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Using Teacher Self-Assessment to Identify Staff Development Needs

Edward F. Iwanicki
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Staff development programs are successful when the outcomes being fostered are relevant to teachers' needs. If meaningful changes in behavior are to be initiated, staff development must focus on areas where teachers perceive the need for improvement (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983; Wood, McQuarrie, & Thompson, 1982). Sometimes such improvement areas are not identified because of the lack of appropriate techniques for this purpose. Teacher self-assessment is a seldom utilized but effective technique for identifying staff development needs. Here teachers take an honest and open look at their performance, assess their strengths, and identify improvement areas. Relevant staff development needs can be identified and appropriate services can be planned by reviewing improvement areas noted by teachers participating in self-assessment activities. Olivero (1976) supports this approach to staff development:

The most powerful staff development, in my opinion, is a development plan prescribed by the individual educator, a growth plan unique to personal needs. Institutional growth, obviously, can take place in the same manner, the differences between the two approaches being in numbers of participants and in focus. For the latter alternative there is usually a catalytic change-team that both identifies school problems and implements constructive action. (p. 197)

Teacher self-assessment is a seldom utilized but effective technique for identifying staff development needs. Here teachers take an honest and open look at their performance, assess their strengths, and identify improvement areas.

In using teacher self-assessment to identify staff development needs, supervisory staff must be aware of (a) the types of information which can be collected through the self-assessment process, (b) possible techniques for collecting each type of information, and (c) procedures for using self-assessment information to identify priority staff development needs.

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Types of Information Relevant To The Self-Assessment Process

The Johari Window (Luft, 1969; Sergiovanni, 1977) is a useful framework for categorizing the types of information which can be obtained during the teacher self-assessment process. Four types of information about teacher behavior can be examined: (a) the open self, (b) the secret self, (c) the blind self, and (d) the undiscovered self.

The *open self* is information about a teacher's behavior which is known to both the teacher and other professionals in the school environment, including administrative and supervisory personnel. The open self is the type of information the teacher is willing to share openly with others.

The *secret self* is information about a teacher's behavior which is known to the teacher but not to other professionals in the school environment. For example, a teacher who is experiencing difficulty in implementing a new social science program may view the sharing of such information as a sign of weakness. Thus, information about this aspect of the teacher's behavior would be relegated to the secret self category. The secret self is the type of information the teacher is not willing to share openly with others.

The *blind self* is information about a teacher's behavior which is known to others within the school environment but not to the teacher. For example, during the course of instruction, a teacher may reinforce certain sex role stereotypes without realizing it. Although the teacher is not aware of these behaviors, they would be recognized by students and other professional staff.

Each of these three categories of information, the open self, secret self, and blind self, should be explored when identifying potential staff development needs through the teacher self-assessment process. The challenge to supervisory personnel is to motivate teachers to go beyond the open self and to delve into the secret and blind self categories when identifying improvement areas. Such exploration of self must be pursued carefully. Burch and Danley (1978) indicate that people are selective in the image they create for themselves and are willing to project outwardly to others. Generally, those teacher behaviors falling into the open self category convey a positive image of the staff member's performance. Those behaviors which reflect less positively on the teacher's performance fall into the secret and blind self categories. In opening up the secret and blind self categories through the self-assessment process, supervisory personnel must be careful to approach these areas in a manner which enhances the positive self-image of the teacher. A support system must be established where the teacher (a) perceives one's self as capable of improving, (b) knows that the resources needed to

facilitate improvement will be provided, and (c) recognizes that such improvement will be rewarded by the leadership of the school. Such a positive atmosphere is essential to the success of the teacher self-assessment and staff development processes.

The *undiscovered self*, the fourth category of information, refers to information about a teacher's behavior unknown to both the teacher and others within the school environment. It is only through substantial dialogue between the teacher and supervisor or supervisory team that the undiscovered self can begin to emerge. The parties involved begin to develop an awareness and understanding of critical teacher behaviors not recognized before. Until recently, little attention has been paid to the undiscovered self as it relates to teacher performance. Current writings in humanistic psychology provide some direction in analyzing the undiscovered self. For example, in viewing staff development as adult development, Witherell and Erickson (1978) have applied the concept of ego development (Loevinger, 1976) to the analysis of teacher performance. In their discussion of the five stages of ego development for normal adults, Witherell and Erickson contend that most teachers operate at either of the first two levels, conformist or conscientious-conformist:

Persons at the Conformist Stage tend to view themselves and others as conforming to socially approved codes or norms. Explanations of behavior and situations at this stage are conceptually simple and often stereotypic, there is little awareness of inner life or depth of feelings.

