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## Educator, know thyself

*Learning where you are is the first step  
in establishing your direction*

By Joan Richardson

**S**top to look at a map in any large shopping mall and you'll find that your position is marked with a large X and the words "you are here." Once you've identified your location, you can determine the best route to reach the shops you want to visit during your excursion.

In staff development, the self-assessment is the "you are here" sign that lets you know where you are on your journey. As in any journey, staff development travelers also have to stop along the route to gauge their progress.

In a self-assessment, a person or organization collects information to determine how a defined group of individuals perceives a situation. Individuals are asked to honestly respond to questions about a given situation in which he or she is involved.

For example, a school improvement team might be asked to assess how it works together as a team or how it perceives the climate in a school. A study group might be asked to evaluate the quality of its meetings.

Sometimes, a variety of groups in a school might take the same survey in order to determine whether they perceive a situation differently. For example, teachers and parents might both be queried on a survey about school culture. Differences

in their perceptions of the school might point up areas of concern that need to be addressed.

"Optimally, a self-assessment is experiential learning. It's a discovery process. You're after some level of ah-has," said Robby Champion, a veteran trainer and staff developer.

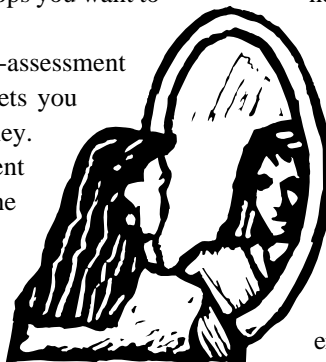
Because groups are often learning something new, Champion cautions that trainers and staff developers must be prepared to let a group go through various stages as members assimilate the information they receive back. At first, groups may experience some cognitive dissonance as they try to adjust to the new information. They may feel defensive about what they're learning about themselves or their school. Others will find it validating because the results will square with their own perceptions.

"Be conversational. Slow the pace of your discussion. Above all, listen to what they are saying, both in the self-assessment and in the conversations surrounding it," she said.

Champion offers a general outline that can guide trainers and staff developers as they work with self-assessments.

**Determine whether the information that will be acquired through the assessment is worth the investment of time to administer and tabulate.**

*Continued on Page 2*



# Learning where you are is the first step

*Continued from Page One*

“It may not seem that way, but using a self-assessment is time consuming. Is the return on investment going to be sufficient to invest your time in this?” Champion said.

On the surface, a self-assessment may seem to require only 10 minutes to administer. But anyone administering such an instrument needs to also calculate the time for tabulating and sharing the results with participants. The amount of time required will vary from instrument to instrument.

## **Determine the information you want to receive as a result of doing the self-assessment and select an instrument appropriate for that use.**

Anyone who administers a self-assessment has an obligation to understand how the instrument was intended to be used, Champion said.

For example, many staff developers use a popular personality inventory to identify individual characteristics as an aid to understanding group dynamics. Champion, who calls herself a “raging extrovert,” comes out closer to the introverted category on this tool. After doing some research on the instrument, she learned that it is intended to measure how individuals prefer to make decisions. For that purpose, she said the instrument was quite accurate.

She recommends that trainers and staff developers test any self-assessment before using it with a group.

## **If nothing else seems to be quite right, design your own self-assessment.**

When trying to gauge the work of a school improvement team, for example, a team leader may need to design his or her own assessment.

Designing your own self-assessment can be as simple as asking team members to mark their progress towards pre-established goals on a scale of 0-10.

For a team’s work, the team leader may want to have the team measure its progress

at several points along the way and to visually display for team members where they are at each step in their journey.

“In the beginning, they may rank themselves higher because they aren’t as familiar with what needs to be done,” Champion said.

She suggests that teams re-grade themselves by asking “knowing what you know now, how would you rank yourself” on various measures at the time they began working together.

## **Be prepared to answer questions from participants.**

Before administering the self-assessment, Champion suggests drafting questions that participants might ask. Then, prepare yourself to answer those questions. In certain situations, she said it might even be helpful to do live practice sessions with someone else who can act as a participant and pepper you with questions.

“This gives you an opportunity to not stutter around in front of the group, to be more prepared when they throw you the hard questions,” she said. Her list of most frequently asked questions include these:

- Where did this come from?
- Where else has this assessment been used?
- Why are we doing this?
- What will happen to the results?
- Who will know the results?
- Will I have a chance to do this assessment again?
- How do I compare to the rest of the group?
- Are there right and wrong answers?

## **Ensure privacy for participants as they respond to the assessment.**

Responding to an assessment is not a time for group work. Individuals should be able to move to a space that gives them some privacy, if that is their choice.

Don’t ask individuals to put identifying information on the response sheet.

Ask them to fold the completed sheets and place in a box. Don’t remove answer sheets from the box until each person has finished.

## **Tabulate the results privately.**

Remove the completed surveys from the room while you tabulate them. If the assessment is being done during a daylong training session, the trainer might do the tabulation during a break or during lunch. If the assessment involves a team that meets regularly, the team leader might tabulate the surveys after one meeting and be prepared to present them at the next meeting.

