

## Using Student Surveys: Research Findings and Implications for Teaching and Learning

### A Forum

December 6, 2013

Rarely have student perspectives been used to inform the work of educators; however with more information available about what happens inside the classroom from students themselves, teachers and administrators can learn what needs to be done to improve classroom teaching and, therefore, the student experience. This forum focused on what we have learned from recent research on the use of classroom-level student surveys.

**Dr. Ronald F. Ferguson, Harvard University**, introduced the Tripod Project for School Improvement, which over the past decade has helped students communicate about their classroom experiences. Tripod surveys, available online or on paper, in multiple languages, and with refined implementation supports, have been used to survey over one million students in 2013 using three versions administered at various K-12 grade levels. Tripod surveys capture key dimensions of school life and teaching practice as students experience them. Results support strategic planning and priority setting by teachers, schools, and school systems. The surveys are grounded in theoretical and empirical work in education, psychology and in the study of organizations; and the conceptual model has been validated through an analysis of past survey results.

Patterns in student responses and achievement data have helped demonstrate that one way to improve student engagement and learning is to improve what teachers do. The survey's measures of effective teaching are organized into a framework named the "7Cs," which include care, captivate, confer, clarify, consolidate, challenge, and control (all supported by peer reviewed research). Through analyzing years of Tripod survey data, researchers have found the strongest predictor of value-added test score gains is students' reports of teacher control (followed by challenge, then clarify). The strongest predictors of interest in life-long learning are care, captivate, confer, and consolidate. All of these elements of effective teaching are critical. Dr. Ferguson presented findings of the 2010 Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) project, which employed the survey to rate classrooms and compared student achievement differences between classrooms that received different ratings. For example, a rating at the 25th versus the 75th percentile of the composite 7Cs ranking, predicted a difference of 4.8 months of learning per school year on state math tests and 2.3 months on state English tests. These findings demonstrate non-trivial differences in learning predicted by what students report they are experiencing in classrooms. In addition, variation is large inside most schools, indicating that we need to focus on teacher effectiveness at the classroom level, not simply the school level, to engage more students effectively and achieve desired outcomes.

**William Hileman, President, Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers**, discussed Pittsburgh Public Schools' (PPS) use of the Tripod Survey. In 2009, about 250 PPS classrooms took part in the MET Study. Use of the Tripod survey has grown each year, and in the 2013-14 school year it was proposed that student perception survey data be included in individual teacher summative ratings. The Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers has agreed to the inclusion of Tripod survey

results in teacher Career Ladder evaluations, but it has opposed the use of Tripod in summative evaluations. The Tripod survey is extremely useful to teachers as a tool for professional growth during the course of a school year.

There was a presentation of a short video about how **Paul Ronevich, Science Teacher, Pittsburgh Science and Technology Academy**, has used the Tripod survey to inform his teaching, and then Mr. Ronevich talked about how he has used Tripod surveys to make changes in his classroom practice. Mr. Ronevich has found the results of his students' Tripod surveys extremely useful in his professional growth. With prior teacher evaluation systems, he received little specific feedback that helped him improve his teaching. Now, with Tripod survey data he has very detailed information about what his students think about his classroom, and this has helped him to continually improve his teaching. One example provided was that students provided feedback related to the lack of summarizing at the conclusion of a lesson. Based on that feedback, Mr. Ronevich now includes a summary activity at the end of lessons, to assist students in consolidating their knowledge.

### **Questions and Answer Period**

*As districts and states are building new teacher evaluation systems, how would an ideal system look?*

Ferguson suggested in Years 1 and 2 districts provide teachers coaching on how feedback from a student survey is to be used and in Year 3 student survey data be used in teacher evaluation. This could provide some reassurance to teachers, while helping them ease into using this data to inform their practice.

Hileman indicated that the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers has worked very hard with PPS to thoughtfully represent a group of professionals and do the right thing for kids. With the current proposal, PPS will be using Tripod as a summative teacher rating, hopefully with four years of data with twice-a-year ratings.

*How does use of student surveys look at the school level, and how much buy-in is there across the school?*

Ronevich shared that within his school the use of the survey has led to increased information sharing about effective practices. The survey has led teachers to address key areas of their teaching in an attempt to improve student learning and student experience. And while many teachers have expressed concerns about students not taking the survey seriously, this rarely occurs, and the survey is designed to take this into consideration.