Collaborative Implementation of Student Evaluations

A process designed through a collaborative effort that includes feedback by the specific stakeholders involved could be a way to address concerns over the validity of student evaluations. Creating ownership for the student survey instrument itself and the process of implementation may alleviate some teacher anxiety.

1. Train teachers, students, parents, and other stakeholders in the role and value of giving students voice. Discuss other ways your school can give students meaningful roles in school improvement efforts. Be sure to include a wide variety of student representation.

2. Form a collaborative implementation team. The team could be a representative from each department or grade level.

3. Create projected timelines. Two student evaluations, one in October and one in April or early May could be administered. If time limitations are present, teachers can administer their own October evaluations and an administrator can administer April evaluation. October student evaluations give teachers the opportunity to discuss evaluation results with students for clarification and give students the opportunity to view their role as partners in the midst of the process rather than just evaluators at the end. In May, administrators can have a summative goal setting discussion with teachers, including one based on student feedback.

4. Consider district or state teacher evaluation rubrics. Decide on constructs or values of the classroom and teacher instruction to be measured that would be the most beneficial to teachers and the most applicable for student input. The implementation process including the survey tool and type and timelines can also be discussed.

5. With individual school needs in mind, a student survey can be developed beginning with a review of research-based survey questions. Using student-friendly language and positive phrasing, initial questions can be drafted. Questions should only measure one construct at a time. If the school will be purchasing a survey instrument, these meetings could review the options. A student self-reflection piece to add to the student survey can also be created.
6. Then student, teacher, administrator, parent, and district feedback on the initial draft and the implementation plan can be collected and brought back to the implementation team. School community councils or PTA’s can be a source of parent feedback. Student councils as well as polling students from a variety of different school groups or classes can be a method for receiving student input. Clarifying student interpretation of questions to original intent can be an important part of these discussions. Collaboration or departmental meetings can help to facilitate faculty input.

7. A second draft and implementation plan can then be created by the implementation team and presented to the faculty. Making any additional adjustments, the survey tool, questions, and method of implementation for the first trial can be set.

8. Before administering the survey, the administration can plan training for the student body on the purpose and role of feedback and the value of student and teacher partnership. This is also a valuable workplace skill. Model, demonstrate, address what if’s, discuss sample questions, show examples, teach the value of being specific, let students ask questions. Explain that an evaluation containing crude comments or personal attacks is more of a reflection on the person writing the evaluation than the one being evaluated. Counselors and other office staff can help. The presentation could be a live video feed or a filmed presentation shown in classrooms. Grade level meetings or assemblies may also be used. Once this becomes part of regular practice, only incoming students will need to be trained.

9. Administering the student survey on-line using a survey instrument tool is time saving and facilitates data collection as well as a user friendly display of the feedback for teachers, chart, graphs, etc.

10. Before teachers have access to the results, the administration can hold training for the faculty on how to interpret and use student feedback.

11. Teachers can view survey results and reflect on feedback as well as ask questions and clarify input with students in a safe classroom discussion.

12. Teachers can then submit a goal or reflection summary to building administrators. This could be in an exit interview where teachers come prepared to discuss his or her student evaluations with a specific goal in mind. An
important evaluative tool for an administrator could be a teacher’s response or level of reflection to his or her student evaluations.

13. Collaboration teams or focus groups can also discuss the results with administrators so that school wide or departmental patterns may also inform additional school-wide goals.

14. Teachers can discuss ways to further embed regular methods for obtaining student feedback into instructional techniques, after units, projects, tests, etc. and also ways to hold discussions about changes the teacher has made due to prior student feedback.

15. The process can be evaluated at the end of the first year again involving all stakeholders to make any needed changes. Additional student surveys for administrators, coaches, club advisors, or other specific school needs could also be added. The process then can be reviewed as needed as it becomes embedded in the teacher evaluation process and school improvement plan.

The new evaluation process could be supported as learning by doing approach while new behaviors are given the chance to develop and old ones slowly melt rather than forcing teachers and administrators into a massive melt-down. The whole process can not only model for but also include students in using a collaborative approach to create change and a win-win community partnership that improves student learning.
Training Students to Give Quality Feedback

1. Everyone has a desire to know the answer to the question, “How am I doing?” Students and teachers alike need feedback to feel good about their progress and to understand specifically how to improve. Ask students to think about the kind of responses they would like to receive to help them improve as well as to let them know where they excel.

2. Define constructive feedback for students.

   Constructive- adjective - serving a useful purpose; tending to build up

   Synonyms: useful, helpful, and productive

   Feedback - information about a person's performance of a task, used as a basis for improvement.

