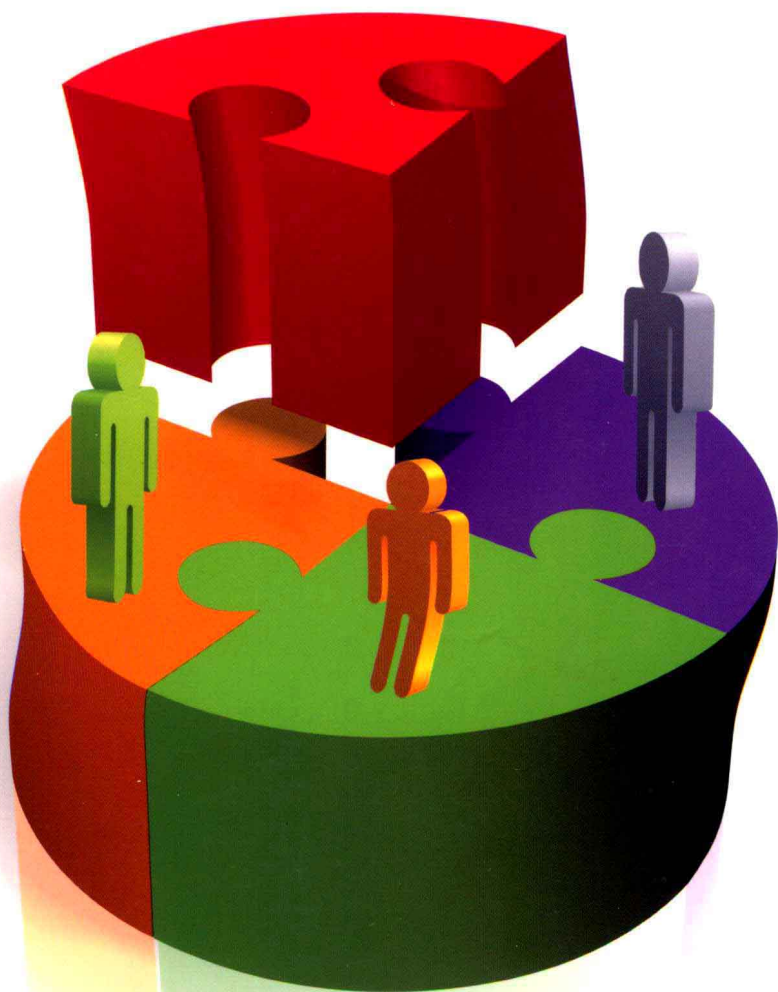


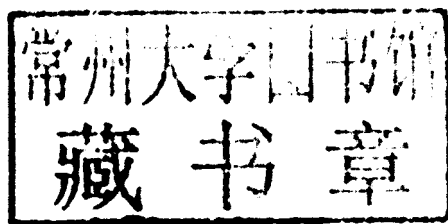
Unlocking Group Potential to Improve Schools



Robert J. Garmston with Valerie von Frank

Foreword by Michael Fullan

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Unlocking Group Potential to Improve Schools

Foreword

Getting work done in groups is a paradox. It should be so easy—common sense, one could say. Yet history's most fundamental blunders are a result of groups gone awry. Whether it is a world crisis or getting through the day, knowing how to behave in groups, how to lead them, and how to facilitate them is one of life's fundamental skills.

Fortunately we have Bob Garmston, who has led the cognitive coaching field for several decades. He is a writer and a practitioner—a trainer and a consultant. He has also been distilling his wisdom in regular columns in the publications of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC; now Learning Forward). Now, with Valerie von Frank, Garmston has brought together in one publication systematic and honed wisdom in the fundamentals of group work and group management.

Garmston first tackles the matter of “getting work done,” delving into understanding and building effective groups. He then takes us into developing group member skills. From there we learn how to develop a sense of community, including how to become self-directed. The final section addresses facilitation skills that will be essential for intervening and maintaining effective group work.

What makes *Unlocking Group Potential to Improve Schools* special is that it easily cycles back and forth from deep issues and skills of effective group functioning to the seemingly most mundane but nonetheless critical basics of setting up a room, organizing the agenda, conducting sessions, and so on.