At the Conscientious-Conformist level, two major characteristics occur: an increase in self-awareness, and the capacity to imagine multiple possibilities in situations. In contrast to the conceptual simplicity of the previous stage, persons at this level begin to allow for exceptions and contingencies in the generalizations they make, paving the way for understanding individual differences at the next stage. (p. 231)

We believe the implications of ego development for staff development are twofold. First, the ego development stage at which a teacher is operating affects one's approach to the self-assessment process. Staff members operating at the conformist level would perceive effective teaching as a more clearly definable and conceptually simple set of behaviors than would staff members at the conscientious-conformist stage. Since teachers at the conformist stage view the educational process as relatively simple and straightforward, they would tend to perceive less need for improvement than would teachers operating at the conscientious-conformist level. Secondly, if a teacher's more complete potential is to be realized through the self-assessment process, supervisory personnel must help teachers at lower ego levels to explore the undiscovered self, the self which could emerge if their ego were developed more completely. Further insights into the role of adult development in the staff development process have been provided by Bents and Howey (1981).

To summarize, effective teacher self-assessment is a process where teachers have the opportunity to explore their open, secret, and blind selves, and possibly their undiscovered self. Promising staff development needs can be identified through such explorations.

Strategies for Teacher Self-Assessment

Table 1 contains a listing of some possible self-assessment techniques for collecting information about the open, secret, and blind selves, and possibly the undiscovered self. These techniques are grouped into three basic assessment strategies: (a) individual assessments, (b) feedback assessments, and (c) interactive assessments. It is important to note that individual assessments are based on the teachers' personal views of their performance. In applying feedback assessment techniques, teachers seek information about their behavior from others, such as students, peer teachers, supervisors, and possibly parents. During the interactive assessment process, teachers not only seek input from others but also involve these others in the analysis of their performance. In summary, there is a hierarchy underlying these assessment categories. As one moves from individual to interactive assessment techniques, one progresses from a more inward to a more outward analysis of teacher performance.

Table 1
Basic Strategies for Teacher Self-Assessment

Basic Strategies	Possible Techniques	Description of the Techniques	Types of Information Provided
Individual Assessments	Personal Reflection	The teacher openly and honestly considers his/her own performance and generates ideas.	Open and Secret Self
	Analysis of Classroom Tapes	The teacher records, observes, and interprets verbal and nonverbal classroom interactions.	Open and Secret Self
	Self-Assessment Checklists	The teacher describes and rates various teaching responsibilities and/or specific aspects of classroom instruction.	Open and Secret Self
Feedback Assessments	Student	The teacher obtains specific information from students about the instructional process through informal discussions, surveys, and analysis of tapes.	Open and Blind Self
	Peer Teacher and Supervisory Staff	The teacher obtains information from peers and supervisors about general or specific concepts and processes through discussions, classroom observations, workshops, and exchange programs.	Open and Blind Self
Interactive Assessments	Clinical Supervision	The teacher requests supervisory assistance in order to cooperatively share, plan, and analyze a lesson or series of lessons.	Open, Secret, Blind, and possibly, Undiscovered Self
	Micro Teaching	The teacher analyzes a condensed or simplified lesson with students, peers, and/or supervisory staff in order to improve a subsequent lesson.	Open, Secret, Blind, and possibly, Undiscovered Self

When initiating the self-assessment process to identify staff development needs, teachers tend to be most receptive to individual assessment strategies, usually personal reflection and self-assessment checklists. It has been our

experience that, as teachers become more familiar with the process, some will begin to use feedback and even interactive assessment techniques voluntarily. Their use will spread as other staff members begin to see the benefit of these techniques. For example, as teachers observe some of their colleagues analyzing the results of self-assessment checklists in the teachers' room or analyzing classroom video tapes in the media center, their curiosity tends to be aroused. They begin to wonder what types of feedback their students would provide and how their classes would look on video tape. Such curiosity often results in teachers piloting these techniques in their classrooms and recognizing their relevance in the diagnosis of instruction. The extent to which teachers pursue more outward self-assessment techniques is a function of many factors. Some of the more critical factors are the professional background of the teaching staff, the inservice resources available for orienting teachers to more sophisticated self-assessment techniques, and the supervisory resources available to support staff in the self-assessment process. The use of the three types of self-assessment strategies to identify staff development needs is illustrated in the following case summaries.

Individual assessment strategies were used in a Right to Read Program in a relatively large urban elementary school to identify relevant staff development needs for teachers committed to improving their instruction. A three phase approach was used. First, a teacher committee reviewed the literature to identify promising techniques for improving classroom instruction within their school. Secondly, these techniques were compiled into a self-assessment checklist which was completed anonymously by the teaching staff. Teachers identified the three techniques which they wanted to know more about and felt had the most promise for improving instruction in their classrooms. Finally, the school's staff development committee analyzed the teachers' responses to the self-assessment checklist and identified priority staff development needs.

The challenge to supervisory personnel is to motivate teachers to go beyond the open self and to delve into the secret and blind self categories when identifying improvement areas.

In this setting, individual assessment strategies were used to identify relevant staff development needs associated with teachers' open and secret selves. The use of a well designed anonymous self-assessment checklist was critical for obtaining information about the secret self. Anonymity allowed teachers to disclose information about their secret self in a non-threatening manner. Since the checklist items were derived by staff from a thorough review of the literature, meaningful staff development needs were identified for improving classroom instruction in this school setting.

Feedback assessment strategies were used effectively by a suburban secondary school (9-12) both to provide the community with information about its high school programs and to identify areas for staff development.

