

DECISION MAKERS
ASSET ASSESSMENT and JOURNEY BOOK

A Goal-Directed, Computer-Supported Assessment
Of Supporting Networks, Assets, Personal Plans, and Progress

Carnegie Mellon University

Why Should Youth Engage in Self-Assessment?

Teenagers are continually being assessed by schools, parents, and peers, but they are rarely asked to engage in a reflective, goal-directed self-assessment of their own actions or assets. To build an *identity as a decision maker*, a young person needs not only the opportunity to make meaningful decisions, but also the awareness that his or her own (sometimes unexamined) actions have reasons and consequences. To be a *reflective decision maker*, one needs, in addition, strategies for assessing one's assets and goals, for making plans, and for evaluating options and outcomes.

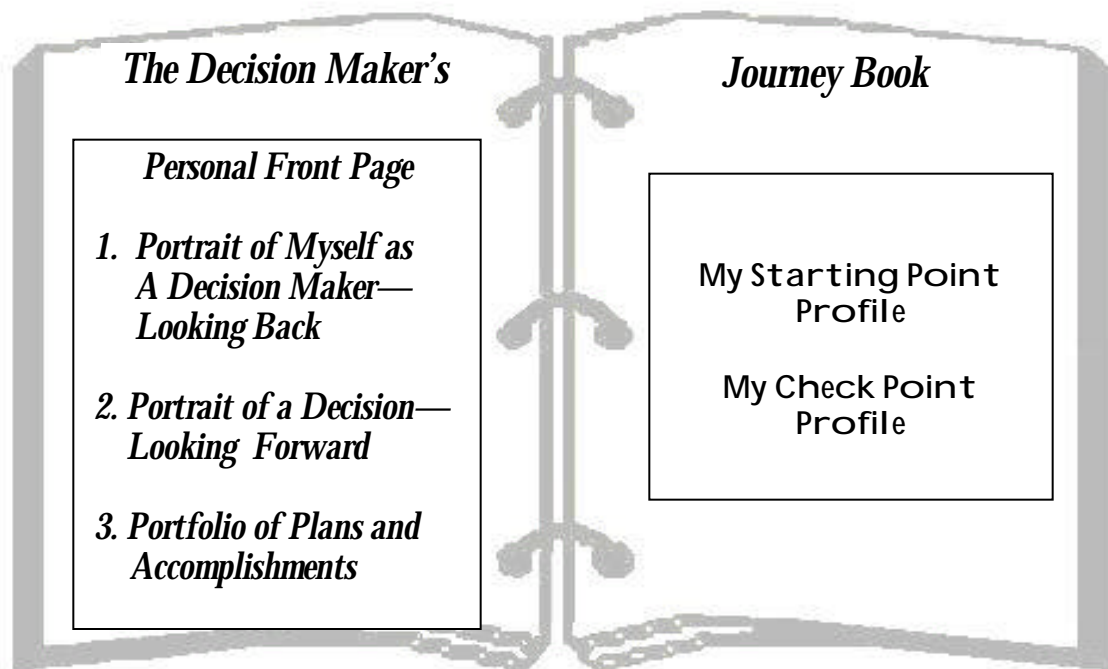
How Can You Support Decision Making?

Decision Makers provides a scaffold for building this problem-solving identity and strategies for reflective self-assessment. Carnegie Mellon supports the process with a seminar and support for teachers and mentors, computer tools, and a final formal analysis of growth and change. Together the Assessment and Journey Book function

As a personal planning portfolio for youth

As a placeholder for personal and problem-solving conversations with mentors

As a tool for program assessment



How Is the Decision Maker’s Journey Book Created?

