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Student-Led Conferences: An Alternative Reporting Method

Cherie Taylor-Patel

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
The University of Auckland, 2011
ABSTRACT

Student-led conferences, an alternative reporting method, have been used in primary and intermediate schools for several years, both in New Zealand and overseas. This thesis examines the extent to which student-led conferences are effective as a reporting method, how they change teachers’ practice, and their impact on the development of student competencies in reporting. It is the argument of this thesis that student-led conferences can be effective if there is clarity around four conditions of reporting if teachers have sufficient knowledge and understanding of assessment and reporting as they link to class-based teaching, and learning that result in student competencies in assessment and reporting being developed.

From this study, a conceptual framework and four-stage audit and evaluation tool to assess the effectiveness of student-led conferences based upon school, teacher, and student capacity has been developed.

This thesis was developed using an embedded multiple case study design. Within two case studies there are three sources of evidence: Year 3-6 students, their parents, and teachers. Results showed teacher and parent expectations in each case study differed and that some conditions of reporting were met in each case study. There were high levels of variation in teachers’ levels of understanding of assessment within and between schools, and students’ knowledge and understanding of assessment information and ability to articulate the information about reporting, also varied within and between schools. Differences found were attributed to school practices around assessment and reporting, teachers’ ‘Assessment Literacy’ levels and the extent to which they had been effective in developing students’ understanding of their learning and skills to articulate this to parents.

To successfully implement student-led conferences, schools need to align professional development, effective teaching practice, assessment, and reporting systems to student-centred pedagogy, and be willing to redefine the roles of students and parents in the reporting process. From this study, a conceptual framework and four-stage audit and evaluation tool to assess the effectiveness of student-led conferences based upon school, teacher, and student capacity has been developed.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Special thanks to my school and my wonderful extended network of colleagues and friends, whom have all stepped up when needed to accommodate a principal researcher who wanted to ‘do it all’. You are a truly special ‘community of learners’ that I am so proud to be part of. Kaku aroha nui ki a koe.

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And finally, I hope, now the thesis is done, that there will be more time to begin to give back to you all.
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