   Psychologist, Dr. John Lund, in his bestselling book, *How to Hug a Porcupine*, states that “There is no such thing as constructive criticism.” Feedback is much more powerful. Feedback and suggestions for improvement are much more beneficial and actually have a much greater chance of facilitating the desired response. Never attack a person’s self-worth or character when giving feedback. Never name call. Dr. Lund defined toxic behavior or porcupine behavior as “any word, deed, or action which detracts from you being your best self or hinders others from becoming their best selves.” How a person gives feedback actually says as much about that person as it does about the person receiving the feedback. Let students know that abusive criticism will be deleted, but specific, productive feedback is welcomed.

3. Feedback should be given in an analytical, specific way. Model this for students and ask them to try it. As in all good writing, students need to have evidence that supports the feedback they give others. Show examples of vague feedback (“This should be more interesting.”) and clear feedback (“Lessons should spend less time using worksheets telling us about cell division and more time on letting us look at cells, see examples, talk about what we see, and then compare and talk about them with a partner). Let students point out which kind of feedback is most useful. If students make a statement, they need to back it up with a specific example of the behavior that they would like to see changed or what they would like to see happen instead.
4. See the article *Are You Good at Giving Feedback? An Exercise in Clapping* by Nancy Darling (2010) in Psychology Today for a very specific scenario called the “Clapping Contest” to teach students the art of giving specific feedback. Elementary students could even act out the scenario.

http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/thinking-about-kids/201002/are-you-good-giving-feedback-exercise-in-clapping

5. Frame the comment section in student surveys so that students are able to be more organized in their feedback. Explain to students that these frames are prompts and should be addressed as they would a writing prompt, staying on prompt, making statements, and backing the statement up with specific details. For example, the student open-ended comments section rather than just saying, “comments,” could use one of the following prompts or a combination.

*What was the best thing about this class?*

* What are some suggestions you have to help your teacher improve?*

* What is the most important thing you learned in this class?*

*What could your teacher do to help increase learning?*

*What parts of this class helped you learn best?*

* What specific advice would you give to help your teacher improve your learning in this course?*

6. Encourage teachers to train students in the principles of feedback in self-reflection and peer reviews. Students then see feedback as a positive, partnering method to create improvement. The ability to reflect, evaluate, and analyze are key skills for students to develop. Students should be given opportunities to be able to review and reflect on their own work and that of fellow students. Developing students’ abilities to participate in peer review and self-reflect on their own work deepens learning and improves their ability to give quality feedback.
Training Teachers to Interpret and Use Student Evaluations

*Video Clip to use in faculty training
https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/improve-teaching-with-student-feedback

1. Read the positive comments first!

2. Look for patterns in students’ comments—identify trends. Note what you have done well and what needs improvement.

3. Take your experience into account. If you are new to teaching, the school, or even the subject or grade, you may still be in a learning curve.

4. Take the context and characteristics of your subject or class or particular students into account. Research shows that student evaluations often are more positive in courses that are smaller rather than larger, and elective rather than required. Also, evaluations are usually more positive in courses in which students tend to do well. This will help you to see your situation realistically while still being able to reflect on the feedback to look for insights to help you improve.

5. When dealing with negative student feedback: Know that almost all teachers receive some negative feedback.

6. Understand that contradictory or opposing comments do not necessarily prove that the feedback is unreliable, but rather are a normal part of the process of receiving feedback from real people who naturally will differ in opinions and learning preferences. You do not necessarily have to throw both out, but look at them individually as possibilities for differentiation of learning or of an opportunity for further conversation.

7. Allow yourself to acknowledge that student feedback can feel hurtful or make you angry and certainly unappreciated, but also may give you insight into student perspective or motivation. Pat yourself on the back for loving your students anyway!
8. Notice comments that make you stop and think or give you ideas.

9. Have a positive, open discussion with students about their feedback, while still not asking for names or downgrading any particular response, and express your appreciation for their feedback. Ask them clarifying questions. Ask for further suggestions. Give clarifications and then ask if your clarifications have helped. Why or why not? Make sure students know that you are always looking for ways to improve.

10. Make references throughout the year to specific ways you have improved or ideas you have implemented based on student feedback.

11. Implement self-reflection and peer review into class design. Teach the skills of giving feedback.

12. Call for input and feedback throughout the year, before or after tests, units, projects, homework, group work, etc.

13. Be creative in using a variety of methods in facilitating student choice and appealing to student interest in “real to their world” applications.

14. Use regular formative assessment techniques involving student feedback to check for understanding and inform instruction.

15. Build a collaborative team atmosphere in the classroom of students and teacher working together to create a learning environment.

16. Student feedback may be overwhelming. Set one or two goals to work on or experiment with.

17. Remember they are young!

Some material adapted from: