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Implementing student-led conferences

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Implementing student-led conferences

Abstract

This study examined the effects of conducting student-led conferences. Benefits, as well as problems, associated with conducting student-led conferences were discussed. Guidelines were presented for teachers to conduct effective student-led conferences. Conclusions were drawn from the literature, and recommendations were made for the future implementation of student-led conferences.

IMPLEMENTING STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

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This study examined the effects of conducting student-led conferences. Benefits, as well as problems, associated with conducting student-led conferences were discussed. Guidelines were presented for teachers to conduct effective student-led conferences. Conclusions were drawn from the literature, and recommendations were made for the future implementation of student-led conferences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The evaluation of students' learning is necessary for educators to know student progress

in schools. Politicians at the local, state, and national level have continuously made demands on

teachers to " . . . be accountable for student achievement results" (Bailey & Guskey, 2001, p. 4).

School administrators have brainstormed ways for their teachers to engage in student assessment

and evaluation strategies. Strategies have ranged from traditional forms of assessment to

authentic forms of assessment. Bol, Stephenson, and O'Connell (1998) discussed differences

between the two: Traditional types of assessment have included standardized achievement tests

and classroom achievement tests with close-ended items such as multiple-choice questions, true

or false questions, checklists, and fill in the blanks; whereas, authentic types of assessment have

included performance-based assessments, observation techniques, student self-assessment, and

portfolios. With all these assessment options available, the question has been asked: What is the

best way to report findings gathered from these various assessment strategies? Guskey (1996)

claimed, "Few topics in education are more controversial than grading, reporting, and

communicating student learning. Teachers, students, administrators, parents, and community

members all agree that we need better reporting systems" (p. 1).

School systems often report these findings through the form of parent-teacher

conferences. "The parent-teacher conference has been an integral part of the elementary school

program for decades" (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989, p. 169). In this situation, a student's teacher

has related information to each parent regarding his or her child's skills in school. Discussion

has involved the student's grades in various subject areas, the student's level of effort, the

student's progress, and the student's behavior. It is these parent-teacher conferences which educators have begun to scrutinize. Guyton and Fielstein (1989) reported existing evidence from a study done by Little and Allan (1989) which revealed " . . . overall dissatisfaction with the present conference system" (p. 169). Research has helped to explain why this dissatisfaction is present.

In the traditional parent-teacher conferences, questions about a student's achievement have been addressed to the teacher, and the teacher has proceeded to answer the questions. Teachers have been given the role of an all-knowing entity and therefore have assumed the role of expert in communicating student progress during parent-teacher conferences (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). However, teachers have found they may not really know answers to all of parents' questions. As a result, teachers have learned to look upon parent-teacher conferences with dread, knowing how difficult and time-consuming the preparation will be. "Communicating to parents what their children have been working on in school and what learning progress they have made is one of a teacher's most challenging responsibilities" (Bailey & Guskey, 2001, p. xi). Educators have realized the scenario of parent-teacher conferences is not as ideal as it was once believed to be.

A vital component has been missing from these parent-teacher conferences. "The teacher's perspective is an important one . . . but it is not the only one parents need to know" (Bailey & Guskey, 2001, p. 2). In traditional parent-teacher conferences, the student has either been absent or has assumed a passive role during the discussion of his or her learning. As a result, teachers have discovered that students see no connection between their schoolwork and grades on their report card. Terri Austin (1994), a sixth-grade teacher, realized this when she said, "Students viewed grades as something that I gave them, not something that reflected their

efforts and learning" (p. 2). Educators have wondered, how do we make this connection between grades, effort, and learning meaningful to students? The review of current literature has shown the answer to this question. "For a discussion of student work to be relevant, accurate, and complete, students must be involved in some way" (Bailey & Guskey, 2001, p. 1). Students need to be included in the conference process.

