

Event 8 Analyze Changes in Educational Needs

Synopsis. The intent of this event is accomplished by performing a self-evaluation that has several parts. It begins with helping students to gain a deeper understanding of their educational and developmental needs, especially those that are not being met well (Activity 8.1). Then it helps many community stakeholders (parents, employers, etc.) to gain a deeper understanding of (a) ways that their community and society are changing and how they would like them to change, (b) the educational implications of those changes and desired changes through looking at the capabilities and qualities their children will need, given those actual and desired changes, and (c) how well their community is currently meeting those educational needs (Activity 8.2). Finally, this event entails helping school personnel (teachers, administrators, and other staff) gain a deeper understanding of their needs, especially those that are not being met well at present (Activity 8.3).

Goals

- Enhance level of commitment to, and motivation for, systemic change in the district.
- Enhance all stakeholders' understanding of how educational needs are changing for their community.
- Compare needs with what we currently provide.
- Promote deeper understanding and mindset (mental model) evolution.
- Promote self-examination.
- Identify potential obstacles and trouble spots for a systemic change process.

Activity 8.1. Analyze student needs

Help students (4th grade and up) identify unmet needs:

- a. Through **small-group discussions** with a sheet of trigger questions that are broader than academics.

Select students: Randomly select two from each class in grades 4 and 5 in the elementary schools, and have all those students attend one meeting in each school. In the middle and high school, randomly select 16 students from each grade, and have all the students in one grade attend the same meeting. Have one facilitator and one assistant for each meeting. The facilitator should be someone from Don's cabinet who is good with children and has been trained for the event. The assistant should be a non-teacher whom the children know and like, such as a secretary or cafeteria worker.

Open with a short **lecture** (motivate for the discussions, define needs). Make it clear this is analysis (identify needs), not design (identify solutions to needs). Focus on understanding the needs; avoid blaming; make it clear they have a voice in defining changes. Provide a snack?

Then have **discussions** at round tables of about 4 students (introductions, select student reporter, discuss answers to trigger questions), with the facilitator and assistant monitoring the discussions. Have a laptop at each table for taking notes (with a document open containing trigger questions and room for responses)?

Then have each table's reporter **report** to the large group at end of session.

Core Team should develop **trigger questions** that they would want to address if they were students. Trigger questions might address categories of needs, like learning (content, methods), social, emotional, physical, artistic, knowledge about the community, food, transportation, security,

- b. Through **survey** of all students about unmet needs identified in the discussions, to get input from students who did not attend the discussions. Prepare a well designed 1-pager to introduce the survey. How get high response rate?

Activity 8.2. Analyze community needs

Synopsis. This activity entails conducting many “conversations” in which as many stakeholders as possible can gain a deeper understanding, in small heterogeneous groups, of how their community and society in general have changed and should change. The major discussion questions include:

- Discuss the major ways that society in general and your community in particular have changed in the past 30 years.
- Discuss the major ways that society in general and your community in particular may and should change in the next 10 years.
- Discuss the capacities and qualities our students will need to be successful, given actual and desired changes in our community and society.
- Discuss how well our schools are currently developing those capacities and qualities.

You (the Core Team) should have reviewed and redesigned this whole process (in Event 7) before you begin doing it. Also, having the whole process in mind is important, because each activity has meaning only in relation to the entire design process.

Strategy. Convene many small-group “conversations” throughout the community, involving as many stakeholders as possible. The most important result of this activity is the evolution of mental models that encourages all stakeholders to advocate for systemic change.

1. Plan the “conversations.”

The Core Team must decide such things as:

- how to recruit participants, especially disenfranchised stakeholders, including recent grads and dropouts,
- where the conversations will be held (including community sites, such as churches, and sites in the north district),
- when they will be held (variety of times of the day and days of the week),
- how to handle the logistics (registration, table assignments, childcare, food, site coordinator and assistants, cordless microphones?).

The following are some considerations you may want to take into account:

- It is important to make each conversation group as heterogeneous as possible, so that participants will be exposed to differing perspectives on how their world has changed and should change.

- It is important that significant numbers of people from all stakeholder groups participate, for any omitted groups will likely become powerful forces of resistance to any changes you make. The more people you involve, the less resistance you will likely encounter.
- It will be difficult to recruit disenfranchised stakeholders. You will need resolve and a good plan. It is helpful to choose locations which are familiar and comfortable to the disenfranchised. That is unlikely to be a school location.
- Conversation groups should be small so that all participants will have ample opportunity to contribute, and so that shy or intimidated participants will feel more comfortable speaking.
- It is beneficial to have several conversation groups in the same place at the same time, so that groups can share their ideas with each other. This requires facilities where a number of groups can converse without disturbing each other, and where they can all get together to share their ideas.
- It is helpful to make the atmosphere for the conversations fairly relaxed and comfortable. Having refreshments available, dressing casually, and introducing the conversations in a relaxed, informal manner are several ways of creating a conducive atmosphere. All of these require planning and preparation.
- It is helpful to have some conversations in the evening, for those who work outside the home, and some during the day, for those who don't want to leave their families in the evening or who don't like to go out at night. It may also help to have some on weekends.
- You should prepare the site coordinators, who will be introducing the activity and handling the logistics at each site. Site coordinators don't have to be Core Team members, but serving that role will expose you to valuable perspectives.
- Conversations should last at least an hour and a half, because it often takes a while for group members to warm up and become comfortable with each other. Conversations should not last more than two and a half hours, especially in the evening, because people get tired and anxious. Two hours usually works pretty well, but the site coordinator should monitor participants' moods and be prepared to draw things to a close earlier if warranted.