## **Share results publicly but ensure confidentiality for individual participants.**

The trainer or team leader should ensure that the results are held privately until they are available to everyone.

Don’t post individual results anywhere in the meeting room.

Go through each dimension of the assessment and tell participants how the majority responded.

Put the summary of the results on an overhead or a piece of poster paper that can be displayed for everyone to see.

## **Provide plenty of time to digest the results.**

Participants will want time to talk over the results. They may want to talk aloud about what they have learned. They may want to reflect quietly and privately about the results. Be sure to manage the time so various options are available for different personalities.

The group may need to use other instruments or collect other data to confirm the results of the self-assessment.

If there are areas in which there clearly needs to be improvement, create an action plan and solicit ideas for how the group could respond to this need.

## **Agree on the next time the assessment will be given.**

If the assessment was given in an ongoing group, select a time when the same assessment will be administered again. This will put some teeth in the action plan and ensure that everyone on the team heeds the norms or goals that have been established.

# School culture survey

## COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR

This tool will help a school assess its culture based on the 12 norms of a healthy school culture identified by Jon Saphier and Mathew King in their article, "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," *Educational Leadership*, March 1985.

The facilitator should prepare individual sheets ahead of the meeting and distribute to participants.

After individuals declare their positions, the facilitator should collect the responses and tabulate privately. The cumulative responses should be shared at the next team meeting. The facilitator should then lead a discussion about possible implications of the responses. *In what areas is there already substantial agreement that the team is performing well together? What areas does this team need to work on? What are some strategies for improvement in that area?*

**The professional staff in this school use their talents and knowledge to help each other with challenges and needs.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**This school encourages and supports experimentation with new ideas and techniques.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**This school has high expectations for teachers and administrators.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**Staff and students in this school trust and have confidence in each other.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**Time and resources are available to support teachers to do their best work.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**Teachers and leaders in this school reach out to a knowledge base to inform their work with students and with each other.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**Good teaching is recognized and appreciated by the school and community.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**This school culture values caring, celebration, and humor.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**School leaders consistently involve staff in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**School administrators keep meetings and paperwork to a minimum in order to protect teachers' instructional and planning time.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**The school has traditions in both curriculum and recurrent events that are significant and known by all.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

**Honest, open communications exist among staff members.**

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Neutral    Agree    Strongly Agree

# Parent/community involvement assessment

## COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR

Schools can use this survey to learn how parents assess their relationship with their child’s school.

Parents should complete one survey for **each** child in the school. If you send this survey home to parents, include a stamped, addressed envelope and a deadline for returning the survey.

Include a cover letter with the survey that tells parents about the purpose for the survey and how the results will be used by the school. Tell them when survey results will be available and how they can learn about the results.

1. **As a parent, I feel welcome when I visit the school that my child attends.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
2. **The school is making special efforts to further its academic program.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
3. **I am aware of the school’s educational goals and direction for the current school year.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
4. **I am aware of the school’s attendance procedures.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
5. **I often receive information from the school regarding activities and events.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
6. **I have copies of the building/district handbooks for students and parents.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
7. **The school staff informs me about my child’s work.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
8. **I am satisfied with the amount of information I receive from the school about my child.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
9. **The school staff informs me about the homework policy.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
10. **I receive information and assistance from school staff on how to work with my child at home.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
11. **I am encouraged to meet with school staff to discuss my child’s progress.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree
12. **My child’s school has an active parent/community group.**  
 Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Unknown    Agree    Strongly Agree

*Adapted from the Parent/Community Information Needs Assessment at Clarfield Elementary School, Columbus, Ohio. For more information, contact Clarfield Elementary School, 3220 Groveport Road, Columbus, Ohio 43207, (614) 365-5423.*

# Rate yourself as a team player

## COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR

The facilitator should prepare individual sheets ahead of the team meeting and distribute to team members. Before distributing, tell them when results will be available and how results will be used.

Ensure anonymity for respondents by having team members fold their surveys and drop them into a box.

Calculate survey results privately and share the total results with the entire group publicly during the next team meeting.

Lead a discussion about possible implications of the responses. *In what areas is there already substantial agreement that the team is performing well together? What areas does this team need to work on? What are some strategies for improvement in that area?*

Effective school improvement teams are made up of individuals who respect each other and work well together. Your behavior has an enormous impact on the team’s ability to do its work efficiently and effectively. The following is a series of questions about your behavior in your work group. Answer each question honestly. There are no right or wrong answers. Describe your behavior as accurately as possible.