Little and Allan (1989) heard these concerns from teachers. With the idea of including students in the assessment process, these two educators set out to introduce a new concept into the traditional style of parent-teacher conferences. "We decided to design a different conference format that would help students be more accountable for their work and help the teacher motivate students to be active in the learning process" (p. 210). The new design became known as student-led conferences. These conferences were set up for each student to initiate a discussion about his or her learning and share pieces of schoolwork with parents (Little & Allan, 1989). A few months later, Guyton and Fielstein (1989) conducted a similar study to determine the effects of student-led conferences. Successful experiences and positive reactions from these two informal studies prompted others to implement this conferencing strategy (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996). During the last ten years, we have continued to find additional research and literature regarding student-led conferences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the literature concerning the effectiveness of student-led conferences and to present guidelines for conducting effective student-led conferences. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. Who are the participants in student-led conferences?

2. What are the benefits of student-led conferences?

3. What are the problems associated with student-led conferences?

4. What are the guidelines for conducting student-led conferences?

Need for the Study

Educators have continuously searched for effective ways to involve students in their learning. Some have been successful with their strategies; others have continued to struggle as they look for a better solution to empower students. The recent concern has been that students lack interest in their schoolwork. Teachers have complained about students " . . . lacking a sense of ownership for their school progress and learning" (Guyton & Fielstein, 1989, p. 169). In consideration of this concern, teachers have granted more responsibilities to students in the area of assessment.

As a result, the focus of authentic assessment and the use of portfolios have entered into classrooms and resulted in the need for students to take ownership and become more involved in sharing their school progress. Bailey and Guskey (2001) claimed, "In order for learning to be relevant, students must be able to see the importance of the concepts they are learning and must be able to connect those concepts to prior learning and to the world outside the classroom" (p. 2). This need for students to become more responsible for their learning has led educators to initiate student-led conferences.

Limitations

The literature reviewed for this study provided information about student-led conferences. These articles are invaluable for understanding what is involved in student-led conferences; however, no basic research studies were found directly relating to student-led

conferences. This study is limited to literature that provides general information regarding student-led conferences, rather than specific, detailed, research analyses.

Definitions

For purposes of clarity and understanding, the following terms will be defined:

Basic Research Studies: Studies of research with the purpose to " . . . develop a model, or theory, that identifies all the relevant variables in a particular environment and hypothesizes about their relationships" (Tuckman, 1999, p. 4).

Parent-Teacher Conference: An " . . . exchange of feelings, beliefs, and knowledge between parent and teacher about a particular student" (Manning, 1985, p. 342).

Portfolio: "A collection of student work . . . that is self-evaluated and reflects the learner's skills and thinking" (Williams, 2000, p. 21).

Student-Led Conference: A meeting in which " . . . students conduct formal conferences with their parents or guests to display their schoolwork as well as discuss their learning, educational goals, and strategies for meeting those goals" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 1).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Participants in Student-led Conferences

Participants in student-led conferences have consisted of at least three vital members: the

teacher, the student, and the parent. Roles and responsibilities have been suggested for each

individual (Austin, 1994). Teachers, students, and parents have learned to perform many

different duties during the implementation of student-led conferences.

Teachers have been placed in the role of observer, to watch students during the

conference, but not to interrupt any conversations. "If the conference is to be truly meaningful to

students, teachers must make a conscious effort to refrain from interfering and let students take

charge" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 70). Taking charge has been the necessary role for students

to employ. "Students must take the lead in student-led conferences . . ." (Paulson & Paulson,

1994, p. 3). In this leadership position, students have been given the responsibility of sharing

their collection of schoolwork and discussing their learning with parents. Parents have been

urged to take the position of being listeners. "Listening well is perhaps the most important role

of the parents . . . at the conferences" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 74).

The listening role of parents, the leadership role of students, and the observation role of

teachers have been determined to be necessary components of student-led conferences.

Teachers, students, and parents must take their specific roles in student-led conferences

seriously. When these individuals follow through with their roles and responsibilities, student-

led conferences have provided many benefits to all involved.