The Journey Book Process	The Products
1. Students create a computer-supported Profile describing their networks of support, assessing their asset base, reviewing values, and making plans for change.	Starting Point Profile Who Is Traveling with Me? What Are My Values and Commitments? How Big Is My Network? What Would I Like to Change?
2. Students explore computer design tools.	A Self-Designed Front Page Who Am I? Images of Identity.
3. Students learn problem-solving strategies for bringing rival hypotheses to a problem, which they use to collaboratively analyze a past decision.	A Portrait of Myself as a Decision Maker—Looking Back Tells the story-behind-the-story of a hard decision, with the help of planning partners, to uncover “how I felt and what I learned.”
4. Students learn a decision making strategy to evaluate options and outcomes and to build plans for a “live” current decision.	A Portrait of a Decision—Looking Forward Uses the Options and Outcomes strategy to think through (ahead of time) “a decision I am likely to face down the road” and to plan a response.
5. Students find the links between the youth organization’s project and their personal journey, and begin to build evidence of progress.	A Portfolio of Plans and Accomplishments Reflections on milestones met Evidence of achievements
6. Students return to update their Profile in order to assess changes in their network and assets as well as progress on their personal plans.	Check-Point Profile Who Are The New People Traveling With Me? How Has My Support Network Of People And Experiences Changed? How Has My Situation Changed? How Have My Values And Commitments Changed?

How Is the Asset Assessment Created?

The Starting Point Asset Assessment	
<p>At the beginning of the Journey Book process, students complete the computer-based Starting Point Profile (which provides the basis for the Assessment). The Carnegie Mellon team provides an analysis of the Profile data for the group and scores it for the level of reflective decision making.</p>	<p>The Asset Assessment Report Size and diversity of personal network Level of assets and support Ability to make operational, reasoned, and reflective self-assessments</p>
The Check Point Asset Assessment	
<p>At the end of a program or semester, students return to complete a Check Point Profile. The Carnegie Mellon report assesses quantitative changes in the asset base of the group and qualitative growth in reflective decision making based on the Profiles.</p>	<p>The Asset Assessment Report Changes in size and diversity of personal network Changes in assets and support Growth in ability to make operational, reasoned, and reflective self-assessments of change</p>

Outcomes for “Decision Makers”

Students develop their identity as decision makers, grounded in strategies for analyzing problems and evaluating options.

The process of writing, rivaling, and collaborating brings the problems employees face into the light of reflection and negotiation (for themselves and mentors).

At the end of this creative, analytical, and technological experience, students (and their supporters) possess a personal up-datable Journey Book which offers a scaffold for on-going planning, reflective assessment, and dialogue.

Outcomes for Agencies, Community Organizations, and Schools

The user-initiated, computer-supported Journey Book record gives trainers, counselors, and community mentors a unique entry point to work as collaborator on employee-initiated projects and to support life planning, decision making, and development.

As a tool for quantitative and qualitative assessment, the Journey Book complements a content-based assessment of learning. It allows agencies and community organizations to assess a critical aspect of personal growth in problem solving, and to document supported perceptions of change.

How Was the Decision Maker's Program Developed?

The philosophy and educational strategies of Decision Makers grew out of a unique collaboration between Carnegie Mellon University and the Community House, a historic urban settlement house. The Community Literacy Center opened its doors on Pittsburgh's Northside in 1990 led by Dr. Wayne C. Peck, Executive Director of the Community House and Dr. Linda Flower, then Co-Director of the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon. Here community literacy developed its community-savvy, research-based, and technology-friendly strategies for reading, writing, and talking, as it helped urban teenagers and residents become writers and problem-solvers in their own lives. In a book called *Learning To Rival: A Literate Practice for Intercultural Inquiry* we document how this community/university approach to decision making through writing helped urban teenagers confront issues such as drugs, risk, and respect as reflective problem solvers.

Meanwhile, many community organizations and schools began asking how these strategies could help their people enter the world of work. And in 1998 this educational collaboration became the Working Partners Network organized by Linda Flower as Director of the Carnegie Mellon Center for University Outreach and Wayne B. Cobb, Community Education Director.

The Working Partners Network helped shape our thinking about asset assessment. One high school wanted to help its struggling 9th graders make the transition to the new responsibility of high school. Another needed an on-line, over-time portrait of progress that could be used by students and teachers. And community organizations, from faith-based youth groups to HUD housing centers needed a way to document the personal growth they were seeing in the people they served.

After a Decade's Work.