**1. I offer facts, opinions, ideas, suggestions, and relevant information during my team’s discussions.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**2. I express my willingness to cooperate with other group members and my expectation that they will also be cooperative.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**3. I am open and candid in my dealings with the entire group.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**4. I support team members who are on the spot and struggling to express themselves intellectually or emotionally.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**5. I take risks in expressing new ideas and current feelings during a team discussion.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**6. I communicate to other team members that I am aware of and appreciate their abilities, talents, capabilities, skills, and resources.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**7. I offer help and assistance to anyone on the team in order to improve the team’s performance.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**8. I accept and support the openness of other team members, supporting them for taking risks and encouraging individuality.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**9. I share materials, books, sources of information, and other resources with team members in order to promote the success of all members and the team as a whole.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**10. Three things I might do to increase the effectiveness of our team include:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

# Team meetings

## COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR

This tool will assist various teams in assessing how well they attend to the basics of successful meetings. In order for this tool to be used effectively, team members must have agreed on a set of norms ahead of time. This tool would best be used after the team has met several times and can gauge the team's attention to its goals.

The team can add its own norms in order to adapt this tool for its unique needs.

Ensure anonymity for respondents by having team members fold their surveys and drop them into a box.

Calculate the results privately and share the total results with the entire group publicly during the next team meeting.

Lead a discussion about possible implications of the responses. *In what areas is there already substantial agreement that the team is performing well together? What areas does this team need to work on? What are some strategies for improvement in that area?*

**We start our meetings on time.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We review and develop the meeting's agenda/goal before the meeting begins.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We set time limits for the meeting.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We identify a recorder to compile notes of the meeting.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We encourage participation by all members.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We summarize what we have accomplished in each meeting before concluding the meeting.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We briefly evaluate each meeting in terms of efficient, productive use of time and each member's concerns.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always

**We end our meetings on time.**

Never 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Always





# Learning about **assessment**

- “Assessing a School Staff as a Community of Professional Learners,” by Shirley Hord, et al, *Issues about Change*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1999. Describes the work of the Southwestern Educational Development Laboratory to identify the characteristics of a school that is a learning organization and its development of a self-assessment that could be used to identify other schools’ progress toward similar goals. Does not include the completed survey, but after a close reading of the article, a reader could develop a workable survey for his or her own school. The article is available online at [www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues71/welcome.html](http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues71/welcome.html).
- *Comprehensive School Reform Research-Based Strategies to Achieve High Standards*, by WestEd. Offers a coherent framework for planning schoolwide improvements. Includes numerous tools and activities to facilitate planning and implementation, including surveys to determine readiness. The entire guidebook can be downloaded at no charge as a PDF file at [www.wested.org/csr/d/guidebook](http://www.wested.org/csr/d/guidebook).
- *Data Analysis for Comprehensive*

*Schoolwide Improvement*, by Victoria Bernhardt. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, 1998. Targeted for non-statisticians. Shows schools how to gather and use data, clarifies what data are important for various purposes, and demonstrates how to communicate and report results. Available through NSDC’s Online Bookstore, [www.nsd.org/bookstore.htm](http://www.nsd.org/bookstore.htm). Price: \$37, non-members; \$29.60, members.

- “Four ways to make a survey slip and fall,” by John Roden, *Journal of Staff Development*, Fall 1998. A primer for developing a good survey and using it without making fatal mistakes. Includes a list of web sites for more information on survey development. Available online at [www.nsd.org/library/jsd/roden194.html](http://www.nsd.org/library/jsd/roden194.html).
- *Learning the Craft of Training*, by Robby Champion. Oxford, Ohio: NSDC, 2000. Answers very fundamental questions about training, including the development and use of self-assessments. Available through NSDC’s Online Bookstore, [www.nsd.org/bookstore.htm](http://www.nsd.org/bookstore.htm). Price: \$75, non-members; \$60, members.

## ONLINE RESOURCES FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

### NORTH CENTRAL REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORY

In its Pathways to School Improvement section, NCREL offers a Trip Planner Inventory that allows visitors to respond to surveys on a variety of topics. Visitors can take the survey online, score it, and receive suggested next steps. Available at [www.ncrel.org/trip\\_planner/welcome.htm](http://www.ncrel.org/trip_planner/welcome.htm).

### PROFILER SITE

Maintained by the High Plains Regional Technology in Education Consortium (HPRTEC) at the Univ. of Kansas, this site allows visitors to create their own surveys or use one of more than 500 surveys from

their library. Visitors can respond to a survey and quickly see the results. Surveys also can be downloaded for us by larger groups. There is no charge to any school or district for their use. Available at <http://profiler.scrtec.org/>

### STAFF DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

The National Staff Development Council offers a self-assessment that districts can use to gauge their progress toward implementing the NSDC Standards for Staff Development. There is no charge to download and use. Available at [www.nsd.org/assessment.pdf](http://www.nsd.org/assessment.pdf).

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April/May 2001

# Goodbye for the summer!

This is the final *Tools For Schools* for the 2000-01 school year.

We hope you've enjoyed the topics we've explored this year.

As we plan for the next school year, the editors want to know which topics you'd like to read more about.

We're offering 25 of our ideas here. Please feel free to add your own topics.

## WHAT TOPICS WOULD YOU LIKE TO READ MORE ABOUT?

*Check the 3 topics that you would most like to read about next year.*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Developing vision                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning from student work                       |
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**Dr. Developer will return in the fall.**

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