What is great about this book is that it contains the complete package, ranging from operating norms to micro and macro skills, leadership, and facilitation. The reader does not have to go hunting through the literature in order to identify and sort out the skills of group work. Take this one book, master its content, practice its principles and techniques, refine your knowledge and skill base, and watch yourself and your group get better and better. This is a book that keeps on giving. Read and reread it, practice its tenets, and you and those you work with will be much better off. Unlock your potential!

Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Preface

Why Read This Book?

This book is about developing group culture, increasing facilitator knowledge and skill, and developing the most precious resource groups have—the members themselves. In short, this book is about leadership for better schools—schools that are better for students, better places for leaders to grow as learners, and better environments for inquiry.

The book can be considered a field guide for two reasons. First, it is written based on my interactions with many groups in the field; second, because the original form of much of the content came in columns, the ideas presented are specific and practical, but not without theoretical foundation. It was inspired by more than 40 years of working with groups on several continents and the resulting columns I wrote for the *Journal of Staff Development*, a publication of the National Staff Development Council, now named Learning Forward. In those columns, I developed many specific ideas that I lay before you now.

The tools, tips, and principles I present here will make working committees, task forces, and grade-level and department teams and faculties not only more effective and efficient, but smarter and able to resolve cognitively complex issues regarding student learning more effectively. Readers also will learn to discern which problems may be solved and which are ongoing tensions that need to be managed.

Who Is This Book For?

Productive groups are developed, not born. This book is a developmental field book for all those laboring in schools and seeking collective improvement in student learning. It is written for anyone needing a current, practical guide to group work.

Here, readers will find not only what makes effective teams, but how to develop teacher skills as facilitators and informed group members in informal and formal settings, small groups and large.

The book takes readers beyond the idea of *professional learning communities* to the practice, describing specific ways to weave the collaborative fabric of a faculty, develop group member skills, and improve facilitation strategies. District and building administrators, K–12 teachers, university students, and teacher leaders of all types—mentors, coaches, and committee and department chairs—will find it useful for working with staffs, parents, or communities.

What's New About This Book?

In *The Adaptive School* (2009), Bruce Wellman and I describe how professional development and ongoing focus on developing the system as an adaptive entity can help groups develop their capacity for productivity. In this book I extend, add depth, provide how-tos, provide more detail about the principles, and bring together more tools and tips for unlocking group potential. The structure of the book should make the material easily accessible to groups, from novice to veteran.

Readers will learn to work together more effectively. This book contains the most current research, revisions to the norms of collaboration and related assessment instruments, and detailed instructions for facilitating and intervening with counterproductive individuals or group behaviors.

A focus on collective intelligence enhances my previous work and provides information to guide readers through the latest research on the concept, what factors are involved, and

how to increase collective IQ, leading to the ability to solve increasingly complex issues.

Special Features

Special features of this book include the newly updated seven norms of collaboration, a sample team assessment survey, instruments for assessing meeting effectiveness, an extensive bibliography, and practical examples and suggestions embedded throughout the text.

Readers who use this text will be better able to

- Develop productive, collaborative work cultures,
- Improve collective focus on student learning, and
- Acquire the principles and understanding to engage in a continuous cycle of self-improvement.

Acknowledgments

I am massively indebted to Valerie von Frank, without whose assistance this book would not have been possible. Valerie and I worked together as editor and author for several years when I was writing columns for the *Journal of Staff Development*. On contemplating this volume, I thought first of her amazing skills of research, organization, and editing and asked her to join me in this enterprise. Thankfully, she said yes, and the result is the book you hold in your hands. I appreciate Learning Forward, formerly the National Staff Development Council, for giving me a forum to develop some of these ideas in my columns for the journal.

Many people contributed to the ideas in this book. I am grateful to Bruce Wellman, a partner in the development of the Center for Adaptive Schools and several publications; his thinking and creativity are always at the forefront of our profession. I thank Michael Dolcemascolo and Carolyn McKanders, codirectors of the Center for Adaptive Schools which has served as a testing ground and training vehicle for many of the concepts I've elaborated on here. They have advanced this work while remaining true to its principles and values and given permission for some of the content in this book. For deepening our understanding and adding to this work, I thank Jane Ellison and Carolee Hayes, codirectors of the Center for Cognitive Coaching. And my appreciation goes to Bill and Ochan Powell, who practice and teach this content internationally and from whom I always learn.

