

The Use of Student-Facing Surveys in the Classrooms of Teacher Candidates to Advance Teacher Preparation Practice

Section I: Content

Statement of the issue

Colleges of education are under close scrutiny in the eyes of policy makers and the general public for their ability to prepare “effective teachers.” In a recent press release, The White House announced plans to grade teacher preparation programs in order to assure “all children in America with the opportunity to get a world-class education,” (The White House, 2014). While the details of this plan are yet to be worked out, evaluating the effectiveness of program graduates is at the core. This begs the question of how effectiveness is measured.

Traditionally, the effectiveness of teacher candidates within a program is measured by their coursework as they advance through the program in addition to classroom observations during their student teaching. In addition to these two typical measures, this large Southwestern state university has started to use student surveys in the classrooms of its teacher candidates to offer another unique perspective to how effectiveness is evaluated. This is not only useful to teacher candidates and program administrators; it is a timely response to the move to incorporate student surveys into the teacher preparation evaluation model. In fact, the Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation approved new standards for accreditation in fall 2013. Among these is the requirement that teacher preparation programs measure the effectiveness of pre-service teachers through multiple methods *including student surveys*. Standard 4.2 states: “the provider demonstrates, through structured and validated observation instruments and student surveys, that completers effectively apply the professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions that the preparation experiences were designed to achieve,” (CAEP, 2013).

In addition to responding to new accrediting standards, student surveys offer a valuable and valid perspective. Research by Ferguson (2010) studied student surveys with in-service teachers and found “student responses are reliable, valid and stable over time at the classroom level” and “are a high-potential mechanism for incorporating students’ voices in massive numbers into school, district, state and national efforts to improve teaching and learning in elementary, middle and high schools.” While several states and districts have begun to use student surveys as one measure of evaluating the effectiveness of in-service teachers, their use is not yet the norm with pre-service teachers. Despite the new CAEP standard, institutions are currently on their own to figure out how to fulfill this requirement in ways that are both valid and efficient.

Because of this, a large southwest state university is taking the lead in using student surveys as one component of pre-service teacher evaluation. Researchers at this public university have designed a 3rd-8th grade student survey to be administered in the classrooms of the teacher preparation program’s teacher candidate classrooms while they are completing their year-long student teaching residency. The survey provides teacher candidates with information about their practice and prepares them for the way they will be evaluated as in-service teachers once they enter the field.

The results of this student-facing survey provide valuable information to program leaders regarding overall program improvement needs and individual focus areas for differentiated teacher candidate support. We see the use of student surveys with pre-service teachers as an innovative practice with great potential value to the teacher candidates and ultimately, the students they serve. Thus, researchers developed this survey, its administration protocols and individualized reporting system in order to address this issue in a way that is 1) free to low-cost, 2) utilizing current teachers college assets, 3) sustainable in its administration and distribution

protocols, 4) practical in its time and effort investment, and 5) replicable in other institutions with little background training and/or knowledge. This proposed conference presentation will explain the rationale for using student surveys as well as their value to teacher candidates and program leaders. This will be followed by sharing lessons learned by our institution around implementation and results reporting.

Literature review

In response to the need of preparing effective teachers, multiple methods of teacher evaluation have gained popularity over time and have sparked much heated national, state and even local debates. When it comes to considering which method is best, many have opted for a multiple measures option, which may encompass principal, parent, peer, and student surveys in addition to direct observations and student growth measures. The benefit and main reason for the current trend to utilize student survey data is that students can easily be considered the main consumer of teacher service and without a doubt have the most contact with them (Goe, Bell, & Little, *Approaches to Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness: A Research Synthesis*, 2008). Student surveys are also gaining momentum in use due to the simple fact that a large percentage of teachers are excluded from using other forms of evaluation (such as VAMs or growth percentages) because they teach either subjects or grades that are excluded from standardized tests which both measures are calculated from. Additionally, many other forms of evaluation do not offer the ability to bring about the kind of immediate change student surveys can stimulate. The results of student surveys can be used to offer individualized professional development plans for improving teacher practice, and if offered early enough in the year, can respond to the immediate needs of the students in the classroom right now.