Decision Makers developed in response to these needs as a concise introduction to decision making and a tool for self-assessment. The Journey Book takes an asset-based approach to personal development, helping writers evaluate their own assets by looking at their experiences and community supports (focusing on assets documented by the Search Institute as strongly linked to healthy development). In the Journey Book writers begin the work of building their own asset base by examining their personal goals, plans for change, and decision making strategies. With the support of the Howard Heinz Endowment and the R.K. Mellon Foundation, Decision Makers has developed into a tool for both self-assessment and for qualitative and quantitative assessment of the assets and decision-making growth of a group.

Relevant publications listed on www.cmu.edu/thinktank include:

“Community Literacy.” Peck, Flower, Higgins. *CCC*, 46, 1995.

Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing in College & Community. Flower. Harcourt. 1998.

Learning To Rival. Flower, Long, Higgins. Erlbaum. 2000.

Negotiating the Culture of Work and Technology. Community Think Tank Findings. 2000.

What Makes Reflective Decision Making Worth Assessing?

Decision Makers and Critical Thinking.

Critical thinking has been described as *reasonable, reflective thinking that is focused on what to believe or do*. It depends on a raft of abilities from analyzing arguments and weighing evidence, to making value judgments, to taking an open-minded, questioning attitude to ideas. All these abilities can come into play in decision making. However, when people are standing there—on the brink of a decision, pulled forward by the need to act—they sometimes fail to do the kind of critical thinking they are capable of. Like a coach that fails to send in the “A” team when it is needed, they never call up the decision making strategies that would let them reflect and reason before they leap.

What the Research Shows About Decision Making.

In-depth studies of the strategies people use to make decisions help explain what goes wrong. When 105 high school students told researchers about a recent decision they had to make (about peers, money, school, sex, drugs, alcohol), it was clear that most teens only considered one option (deciding between “Yes, I’ll do that” or “No, I won’t”). They rarely named any distinct alternatives or additional options. They focused on avoiding bad outcomes rather than achieving positive goals, and rarely considered the possible outcomes of their choice or the probabilities it would succeed. In other words, they stopped *thinking* about their options before the decision *making* really got started. And other studies suggest that adults are often much better.

Strategies for Reflective Decision Making.

Reflective decision making calls the critical thinking “A” team into the game. More specifically, it uses a set of strategies that helps people to focus on realistic, specific actions and situations, to come up with more options and good rivals, and to test and question their own ideas. And because it depends on specific strategies, it also lets people judge whether they have built a reflective or “strong” decision.

You can tell a “strong” decision that is built on reflective thinking because it:

- Is detailed and elaborated with specifics.

- Spells out practical actions the decision maker could take or steps for what to do.

- Is personal and clearly refers to the decision maker’s actual situation (beyond the generalities anyone might say about this problem).

- Goes even further to explain the situation or decision by giving reasons (with words like “since,” “because,” “so”).

- Raises real rivals and recognizes alternatives to the decision maker’s own ideas

- Describes the special conditions under which their options would work, (with words like “if” or “when”).

How Do You Recognize “Strong” Decision Making?

In the Asset Assessment, when people use more of these strategies in talking about their decisions, they can move from a relatively weak decision with little evidence of critical thinking (a Level 1) to a strong decision built on reflection and the active use of multiple decision making strategies (a Level 3).

Level “1” decisions are appropriate, standard answers that are not elaborated or personal.

For example: I want to make good grades and pay attention to my teachers.

Level “2” decisions are elaborated and personal with specific actions and reasons.

For example: I am going to study everyday after school at my desk in my room, with the radio turned off. My brothers and sisters are not allowed to come in and bother me because I always use that as a reason to stop.

