

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS
OF RESPONSES OF STUDENTS AND PARENTS TOWARD
STUDENT-LED CONFERENCES
1997

MASTER'S THESIS

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Approved by:

Signature of Advisor

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We wish to thank . . .

Our terrific families for their patience, understanding and support.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Many Americans revel in the unofficial national pastime of public education bashing. Public education has been blamed for everything from the high drop-out rate to low self-esteem in students. Newspaper headlines point fingers at schools with low proficiency test scores. Television pictures American youth as mindless, irresponsible, "gun-toting brutes". Everyone seems to have a solution. Various agencies have lobbied for or have enacted laws as a measure to remedy the situation. Statewide tests and extra phonics courses for teachers are two "fingers-in-the-dike" fixes. Teacher-initiated grassroots movements have evolved as well (Michener, 1989). Among them are whole language, alternative assessment, portfolios, anecdotal records, and student-led conferences. Whether these changes are effective or just a fad, they involve more work than teaching by the book (Atwell, 1987; Fox, 1993; Potter, 1992; Scanland and Heiden, 1996; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994).

One of these changes, student-led conferences (SLC), does require more teacher time and effort than the traditional parent-teacher conference. Many studies show that SLC's may raise student self-esteem, may make them more responsible for their own learning, and may increase student-parent interaction (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994). However, the teacher must confer with each student several times during each quarter to set goals, check on these goals, and prepare what will be said during the conference (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992; Scanland and Heiden, 1996; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994). Is this extra effort and reflection worth the time and teacher commitment?

Over sixty years ago John Dewey (1938) suggested:

There should be brief intervals of time for quiet reflection provided for even the young. But they are periods of genuine reflection only when they follow after times of more overt action and are used to organize what has been gained in periods of activity in which the hands and other parts of the body beside the brain are used. . . The old phrase "stop and think" is sound psychology. (pp. 63-64)

It appears that John Dewey would have agreed with the concept of SLC's. But will parents and students who are witnessing this century's new concept of conferring?

This study explored the concept of SLC's by surveying the attitudes of parents and students who have participated in them. Comparing these attitudes to existing research provided interesting results. Strengths and weaknesses of SLC's were examined by studying the research. This study noted similarities and differences of attitudes by gender and age.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study was to analyze the responses of students and parents opinions toward the concept of student-led conferences.

Assumptions

In order to carry out this study, the authors needed to make several assumptions. First, the authors assumed that the responses to the opinion survey were honest. The authors also assumed that the testing instrument was reliable in measuring the intended attitudes.

Limitations

There are many limitations to this analysis. SLC's were a new concept to this school district. Parents may be more comfortable with parent-teacher conferences and may feel that the teacher is trying to get out of his or her job. Students must develop new personal assessment skills with this new method. The teacher prompted the students

whenever they could not remember what to say. If there was a student having severe academic or behavioral problems, the parent and the teacher met later for a private conference. Moreover, the design of this survey is a limitation in itself. Those being surveyed would certainly have more opinions than those on the instrument itself. Finally, opinions change over time. This survey showed initial opinions of SLC's.

Furthermore, sample size was a limiting factor. Although one-hundred percent of the students completed the survey, there were only fourteen second grade girls, ten second grade boys, thirteen fifth grade girls, and twelve fifth grade boys. Only eighty-one percent of the eligible parents responded, even though Teacher A and B included reminders in their parent newsletters. Nineteen out of twenty-five (seventy-five percent) eligible second grade parents responded, while eighteen out of twenty-one (eighty-six percent) eligible fifth grade parents responded. Of the total parental responses, fifteen were male and twenty-two were female.

Because of the small sample size this survey cannot be used to generalize to any other population.

Definition of Terms

Portfolio. This term was used to refer to a folder of selected assessment records collected over time to help document a child's progress or competencies. Students generally shared in the selection and reflection process. Portfolios often contained some of the following: observational data, anecdotal record sheets dated with samples, performance samples, checklists, rating scales, inventories, student reflections, photographs, audio tapes, and video tapes. The portfolio should answer the following questions for the collector.

Does it show your strengths or weaknesses? Does it show growth? Do you like or dislike the activity? How is it important to you?

