

Whole-Faculty Study Groups

A Powerful Way to Change
Schools and Enhance Learning



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Lick

Forewords by
Dennis Sparks
Ron Brandt

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Foreword

Imagine a school that has committed itself to high levels of learning for all its students. The school has declared that it will educate all its students to meet national standards in the core academic areas. And the school recognizes that the knowledge and skills of its teachers will be its most important resource in meeting this lofty goal. Put another way, high levels of learning and performance on the part of all teachers will be the key to high levels of all learning and performance for all students.

The challenges faced by such a school are immense. As Carlene Murphy and Dale Lick point out in their preface to *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning*, “Like other organizations, schools are not naturally open or amenable to major change.” What processes will perturb the status quo, create sustained commitment to innovative practices, and provide a means for learning that will enable teachers to plan the change effort and alter their day-to-day instructional practices?

Although no single professional learning process can measure up to that challenge, whole-faculty study groups are an essential element in the mix of strategies that can lead schools to high levels of learning for all students and staff members. Such groups involve the entire faculty in sustained, rigorous study of the innovations they will implement and in working through the problems that inevitably accompany such innovation.

The use of whole-faculty study groups is, the authors point out, “a holistic practical process for facilitating major schoolwide change and for enhancing student learning in the schools.” These groups make it possible for teachers “to explicate, invent, and evaluate practices that have the potential to meet the needs of their students and the community their schools serve,” Murphy and Lick write. “As teachers work together in these study group approaches, they alter their practices to provide new and innovative opportunities for their students to learn in challenging and productive new ways.”

Consider the power of whole-faculty study groups in improving student learning. The faculty begins by committing itself to extended study by an overwhelming vote in favor of the study group process. The faculty gathers and analyzes data to determine the focus of its efforts. The teachers form groups that will meet weekly for about an hour to discuss research, consider alternatives for actions, and acquire instructional skills. Because everyone is involved in the study, the faculty develops a common vocabulary and strategies to address the student learning goals it has identified. Because of the meetings, barriers that isolate teachers are removed, and norms of collaboration, experimentation, and risk taking are nurtured. Whole-faculty study

groups teach their participants through example that professional learning must be an ongoing, focused process if it is to affect student learning.

In such a school, the principal is a skillful leader who is a “keeper of the dream” and a holder of high expectations for students and staff. This person values continuous improvement and models this behavior by participating in a study group. Surrounding the school is an infrastructure of district support in the form of resources and visible district leadership and pressure in the form of high expectations and accountability for high levels of learning for all students.

If school reform efforts are to succeed, individuals who occupy various roles in the educational enterprise must be knowledgeable about the benefits and processes of whole-school study groups. Leading the list would be teachers, principals, and district leaders, such as superintendents, directors of staff development, and curriculum specialists. Education professors and consultants who work for educational agencies would also benefit from a deeper understanding of this process.

Carlene Murphy and Dale Lick bring a unique combination of experiences to this book. Murphy has distinguished herself as a national staff development leader and a consultant to numerous schools. She is familiar with both the practical day-to-day realities of school change and the theory and research that support those efforts, a special combination that makes this book a rare blend of theory and practice. Lick brings a background in organization development and leadership that rounds out the knowledge and skills required to transform schools and school systems. Together, they have written a book filled with practical advice for those most closely involved with educational reform.

It is difficult to imagine a school seriously committed to high levels of learning for all students and staff members that does not use some form of whole-faculty study. *Whole-Faculty Study Groups* provides the theory, strategies, and examples schools need to begin such a journey.

DENNIS SPARKS
*Executive Director,
National Staff Development Council*

Foreword

This book is about a simple but powerful idea: people working in small groups to improve their professional performance. It's not a new idea; social psychologists have recognized the power of small groups for decades. But most organizations, especially schools, have not made effective use of that power.

We have committees, of course. Every educational institution at every level has them—with varying results. Teachers know that what appears to be a sensible device for getting things done can be fruitless and frustrating instead. And even when committees function well, their perspective is outward, not inward. Their focus is the task, not the growth of participants themselves.

The small-group process explained in this book is different. Members of whole-faculty study groups are concerned with what they themselves do and what they might do differently. If they find an idea appealing, they must decide how it applies to them and what they should do about it.

