POLARITY MAP

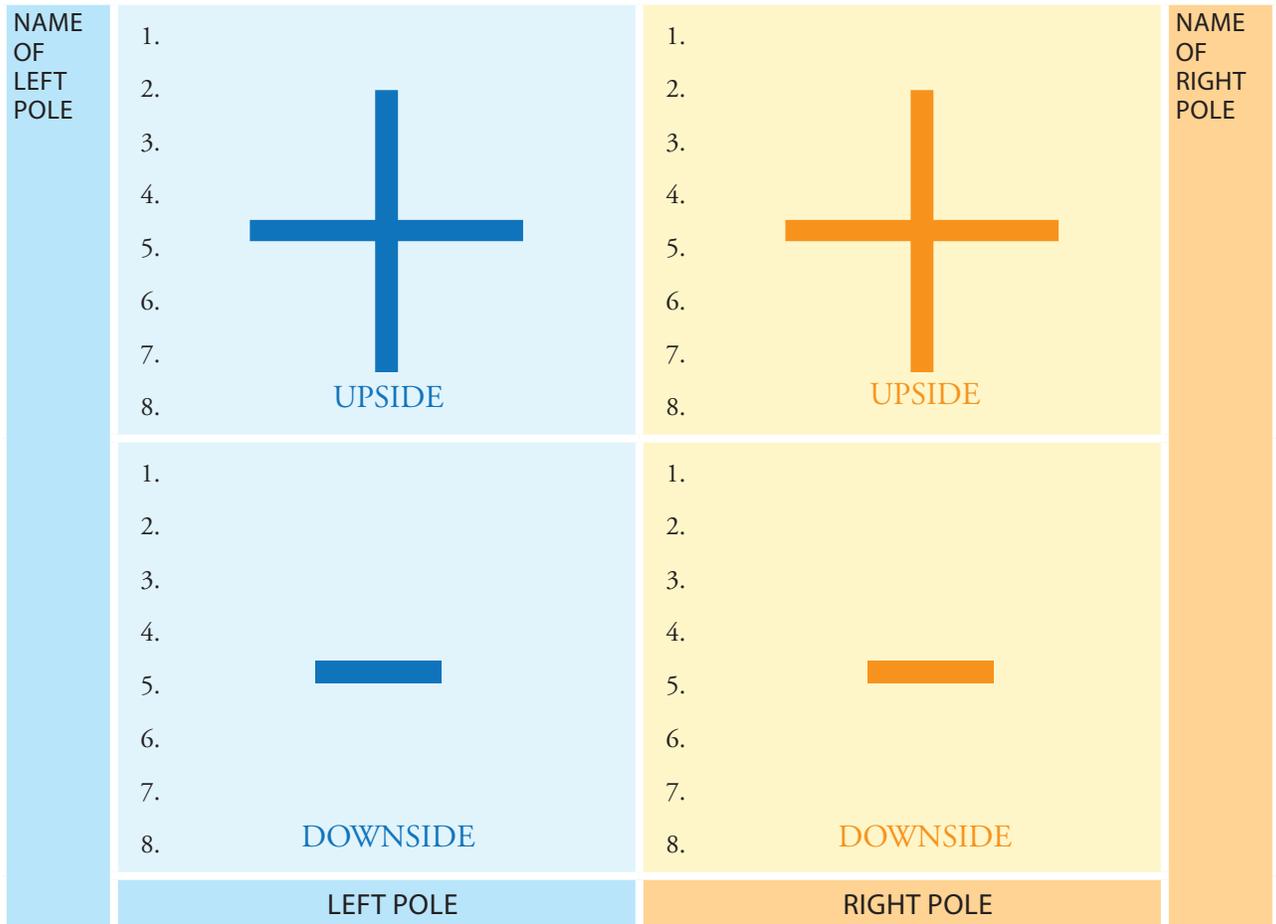| NAME OF LEFT POLE		NAME OF RIGHT POLE	
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	UPSIDE	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	UPSIDE
1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	DOWNSIDE	1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	DOWNSIDE
LEFT POLE		RIGHT POLE	

THE POLARITY MAP

Teacher-facilitators guiding groups through difficult discussions need a range of protocols to support making such conversations productive. The Polarity Map on these pages is a tool for mapping paradoxes or dilemmas. The map provides a structure for making invisible tensions visible and for addressing the whole polarity picture. Once the map is completed through collaborative conversation, it provides a focus for the group to engage in dialogue from diverse perspectives. This concept draws on that of Barry Johnson in *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvable Problems* (1996).

The structure is a square divided into four quadrants. The right and left halves are each called poles. The upper part of each pole contains the positive aspects of that pole,

referred to as its upside. The lower part of each pole contains the negative aspects of that pole and is called the downside. For maximum effectiveness in managing a polarity, groups create and discover the content of all four quadrants.

Once a group has completely mapped a polarity on chart paper, a facilitated conversation offers members the opportunity to view and explore the dilemma as a whole and from multiple perspectives. Further, the group can now generate strategies for staying in the upsides of both poles while avoiding the downsides of each pole. A facilitator's questions in this discussion are invitational in tone and form and can help promote group dialogue and discussion. These kinds of questions are intentionally designed to engage and transform group members' thinking and perspectives.

GUIDELINES FOR CREATING A POLARITY MAP

1 Define the challenge. Identify an ongoing, chronic issue that

- Is within your sphere of influence.
- Has eluded problem solving.
- Must be addressed in the next two months.

2 Identify a key polarity. A polarity differs from a problem in that all four of the following must be present. Explore these questions to learn if you have a polarity.

- In what ways do you continue to experience this issue over time?
- In what ways are there two interdependent alternatives? This means that you can only focus on one pole for so long before you are required to focus on the other pole.
- What is the necessity of having the upsides of both poles over time?
- To what extent will focusing on one upside to the neglect of the other eventually undermine your productivity?

Use dialogue to create a description of the issues that doesn't lay blame, and describe opportunities and polarities present in any given situation.

3 Agree on the names for the poles. Names for poles are value-neutral.
Avoid language with charged connotations.

4 Write the pole names on the map.
The map is created on chart paper so that group members may see the map as it unfolds.

5 Brainstorm together the content for each quadrant.
Aim for four to eight entries in each quadrant.
Identify both upsides, asking, "What are some positives or upsides of _____ (this pole)?
"Then identify both downsides, asking, "What are the negatives of over-focusing on a pole to the neglect of the other pole?"
This order can be modified to meet individual and group needs.
The result of the brainstorming is that oppositional values and fears are identified and respected as important.

6 Agree on a higher purpose and a deeper fear.
Agreeing on a higher purpose and a deeper fear integrates oppositional views and provides a reason to manage the tension between the two views.
The higher purpose is the major benefit for managing the polarity well, and the deeper fear is the major negative for not managing the polarity well.

Reference: Johnson, B. (1996). *Polarity management: Identifying and managing unsolvable problems.* Amherst, MA: HRD Press.
Source: Adapted with permission from **Garmston, R. with von Frank, V. (2012)**. *Unlocking group potential to improve schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.