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Mark Ravlin, at my request, revised and gave permission for me to use the Seven Norms of Collaboration Toolkit, available to readers in the Appendixes of this book, and on www.adaptiveschools.com. I am also thankful to the principal, Lilita Narvaez, and teachers of the Estrella School—a Garmston and Costa Academy, who contribute to our knowledge base through their daily practice of the principles and tools of Adaptive Schools, Cognitive Coaching, and Habits of Mind.

Finally, I am grateful for the legions of Adaptive Schools colleagues who both train others and practice these skills in their own settings. We are, ourselves, a community of learners.

Robert Garmston
El Dorado Hills, California

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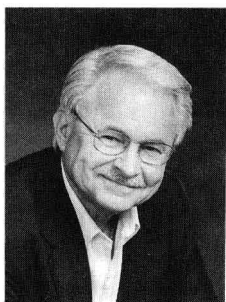
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Robert J. Garmston, EdD, is an Emeritus Professor of Educational Administration at California State University, Sacramento and codeveloper of Cognitive Coaching (www.cognitivecoaching.com) with Dr. Art Costa. Formerly a classroom teacher, principal, director of instruction, and acting superintendent, he works as an educational consultant and is director of Facilitation

Associates, a consulting firm specializing in leadership, learning, personal, and organizational development. He is codeveloper of the Center for Adaptive Schools (www.adaptiveschools.com) with Bruce Wellman. The Center for Adaptive Schools develops organizational capacity for self-directed, sustainable improvement in student learning. He has made presentations and conducted workshops for teachers, administrators, and staff developers throughout the United States, as well as in Canada, Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Middle East.

Bob has written and coauthored a number of books including *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools*, *How to Make Presentations That Teach and Transform*, and *A Presenter's Fieldbook: A Practical Guide*. In 1999, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) selected *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* as book

of the year. In that same year, Bob was recognized by NSDC for his contributions to staff development. His books have been translated into Arabic, Hebrew, and Italian.

Active in many professional organizations, Bob served as president of the California Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and as a member of the Executive Council of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) at the international level. In addition to educational clients, he has worked with diverse groups including police officers, probation officers, court and justice systems, utilities districts, the United States Air Force, and the World Health Organization.

Bob lives with his wife, Sue, near Sacramento, California and has five children and five grandchildren, each of whom, of course, is bright and cute.



Valerie von Frank has had a front row seat on education reform in the past several decades. As a daily newspaper reporter and editor in multiple states, communications co-director in an urban school district, and director of communications for a nonprofit school reform organization, she has explored with educators the multiple facets of daily work in schools. In the last decade, she has worked with Learning Forward as editor of *JSD* and written extensively for the journal, as well as for *Tools for Schools*, *The Learning System*, *The Learning Principal*, and *T3*. She is co-author with Ann Delephant of *Making Meetings Work: How to Get Started, Get Going, and Get It Done* (Corwin, 2007) and with Linda Munger of *Change, Lead, Succeed: Building Capacity With School Leadership Teams* (NSDC, 2010).

She currently lives in Michigan, where her two daughters receive an excellent public education.

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Introduction

National improvement on standardized tests seems a goal just out of reach. The lack of improvement in overall school performance is evident both in the research literature and in the media (Good & McCaslin, 2008). But this is not the full story. In Illinois, California, and Nebraska; in Hawaii, Ohio, and Idaho; in New York, Calgary, and many other settings, urban and rural, rich and poor, some schools are making a difference for students. The difference is measured in unusual progress on standardized tests, improved attendance, higher graduation rates, and the exuberant smiles of students being pressed and supported in their learning and play.

What dynamics have enabled some schools to become these islands of optimism? The answers are neither simple nor easy. For schools to succeed in improving student learning requires leaders' attention to a mutually supportive, multilayered, non-linear, extraordinarily complex, often competitive association of interrelated factors (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2010). In these schools are teams of teachers with shared values and goals, able to clearly identify a problem and come together to improve student learning. These teams share a collective sense of responsibility and accountability for student achievement. Teachers use authentic assessments as essential tools to improve learning. They practice self-directed reflection based on their own and student needs. The schools are stable settings—collaborative work cannot occur in dysfunctional environments. These are schools in which strong