggestions follow for use in the university classroom, with school leaders and teachers, parents, and children. The author recounts one of her personal experiences introducing the inventory and concludes with reflective questions about the use and value of the inventory in the readers' schools.

Based on the knowledge gained in the first chapters, Chapter 4 facilitates the development of the first draft of your leadership vision statement. The authors provide guidelines to start your thinking and provide a reflective format to develop your ideas with university colleagues or other school leaders. Sample statements are included to start the reflection process. Equipped with personal understanding of who you are as a leader and learner and how that knowledge is reflected in your leadership vision, you are prepared to tackle the skills needed to lead and participate in groups and teams. The second section of the book is divided according to the skills and strategies essential for effective meetings. Chapter 5 begins with an overview of communication skills and techniques that are prerequisites for effective meetings: Listening skills, barriers to communication, and sending assertion messages form the baseline of effective communication.

The next steps, "breaking the ice" and "getting started," form the basis of Chapter 6. Included in this chapter are suggested "icebreakers," which set the personal tone for meeting communication. The second section of this chapter offers a panoply of techniques to foster the building of a collaborative, productive environment. All of the suggestions in this chapter include adaptations to different environments and recommendations for classroom and/or site practice.

In Chapter 7, the authors cull together from their extensive combined experience fostering and teaching collaborative decision making a panoply of effective strategies, techniques, and exercises for making meetings work. The range is from corporate techniques such as force field analysis, rating scales, and systems thinking exercises to tuning protocols such as descriptive review and small-group consultancies. As a guarantee of their effectiveness, the authors have included only approaches that have personally worked for them. Guidelines for using these skills, reflective questions, vignettes to contextualize their appropriateness, and scenarios to practice them in the university classroom and on-site are provided.

Chapter 8, "Pulling It Together," tells the story of a district and school that created a learning community through the use of many of the processes described in the book. It concludes with reflective questions to facilitate the readers' reflections about their personal contexts.