What Are The Elements Of An Effective Student Survey System?
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Research Question:
What are the elements of an effective student survey system?

Rationale:
As professionals, feedback is a crucial component of each workday. On average, a classroom teacher is asked to make an average of 1,500 decisions each day, each one based on the feedback and input of students, parents, administrators, legislators, and current best pedagogical practices. With so much relying on feedback, it is critical to analyze the feedback that is available to teachers and as we see the pendulum swing back and forth between evaluation systems that depend upon student and parent feedback, we must look at what elements comprise an effective student survey and feedback system.

Student surveys also referred to as Student Perception Surveys (SPSs) are currently being used across the country as one of the "multiple measures" included in formal teacher evaluations. These surveys are implemented with the intent to gather students' opinions about different elements of their teacher's attitude, disposition, and pedagogy.

Review of Literature:
According to Ferguson (2012), "They spend hundreds of more hours in each classroom than any observer ever will. Nonetheless, until now, school improvement efforts have seldom sought systematic student feedback at the classroom level (as opposed to the whole school level) in primary and secondary schools". Previous research has found that it is easy to automatically discredit the opinion of primary or secondary children. "For example, many current authoritative guides to teacher evaluation practice do not specific methods for including students. Very few school districts use systematic student input in their teacher assessment systems." (Peterson, 2000).
It is necessary to take a closer look at what feedback from students can be considered both valid and reliable and how this information can be efficiently collected. McGreal (1983) gave feedback about the construction of student survey items and advocated against weaker items such as "teacher knows subject matter" and "has favorites" in "distinction to better items such as "I get help when I need it" and "I feel my ideas are important". Furthermore, "It is important that students be asked to report things that they have directly experienced, for example, that the teacher provides them an opportunity to learn new things. It is equally important that students not be asked to report on issues they have not experienced". (Peterson, 2000).
As more research is conducted and more states are adopting teacher evaluation models that incorporate student surveys, we are learning that "well-constructed classroom-level student surveys are a low burden and high-potential mechanism for incorporating students' voices in massive numbers into our efforts to improve teaching and learning." (Ferguson, 2012).

Research-Methodology

The purpose of this research was to connect with educators who are currently working in the field of elementary public education about the feedback they wish to receive from their students as well as when it would be impactful to have this survey data shared with them. The benefits of identifying the specific types of questions teachers would like their students to answer about their teaching practices, are two-fold. One, teachers can have direct, meaningful feedback from their students about their practice and two, districts can use this data to provide meaningful professional development and support for teachers based on specific areas of growth that are identified.

The data collection was done over a period of two weeks through an anonymous Google Form. I chose to keep the form anonymous as I believe that teachers would be more willing to be vulnerable about their preferences during a period of time in which education professionals are still recovering from years of being the state government's scapegoat. This data sample included teachers with numerous years of experience as well as novice teachers. The questions included were based on Dr. Ronald Ferguson's Tripod Framework. The survey consisted of 15 items and a rating system where the participants were asked to rate each possible student survey item on a scale from effective to ineffective. The data collected from this survey could then be utilized to refine and develop a student survey system that works.

Data Analysis

The survey remained open for a period of two weeks and during that time received a total of 21 responses. Across the board, the questions relating to items within the realm of control of the teacher had an overall positive rating. For example, a question that read "My teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things" received a positive rating with 100% of participants determining that this would be an effective question to have on a student survey. Additionally, 100% of participants rated the question "my teacher gives us time to explain our ideas" as an effective survey item.

Furthermore, items that put the onus on the students and are not within the control of the classroom teacher received low ratings. An item which read "Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time" received a rating of 61.9% ineffective, 28.6% effective, and 9.5% unsure, and an item that read "the rules in our class help us learn" received a rating of 71.4% ineffective, 19% effective, and 9.6% unsure.

Items that focus on students' social-emotional wellbeing received mixed ratings. "I have enough supplies and materials to learn", an item designed to address the safety level of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs received a rating of 52.4% ineffective, 19% effective, and 28.6% unsure. Similarly, "This class is not too slow or too fast to learn" was rated 61.9% ineffective, 23,8% effective, and 14.3% unsure.

The items that were ranked the highest as being an effective piece of feedback from their students were "my teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in class", "my teacher takes time to summarize what we learn each day", "my teacher gives us time to explain our ideas", and "my teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things" with each question ranking between 95% to 100% effective.

As with all data sets, there are a few caveats to the interpretation of this data. The prevalent one being that this was conducted amongst elementary school teachers with the majority of the participants have taken several of the same professional development courses together over the

school year. This is an elementary school in a predominantly white neighborhood. The issues and trauma that these students carry with them to school each day are different than what one would encounter in a setting outside of this suburban one. It is likely that the trends that were identified here would not be replicated if the same set of items were given to teachers that work with middle or high schoolers.

Recommendations
From this data, it is clear that elementary school teachers want actionable feedback on the specific areas of their teaching that they have control over. More pointedly, the items determined to be rated the highest as viewed most effective were things that a teacher can *do*. Teachers want quantitative data about how often they are summarizing learning, allowing space for ideas to be shared, and demonstrating an understanding of how students feel. Based on these results, it should become a priority to provide a data-driven tool based on worthwhile feedback. Students should be asked things specifically about a teacher's pedagogy, with little to no questions about things that aren't under the direct control of the teacher (for example limited questions such as: " the rules help me learn" or "Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time").

   The questions ranked the highest were consistently ones taken directly from Ferguson's Tripod Framework. The recommendation made is that school districts make a genuine investment in adopting a student survey tool that closely models that of Ferguson's Tripod model and uses the areas identified from the student feedback to identify and provide meaningful professional development for teachers at each level. This can provide professional educators with a targeted set of skills to add to their pedagogy toolbox and in the long run, can provide teachers with more autonomy as they are able to attend professional development relevant to their needs. Most importantly, it can begin the process of rebuilding a system that includes much-needed respect for educators as the feedback gathered is used for targeted growth and is no longer used for punishment.

Bibliography

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Appendix A

Survey Questions
1. My teacher really tries to understand how students feel about things.
2. I know what I am supposed to do in class.
3. There is enough time for me to finish classwork.
4. My teacher gives us time to explain our ideas.
5. My teacher makes lessons interesting.
6. This class is not too noisy for learning.
7. If you don't understand something, my teacher explains it another way.
8. We have enough materials and supplies to learn.
9. My teacher takes the time to summarize what we learn each day.
10. This class is not too slow or fast to learn.
11. Our class stays busy and doesn't waste time.
12. The rules in our class help us learn.
13. Students in this class encourage one another to do well.
14. My teacher is good at answering our questions.
15. My teacher has several good ways to explain each topic that we cover in this class.