

Foreword

It just keeps getting better! And better!

For anyone who missed the first edition (1998), Carlene Murphy and Dale Lick gave us the definition, descriptions, and applications of Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSGs). The second edition (2001) brought additional information, understanding, and insights about the processes and outcomes of WFSGs in schools. Now, more time and experience of the authors and the model in the field have produced highly credible results—staff and student learning outcomes.

In this third edition, Murphy and Lick express WFSGs as professional learning communities. They point out how groups of teachers come together to

use reliable assessments to identify strong areas and weak spots in their curriculum and instruction that do not result in desired gains for students;

specify what they should modify or change in their teaching to gain increased student results;

determine what and how they need to learn to become more effective with students;

deliver their new strategies or program and monitor implementation; and

check consistently on student results to track how teachers' work is benefiting students.

These steps are those employed by professional learning communities whose undeviating focus is on student gains and on how what teachers and administrators do supports those gains. Thus, this is the connection of WFSGs to professional learning communities.

In this era of highly promoted collaboration and democratic participation, WFSGs show us a way to express and demonstrate collaboration and democracy in professional teachers' work. These groups provide the opportunity for those closest to the work of students to use their expertise to guide that work. Furthermore, WFSGs provide the possibility for those who have learned their art and craft through training and experience to share their knowledge and skills with those who are in their early professional years. Together, experts and novices learn with and from each other, and they make important decisions about how they will design and deliver a high-quality, intellectually stimulating instructional program for students.

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This way of working is particularly significant because the profession, particularly those members who research and write about it, has widely proclaimed the importance and value of functioning professional learning communities in schools. Sadly, there has been limited experience and study of how to create professional learning communities, and Murphy and Lick have gone a long way to filling this gap with their specific and concrete directions about constructing WFSGs. To them, we are indebted.

We know that when professionals have the power and authority to make decisions about their work, they are more stimulated and challenged to do their best work and to take the risks that are part of that work. In the company of like-minded professionals, they assume the responsibility and accountability that have been placed on them, and through the creation of collaboratively created tasks for students, they enhance their students' chances for successful high-quality learning.

It is not only teachers who play an important role in the creation and operationalization of WFSGs. The principal is a major player, and Murphy and Lick describe this role carefully and in detail so that administrators can take guidance from their writing. For years, principals were not considered in the instructional process, but effective schools and effective districts have shown that administrators have a significant role to play in the nurture and development of faculty. Administrators do this not only by making the resources of time and material available but also by providing human resources and their own personal attention. Making time for teachers to meet in WFSGs is a critical factor that principals and other administrators can support with creative scheduling and other arrangements. The authors give suggestions for how this can be done. This volume has abundant suggestions and ideas for how logistical and managerial issues may be handled as well as how the content and substantive work of WFSGs may be supported successfully.

This third edition from Murphy and Lick is a superb resource and a must read for all educators involved in the improvement of education. It should be in the hands of individuals from the state department of education to the classroom teacher because it speaks to all layers of the system and to the role that each person must play to ensure successful learning for all students.

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