(Time: 1-2 hours)

2. Conduct each conversation.

The site coordinator should be prepared to do the following:

2.1 Register participants and assign to tables.

2.2 Introduce the “conversation.”

Thank participants for being there.

Hand out a Participant Briefing Sheet (see sample below).

Next, introduce the **activity**: goals, rationale, importance, and how it represents the foundation for any improvement efforts that may follow.

Emphasize the importance of **all stakeholders** being involved.

- valuable experiences and perspectives to contribute

Emphasize the importance of good **listening** skills.

- listening is crucial to reaching consensus.
- try to understand why they believe what they do

Emphasize the importance of **respecting** all stakeholders' input.

- it's their school system, too; they should approve any changes that are made
- valuable perspectives and experiences to contribute

Then discuss the **rules of behavior**. Ask if they would like to make any changes or additions to them.

- don't interrupt, no put-downs
- when you disagree, try to understand why the other person believes what they said
- ask for clarification when you don't understand why

Discuss the **responsibilities** for each role:

- record keeper (who will present), time keeper, and referee.

Give a brief **presentation** on Toffler's three waves of change and the key markers that distinguish the information age from the industrial age.

Overview the activity. Say how long they can take for each part (introductions, self-organizing, round 1, and round 2).

The entire introduction shouldn't take much more than 10-20 minutes, but you should anticipate having to start a few minutes late. Those first minutes before you begin the introduction can be valuable for establishing an appropriate, relaxed, caring atmosphere.

(Time: 10-20 minutes)

2.3 Form heterogeneous small groups.

Form participants into groups of about 4-5 people. Groups should be as heterogeneous as possible regarding stakeholder group, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, age, and so forth. One way to do this would be to have different colored name tags for the different stakeholder groups (though some people might need two or three colors). Then ask people to form into groups with as many different colors as possible. We strongly recommend that you insist on no more than five people per group, with a preference for four?. One facilitator for every 4 tables?

(Time: 5 minutes)

2.4 Participants introduce themselves.

Instruct the participants in each group to introduce themselves, saying:

- their name,
- what stakeholder groups they are from (often more than one),
- conduct an ice-breaker,
- why they are interested in being involved in this effort, and
- what valuable perspective they can contribute to the effort.

- assign roles and provide a template for record keeping.

(Time: 5 minutes)

2.5 Participants discuss the first question.

Ask each small group to:

- discuss the major ways that society in general and their community in particular have changed in the past 30 years,
- discuss those changes separately for the workplace, the family, and general social and cultural factors in the community and society, and
- appoint a record keeper to take notes.

Comment [CMR1]: What did their grandparents do? Their parents? Them? Expect for their children?

You should circulate and try to listen from afar to each group. Focus on group process, making sure that people are listening well and staying on task. Make sure that the record keeper, time keeper, and referee are all doing their jobs well.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.6 Small groups report on their discussions.

Each small group's record keeper should summarize their changes for each category and briefly describe each entry in their summary (whip-around). Encourage questions of a clarification nature.

Deleted: on some newsprint (one sheet for each category). Have each group's record keeper

As you proceed to other groups' reports, discuss and synthesize them with the results of the previous group(s), and at the end try to come to consensus on the changes for each category. Encourage discussion whenever there are important differences between any two groups. Probe the reasons underlying the differing positions, and try to reach common understanding, if not consensus.

Have a record keeper (site coordinator's assistant) make a record of the final synthesis, to share with the Core Team and eventually (probably after this activity has been completed with all the participants you can get) the broader community.

(Time: 20-30 minutes)

2.7 Participants discuss the second question.

Ask each small group to:

- discuss the major ways that society in general and their community in particular should change in the next 10 years,
- not just project past trends to the future, but think also in terms of how they would like their community and society to change, for education can be a powerful instrument for such change,
- discuss those changes separately for each category: the work place, the family, and general social and cultural factors in the community and society,
- have a record keeper continue to take notes.

Again, you should circulate and listen from afar to each group. Focus on group process, making sure that people are listening well and staying on task. Make sure that the record keeper, time keeper, and referee are all doing their jobs well.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.8 Small groups report on their discussions.

Same as 2.6.

(Time: 20-30 minutes)

2.9 Participants discuss the third question.

Ask each small group to:

- discuss the capacities and qualities our students will need to be successful, given the actual and desired changes in our community and society,
- discuss those capacities and qualities separately for each category: the work place, the family, and general social and cultural factors in the community and society,
- have a record keeper continue to take notes.