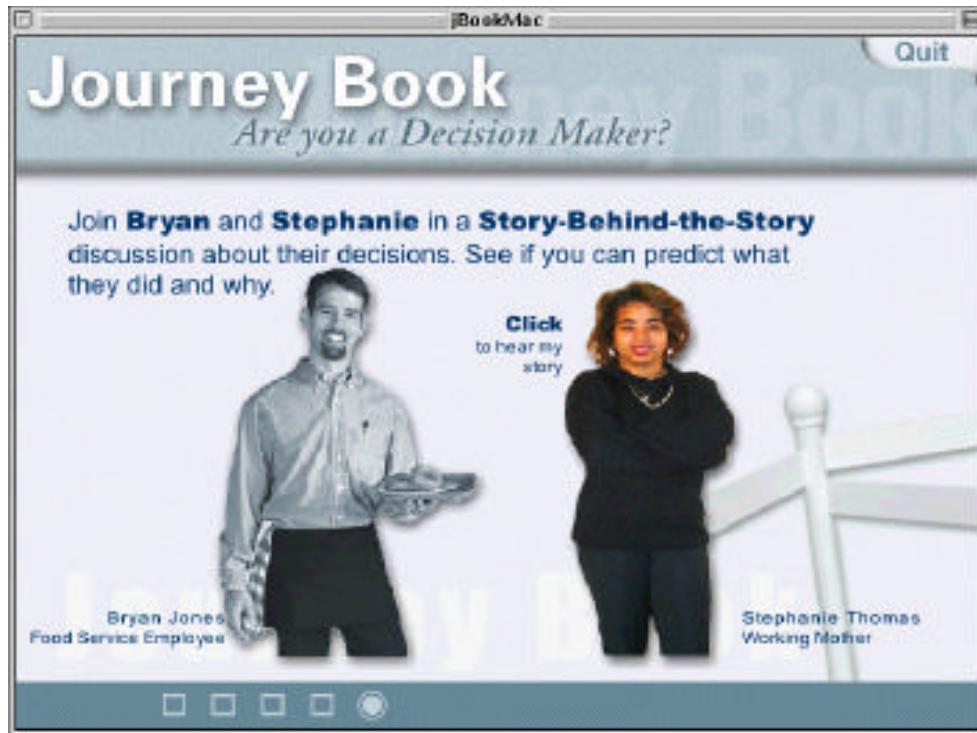
Level “3” decisions go a step further by considering multiple options and rival readings, by imagining possible outcomes and recognizing the conditions that affect them.

For example: I have to start asking my teachers for help at school when I’m having a problem. Before I thought that asking my teachers would make me look stupid because my dad always hates it when I ask him questions. But I know teachers are really there to help me. Well, at least three of them are, if they think I am really trying.

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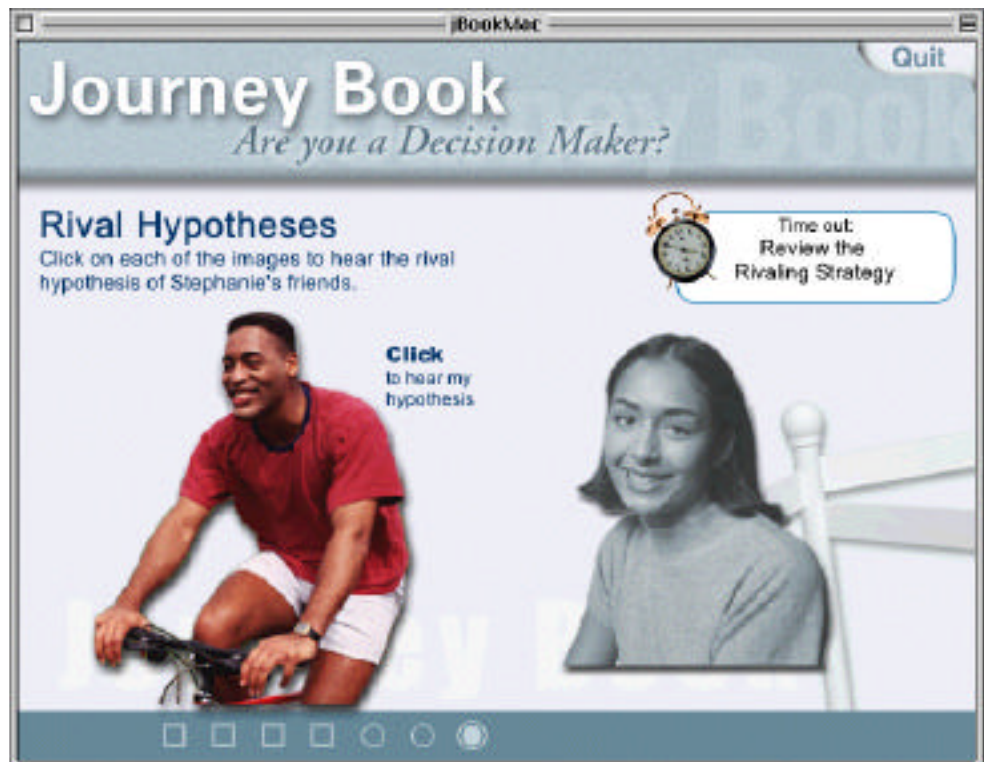
From the Decision Maker's Journey Book CD