That can be threatening, but it can also be exhilarating. What could be more relevant to any professional than his or her own performance? And what responsible person wouldn't like to hear new ideas and learn new methods, if they can be freely discussed and evaluated?

The problem for many teachers is that they are already overwhelmed by the demands of their jobs, so they are unlikely to want to attend more meetings, no matter how apt. An eager few may voluntarily form study groups on their own. Most will need encouragement.

The authors understand this and offer sound advice on how to set up study groups that teachers will enjoy and support. They are supremely well-qualified to do so. Dale Lick, who has been president of three respected universities, is a scholar of organizational change, a researcher, and consultant. Here, he teams with Carlene Murphy, who originated and managed an extensive program of faculty study groups when she was director of staff development for the Richmond County, Georgia, Public Schools.

In recent years, Murphy has consulted with schools in numerous other districts, including Cobb County, Georgia, where principals report dramatic changes. Teachers, they say, are less likely to avoid important issues with small talk and more often discuss educational matters. One principal says teachers consider study groups the most important aspect of their school. "They'd do without me before they'd give up study groups," she jokes.

Teachers elsewhere may not be quite that enthusiastic, but many will find study groups satisfying, because they are a refreshing antidote to the professional isolation

that characterizes most schools. Observers bemoan the fact that teachers spend their days engaged with students and seldom interact with other adults. The study group format changes that, putting teachers in regular communication with a handful of colleagues. Researchers say this “professional community” is at the heart of successful school reform. Karen Seashore Louis and her coauthors Kruse and Marks (1996) write, “By collaborating on common objectives, sharing developmental activities and concerns, and reflecting together on the technical aspects of their teaching, teachers come to own in common the consequences of their joint work for students’ intellectual progress” (p. 180).

A skeptic might ask why, if study groups are beneficial, so few schools have them. Part of the answer may be that recognizing the value of something is only the first step. To make it work, you need to know how. That is the contribution of this book. The authors provide detailed, practical advice that will help educators avoid missteps that could lead to misunderstandings and rejection. How large should the groups be? How often should they meet? Who decides what they will talk about? How can administrators keep informed and be responsive? What if most teachers are willing but a few are not? The authors answer these and other questions based on successful experience in schools large and small, urban and rural, elementary and secondary.

Educators seeking school improvement—especially principals and superintendents but also teachers, central office staff members, and others—will welcome this book, because it outlines a process by which promising reforms can become realities. Whole-school study groups have value in themselves, contributing to faculty solidarity and a climate of professionalism. Beyond that, they are a vehicle for implementing the many other changes that must be made if schools are to meet the challenges of a new century.

RON BRANDT

*Former Assistant Executive Director of the Association
of Supervision and Curriculum Development and editor
of the journal **Educational Leadership**, now retired*

Preface

Need and Purpose

School reform and the improvement of schools are not as simple as the last decade of general and educational rhetoric 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 last decade. We must not only decide what changes or reforms are required, but we must also put in place a significant transition process to help negotiate the societal, organizational, cultural, and people barriers in and affecting schools.

One of the most successful and exciting new approaches to reform and change in education today is that involving professional whole-faculty study groups. The key element in these efforts, and unique to this book, is the "whole-faculty" involvement. Not just study groups, but whole-faculty study groups, where all of the faculty are committed to the effort, actively involved in it, and responsible for an important part of the total effort. Where whole-faculty study groups have been properly implemented, they have been unusually successful. The whole-faculty study group approach is a holistic, practical process for facilitating major schoolwide change and for enhancing student learning in the schools. This book presents a detailed discussion of whole-faculty study groups, their application, and the underlying change principles necessary for such study groups to be successful in the school environment.

Based on our work in managing major change and our experiences in over 100 schools and 1,000 whole-faculty study groups in those schools, this book provides both (a) the practical knowledge required to implement and successfully use the whole-faculty study group approach in schools and (b) the theoretical foundation to understand the key change elements involved and how these can be applied, using whole-faculty study groups, to facilitate schoolwide change and enhance student learning. Furthermore, the book contains a generous collection of relevant and illustrative examples, "snapshots" of real-world situations, and a detailed, step-by-step practical methodology for the development of successful professional whole-faculty study groups in schools.