Benefits of Student-led Conferences

Many benefits have been cited as a result of implementing student-led conferences. According to Linda Picciotto (1999), "Student-led conferences are beneficial for everyone" (p. 33). More specifically, these benefits have affected teachers, students, and parents.

Through the process of conducting student-led conferences, students have gained a voice in their education. Allowing students time to communicate what they have learned " . . . encourages them to accept more personal responsibility for their academic performance" ("Add Students," 2000, p. 6). This voice has also allowed educators to see learning through each student's viewpoint. "We must consider the experiences of individual students as they move through the curriculum . . ." (Bailey & Guskey, 2001, p. 2). When teachers listened to students, they were better able to distinguish needed areas of learning. As a result, students became more focused and serious about their work (Ricci, 2000). This increased seriousness by students has led them to produce higher quality work.

Chosen pieces of this quality work have been organized in a portfolio, enforcing students to reflect on their learning. Through this process, students have been given the opportunity to assess their work. Joan Servis (1999), a fourth grade teacher, stated, "When students are involved in the assessment and evaluation of their own learning, a more complete picture of their progress is possible" (p. 112). "Time management techniques, problem-solving strategies, and decision-making methods are also a part of the process" (Little & Allan, 1989, p. 210). A student's ability to self-evaluate has naturally led to a greater benefit of student-led conferences.

Students have inadvertently taken more responsibility for their learning. "Through student-led conferences, students learn that learning itself is important" (Shannon, 1997, p. 49). They have learned to understand the difference between quality work and inadequate work.

Shannon found this to be true with her students. "The students begin to take more pride in their work and look for improvements before they turn in their assignments" (Shannon, 1997, p. 48). According to Servis (1999), "Students who do this become lifelong learners. They make decisions about their learning, they assess their growth, and they talk confidently about their learning" (p. 113). Consequently, students have been encouraged to share this learning process with parents.

Parents have been pleasantly surprised with the result of student-led conferences. As two second grade teachers observed conversations between students and parents, they saw ". . . parents being both astounded and delighted by the evidence of their children's accomplishments" (Taylor, 1999, p. 80). Other teachers have received similar comments following conferences. Hilary Colvin, a parent of an upper elementary student, wrote, "Student-led conferences are so valuable because . . . you know your child has a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses" (Servis, 1999, p. 125). Another parent commented, "This was a great opportunity for the child to explain his work with confidence and detail" (Anthony, Johnson, Mickelson, & Preece, 1991, p. 172). As an outcome, parents have seen many positive effects that student-led conferences have had on their child's attitude toward school.

Students have displayed excitement and confidence about their accomplishments. During the student-led conferences in principal Barry Ricci's (2000) elementary school, students ". . . talked with pride and enthusiasm about their work" (p. 53). A kindergarten parent who had listened to her son lead his conference noted how thrilled he was about taking charge of his education (Rampelt, 1995). This leadership position has been internally rewarding for students.

Another reward for students has been the improved communication with their parents. Countryman and Schroeder (1996) exclaimed, "This potential for increased parent-student

communication is an unexpected bonus of student-led conferences" (p. 66). When students

shared their work with parents, they found how intently parents listened. Students received the

" . . . undivided attention of their parents. . ." (Little & Allan, 1989, p. 217). Parents and students

have opened up the possibility of in-depth communication relating to a student's total school

experience.

This sharing by students has resulted in more parent support and more parent

involvement at school. As a result, relations between the home and school have begun to

improve. The implementation of student-led conferences has created a " . . . stronger partnership

between school and home" (Ricci, 2000, p. 54). According to Culver and Cousino (2000),

bringing parents, teachers, and students together will " . . . forge lasting partnerships for the

benefit of students learning" (p. 15). Parents and teachers have made helpful observations during

conferences. Parents have become " . . . aware of the programs and teaching methods at work in

the school, and they observe how students interact with the teacher. . . . Teachers gain insight

into family expectations, interests, and relationships" (Picciotto, 1999, pp. 33-34). This

improved relationship between home and school has been evident through high attendance rates

of student-led conferences. Taylor (1999) commented, "The high rate of attendance illustrated

the importance . . . for the children and their families" (p. 80). With the improvement of

relations between home and school, benefits have been clearly distinguished for students.