Of the literature that exists on student surveys and their validity in predicting teacher effectiveness, the most comprehensive studies have been on student ratings of college professors. These studies suggest that student ratings are both stable and reliable measures of instructional quality of professors (Aleamoni, 1999). However, the research on the use of student surveys in the PK-12 education system is still growing. As far back as 1976 a study of K-12 students in Wyoming showed that student ratings of teachers were significant predictors of student achievement in reading while self-ratings, principal ratings, and principal evaluations were not (Wilkerson, Manatt, Rogers & Maughan, 2000). Recently, research funded by the Gates Foundation has shown 1) significant correlation between teachers' total scores from students on the survey and their value-added achievement on standardized tests and 2) reliability between different sections of a class taught by the same teacher (Balch, 2012).

Currently, only a handful of states utilize student surveys in teacher evaluation and although the majority of these are still in piloting stages (Burniske & Meibaum, 2012, p.3) they are drawing national attention (Balch, 2012). Moving to the pre-service setting, even fewer teacher preparation programs are utilizing student surveys. In fact, the survey and its protocols developed by researchers here were aided by the pioneering work of the Texas Tech University's College of Education's survey administration process. While the number of institutions using student surveys may currently be low, the potential to use them to 1) prepare teacher candidates for the realities of how they will be evaluated, 2) help them reflect and improve upon their own practice, and 3) help teacher preparation programs reflect and improve upon their own preparation practices is clear.

Contribution, Strand III: The Curricular Imperative: Innovative Practices

This paper addresses the Strand III question of how beginning teacher success is defined, documented, and shared to enhance teacher candidate and student success, and to inform

educator preparation. Specifically, it adds to the current discussion of how to move the field of teacher preparation forward in using student surveys as one data source in a multi-measure evaluation of teacher candidates. The researchers will engage session participants in a discussion of the process used in designing a student survey that encompasses 4 major teaching frameworks (TAP, TAL, Danielson, and Marzano), the administration protocols set in place to assure reliability of the data-collection, and the results reporting process used to provide individualized reports to the teacher candidates in a timely manner. Researchers will also discuss how the results are being used by teacher candidates to identify areas of refinement in their own practice and how the results will be used by the teacher preparation program to identify areas that may need further development within the program itself to better meet the needs of the future educators it is producing.

Relevance

This paper serves to further the discussion around policy and successful practice for evaluating pre-service teachers. The discussion provides an opportunity to critically examine the role student surveys play in teacher preparation. This is a timely discussion as programs prepare to demonstrate this as part of the CAEP accreditation process moving forward. The effort by researchers has already affected policy at this teacher preparation institution where student surveys will be a program requirement for all teacher candidates. Additionally, this paper supports the sharing and replication of exemplary practice, as it will detail for participants obstacles overcome and recommendations for successful implementation of student surveys in a teacher preparation program.

Implication for Action

As mentioned, the potential of this work to improve the accountability measures for teacher preparation programs and policy surrounding it are clear. It also adds to the existing literature on student surveys for teacher evaluation, addressing a gap in the literature around how student surveys are used in the pre-service environment. At a program level, this work can inform changes in how teacher candidates are evaluated, how teacher candidates are prepared for the types of evaluation they will face as in-service teachers, and how teacher preparation programs prepare to meet accreditation standards. At an individual teacher candidate level, student surveys provide teacher candidates with an opportunity to consider the perspective of their learners along with the support from the university in developing a way to grow professionally based on this information. The results of this effort may result in changes to teacher program evaluation policy and more reflective (and hopefully better prepared) beginning teachers.

Section II: Outcomes and Methods

Learner/participant outcomes

The discussion around this paper will provide participants with an opportunity to critically examine the role that student surveys can play in a teacher preparation program. Participants will share ideas around teacher candidate evaluation methods, the use of student surveys at the pre-service level, and the possibilities student surveys may offer in their own programs. In addition, researchers will share challenges faced and solutions identified in our own development process and invite participants to brainstorm and troubleshoot to generate shared best practices.

Methods

This session will be discussion based and open to participant engagement throughout. Questions will be posed to engage participants in conversation during the session with a goal of refining our own current thinking and supporting new understanding among attendees of the issues surrounding the use of student surveys in a teacher preparation program.

References

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