Again, you should circulate and listen from afar to each group. Focus on group process, making sure that people are listening well and staying on task. Make sure that the record keeper, time keeper, and referee are all doing their jobs well.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.10 Small groups report on their discussions.

Same as 2.5.

(Time: 20-30 minutes)

2.11 Participants discuss the fourth question.

Ask each small group to:

- Discuss who should be responsible for each educational need (school, family, church, social service agency, etc.).
- Discuss the extent to which our schools are currently developing the capacities and qualities for which they should be responsible.
- Have a record keeper continue to take notes.

Again, you should circulate and listen from afar to each group. Focus on group process, making sure that people are listening well and staying on task. Make sure that the record keeper, time keeper, and referee are all doing their jobs well.

(Time: 15-25 minutes)

2.12 Small groups report on their discussions.

Same as 2.5.

(Time: 20-30 minutes)

2.13 Evaluate the activity.

Ask each small group how to improve this activity, what made it useful, what they learned, and what could make it a more powerful experience. Have their record keeper take notes and give them to you. Share the results with all other site coordinators and the Core Team.

(Time: 5 minutes)

2.14 Make optional readings available and ask for volunteers.

Provide free copies of short readings that may reinforce or elaborate on what was discussed. Schedule some kind of interim event they can attend soon. Membership card.

(Time: 5 minutes)

(Time: 2.5 - 4.0 hours)

(Materials and Resources: Activity briefing sheets, newsprint)

2.15 Conduct a broad survey of community members.

Synthesize the results of several such meetings in different buildings and send them out to the community members for their broad reaction and input.

(Time: 2 weeks)

Sample Participant Briefing Sheet

About this Activity

Goal: To explore ways in which our community and society in general are changing, and should change.

Importance/rationale: 1. Education has to meet the needs of our community in order for the community to continue to support education. 2. Changes in our community influence how well our schools are working. 3. Our schools can help our community to change in positive ways.

Values:

- Importance of all "stakeholders" being involved
 - valuable perspectives and experiences to contribute
- Importance of good listening skills
 - try to understand why they believe what they do
- Importance of respecting all stakeholders' input
 - it's their school system, valuable perspectives

Rules of behavior

No put-downs

Don't step on others' words or ideas (allow other to finish their thought—don't interrupt)

Try to understand why others believe what they do

Introductions

Take turns going around the table, and say:

- your **name**,
- what stakeholder **groups** you represent (often more than one—for example, parent and employer),
- why** you are interested in being involved in this effort, and
- what valuable **perspective** you can contribute to the effort.

Before you Begin

Appoint a **record keeper** to take notes to write down points of consensus

Appoint a **time keeper** to keep the discussion moving.

Appoint a **referee (facilitator?)** to make sure everyone has an opportunity to express their views.

Round 1: Question to address

Discuss the major ways that U.S. society in general and the Decatur community in particular have changed in the past generation (25 years),

- Discuss those changes separately for the workplace, the family, and general social and cultural factors in the community and society.

Round 2: Question to address

Discuss the major ways that society in general and your community in particular should change in the next 10 years.

- Don't just project past trends to the future, but think also in terms of how you would like your community (and society) to change, for education can be a powerful instrument for such change,
- Discuss those changes separately for each category: the work place, the family, and general social and cultural factors in the community and society,

Round 3: Question to address

Discuss the capacities and qualities our students will need to be successful, given the actual and desired changes in our community and society.

- Discuss those capacities and qualities separately for the workplace, the family, and general social and cultural factors in the community and society.

Round 4: Question to address

Discuss who should be responsible for each educational need (school, family, church, social service agency, etc)

Add times for each activity? Put roles and rules on a laminated card?

Potential Problems with the Process

The following are some of the problems you may anticipate in trying to conduct this process:

- Site coordinators may need training, including some practice sessions and coaching. Debriefing of results after each conversation may be very helpful.
- People who say they will show up often don't. Recruiting and reminding prior to the conversations are crucial, especially for the disenfranchised and traditionally underrepresented groups.
- Logistical problems are common. You should make plans to arrive at the site early to ensure tables are set up appropriately, arrange the refreshments, make sure newspapers and markers are available for each table, and so forth.
- As you observe the small groups in action, you may find that some people are not listening well and are not trying to understand others' beliefs because they disagree with them. It will be important for you to step in and try to get them to understand even if they disagree.
- As you observe the small groups in action, you may find that some people are not participating or that some are dominating the conversation. You should step in and try to get them to contribute more equally.
- You should ensure anonymity for each person's or group's evaluations of the conversation.

Understandings

We offer the following suggestions for specific understandings you may wish to work on. Again, please do not feel you have to use these understandings, and we hope you will identify other understandings you think are important. We encourage you to carefully consider *why* you are accepting, rejecting, or adding each understanding.

- Small-group dynamics

We recommend:

Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, R. T. (1997). *Joining together: Group theory and group skills* (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Activity 8.3. Analyze school staff needs

Form homogeneous small discussion groups with all teachers, staff, administrators, and board members; and help each to identify unmet needs with a sheet of trigger questions.