Another important benefit related to student-led conferences has been the reduction of

stress for all involved. Picciotto (1999) said, "After adopting [student-led conferences], we were

able to say good-bye to the stressful days of meeting with a seemingly endless stream of parents

to repeat what was written on the report cards, while the children waited anxiously" (p. 34). To

alleviate more stress, the conference design has invited a relaxed environment. Students and

parents sat around tables conversing and sharing refreshments (Austin, 1994). In addition, the ease of student-led conferences has encouraged parents and students to discuss school topics at home or at other convenient places (Shannon, 1997). Educators have even found that the over-all time of scheduling conferences has been reduced. "Teachers can have several conferences going on simultaneously" (Santa, 1995, p. 94). The new form of conferencing has resulted in less frustration for teachers, students, and parents.

Most educators have found it easy to determine positive aspects of conducting student-led conferences. They have seen how teachers, students, and parents benefit. However, the implementation of a new idea has always required the review of related problems.

Problems Associated with Student-led Conferences

Implementing student-led conferences has required change. Change has not been an easy accomplishment. Marilyn Haring, Dean of the School of Education at Purdue University, stated, "Change is always hard, even when it's for the best" ("Add Students," 2000, p. 7). Teachers who are not familiar with student-led conferences have raised many questions regarding the change from traditional parent-teacher conferences. A sixth grade teacher discussed the concept of student-led conferences with his teaching team, and he became aware of their increasing frustration level. "There was apprehension and concern about the process" (Kinney, Munroe, & Sessions, 2000, p. v). To explain these changes, educators have found the need for training.

Training teachers to implement a new teaching strategy has always been a concern in education. The process has been found to be time-consuming and costly. However, training has been determined to be very critical in developing teachers' expertise regarding new ideas (McGill-Franzen, Allington, Yokoi, & Brooks, 1999). Teachers have needed the opportunity to

learn about student-led conferences, to discuss the strategy with other colleagues, and to review the new concept.

After learning about student-led conferences, teachers have become aware of a time issue. A lot of time and effort has been needed to prepare students, parents, and teachers for conferences (Conderman, Hatcher, & Ikan, 1998). This high amount of preparation has involved training students to lead a conference. Some teachers have questioned if this was an " . . . efficient use of instructional time" (Taylor, 1999, p. 80). Others have discussed the need for educating families about student-led conferences and the time needed to adequately communicate the changes.

Parents have voiced concerns about the new conferencing style. As mentioned by Bailey and Guskey (2001), "The idea of students leading a conference may provoke some reluctance on the part of parents" (p. 62). These concerns from parents have hinged mostly on the change of the leadership role between teacher and student. The change of roles left some parents questioning the accuracy of their child's self-evaluation. "Parents still feel a need for more feedback from the teachers" (Shannon, 1997, p. 49). Other parents were reluctant to openly discuss specific issues in the presence of their children (Santa, 1995). Teachers have learned to be flexible and to communicate with parents who need more assurances about their child's progress in school.

Flexibility, awareness of parent needs, preparation of students, training of teachers, and accepting change have been problems associated with student-led conferences. To help teachers deal productively with these problems, educators have suggested guidelines for the implementation of student-led conferences.

CHAPTER 3

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES

Developing Guidelines

The success of student-led conferences is dependent on effectively implementing the roles of teachers, students, and parents. Working as a team, these individuals can create an educational environment where communication, responsibility, and self-evaluation promote life-long learning. A set of guidelines is necessary for the implementation of successful student-led conferences. The following suggestions can be utilized by teachers, students, and parents to ensure the success of student-led conferences.