Parent-Teacher Conferences. This type of conference is a time set aside for teachers to tell parents about their child's progress in school and for parents to discuss social, personal, and academic needs for their child.

Student-led Conferences. SLC's are an alternative to parent-teacher conferences. Prior to this type of conference, the student was required to reflect on his or her own progress in school. During the conference the student discusses personal strengths and weaknesses with his or her parents. The student is in charge and is responsible for reporting progress, explaining competencies, and setting new goals.

Journal Conferences. Student-teacher conferences can be focused on student writing. This type of conference identifies strengths and interests in writing, providing a place to reflect. Teacher feedback attempts to reinforce students' positive conclusions.

Class Meetings. Forums allow students to begin talking about themselves without feeling pressure. Early meetings focus on recent work. As students become comfortable analyzing themselves, the questions become more long-term. While identifying patterns in their work, mistakes they made frequently, and outstanding strengths, students develop confidence and vocabulary to give intelligent analysis of their academic efforts.

Assessment. Data collection and the gathering of evidence is one form of assessment.

Evaluation. By bringing meaning to that data through interpretation, analysis, and reflection, one can also include kinds of instructional decisions that are made by careful examination of evidence.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

"Traditionally, during conferences, parents and teachers have met to discuss their children's progress for twenty minutes, approximately twice a year and the parents have had to go home and tell their children what the teacher said. In this case, the parents and the teachers assumed about ninety percent ownership of all accomplishments and failures of their children. If there was a problem, it was up to the parent(s) and/or the teacher to figure out what to do about it" (Potter, 1992, p.13). Students' input was conspicuously absent. Mem Fox, in her book, Radical Reflections writes, ". . . we expect too little of children in our care . . . If we allowed children to show us what they could do they would probably learn a lot faster than we permit them to . . ." (p. 59). "Students want to be recognized, inspired and successful as individuals. They need an environment and system that insure psychological safety and freedom. They need teachers who can appreciate and guide them" (Friedman, Skelton, Richardson, Luehr and Baizerman, 1987, p. 11). SLC's allow students to take a more active role in their own education (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Karp, 1997; Mick, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992; Scanland and Heiden, 1996; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994).

Benefits of Student-Led Conferences

Research illustrates many benefits from SLC's. SLC's may increase teacher/parent/child communication (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Johnson, 1996; Potter, 1992).

At times, what the parents heard at home from their child was quite different from the picture the advisor painted from teachers' reports. Parents were then in the difficult position of either believing their child or the teachers. This generally placed them and the teachers on the defensive, blocking open communication and better understanding. If a student joined the conference, he or she often played the silent partner or a martyr chastised for little effort. Some students were truly surprised by the description of their progress. (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996, p. 64)

After SLC's, Countryman and Schroeder (1996) quoted students.

"I like the positive comments my parents gave me and it was great to see the look on my parents' faces when they saw my good work."

"That's the longest time my parent has ever sat down and listened to me."

"Yeah, my mother doesn't usually say much to me about school, but, since conferences, she is still saying nice things and how proud she is of me and this is nice." (p. 66)

The SLC's allow for a gap to be bridged between the three parties (parents, students and teachers), thus, no delay of communication.

One parent said this style of meeting "strengthens the parent/child/teacher relationship. "In an environment where parents and teachers often have difficulty communicating because of language barriers, this is invaluable. Communication and involvement between home and classroom is much easier with a process like this because parents have greater awareness of what their children are doing at school. A lot of them learned not only a lot about their children, but also about why we do some of the strange things in our classrooms. (Denby, 1995, p. 47)

Johnson adds, (1996) "One parent remarked, 'He never says anything about school, and tonight he explained his work for a half-hour!'" (p. 44).

Another benefit of SLC's may be students with higher self-esteem (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992).

In practice, students in grades two through five, proved themselves able to speak authoritatively about all aspects of their school lives and identify with remarkable accuracy their academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses. That children so young would have such a clear view of themselves amazed the adults. According to Sandy Waite, a third grade teacher, parents "sat in awe, watching

their youngsters speak with such confidence about themselves." (Denby, 1996, p. 378)

Students who can identify their own problems and begin a plan to correct them may be an additional benefit of SLC's (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992). Parents contributing solutions to their children's school problems may be a hidden benefit (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992). "By identifying their [the students] own problems, they also began to develop strategies to improve work or behavior. Parents also offered suggestions as to how they could help at home" (Denby, 1995, p. 45).

