

# Student Led Parent Conferences

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# **The traditional parent-teacher conference**

- Held by the teacher
- Offers information to the parent
- According to Swedish school law
  - the student should be present
  - there should be a written formative documentation
- An alternative is presented with the student led parent conference

# A qualitative study

- 11 group interviews with 20 students, 16 parents, 12 teachers, and 9 leaders
- A check-up survey, all students (157 +156)
- The two participating schools, Village School and Small-town School have practiced student led parent conferences for five and ten years
- Interviews tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed
- Relevant literature helped forming the questions and to analyze the material

# Questions

- How do the respondents describe the effects of the student led parent conferences, compared to the teacher led conferences, in the areas of information, student's educational and social development, on interaction and cooperation among parent-student-teacher, and on conference procedure?
- How (if so) do leaders and teachers describe that the student led parent conferences have changed teachers' and the schools' pedagogical planning, the schools' results (national tests, grades), and administration?
- What differences (if any) can be found when comparing the two schools' descriptions of the effects of the student led parent conferences?

# The teacher led conference in previous research

- Even when the student is present, the parent and the teacher do the talking (Hofvendahl, 2006)
- The dialogue concerns the present situation, rather than goals (Tholander & Norrby, 2008; Lindh-Munther & Lindh, 2005)
- The teacher tend to concentrate on the student's character rather than on knowledge (Hofvendahl, 2006)
- The teacher tend to focus on reading the documentation rather than having a processing dialogue (Hofvendahl, 2010)
- The teacher focus on the student's shortcomings (Hackmann et al, 1998; Hofvendahl, 2006; MacLure et al, 2000)
- The conference and its documentation become means to show the student expected ways to behave properly (Granath, 2008; Mårell-Olsson, 2012)

# The student led parent conference

- Prepared as a thematic unit 1-2 weeks
  - the student self-assess
  - student and teacher discuss the assessment, compare to teacher's assessment, and decide on goals
  - the conference is practiced with a classmate
- The conference
  - the student present the assessments, suggested goals, and a portfolio to his/her parents
  - the teacher join the conference in time for deciding the goals
  - the conference is evaluated



# Some voices...

- *Student: It becomes clear to me what I want to develop and what I can actually accomplish. I'm forced to consider what effort I'm prepared to put into the work. It's not the teacher's matter, it's mine.*
- *Parent: I can pretty quick see the core, strengths and weaknesses of my child. I see what I should bring forward... I have understood the goals better. /--/ I think that the children will get a very clear picture of what they know and need to practice. Just as I see the core.*



# Conclusions

- The students understand, describe, and make strategic decisions about their development
  - Formative and understandable documentation is imperative
- The conferences are more informative, have higher pedagogical qualities, and will introduce a more egalitarian division of power
- Teacher and parent roles change to be more cooperative
  - necessary to introduce new parents, and to recurrently inform and educate them over the years
  - the teacher's ability to understand why different methodological steps are carried out affects how the conferences are carried out and hence the effects on student learning
  - important to teach the teachers about pedagogical theory connected to the conferences
- There are some school differences in the material
  - at Village School (five years of practice) not all teachers can handle the formative assessment
  - at Small-town School all teachers work formatively over the year



# A European perspective

From a European perspective, student led conferences offer students, parents, and teachers a better chance to develop crucial information as well as superior education.

