

**Mennonite
Education
Agency**

The education agency of
Mennonite Church USA

stepping up

for board members of Mennonite educational institutions



Board assessment: Critical step in board development

By **John Yordy**, Venture International LLC, www.vianswers.com

Institutional boards can add significant value to an organization. They can also be mediocre and ineffective. In extreme cases, their dysfunctional behaviors can seriously damage an organization. While an effective board does not guarantee an exceptional organization, an exceptional organization usually has an effective board. Effective boards are those that have implemented best practices in their domain of responsibility. They also have a process that ensures continuous learning and improvement.

Continuous improvement is only possible when a board has a clear picture of how an effective board should function and regularly assesses its own effectiveness. These assessment results enable the board to design a development plan and determine its effectiveness. Boards that are serious about assessment should address the following questions:

What characteristics should be assessed? The design of an effective board assessment tool begins with knowing what should be assessed. High-functioning boards fulfill their legal obligations. They are committed to the mission, vision and values of the institution.

An effective board is a governing board that is able to monitor institutional performance through well-defined performance metrics. A carefully designed process is also in place for regularly assessing the effectiveness of the organization's leader.

Besides their governance function, effective boards also engage in strategic and generative thinking. This enables them to more actively

partner with the organization in developing a culture for positive change.

Board meetings are carefully structured and all board members engage in active and highly functional engagement. In meetings, the chair nurtures an environment of appropriate humor and fun.

Finally, effective boards have a carefully designed process to hear from their internal and external stakeholders. Most importantly, they always speak with one voice, or they do not speak at all.

Who should participate in the assessment? The board should both assess the board's work as a whole (including the work of the board's executive officers) and the contribution of individual board members. The purpose of these evaluations is to provide information that can lead to enhanced effectiveness in the board's work and that of each member.

All board members and senior organizational staff should participate in assessing the board's overall effectiveness. This process ensures a more balanced perspective than the one that may emerge if only the board completes the assessment survey.

There are many different approaches to consider in assessing an individual board

(Continued on page 3)

Inside this issue:

Board assessment - pp. 1, 3

Envisioning an Anabaptist Christian ... - p. 2

Book: *Realizing Our Intentions* - p. 3

Govern like we teach - p. 4

Envisioning an Anabaptist Christian pedagogy

By [Judy H. Mullet](#), Eastern Mennonite University

[\(A longer version of this article is available online.\)](#)

If I told you, “I teach like a Mennonite,” what picture would come to mind? What instructional strategies do you think I’d model? Indeed, what does pedagogy look like in an Anabaptist perspective?

Within popular culture, curriculum and instruction are commonly viewed as separate elements of education: the what and the how of education. Likewise we perceive teaching as separate from learning: the means and the end. Even the questions posed above reflect this separation. From an Anabaptist Christian (ABC) holistic perspective, perhaps teaching should be framed as lifestyle. Teaching and learning, and curriculum and instruction are ways of being and doing within a seamless process. What you see is what you get; what is caught is taught. There is no “hidden curriculum” per se because it’s been outed; the who, what, where, when, how and why of education implicitly and explicitly teach.

What are we modeling as we teach? Adapting Harold Bender’s vision of the Big Three descriptors of an Anabaptist lens—Spirit-empowered discipleship, community and an ethic of unconditional love—we have a foundation for a how and a what in Anabaptist pedagogy that models the content it offers. As such we believe in an education for and by community, discipleship and love—one without the other isn’t possible. They comprise a lifestyle, the way of the Way.

What does this look like in the day-to-day classroom? One metaphor for how teachers function in ABC education might be “teacher as preposition.” Prepositions are first and foremost relational facilitators; ABC “prepositions” live and breathe for relationship-building with God, with humanity and with creation. As “prepositions” in a connected creation, teachers mediate conflict, attend to meaningful relationships in space, time and movement, and function as co-creators with God. They aren’t flashy; they lead by serving. They not only “walk before” or in front of students as they model and use direct instruction, but they “walk with” by sharing power and offering collaborative

learning opportunities. More distinctively, they “walk behind” at times, sensitive to the pace and needs of the students. [\(Click for illustration.\)](#) As prepositions, ABC educators:

Live mindfully in each moment. The mending of creation happens one moment at a time. Thus each moment is a teachable one.

Invite all to the table. No child left friendless is the motto. ABC educators understand that violence begins with exclusion because exclusion means someone is lonely.

Reveal tenderness and compassion. I care, therefore I am. Teachers who care reveal tenderness as a way of being.

Listen for surprise. For mending creation, listening may be more important than speaking. Listening for surprise typifies the mindfulness in an ABC classroom.

Live into the questions. We grow in the direction of the questions we ask. Perhaps we should assess learning by the nature of the questions asked by our students. And when we think we know the answers, we would do well to add, “But I could be wrong” to our statements.

To teach like a Mennonite means to listen, question, invite, relate, risk and wonder. As we live into the kingdom, or “live between the times” as John Roth describes it, we catch a glimpse of the impossible through a transformative partnership with God. We discover an authentic ABC pedagogy that is rooted in the past, practices mindfully in the present, plans for the possible and dwells in the impossible. Will our students catch this vision?



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This newsletter is produced by Mennonite Education Agency for board members of Mennonite educational institutions and is distributed by e-mail. It can also be viewed at: www.MennoniteEducation.org/StepUp.

The mission of *Stepping Up* is to provide some insights, suggestions and resource ideas to help strengthen boards and emphasize those unique features that reflect Anabaptist-Mennonite theological understandings.

Questions? Comments? Please e-mail the editor, rachelne@MennoniteEducation.org.