In particular, this book grew out of a wide array of real-world whole-faculty study group efforts and experiences, encompasses the existing relevant literature on study groups, and significantly extends 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 across the country, and (c) the unique integration and use of practical and theoretical concepts regarding change 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 change in the schools and increasing student learning. A primary audience for the book should be the personnel in schools (kindergarten through 12th grade)—all teachers, administrators, and staff.

For schools that choose to introduce the whole-faculty study group approach, all school personnel will be involved in their schoolwide effort. Consequently, in such schools, each faculty, administration, and staff member should have a copy, or many copies should be shared generously for 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

- Central office personnel in school systems, especially for consideration and possible implementation of study groups in their school systems
- 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 their 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

Knowledge Base of the Authors

Both of us have spent successful careers in education as teachers and administrators. Carlene U. Murphy has an extensive background as a teacher and staff development director. During her 17 years as the administrator of a large school district's comprehensive staff development programs, the whole-faculty study group process was implemented in 10 of the district's schools.

In 1993, she began working at the national level with faculties who wanted to initiate the whole-faculty study group process in their schools. She is a past president of the National Staff Development Council; regarded as the national leader in the whole-faculty study group movement; a recipient of several related state and national awards; creator of the Whole-Faculty Study Group Collaborative, a national organization for those interested in areas relating to whole-faculty study groups; and the most prominent national researcher, practitioner, and author on whole-faculty study groups (e.g., see typical publication examples in the bibliography). During her role as a private consultant who has narrowed her focus to schools implementing the whole-faculty study group process, her work has taken her to schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas; elementary, middle, high, and vocational schools; and schools with as few as 10 teachers and as many as 250 teachers. Her association with ATLAS Communities, one of the seven design teams funded by the New American Schools Cooperation, has put her in the center of the nation's major national reform initiatives.

Dale W. Lick has been a faculty member and educational administrator for over 35 years, at nine colleges and universities, including three college and university presidencies. Included in 33 national and international biographical listings, he is the author of a book, over 50 professional articles and proceedings, and 285 original newspaper articles. Over the years, his work and responsibilities have been directly and indirectly related to teacher preparation, school operation, and school improvement. More recently, he has been a researcher on the statewide school enhancement initiative, "Florida Schoolyear 2000," served as a school consultant, and offered national and international educational workshops. In addition, he presently teaches and does research on educational and transformational leadership, managing organizational change, and learning organizations, especially as related to education and the schools. He is also formally trained and certified in Change Management (in the three certification areas: Change Knowledge, Trainer, and Consultant) and may be the only person in the country so certified to be working in the school improvement areas and with whole-faculty study groups.

Organization and Contents

The book is organized so that its chapters logically build on each other with each laying a foundation for those that follow. The contents include the key elements in the whole-faculty study group and change processes and their implementation and 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 whole-faculty study group approach in schools.

Chapter 1 discusses the school reform environment and the potential of the whole-faculty study group approach serving as a major change process to improve schools and student learning and enhance schools as learning organizations. This chapter also summarizes fundamental faculty-student-school-teaching-research-support relationships and approaches.

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

Chapter 3 helps the reader differentiate between “means” and “ends” and keeps attention focused on the desired “ends,” namely, enhanced student learning and school improvement. The whole-faculty study group approach is the “means” that modifies the culture and innovative processes, changes the ways teachers learn about new instructional models and strategies and transfer new skills to the classroom, and creates more of a learning organization environment.

The principal function of the whole-faculty study group approach, as described in Chapter 4, is to effectively manage change and transition schools and their processes, including curricular and instructional innovations, coherence of instructional practices and programs, identification of schoolwide needs, research on teaching and learning, and assessment of the impact of innovations on students and the workplace.

Chapter 5 addresses the context for schools (i.e., the organization, the system, and the culture) in which study groups must function. Especially key among the school-context-related topics discussed are the change concepts of building commitment, developing effective sponsorship, dealing with human change and resistance, using the roles of change, understanding assimilation capacity, and modifying school-related cultures, as well as applying the important, overarching Universal Change Principle.

The process for the whole-faculty study group approach, unfolded in Chapter 6, allows educators to acquire and develop the knowledge and skills necessary to increase student performance and improve schools. Toward these ends, 14 study group process guidelines are discussed, 14 procedures are established for the creation of communication networks and strategies, and 24 study group “work time models” are provided.