An added benefit of SLC's may be that it assesses whether students met curriculum objectives instead of comparing student to student (Denby, 1996; Glazer, 1994).

Most students meet objectives (although this designation admittedly covers a wide range of achievement). "Average" students may simply have more difficulty meeting objectives than "excellent" students. At Bolivar, individual students and their teachers now pay attention to what the students have accomplished, rather than to what others have done . . . This approach to assessment inspires even more changes . . . When the conferences were over, teachers felt they had taken a giant step toward creating a child-centered environment. (Denby, 1996, pp.378-379)

Students were possibly held more accountable for their own education was another benefit of SLC's (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992).

The work of many students improved dramatically as they began to feel ownership of their work. Rather than working hard to win teacher approval, students focused on doing something of which they would be proud. Many felt far more accountable for their behavior and work when they had to explain it to parents, peers, and teachers. Students having difficulties seemed to begin thinking of strategies to improve. (Denby, 1995, p. 47)

Disadvantages of Student-Led Conferences

The amount of time involved in preparing, planning and implementing SLC's may be a disadvantage (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992; Scanlan and Heiden, 1996).

"Even after being involved in the time-consuming process of reading and reviewing portfolio conferences, Kate's enthusiasm for our use of portfolios never waned (Scanlan and Heiden, 1996, p. 305).

Another disadvantage of SLC's may be that parents and students are nervous or worried about this new situation (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992).

Some parents were apprehensive about having little verification from the advisor, so arrangements were made to allow parents to schedule a private conference with the advisor if they wished. On Conference Day, students expressed anxiety about discussing their work in front of their parents. After it was over, however, one student commented, "I was a little nervous starting out the conference, but it got easier as I got further through." Most found that once they began, the presentation was easy. (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996, p.p. 65-66)

Since the advantages appear to outweigh the disadvantages the authors believe SLC's merit further investigation.

Preparation for Student-Led Conferences

When the semester begins, the students need to be informed that they will be conducting their own conferences with their parents (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Norwick, 1992; Potter, 1992). Since the format is new, the parents should also be informed by letter and/or meetings (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992).

As the semester progresses, the students prepare for their SLC's by creating what the authors refer to as "gathering portfolios," folders into which students place at least one item selected from that week's work and/or teacher required selections (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Karp, 1997; Mick, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992; Scanlan and Heiden, 1996; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994). The goal of keeping a gathering portfolio is to help document a child's progress or competencies over time. However, there are many ways to achieve this goal.

These and other titles indicate the diverse definitions of portfolios and their uses: "Portfolios in Reading and Writing" (Manning and Manning), "Writing Developed in Second Language Acquisition in Young Children" (Perrotto, 1994), "How You Can Use Tests and Portfolios" (Glazer, 1994), "External Review of Portfolios in Preservice Teacher Education" (Scanland and Heiden), "Preservice Elementary Teachers: Building Portfolios Around Student Writing" (Pokay and Tayeh, 1996), "How Teachers' Literacy Coursework and Experiences Affect Their Perceptions and Utilizations of Portfolio Document" (Harlin and Lipa, 1995), "Glimpse Through the Door: Journal Writing with Preservice Teachers" (Surbeck, 1994).

In her book, In the Middle, Atwell (1987) describes using portfolios to collect student writing and to contain their writing process (1987). Some middle school students conferred during class sessions with their teachers about what to include in their portfolios (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996). Elementary mathematics methods students utilized portfolios as an alternative assessment technique to promote reflection on what has been learned (Karp, 1997). As exhibited, a "portfolio" can gather a variety of evidence.