1. Introduce the Idea of Student-led Conferences to Teachers, Students, and Parents.

Teachers, students, and parents need to be informed of the concept of student-led conferences. "The first step in making the transition to student-led conferences is preparing everyone involved in the process" (Shannon, 1997, p. 47). Teachers, students, and parents need time to ask questions and to raise concerns relating to student-led conferences. These individuals need opportunities to make comparisons between traditional parent-teacher conferences and student-led conferences. "For the project to be a success, there must be time to discuss with teachers, students, and parents the advantages and disadvantages of the student's assuming a leadership role . . ." (Little & Allan, 1989, pp. 210-211). Teachers, students, and parents need adequate time to digest new concepts relating to student-led conferences. Teachers, students, and parents should strive for ongoing communication to keep a high level of involvement in the process of implementing student-led conferences.

2. Train Teachers, Students, and Parents to Implement Student-led Conferences.

Appropriate training of teachers, students, and parents is crucial to the success of implementing student-led conferences. Dr. Richard Stiggins, head of the Assessment Training Institute based in Portland, Oregon, observed that the idea of student-led conferences ". . . takes careful study and preparation, and an up-front investment in professional development" (Paglin, 1996, p. 19). This training for all individuals needs to be an on-going process throughout the school year (Cleland, 1999). Training must be made a priority for the successful implementation of student-led conferences.

Staff training should be made available for teachers to further their study of student-led conferences. Teacher training should involve discussion on creating a classroom environment necessary for student-led conferences. Austin (1994) stressed the need for a welcoming classroom. "If I want my students to learn and be actively involved, I must create a non-threatening environment for each child" (p. 8). In addition, vocabulary related to student-led conferences should be taught and used regularly so students and teachers can converse in a common language. A shared vocabulary will further aid teachers and students in the development of a classroom community (Austin, 1994). In such a classroom, students will learn to work cooperatively and will learn to value each other. As a result, students and teachers will learn to respect each other. "Respect for each other is the cornerstone for a caring classroom community. . . . If students respect themselves, they can become full participants in the learning process by taking the risk of discussing their learning with their parents, including areas where they are the most proud and places where they feel dissatisfied" (Lenski, Riss, & Flickinger, 1996, pp. 24-25). Respectful relationships give students confidence to begin evaluating their own work.

Students will learn to evaluate their work as they prepare for their roles in student-led conferences. Stiggins claimed, "For student-led conferences to work, it's essential that teachers be clear with students about what it takes to succeed" (Paglin, 1996, p. 19). Early in the school year, students should learn how to collect work for their portfolio. When developing and organizing portfolios, students engage themselves in reflection and self-evaluation of their work. According to Williams (2000), "Self-evaluation is a skill that must be taught" (p. 21). Guidance is needed from the teacher for students to successfully develop their own portfolios. Culver and Cousino (2000) suggested having teachers and students work together to set goals for collecting needed work samples. Students should reflect on their work and then discuss their portfolio contents with the teacher and other students. "Students need to learn how to reflect on their learning, evaluate their progress, and communicate this information to their parents in a conference situation. . . . Through carefully organized experiences in guided participation, students learn the skills to manage this complex event" (Lenski et al., 1996, p. 24). This practice in sharing portfolios will allow students to feel comfortable when sharing their work with parents during conferences.

Students should extend invitations to parents requesting their attendance at conferences. Teachers should also send letters or make phone calls to parents providing conference information (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). Teachers should also explain to parents and students what a typical student-led conference looks like. Parents' and students' concerns, fears, and questions should be discussed. To alleviate student fears, teachers need to allow time for students to practice student-led conferences. "The practice conference gives students the opportunity to explain everything to an adult . . . who is not a parent. The practice conference builds confidence

and the ability to discuss personal learning" (Austin, 1994, p. 61). With adequate practice, students will feel confident conducting student-led conferences.

3. Create a Welcoming Environment Conducive to Implementing Student-led Conferences.

Student-led conferences should be conducted in student classrooms. "The elementary classroom provides a perfect backdrop for the student-led conference" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 50). The environment should be inviting to parents. They should see a clean and well-organized classroom, centered on student learning. "The classroom should be child centered, attractive, and inviting. It should reflect the individual personalities of the students; the learning that has taken place over the marking period; and an emphasis on quality work and quality standards" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 50). Teachers should display student work around the room to make students' work visible for parents.