The heart of the study group process, the content, detailed in Chapter 7, is what teachers study, what teachers investigate, and what teachers do to become more skillful in the classroom with students. This chapter discusses staff development content; academic knowledge, instructional strategies, instructional skills, management, and belief systems; a decision-making cycle, involving data collection and analysis, student needs, prioritization of needs, organization around student needs, plan of action, implementation, and evaluation; and 14 suggested recommendations for dealing with groups that seem to be stuck.

Effective study groups are effective teams. Teamwork is what differentiates an effective study group from a typical committee or other work group. Chapter 8 describes how to use the study group process to build effective teams and teamwork in schools. Discussed and illustrated in this chapter are the key elements of synergistic team building, including synergistic relationships; prerequisites of synergy—common goals, interdependence, empowerment, and participation—and the synergy creation, process-interaction, appreciative understanding, integration, and implementation; and a synergy checklist for diagnosing and correcting teamwork problems.

The resources also include additional important and helpful nuts-and-bolts information for the effective application of the whole-faculty study group approach, including examples of study group action plans, a set of study group logs, and exhibits from whole-faculty study group schools.

It is hoped that the material in this book will inspire you and help you understand and use whole-faculty study groups in your work to develop more effective schools for the new century and create learning environments that significantly enhance student learning.

Acknowledgments

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Richmond County Public Schools, Augusta, GA

Richmond County's Models of Teaching Cadre (1987-1992)

Richmond County's Models of Teaching Schools

1987-1993:

Barton Chapel Elementary School—Audrey Wood, Principal
Wheless Road Elementary School—John Black, Principal
East Augusta Middle School—Lee Beard, Principal

1988-1993:

Morgan Road Middle School—Vivian Pennamon, Principal
Murphey Middle School—Winnette Bradley, Principal
Tubman Middle School—Tracey Williams, Principal
Laney High School—William Holmes, Principal

1989-1993:

Copeland Elementary School—Eddie Robinson, Principal
Hains Elementary School—Nathaniel Dunn, Principal
Hornsby Elementary School—Thelma Williams, Principal

ATLAS Communities

Linda Gerstle, Director
Ronald Walker, Associate Director
and ATLAS schools in: Memphis, TN
CHAIN Cluster and Strawberry Mansion Cluster in Philadelphia, PA
Everett, Northshore, and Shoreline School Districts in Washington state

Americus City Schools, Americus, GA

Patricia Turner, Visionary
Sarah Cobb Elementary School

Cobb County Public Schools, Marietta, GA

Tricia Mingledorff, Executive Director
Addison Elementary School
Bryant Elementary School
Murdock Elementary School
Sky View Elementary School

Baltimore County Public School, Baltimore, MD

Arbutus Elementary School

Boyle County Public Schools, Danville, KY

Pam Rogers, Assistant Superintendent

Perryville Elementary School

Woodlawn Elementary School

Boyle County Middle School

Decatur City Schools, Decatur, GA

Gloria Lee, Director

Clairmont Elementary School

College Heights Elementary School

Fifth Avenue Elementary School

Glenwood Elementary School

Oakhurst Elementary School

Westchester Elementary School

Winnona Park Elementary School

Renfroe Middle School

Decatur High School

Imperial County Public Schools, Holtville, CA

Holtville High School

Holtville Middle School

*Lyons Unified School District 405, Lyons, KS**Montgomery County Public Schools, Mt. Sterling, KY*

Liz Petitt, Assistant Superintendent

Mt. Sterling Elementary School

Round Rock Independent School District, Round Rock, TX

Edna Harris, Director

Brushy Creek Elementary School

Deepwood Elementary School

Forest North Elementary School

Round Rock High School

San Diego Unified School District, San Diego, CA

Carol Leighty and Mariam True

Birney Elementary School

Fulton Elementary School

Johnson Elementary School

Jones Elementary School

Toler Elementary School

Mission Bay High School

Garfield High School

San Diego County Board of Education, San Diego, CA

Karen LaBlanc and Shirley Mills

Sweetwater High School

Ramona High School

Washington Middle School

Washington County Public Schools, Sandersville, GA

Grace Davis, Assistant Superintendent
Sandersville Elementary School
Elder Middle School

