

Did I See What I Thought I Saw?

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Background That Led to Your Inquiry:

I am getting ready to begin my third year as the Eastern Greene High School principal. Prior to that I served as the middle school principal for 10 years. Every year I have been a principal, I have been the lone evaluator. I have not had anyone to review my evaluation or to “bounce” ideas off of. As I have changed buildings and levels I have been wondering if my observations and more specifically, my views of student engagement were accurate. Does my views of student engagement line-up with what the high school students see as positive student engagement? Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to look at how students see engagement in the classroom and how that compares to what I see.

Statement of Your Wondering:

With this purpose, I wondered how closely is my perception of student engagement in line with what students feel is positive engagement...especially at the high school level?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into my wondering, I added steps to how I conducted my observations of the teachers focusing directly on student engagement. During regular observations I developed a form that I used to take notes specifically on the engagement I witnessed and how effective I thought it was. I also scheduled additional 10-15 minute observations (unannounced) of almost every classroom and used the same form. The created form focused entirely on student engagement. Within a day or two I would call down three students (varying academic ability) from each class I observed to complete a form explaining what they thought of the engagement in the classroom. I also made it very clear to the students that their responses would remain confidential and I specifically ask them to complete it independently from their classmates. I wanted their own opinions not that of their friends.

Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of analyzing my data, two important things I learned included, 1) students want to be actively engaged with the material and 2) my general observations were fairly accurate on student engagement as compared to the observations of the students. The students and I completed similar type forms to represent our views of the engagement that happened in the classroom. I ask the students to complete a form with the following questions:

- What did you think of the teachers lesson today?
- Do you feel like you were engaged with the material and learning in the classroom? Why or why not?
- Did you like the activities?
- Which ones did you like best?
- Which ones did you like the least?
- How did this lesson and the level of student engagement differ compared to a normal day (if any at all)?

- If you could teach the class, what engaging activities would you like to do? The students were quite candid with their thoughts and opinions. Statements such as "the lesson was good, but it is tough to sit with the lights off for 20 minutes right after lunch" represent just one type of response that provided a great deal of insight. The students response also noted they picked up quickly when they were being given busy work. They were not against working hard if it was meaningful and engaging.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

After reflecting on the action research, I feel that my basic perceptions of student engagement are accurate but the students can still bring a valuable insight and thought into looking at engagement as a whole. I believe I will be a better at evaluations after this project. I also learned valuable information to help guide our school and the teachers to provide better and more engaging activities for the students. I hope to take aspects of this moving forward to drive professional development for the teachers.

References:

I really only used my self created forms and data from the student completed forms and my own evaluations.