See yourself as a decision maker

Hear, write, and share stories of good—and bad—decisions

Try out new strategies for decision making



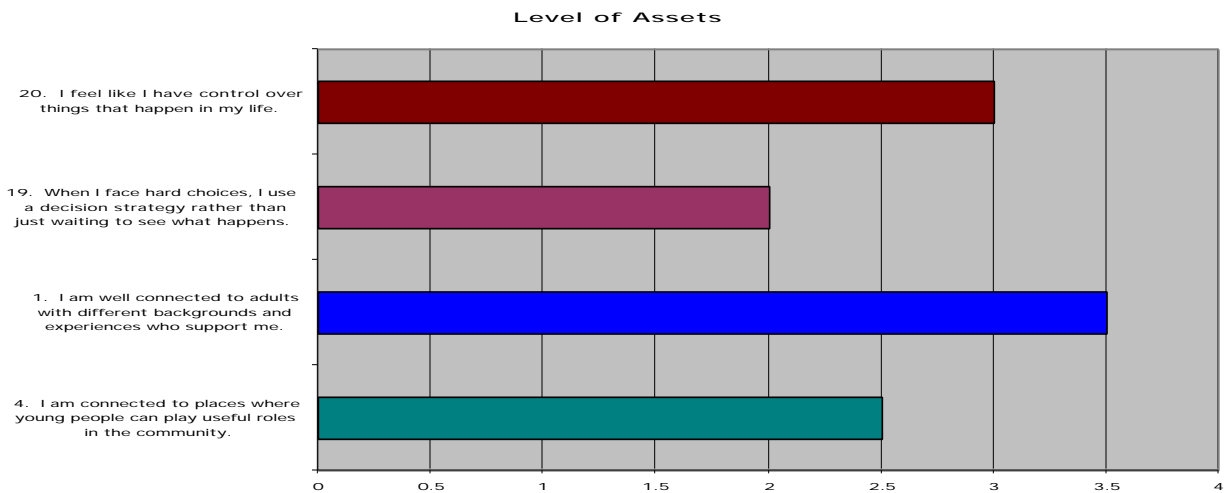
What Does the Carnegie Mellon Asset Assessment Report Tell Me?

The Network of Support Analysis

This section gives you a quantitative snapshot of the size and diversity of the group's network of support—plus their awareness of how that support functions.

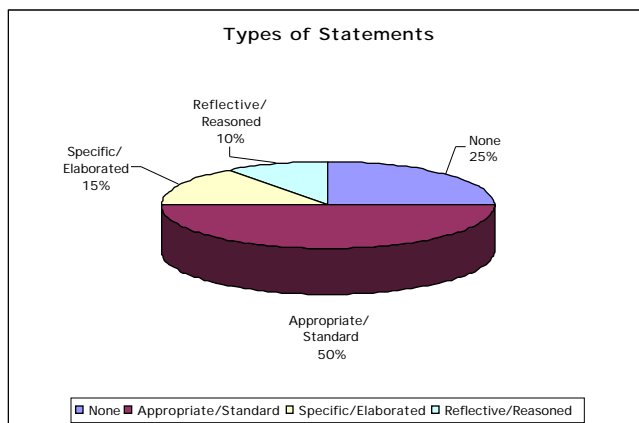
The Asset Analysis

This section gives you a quantitative picture of the asset base (the level of support and size of change) the group perceives they have in 23 areas (clustered around issues of agency, motivation, decision making, support networks, and dealing with others).



The Reflective Decision Making Analysis

This section gives you a qualitative assessment, scored by Carnegie Mellon judges, of the level of reflective decision making demonstrated in the 20 written comments throughout the Profile.



What type of statement is the student giving?

- Level 0. No statement*
- Level 1. Appropriate, general*
- Level 2. Operational, elaborated*
- Level 3. Reflective awareness of alternatives or qualifications*