After this body of learning and growth has been collected and as the semester or quarter draws to a close, students select pieces from their gathering folders to put in what the authors refer to as "a showcase portfolio", a folder containing work that was chosen by specific criteria. For example, the piece could show steps in the writing process, could exhibit work samples showing pride, could display how the students improved, could show persistence, could demonstrate how different math strategies were used, or could illustrate how the scientific method was employed (Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992). The students may be asked to complete a form to aid this "lingering over learning" (Potter, 1992) for some or all of their showcase portfolio picks. Other possible inclusions

may be photographs, teacher reports, self-evaluations, and video or audio tapes (Denby, 1995; Potter, 1992; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994).

These questions should be answered in the showcase portfolio. Why was this piece selected? What improvement was shown? What was learned? What was difficult? What risks were taken? What do you want us to notice? (Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994).

The purpose of the showcase portfolio was to highlight students' learning during SLC's. Sometimes a table of contents, log or script is included to organize the SLC's (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Potter, 1992).

During a Student-Led Conference

During SLC's, students discuss their strengths, weaknesses, and growth while exhibiting evidence from their portfolios (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1996; Mick, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992; Scanland and Heiden, 1996; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994). The teacher's role is to direct parents' questions to the students and to keep the conference flowing, possibly by asking the students questions to facilitate dialogue and for moral support (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992; Ulrey and Ulrey, 1994).

The time allotment for a traditional conference is fifteen minutes. SLC's need thirty to forty-five minutes (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992).

To eliminate this doubled time factor some instructors ran up to three SLC's simultaneously (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Potter, 1992). Other instructors preferred to run one SLC at a time (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992).

After the teachers modeled SLC's, students spent time rehearsing for the SLC's (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Potter, 1992). The students should be given "a vision of what SLC's might look like" (Potter, 1992, p. 4).

Students may practice SLC's with their teachers and/or peers an average of three times (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Norwick, 1996; Potter, 1992).

The importance of this preparation for SLC's is summarized below: Student-led conferencing should be a process, not an event. Though students may have a lot to say about themselves, in most cases they are not used to having the opportunity to say it. To throw a child into a parent-teacher meeting without preparation would likely be intimidating. The confidence and self-knowledge parents witnessed did not appear that day, but rather grew out of a long term-term learning process.

This process took the form of class meetings, journal conferencing, peer conferencing, portfolios, and self-evaluations. Students learned over an extended period to think critically about their experiences in school and were encouraged to express opinions about their work and all classroom activities. At every step, teachers reminded them that their views mattered. (Denby, 1995, p. 46)

The parents' role during SLC's is to be active listeners, to respond to their children's schoolwork with thoughtful silence and in-depth questions.

. . . good listeners are active. They get involved with what they hear, both intellectually and emotionally (Jacobs, 1990). Such listeners give complete attention to what they hear, actively process the information, make pertinent comments and ask relevant questions (Brent and Anderson, 1993). Real listening is an active process (Bakhtin, 1986). . . .the connection between listening and learning is an important one . . . according to popular wisdom, we "listen and learn." (Jalongo, 1995, p.p.13 - 14)

Therefore, another goal during SLC's could be to celebrate students' learning and achievement so the students come away from their conference feeling successful (Potter, 1992; Denby, 1996).

Post Student-Led Conferences

Post student-led conferences may include a student's reflection time to discuss elements of realistic goals (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992; Scanland and Heiden, 1996). This reflection may be oral or may involve completing a form. Open ended questions such as these may be asked. What did you like about student-led conferences? How did you feel during the conference? What would you change to make the conference better? What did you learn about yourself? (Countryman and Schroeder, 1996; Potter, 1992).

Parents, teachers, and students all have parts to play after the conference. The teacher's role in post conference reflection is to ask challenging , open ended questions and stimulate well thought-out responses while providing encouragement. The students' role is to provide those thoughtful answers and perhaps some thought provoking questions of their own. The parents are often asked to offer suggestions as to how they can help at home or they write encouraging notes to their children (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Potter, 1992).

CHAPTER III PROCEDURE

Overview

Teacher A, a fifth grade teacher, and Teacher B, a second grade teacher, had been utilizing the portfolio method of authentic assessment to aid student evaluation for the years, 1994-1996. During the 1996 - 1997 school year they decided to take portfolios one step further by putting students in charge of their own parent conferences.

