

# Preface

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## THE NEW EDITION

*Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Creating Professional Learning Communities That Target Student Learning* is a new edition of our earlier books. The titles of the first edition, *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning* (1998), and the second edition, *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: Creating Student-Based Professional Development* (2001), reflect the shift in focus. In the first edition, we were not as clear as we are now in how Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSGs) change schools and what types of learning are enhanced for students. In the second edition, we presented a much more coherent picture of how WFSGs are implemented and maintained. In this new edition, 4 more years of experiences in many very different schools bring more clarity to all three phases of the change process: initiation, implementation, and institutionalization. On the basis of practice, in this edition, there is more focus on assessment of student results, and the action-research cycle that WFSGs experience is described in more detail. A major change from the earlier editions is that this edition views WFSGs as a system rather than simply as a model or a design for professional development. We are taking the view, as seen in Figure 2.1, that when implemented as described in this book, WFSGs represent a systemic change system. The theory that supports professional learning communities has remained constantly supportive; however, we have tried to more directly connect theory and research to the WFSG practice. In the first two editions, we did not use the term *professional learning communities*, assuming that readers would connect the term to what we were describing. We realized that we may not have made the connection, however, when principals asked, "Now that we have Whole-Faculty Study Groups in place, when do we begin implementing professional learning communities?" This new edition also uses the National Staff Development Council's staff development standards to illustrate how the WFSG system continues to use the context-process-content framework for its basic design. Although the three books are similar, many important modifications and significant additions have been included in this new edition.

The WFSG system has spread to school systems across the country, and the implementation and work of study groups has become a daily occurrence in many schools, districts, and school systems. Because such work is continuous in these schools, the process and its refinement are constantly evolving. What one study group does has the potential to affect others, not only in that school but also in other schools that use the WFSG system.

In addition, as Murphy and other consultants travel from school to school throughout the country in their consulting role and Lick continues to research the theoretical basis for study groups, new ideas are generated that help strengthen the WFSG system. These changes accumulate over time and lead to major adjustments that make the process even more effective.

In the 6 years since the first edition was written, several hundred schools have implemented the WFSG system, which translates to more than 2,000 individual study groups. From these and continuing groups, new insights into the WFSG approach have created a wealth of new and helpful material.

If the study group model were a “paper-and-pencil” design, it might remain in a fixed or rigid state. Because the model continually evolves from how teachers actually work together in schools, it is fluid, flowing, and readjusting itself. As leaders in schools chronicle the movement of study groups, we examine why some are high-performing groups and others struggle. What we learn is shared with continuing schools and those that are considering or just beginning the process. This edition of our book is how we keep schools up to date with our findings on what is working best.

Included in this edition of the book are the following major changes we have made during the past 4 years:

- An updating of every chapter
- The addition of three new chapters to make the book more effective and usable
- A reorganization of chapters to allow the book to flow more useably for the reader
- An expansion of the discussion of practical approaches and processes that will help the user and reflect “what works most effectively” in difficult situations
- New materials on key and timely topics, such as “learning communities” and “learning teams”
- Fourteen new and important “lessons learned”
- Completely revised and updated sets of practical and concrete resources
- Illustrations in the appendix

## **NEED AND PURPOSE**

Staff development, school reform, and the improvement of schools are not as simple as the general and educational rhetoric of the past decade would imply. Well-intentioned societal leaders and school personnel have talked about the necessity to change and improve, and schools and their personnel have attempted a wide variety of what appeared to be logical and progressive solutions. Unfortunately, most of these have failed or, at best, been only partially successful. This failure or limited success happened because change, even positively perceived change, is difficult to bring about in long-standing, well-established organizations. Like other organizations, schools are not naturally open or amenable to major change.

To successfully reform, improve, and transition schools to meet tomorrow’s needs will require approaches and processes that are different than most attempted during the past decade. We must not only decide what changes or reforms are required but also put in place meaningful staff development and significant transition processes

to help negotiate the societal, organizational, cultural, and people barriers in and affecting schools.

One of the most successful and exciting new approaches to staff development, reform, and change in education today is that involving professional WFSGs, as discussed in detail in this book. A key element in these efforts and unique to this book is “whole-faculty” involvement, not just study groups but WFSGs, in which all members of the faculty are committed to the effort, actively involved in it, and responsible for an important part of the total effort. Where WFSGs have been properly implemented, they have been unusually successful. The WFSG system is a holistic, practical process for facilitating major staff development and schoolwide change and for enhancing student learning and school improvement. This book presents a detailed discussion of WFSGs, their step-by-step application, and the underlying change principles necessary for such study groups to be successful in the school environment.