When parents and students arrive for conferences, steps should be taken to allow families to feel welcome in the classroom. Refreshments should be served and introductions should be made between families and the teacher. While sharing refreshments, students should lead parents in a tour around the room. Austin (1994) found that room tours conducted by students created ". . . an easy way for students to enter the role of expert" (p. 67). Room tours, refreshments, and relaxing conversation prepare students and parents for conferences.

Students and parents should situate themselves at tables that have been arranged to accommodate private family discussions. As the conference begins, students should share their portfolio with parents. Remembering prior practice rehearsals allows students to confidently lead parents through the conference. If desired, scripts or prompts could be used to help students work through conference materials (Conderman et al., 1998). Plenty of time should be allowed for students to share their work and to discuss parent questions.

Teachers should allow for scheduling conflicts and should be flexible when scheduling student-led conferences. Bailey and Guskey (2001) have suggested that teachers brainstorm possible conflicting situations before scheduling student-led conferences and provide solutions for dealing with different situations. As a result, teachers will be prepared to handle conflicts, and student-led conferences will be implemented successfully.

4. Evaluate Student-led Conferences through Teacher, Student, and Parent Feedback.

An evaluation phase must be present in the process of implementing student-led conferences. "Reflection is the last component in the student-led conferencing process and undoubtedly one of the most important" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 91). Teachers, students, and parents should all contribute towards evaluating conferences. Hubert (1989) stated, "Evaluate the conference, and seek input from all participants in the interest of making improvements" (p. 30). Evaluation techniques differ among parents, students, and teachers.

Teachers should evaluate the entire process of student-led conferences. "Most teachers need time to step back and reflect over the events leading up to and including the student-led conferences" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 95). Reflections made before, during, and after student-led conferences should lead to the improvement of future student-led conferences. "One of the best reasons for carefully evaluating the process is to promote teacher self-reflection and self-assessment" (Bailey & Guskey, 2001, p. 90). When completing the evaluation process, teachers should consider the needs of parents and students, striving to make student-led conferences meaningful to parents and students.

Students also need to spend time reflecting on completed conferences. "It brings a formal closure to the process and provides a step toward the next conference" (Austin, 1994, p. 76). Teachers should have students share their thoughts on the conference process through

written evaluations or oral discussions. Austin (1994) stated her expectations for student evaluations. "I want the students to carefully reflect on their actions during the conference with the purpose of identifying what went well for them and determining anything they need to change next time" (p. 75). The task of self-evaluation provides students the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning. "It is this self-analysis during the reflection process that enables students to set goals for future improvement and motivates them to become self-directed learners" (Benson & Barnett, 1999, p. 94). Student comments provide valuable information to teachers.

Other valuable comments relating to student-led conferences come from parents. "Feedback received from parents can . . . be very beneficial for improving the process" (Kinney et al., 2000, p. 45). Benson and Barnett (1999) suggested having parents write reflections in letter format to students. "This type of response from the parents . . . is more useful to the student. In fact, students treasure these letters" (p. 92). According to Bailey and Guskey (2001), "Parents like to share their opinions, and they appreciate a teacher's willingness to reflect and make changes" (p. 90). Parents can offer different perspectives and innovative ideas to teachers on how to alter student-led conferences to make the experience meaningful.

CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The intent of this study was to examine the literature concerning the effectiveness of student-led conferences and to present guidelines for conducting effective student-led conferences. The paper addressed four questions to accomplish this purpose.

1. Who are the participants in student-led conferences?

Participants in student-led conferences have consisted of the teacher, the student, and the parent. Roles and responsibilities have been suggested for each individual (Austin, 1994; Benson & Barnett, 1999; Paulson & Paulson, 1994). Teachers have been placed in the role of observer. Students have been forced to take a leadership role. Parents have been encouraged to take the role of listener. When teachers, students, and parents successfully fulfill their roles, student-led conferences have provided many educational benefits.