At the beginning of the school year, the teachers explained to the students that they would be in charge of their own conferences. They would prepare for these student-led conferences in many ways. The parents were informed of the change in conferences via class newsletter. The letter briefly described the reasoning behind the conference format change (see Figure 1).

Every week students placed samples of their work in gathering folders as described in Chapter II. During each quarter, students evaluated their work by using rubrics for various assignments (see Figure 2). This helped them develop a critical eye for excellent work. Two weeks before conference day, students selected certain pieces from the gathering folder using criteria that the students demonstrated by completing a form (see Figure 3).

The students filled out a strengths and weaknesses form (see Figure 4). The teachers completed one of these as well as a report card for each student (see Figure 5 and 6). The teachers kept anecdotal records on each student. The students completed student attitude surveys (see Figure 7). All of these items were placed in the showcase portfolios.

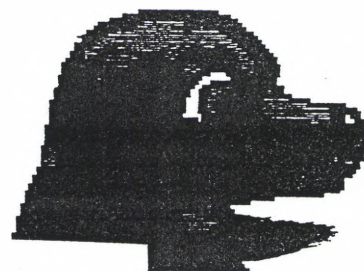
The teachers conferred with each student. Each item in his or her showcase portfolio was examined, discussed, and compared. If an area of study or behavior was shown to be weak, the student was asked to come up with a plan of improvement.

THE ACCIDENT

One day I was in my big house playing with my oldest brother. It was a very nice and beautiful day. My brother and I were having fun. It was about 6:00 pm at night. My mom let my dog in. I said Max come here. His breed is a chocolate lab. My brother and I started to play keep away from Max. My mom and dad came in the living room. Josh, my brother, threw the ball to me. I was sitting on the couch and Max jumped up and scratched me on the nose and the eyelid I would not have an eye.

WRITING CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

Read your writing aloud to your partner. As you and your partner revise and edit your writing, be sure you can answer "yes" to all these questions. If you had to check "no," do some more thinking and correcting.



| | YES | NO |
|---|-----|-------|
| 1. Do I have a beginning? | ✓ | _____ |
| 2. Do you understand everything I've tried to say? | ✓ | _____ |
| 3. Did I indent each new paragraph? | ✓ | _____ |
| 4. Are all the sentences and paragraphs in the right order? | ✓ | _____ |
| 5. Is each sentence complete? | ✓ | _____ |
| 6. Do my sentences start in different ways? | ✓ | _____ |
| 7. Does each sentence sound right and make sense to you? | ✓ | _____ |
| 8. Does the story have enough middle? (details) | ✓ | _____ |
| 9. Are all the words spelled correctly? | ✓ | _____ |
| 10. Did I capitalize correctly? (beginning of sentences and proper nouns) | ✓ | _____ |
| 11. Did I punctuate correctly? (sentence endings, commas, quotations) | ✓ | _____ |
| 12. Do I have an ending to my story? | ✓ | _____ |

Figure 2. An example of a rubric.

Ingredients Recipe For Friends

You need a few people
5 cups of friendship
3 cups of understanding
2 cups of caring
2 cups of trust
2 cups of honesty
2½ cups patience
4 cups of sticking together
6 cups of being there for each other

Directions: Mix everything but the people. After very well mixed, coat each person generously with the mixture. Bake at 375° until golden brown.
You've Made Friends!



Portfolio Free Pick



Name Meredith Date 1-23-97

Name of the selected piece

Recipe

What I like best about this piece is

It shows what I think friendship should be made of. It was probably the funnest writing piece that I've done all year. It shows that you need a lot of things to make a friendship.

What do you know now that you

didn't know before? After I thought about all the things that make friendships

I noticed that all those things would be nice

to have in a friendship. But sometimes you

just can't in friendship if both people don't give it.

From this piece and other pieces you

have chosen for your portfolio, what

goal do you have for your writing in

the future? I'd to be more descriptive

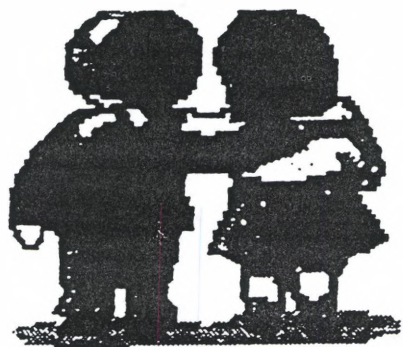
in my writing. And at least try to enjoy

all the pieces I do but sometimes

there's just one that I probably never

would enjoy.