A second key element is that WFSGs are a student-based approach to professional development, and they rest on the basic question, “What do students need for us, the teachers, to do?” Using this focus radically changes the tone and dynamics of professional development for teachers, and brings it right to the heart of the matter. Based on our work in leading and managing major change and our experiences in hundreds of schools and more than 2,000 WFSGs in those schools, this book provides (a) the practical knowledge required to implement and successfully use the WFSG approach in schools and (b) the theoretical foundation to understand the key change elements involved and how these can be applied to facilitate staff development and schoolwide change, enhance student learning, and improve schools. Furthermore, the book contains a generous collection of relevant and illustrative examples of real-world situations and a detailed, step-by-step practical methodology for the development of successful professional WFSGs in schools.

In particular, this book grew out of a wide array of real-world, Whole-Faculty Study Group efforts and experiences, it encompasses the existing relevant literature on study groups, and it significantly expands this knowledge base through (a) new up-to-date information and refinements of processes, procedures, and approaches; (b) new experiences and applications from user schools throughout the country; and (c) a unique integration and use of practical and theoretical change-knowledge concepts and change-management approaches.

## **WHO SHOULD READ AND USE THIS BOOK?**

This book should be read and used by anyone who is interested in facilitating important staff development and change in schools and increasing student learning. A primary audience for the book should be the personnel in K–12 schools—all teachers, administrators, and staff.

For schools that choose to introduce the WFSG approach, all school personnel will be involved in their schoolwide effort. Consequently, in such schools, each faculty member, administrator, and staff member should have a copy, or many copies should be shared with school personnel, allowing full and convenient access across the school.

In addition, the book holds special potential for individual teachers and administrators and groups of teachers and administrators who are considering new

options for seriously improving their schools. Other important audiences for this book include the following:

- Central office personnel in school systems, especially for consideration and possible implementation of study groups in their school system
- College of education faculty in colleges and universities for understanding this new and successful process for schoolwide change and enhanced student learning, as well as for possible use as a textbook or reference book in classes relating to teacher training and school enhancement
- Community college faculty and administrators for consideration of study groups and their application in their institutions for collegewide change and improving student learning
- School, community college, college, and university libraries
- Individuals and groups in national and international workshops on study groups and their application in education, from small seminars to large groups
- Individuals and groups in corporate, community, and governmental organizations involved with schools, education, and training

## **ORGANIZATION AND CONTENTS**

The book is organized so that its chapter contents logically build on each other, with each laying a foundation for those that follow. The contents include the key elements in the WFSG and change processes and their implementation along with a large number of real-world examples and illustrative cases. The book is written so that it can serve as a textbook, a detailed reference book, or a stand-alone guide for the effective initiation, comprehensive implementation, and successful completion of the WFSG approach to staff development and major improvements in schools.

Chapter 1 discusses the school reform environment and the potential of the WFSG approach, serving as a major change process to improve schools, enhance student learning, and move schools toward becoming learning organizations.

The concept and nature of study groups, their strengths and perceived weaknesses, their purposes, and their ability to serve as vehicles for staff development and change and the creation of collaborative work cultures are described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 provides an overview discussion of relevant research findings relating to school change and improvement, including professional learning communities, staff development and training, the change process, school cultures, and leadership.

Chapter 4 sets the framework for the three components of the WFSG approach: context, process, and content. Key among the context-related topics discussed are roles and responsibilities of school personnel, school district influence, importance of leadership, power of a shared vision, time and resource requirements, school data and student needs, organizational structure, and capacity building.

Critically important issues of school culture are discussed in Chapter 5, including the change concepts of building commitment, effective leadership and sponsorship, human change and resistance, roles of change, assimilation capacity, modification of school-related cultures, and the overarching universal change principle.

The process for the WFSG system, including the 15 study group process guidelines for success, is unfolded in Chapter 6, helping educators acquire and develop

the knowledge and skills necessary to increase student performance and improve schools.

Chapter 7 introduces the seven steps of the WFSG decision-making cycle, which provide the mechanisms for decision making involving data collection and analysis; critical student needs; study group organization around student needs; and plans of action, implementation, and evaluation.

The heart of the study group process, the content, detailed in Chapter 8, is what teachers study; investigate; add to their strategies, repertoires, and resource bank; do to become more skillful in the classroom with students; and use when study groups meet.

Chapter 9 describes how to use the study group process to build synergistic groups, which are “authentic teams,” and how to turn such teams into highly productive and successful learning teams and learning communities in schools.

Chapter 10 reviews, in the WFSG process, the stages of change, concerns and practices related to change, questions that leaders must answer for study groups, and sets of practical, concrete approaches to help study groups become fully successful.

Chapter 11 discusses “learning experiences” from the “educational field of practice,” including key local school, regional, state, and national WFSG initiatives.

Chapter 12 presents 14 reflective “lessons learned” from the authors’ extensive work and study of WFSGs, which should be helpful to readers of this book.

Finally, the appendixes contain a plethora of helpful nuts-and-bolts information, forms, guides, and illustrations for the effective application of the WFSG approach, including study group action plans, study group logs, and artifacts from WFSG schools.

We hope that the material in this book will inspire and help you understand and use WFSGs in your work to produce especially meaningful staff development, create more effective schools, and generate learning environments that significantly enhance student learning and improve schools in the 21st century.