2. What are the benefits of student-led conferences?

Benefits of student-led conferences have affected teachers, students, and parents. Teachers have taken the opportunity to listen to students and see learning through each student's viewpoint (Bailey & Guskey, 2001). As a result, teachers have been better able to distinguish needed areas of learning for students. Students have gained a voice in their education and have been allowed to communicate their learning needs. Students have also been given the opportunity to assess their work and evaluate their learning (Servis, 1999). As a result, educators have noted students' increased seriousness about their work, students' increased responsibility about their learning, and students' increased production of higher quality work (Picciotto, 1999; Ricci, 2000; Servis, 1999; Shannon 1997). Students have been encouraged to share this learning

process with parents. Parents have noticed positive changes in their child's attitude toward learning (Anthony et al., 1991; Rampelt, 1995; Ricci, 2000; Servis, 1999; Taylor, 1999). As a result, communication has increased between parents and students (Countryman & Schroeder, 1996; Little & Allan, 1989). In addition, educators have pleasantly reported the improved relations between home and school (Culver & Cousino, 2000; Picciotto, 1999; Ricci, 2000; Taylor, 1999). Furthermore, student-led conferencing has resulted in less frustration and stress for teachers, students, and parents (Austin, 1994; Picciotto, 1999; Santa, 1995; Shannon, 1997). Teachers, students, and parents have greatly benefited from the implementation of student-led conferences.

3. What are the problems associated with student-led conferences?

Although educators have pointed out numerous benefits with the implementation of student-led conferences, the process has not gone without problems. The process of implementing student-led conferences has required change, and change has not been an easy accomplishment (Kinney et al., 2000). Teachers have needed training to implement student-led conferences. This training has been found to be time-consuming and costly (Conderman et al., 1998; Taylor, 1999). Students and parents have voiced concerns about the new conferencing style regarding the change in leadership roles (Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Santa, 1995; Shannon, 1997). To effectively deal with these problems, educators have suggested guidelines for the implementation of student-led conferences.

4. What are the guidelines for conducting student-led conferences?

A set of guidelines is necessary for the implementation of successful student-led conferences. The first step is to introduce the idea of student-led conferences to teachers, students, and parents (Little & Allan, 1989; Shannon, 1997). Allow adequate time for the new

concept to be digested, and encourage ongoing communication between teachers, students, and

parents to keep involvement high during the process of implementing student-led conferences.

Next, train teachers, students, and parents to implement student-led conferences. Teacher

training should involve discussion on appropriate learning environments (Austin, 1994; Lenski et

al., 1996). Student training should include strategies for self-assessment and time to practice

student-led conferences (Austin, 1994; Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Culver & Cousino, 2000; Lenski

et al., 1996; Paglin, 1996; Williams, 2000). Following proper training, teachers, students, and

parents will be prepared to create a welcoming environment conducive to implementing student-

led conferences. Finally, student-led conferences should be evaluated through teacher, student,

and parent feedback. Evaluation techniques differ among teachers, students, and parents (Austin

1994; Bailey & Guskey, 2001; Benson & Barnett, 1999; Hubert, 1989; Kinney et al., 2000).

These guidelines should be utilized to ensure the success of student-led conferences.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Student-led conferences are an invaluable assessment tool in education.

2. Teachers, students, and parents play important roles in the implementation of student-led

   conferences.

3. The success of implementing student-led conferences requires proper training for teachers,

   students, and parents.

4. The implementation of student-led conferences leads to increased teacher awareness of

   students' learning, to increased student responsibility for learning, and to increased parent

   involvement with students' learning.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested based on the review of literature:

1. Educators should make the implementation of student-led conferences a priority in their classrooms.

2. Proper training is necessary for teachers, students, and parents to successfully implement student-led conferences.

3. Educators should allow students to take the leadership role in their learning and should provide students with self-assessment strategies.

4. Further research studies are needed to understand the educational benefits of implementing student-led conferences.

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