Woodford County Public Schools, Versailles, KY

Sue Bowen, Assistant Superintendent
Sheila Hollin, Director
Huntertown Elementary School
Northside Elementary School
Simmons Elementary School
Southside Elementary School
Woodford County Middle School
Woodford County High School

Weld County School District 6, Greeley, CO

Jackson Elementary School with special recognition to Barry Shelofsky,
Principal, for charting his own journey

and all of the faculties at the whole-faculty study group schools listed above

*For Sarah Zemulaw Louise (Moore) Usry,
my mother, whose joy in me made me all I am and
who taught me by example how to be a mother,
a grandmother, and a great-grandmother.*

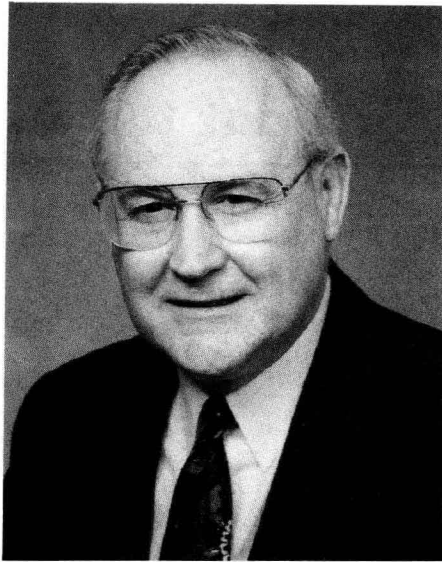
—Sarah Carlene (Usry) Murphy

About the Authors



Carlene U. Murphy lives in Augusta, Georgia, where she worked in the public schools in her hometown for 22 years as a classroom teacher and the administrator of the district's staff development programs. She also was a classroom teacher in Memphis, Tennessee, for 13 years. From 1978 to 1993, she was director of staff development for the Richmond County Public Schools in Augusta, Georgia, and the work was recognized at the state and national levels. In 1991, Richmond County received the American Association of School Administrators' and the National Staff Development Council's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Professional Development. Also, in 1991, she received the National Staff Development Council's Contributions to Staff Development Award. Since her retirement in 1993 from the Richmond County school district, she

has narrowed her work to schools that want to implement the whole-faculty study group process. This work has taken her to more than 100 schools in which she has had contact with over 1,000 study groups. These have been high schools, middle schools, elementary schools, and vocational schools; schools with a range from 250 teachers to schools with 10 teachers; schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas; and schools in all regions of the country. She is a staff member of ATLAS Communities, one of seven design teams funded by the New American Schools Corporation; based in Boston, it is a collaboration of four of the nation's leading reform efforts: Harvard University's Project Zero, Brown University's Coalition of Essential Schools, Yale University's School Development Program, and the Education Development Center. Because all ATLAS schools are also whole-faculty study group schools, her work with ATLAS is to train and support faculties in the study group process. She has written extensively about her work in *Educational Leadership*, *The Journal of Staff Development*, and *The Developer*. She has led numerous professional development institutes for the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, for the National Staff Development Council, and for several state organizations. She and her husband, Joe, who is a former principal, district administrator, and college dean, have two children and three grandchildren who also live in Augusta.



Dale W. Lick is a past president of Georgia Southern University, University of Maine, and Florida State University and presently, is University Professor and Associate Director of the Learning Systems Institute at Florida State University. He teaches in the Department of Educational Leadership and works on projects involving education, transformational leadership, managing organizational change, and developing learning organizations. He is an active school and higher education consultant and researcher on transformational changes in education, and he offers educational workshops nationally and internationally. Included in 33 national and international biographical listings, he is the author of over 50 education-related books, articles, and proceedings, and

285 original newspaper columns. He received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Michigan State University, and a PhD degree from the University of California, Riverside. Also, he is probably the only educator in the United States with his educational experience to hold all three levels of formal training and certification for Managing Organizational Change—Change Knowledge, Instructor-Trainer, and Consultation Skills—from the international change research and development organization, ODR, Inc. He and his wife, Marilyn, live in Tallahassee, Florida, and have three grown children and two grandsons.