Since this school was to be reviewed by the regional accreditation agency during the next year, its faculty, administration, and school board agreed to conduct a comprehensive assessment of its school programs using various forms of the *Questionnaire for Students, Teachers, and Administrators* (QUESTA). The QUESTA instruments, developed by the Secondary School Research Program at Educational Testing Service (1978), were used to obtain a sample of student, teacher, administrator, and parent perceptions of the school's programs in relation to the following areas:

- Purposes of the School
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Personal Relations and Communications within the School
- Counseling and Pupil Concerns
- Extracurricular Activities

There is a hierarchy underlying these assessment categories. As one moves from individual to interactive assessment techniques, one progresses from a more inward to a more outward analysis of teacher performance.

Through analyses of the QUESTA results, teacher committees used parent and student feedback to identify some critical program and staff development needs. Responses of parents and students provided information about the blind self. Teachers were sensitized to the need for staff development in such areas as career development and home-school cooperation. These areas were not perceived as priority needs by teachers before the survey was conducted. This school survey approach is an example of how feedback assessment techniques can be used to obtain information about teachers' open and blind selves for use in planning meaningful staff development activities. Parents and students are important sources of information about the blind self, especially at the secondary school level.

Interactive assessment strategies were used by a middle school science team to identify its staff development needs in relation to an ongoing curriculum development project. These teachers were involved in the design of a science curriculum for grades 5-8 which focused on higher level cognitive behaviors as defined in the *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Bloom, 1956). An important aspect of their work was to evaluate the extent to which the materials being developed fostered the acquisition of higher level cognitive skills. A representative science unit was selected, and teachers completed the Science Activities Questionnaire (SAQ) (Iwanicki, 1974) based on their perceptions of the cognitive skills which were emphasized during that unit. The SAQ was also administered to each of their classes. Teacher and class responses to the SAQ were then profiled and discussed by the science team.

For the most part science teachers perceived a stronger emphasis on the higher level cognitive skills than did their students. Through a review of their instructional materials and discussions with consultants, the science team began to discover that this discrepancy was due largely to their

misunderstanding of the higher level cognitive behaviors as defined in the *Taxonomy*. Subsequent inservice experiences were planned to help these teachers develop an improved understanding of the higher level cognitive skills as well as techniques for fostering these skills in the classroom. The questionnaire, materials review, and discussion techniques were combined by the science team in using the interactive assessment process to disclose aspects of the teachers' secret, blind, and undiscovered selves which needed to be addressed through the staff development process.

These are just some examples of using the various types of assessment strategies to identify staff development needs. Many variations exist within each type of strategy leaving considerable leeway for flexibility and creativity in the needs assessment process.

Using Self-Assessment Information To Identify Priority Staff Development Needs

Once teachers have identified potential staff development needs through the self-assessment process, these needs should be forwarded to a school level staff development committee comprised of teachers as well as supervisory and administrative personnel. This committee may be viewed as the "catalytic change-team" referred to by Olivero (1976). Its role is to identify priority staff development needs for the school and to play staff development activities consistent with these needs. Some crucial factors to consider when setting staff development priorities are the following:

1. Time required to initiate the change
2. Personnel, material, and financial resources needed to initiate change
3. Impact of the change on teacher behavior
4. Impact of the change on pupil behavior
5. Impact of the change on the achievement of crucial school objectives

Once the priority improvement areas have been determined, staff development activities for strengthening these areas can be planned and implemented.

When implementing this approach it is important to maintain anonymity when self-assessment information concerning staff development needs is gathered. The examples cited earlier illustrate how information about the secret, blind, and undiscovered self can be collected while maintaining the anonymity of participants in the self-assessment process. When analyzing this information, it is important for the staff development committee to keep in mind that the primary focus of staff development is the improvement of the quality of school programs (Wood, McQuarrie, & Thompson, 1982). In reviewing feedback from teachers, the committee will identify some needs common to the majority of teachers and others specific to the needs of particular departments, teams, or smaller clusters of teachers. Depending on the resources available, this committee can plan school-wide and small group staff development activities which address priority school improvement needs. While this approach addresses the staff development needs shared by groups of teachers, the critical needs of individuals are not met. Thus, as Sergiovanni and Starrett (1983) have noted, effective staff development must take place in a dynamic environment where a committee can effectively plan programs to meet

the needs of groups of teachers, but this effort must be complemented by a supervisory program responsive to the staff development needs of individuals. Through observations of and conferences with each staff member, supervisory personnel need to identify those critical aspects of the teacher's development which need to be addressed through an individual professional development plan. As an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust is developed between the teacher and supervisor, such conferences can focus on critical aspects of the teacher's secret, blind, and undiscovered self, derived through the self-assessment process.

In reflecting upon the approach which has been advocated, one may ask — "What's new? Isn't this the way any good staff development program should be initiated?" Depending upon the school system and resources that are available, the answer could be "Yes!", but too often this is not the case. As school systems strive to strengthen the overall quality of their staff development programs, it is critical that the needs addressed emanate from the staff responsible for the educational program and focus on those areas that teachers recognize as needing improvement. One way to achieve this goal is through the effective use of teacher self-assessment in determining staff development needs. ✓

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