Board Assessment

(Continued from page 1)

member's effectiveness. One possibility is for each board member to do a self-assessment. At the other extreme, the board executive officers may carefully and sensitively reflect on the effectiveness of individual board members. However, it is essential that a mechanism is in place that enables executive board leadership to address board member problems.

Who should analyze the assessment? After the board approves an assessment document, some boards delegate to staff the task of analyzing the assessment results. Other boards feel more comfortable in having a board member do the analysis. In either case, it is critical that the integrity of the process and the confidentiality of the report are not compromised.

Periodically, an independent organization should conduct the board assessment. This helps to keep the assessment tool and process objective. Such a process can also add an outside perspective regarding the board's effectiveness and provide options for the board to consider for enhancing its work.

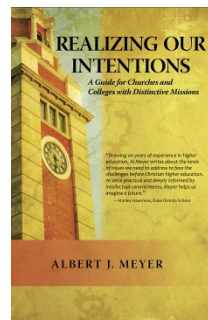
What should be done with results? Board leadership must be intentional about using assessment results to prepare a development plan with measurable outcomes and timelines. There should also be a process in place that enables the full board to have ownership in the plan. Shared ownership will encourage each board member to participate in achieving the goals of the plan.

How will the board know if it is improving? After the board has implemented a development plan, it must regularly assess whether the goals of the plan are being achieved. The board is then able to modify its board development plan as needed.

In conclusion, good intentions on the part of a board are not enough to ensure board effectiveness. The effective board utilizes an assessment to design an effective board development process for continuous improvement. After implementation, the board will evaluate the effectiveness of the plan in order to modify the plan as needed.



HIGHLIGHTED BOOK



Summary by the author,
Albert J. Meyer
[Click for reviews by Loren Swartzendruber, Charles Pollard, Richard T. Hughes and Stanley Hauerwas.](#)

Many works have documented the history of higher education in the West, showing how churches have started colleges and universities, and then how the churches and schools gradually have distanced themselves from the church.

Realizing Our Intentions goes one step further by offering specific and practical strategies for healthy and long-term relationships between faith-based colleges and churches. Some of the findings are relevant for faith-based institutions generally. ***Realizing Our Intentions* focuses on two questions:**

- What are the dynamics of church-school dissociation, especially when this is contrary to the initial intentions of both?
- What would churches and colleges have to do to realize healthy longer-term relationships?

Specific recommendations include:

- Procedures for board initiative in developing and implementing long-term goals that can actually guide short-term decision-making;
- Proactive faculty team development through the appointment of a top-level administrator for strategic faculty recruitment;
- Church structuring of a higher education board or boards that effectively represent the church's interest and support for the respective roles of church and school in the implementation of a common mission; and
- Board and administration adoption and implementation of procedures for periodic review of their institution's movement toward its long-term goals.

The book will be available at the end of October; see www.acupressbooks.com or www.Christianbook.com for more details.

Govern like we teach

By Carlos Romero, executive director

John Yordy, former provost of Goshen College, makes an excellent case in this issue for the need of an effective process for board assessment. Over the years, I have heard presenter after presenter illustrate that long-term institutional effectiveness will not go beyond the effectiveness of its board.

Albert J. Meyer focuses a section of his new book, *Realizing Our Intentions*, on the importance of boards being structured in a way “that effectively represents the church’s interest and support for the respective roles of church and school in the implementation of a common mission and the periodic review of the institution’s movement towards its goals.” Although he focuses on higher education, many of the principles are applicable to all levels of education.

A former higher education board member commented that it took about “one year of service in the board for [his] thinking to shift from seeing [himself] as representative of the church to simply protecting the institution (sometimes even from the church!).” Although this is just one person’s experience, it does provide a glimpse of why a proper assessment mechanism should include a focus on the institution’s relationship with its sponsoring organization and on its mission.

Also in this issue, Judy Mullet envisions an Anabaptist Christian pedagogy where our theology does make a difference in the way teachers teach. *If our understandings make a difference in how we teach, it should also make a difference in how we govern.* She writes, “To teach like a Mennonite means to listen, question, invite, relate, risk and wonder.” It would be interesting to connect this idea to assessments. What if we could say our boards will:

Listen: Take time to listen carefully to the reports, advice and counsel of the administrators they have entrusted to lead the institution; have processes in place to listen to its stakeholders, faculty, students, alumni, congregations, church leaders, local communities, etc.

Question: Are the right questions being asked?

Has the board taken time to collectively discern what those questions should be? Has the board spoken with one voice to its CEO about what they want answered? Does the board regularly ask questions that assess the progress of the institution’s mission?

Invite: Is the board culture one that is inviting to its members? How hard or how long does it take a new board member to feel included? Does the board carry its work in a way that invites others to share ideas and suggestions.

Relate: How would the board assess how it relates to the administration? The institutional community? The broader church? The local community? How do our Anabaptist understandings of community, peace, and social-justice impact the way the board relates to others and treats each other?

Risk: Jesus took many risks and often went against the established norm and cultural patterns of the day. The Anabaptist story around the world is one of taking risks. As our educational institutions face significant challenges today, are our boards willing to take those risks that will help us move to the future?

Wonder: Does our work “[plan] for the possible and [dwell] in the impossible”? We work with data, research and facts, and yet, we are called to wonder and think beyond what we feel is possible. I believe that it was this wonder which led to the establishment of many of our Mennonite educational institutions and this year led to the opening of The Peace and Justice Academy in Pasadena, Calif.

Board assessment is an important and critical part of a strong board. MEA staff is available to help boards work with their self-assessment as well as with the implementation of a helpful assessment mechanism. May we, as Anabaptists, never lose our desire to “listen, question, invite, relate, risk and wonder.”

Until the next time,

