Students talk back:
Opportunities for growth lie in student perceptions
Student perceptions

- Student surveys are one of multiple measures of teacher effectiveness.
- Students can identify what teachers do well.
- Students’ perceptions of teachers correlate to student performance.

Define the desired outcome

- Measured learning?
- Self-directed learning?
- Balance engaging with challenging.

Ask the students

- One or two open-ended questions per week.
  “What is working well in our class?”
  “What things do you think I could do better?”
- Ask students to formulate next questions.
- Follow up with students through discussion.

Prepare for the results

• Results should guide teacher practices.

• Reactions depend on teacher’s personality and skill level.

• Leaders can guide how the feedback is used.

• Ensure there are no repercussions for students.

• Make counseling services available for when results are different from self-perception.

Use the information

• Recognize connection between actions and student results.
• Use feedback to fine-tune practices.
• Use feedback in a collective learning experience within learning teams.
• Create norms and values for how the feedback will contribute to teacher learning.

A higher awareness

- Student input can raise awareness of goals.
- Posing questions about classroom practice can improve perception and preparation of practice.

Students talk back: Opportunities for growth lie in student perceptions.

By Valerie von Frank

Some states and districts now are finding new ways to ask, what do students know? Not just about reading, writing, and arithmetic, but what do students know about their teachers? Who are good teachers, and in what ways?

States and districts revamping their formal teacher evaluation systems in some cases are using student surveys as one of multiple measures of teacher effectiveness (BURNSKIE & MEIBAUM, 2012). They generally use standardized student surveys, such as the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction, the Pupil Observation Survey, the Student Evaluation of Teaching, or Ronald Ferguson's student perception survey for the Measures of Effective Teaching project of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (MET, 2010).

Good teaching can be defined by common traits, according to Ferguson, senior lecturer in education and public policy at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who categorizes these common traits into “seven C’s” (see box on p. 4).

“Researchers over many decades have suggested that students will engage more deeply and master their lessons more thoroughly when their teachers care about them, control the classroom well, clarify complex ideas, challenge them to work hard and think hard, deliver lessons in ways that captivate, confer with them about their ideas and consolidate lessons to make learning coherent,” Ferguson has written (2010, p. 7). Other research also concludes that students — who naturally spend hundreds of hours with their teachers — are capable from the early grades of identifying what teachers do well, and what they don’t (MURPHY, Delli & EDWARDS, 2004).

Students' perceptions of teachers are highly correlated to student performance on standardized tests — when students find teachers effective, achievement gains as measured on the exam are greater for all the students of that teacher (MET, 2010). Research finds students from different classes share similar responses to the same teacher, according to...

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