

## The Retrospective Pre-test

A retrospective pretest item is administered after an event (e.g., professional development workshop) has concluded and asks participants to assess their degree of knowledge, skill or attitude both prior to and after the event. The differences between the pre- and post-event ratings represent the participants' perceptions of their learning over the course of the event. For example:

For the questions below, please indicate your comfort using the Danielson tools *before* and *after* your participation in the training.

7. How confident are you that you understand the overall Danielson framework?

|                     | Not at all confident (0) | (1)                   | (2)                   | (3)                   | (4)                   | Moderately confident (5) | (6)                   | (7)                   | (8)                   | (9)                   | Highly confident (10) |
|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Before the workshop | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| After the workshop  | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

The retrospective pretest approach is often used when a participant's frame of reference is likely to change over the course of an event. For example, with the question above, a participant may begin a workshop thinking they have a very good understanding of the Danielson framework only to discover that their understanding was not as extensive as they thought. Using a traditional pretest-posttest model, participants might rate their confidence higher on the pretest than on the posttest *even though they may have gained* a much better understanding of the framework from the workshop this circumstance analysis of the pre and post event ratings would lead to the conclusion that the workshop was ineffective when in fact this was not the case. Conversely, participants might underestimate their understanding during a pretest, leading to an inflated impression of the workshop's impact. In Some researchers have found that in these circumstances, self-assessments from retrospective pretest items more closely match expert judgment of participant knowledge and skills than do ratings from pre-assessment surveys. (Sources: Goedhart and Hoogstraten 1992; Howard et al. 1979; Klatt and Taylor-Powell 2005; Lamb 2005; Pratt, McGuigan, and Katzev 2000)

The retrospective pretest approach is also used is when a traditional pre- and post-test is not practical. This may occur when no pretest data were collected or when an event is of such short duration or when time is too limited to reasonably permit the use of two surveys. Lamb (2005) provides a brief discussion of the strengths and limitations of retrospective pretests.

## References

- Goedhart, H., and J. Hoogstraten. 1992. The retrospective pretest and the role of pretest information in evaluation studies. *Psychological Reports* 70:699-704.
- Howard, G.S., K.M. Ralph, N.A. Gulanick, S.E. Maxwell, D. Nace, and S.L. Gerber. 1979. Internal invalidity in pre-test-posttest self report evaluations and the re-evaluation of retrospective pretests. *Applied Psychological Measurement*, 3 (1):1-23.
- Klatt, John, and Ellen Taylor-Powell. 2005. Synthesis of Literature Relative to the Retrospective Pretest Design. Paper read at American Evaluation Association, at Toronto, Ontario.
- Lamb, Theodore. 2005. The retrospective pretest: An imperfect but useful tool. *The Evaluation Exchange* (2), <http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/original/application/d6517d4c8da2c9f1fb3dffe3e8b68ce4.pdf>
- Pratt, C.C. , W.M. McGuigan, and A.R. Katzev. 2000. Measuring program outcomes: Using retrospective pretest methodology. *American Journal of Evaluation* 21 (3):341-349.