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# SURVEYS: VALUABLE TOOLS FOR THE READING CONSULTANT

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Grant-writing—everybody's doing it. Have you noticed the increasing number of job descriptions related to reading that include this as a necessary skill for qualification in the particular position? Project directors, reading coordinators, supervisors and all sorts of administrators must face, sooner or later, the task of pulling together the resources upon which to base a "can't miss" grant application.

If you are writing a grant application or a district reading curriculum, think for a minute about two sections of those documents: the needs assessment and comprehensive planning. Information necessary for both may be obtained via the same technique: the survey.

Surveys range from involved to simple; some are well-done, while others are poorly-constructed. One thing is certain . . . depending on your own immediate objectives, the complexity of the survey will vary. But what of the quality? If you foresee any possibility of employing a survey, you may wish to consider the following information about the construction of survey instruments.

## *Background Information*

The most significant type of study has been the social survey. Historically, surveys date to the first census ordered by Caesar Augustus. Their primary goal—the investigation of the present status of phenomena—is generally the same, despite their variance in complexity and sophistication. As bases upon which to make decisions, surveys are decidedly practical.

In our present diversified society, ways to bridge the gap between school and community is a "survey-ripe" topic. It divides into the following dichotomous grouping: 1) sell the school to the public; and 2) involve citizens in planning, executing, and evaluating the local educational effort (Hofstrand, 1971). Choosing the second alternative often necessitates that additional information be obtained.

Surveys, however, are more than merely collecting information. They involve:

1. designing the survey instrument;
2. collecting information;
3. analyzing the information;
4. reporting the findings;
5. making recommendations.

In other words, surveys do more than merely uncover data. It is the

interpretation, synthesis and integration of these data that provide the ammunition with which to point out the implications and interrelationships that can strengthen your proposal.

### *Types of Instruments*

In order to describe various survey instruments and to determine characteristics peculiar to those types, an informal study was conducted in which approximately thirty were examined.<sup>1</sup> Their potential usefulness was ascertained by measuring each according to certain basic criteria:

1. Does it contain a sufficiently long sample of the actual instrument used?
2. Does there appear to be a definite organizational structure, rather than a vague diffusion of questions?
3. Is there accompanying information which indicates the geographic coverage, intended respondent, length, and method for collecting data?

When several types of design (such as check-list, open-ended) were present in a single instrument, this was noted, but the type encompassing the majority of the information was used for the purpose of analysis.

It was first necessary to select the frame of reference for classification. The one chosen for this discussion has merit from a functional as well as operational and organizational point of view; the *type of instrument* formed the major area of identification.

Three main categories emerged when the instruments were classified functionally according to their *type*. Figure 1 shows the types of survey instruments categorized functionally. The number of instruments having the characteristics attributed to the check-list type comprises 50½ of the total. Since some check-lists and rankings follow a rating-scale format, the distinguishing criterion between these types was the prioritization factor.

Based on a thorough qualitative examination of the characteristics of survey instruments, these generalizations seemed appropriate as descriptors of "most" survey instruments:

1. Check-list in format;
2. Structured;
3. Locally-administered and focused;
4. Addressed to staff, parents, students, and the community-at-large;
5. Brief, especially if free responses are requested;
6. Collected, rather than mailed back.

Surveys, then, may be valuable resources for the reading consultant, especially in the area of staff development.

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<sup>1</sup>Survey instruments reviewed at the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston University, Boston, MA.

Figure 1.  
Types of Survey Instruments  
Categorized Functionally

TYPE	%	SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS	SAMPLE QUESTIONS
open-ended	.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- elicit opinion</li> <li>- are often unstructured</li> <li>- request additional information</li> <li>- interview</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What are some of the good things you see happening in your child's reading program?</li> <li>b) What do you expect to get out of your work as a literacy volunteer<sup>0</sup></li> </ul>
check-list	.50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- true/false; yes/no</li> <li>- check as many as apply</li> <li>- structured</li> <li>- demographic information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Does the board utilize ad hoc committees?</li> <li>b) Does your parent advisory council meet regularly?</li> </ul>
ranking	.27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- scaled</li> <li>- prioritized</li> <li>- structured</li> <li>- coded data sheet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Put a "1" in front of the most important experience, a "2" in front of ...</li> <li>b) Place an "x" on the following line to indicate . . . .</li> </ul>
Total	1.00		

INSTRUMENT

### *Surveys of Content Teachers*

Consider these two examples of pre-assessment surveys for functional reading in content areas. The first (Figure 2) is designed to probe teachers' opinions about their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to their instructional situations.

Figure 2

## Survey of Competency Needs and Resources

Directions: Listed below are competencies related to reading in content areas. Indicate whether you would like assistance in each area. If you are willing to help others, or if you know of resources that might be used for staff development activities in an area, please indicate this in the column labeled "Resources."

Competencies	Needs			Resources
	I feel confident in this area	I would like a little more help	I would like lots of help here	
1. Differentiate reading assignments in a single text to provide for a range of reading abilities				
2. Plan instruction so that students know how to approach their reading assignments				
3. Help students identify various patterns of organization which a writer uses in text material				
4. Help students set purposes for their reading assignments				
5. Develop reading and study guides to help students comprehend text material				

continued:

Competencies	Needs			Resources
	I feel confident in this area	I would like a little more help	I would like lots of help here	
6. Pre-teach technical vocabulary before students meet terms in their reading				
7. Reinforce students' understanding of technical vocabulary by providing opportunities for their repeated use				
8. Use tradebooks to supplement the basic textbook				
9. Determine the difficulty of my content area materials				
10. Use informal group inventories to discover students' limitations in reading textbook assignments				

The second survey (Figure 3) is designed for content teachers to get a handle on their students' performances in various kinds of reading and study activities.

INSERT -- Figure 3

Reading and Study Behavior	Student Name						
<i>Comprehension</i>							
1. Follows the author's message							
2. Evaluates the relevancy of facts							
3. Questions the accuracy of statements							
4. Critical of an author's bias							
5. Comprehends what the author means							
6. Follows text organization							
7. Can solve problems through reading							
8. Develops purposes for reading							
9. Makes predictions and takes risks							
10. Applies information to come up with new ideas							
<i>Vocabulary</i>							
1. Has a good grasp of technical terms in the subject under study							



9. Understands charts, maps, tables in the text								
10. Summarizes information								

Grading Key: A = always (excellent)      D = seldom (poor)  
 B = usually (good)                              F = never (unacceptable)  
 C = sometimes (average)

This article has attempted to provide a thorough "grounding" for the reading consultant who seeks to collect information for proposed funding and/or curriculum innovation. Clearly, surveys can be efficiently constructed tools, used for an amalgam of purposes by reading personnel.

#### REFERENCES

Hofstrand, Richard K. and Phipps, Lloyd J. *Advisory Councils for Education: A Handbook*. Urbana, Ill.: Urban Educational Development Laboratory, 1971.