Figure 3. Meredith's portfolio pick.



Conference for

Michelle: B.

Strengths:

Spelling test sounding words out

writing stories

doing math facts fast

Reading big words

Areas of concern:

I understand everything

I need harder books

Figure 4. A strengths and weaknesses form.



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
OHIO
5th GRADE REPORT CARD

18

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|--------|---------|----------|--------------|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Student's Name | (Last) | (First) | (Middle) | Attendance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Total |
| Teacher | | | | Days Present | | | | | |
| | | | | Days Absent | | | | | |
| | | | | Days Tardy | | | | | |

| Reporting Period | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Year Average |
|---------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Reading | | | | | |
| Percent | | | | | |
| Vocabulary | | | | | |
| Comprehension | | | | | |
| Independent Reading | | | | | |
| Weekly Reader | | | | | |

| Reporting Period | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Year Average |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Physical Education | | | | | |
| Effort | | | | | |
| Skills | | | | | |
| Conduct | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| English Language Arts | | | | | |
| Percent | | | | | |
| Written Expression | | | | | |
| Content | | | | | |
| Grammar Mechanics | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Music | | | | | |
| Effort | | | | | |
| Skills | | | | | |
| Conduct | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Spelling | | | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|--|--|--|

| | | | | | |
|------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Art | | | | | |
| Effort | | | | | |
| Skills | | | | | |
| Conduct | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Handwriting | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|--|--|--|

| Social Growth and Work Habits | | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Shows Effort | | | | | |
| Attentive During Instruction | | | | | |
| Completes Assignments On Time | | | | | |
| Prepares Work Neatly | | | | | |
| Makes Good Use of Time | | | | | |
| Listens and Follows Directions | | | | | |
| Respects Property | | | | | |
| Is Courteous and Kind to Others | | | | | |
| Cooperative Group Worker | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Math | | | | | |
| Percentage | | | | | |
| Multiplication Facts | | | | | |
| Division Facts | | | | | |
| Addition Computation | | | | | |
| Subtraction Computation | | | | | |
| Multiplication Computation | | | | | |
| Division Computation | | | | | |
| Decimals | | | | | |
| Fractions | | | | | |
| Problem Solving | | | | | |
| Geometry | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Progress Report Sent | | | | | |
| Teacher Requests Conference | | | | | |
| Promoted/Retained/Assigned to: | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Social Studies | | | | | |
| Percentage | | | | | |
| Participates in Class | | | | | |

| Grade Explanation | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| A - 93 to 100 % - Excellent | O - Outstanding |
| B - 85 to 92 % - Above Average | S - Satisfactory |
| C - 73 to 84 % - Average | N - Needs to Improve |
| D - 65 to 72 % - Below Average | U - Unsatisfactory |
| F - 64 or Lower - Failing | Any area not marked was not introduced or evaluated during the grading period. |
| I - Incomplete | |
| P - Passing | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Science | | | | | |
| Percentage | | | | | |
| Participates in Class | | | | | |

Teacher's Comments:

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Health | | | | | |
| Percentage | | | | | |
| Participates in Class | | | | | |

Principal's Signature

Teacher's Signature

Figure 5. A fifth grade report card.

Elementary School

Ohio
Elementary Report 2nd Grade
 19 - 19

19

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|------------|---|---|---|-----|--|---|---|---|-------|-----|
| Student's Name (Last) (First) (Middle) | Attendance | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Total | |
| Teacher | Grade | | | | | Days Present | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Days Absent | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Days Tardy | | | | | |
| Student is Working At Or Above Grade Level Unless Indicated Below | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Grading Period | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | AVE | Grading Period | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | AVE |
| READING | | | | | | PHYSICAL EDUCATION | | | | | |
| Reacts for meaning | | | | | | Skills | | | | | |
| Draws Conclusions | | | | | | Conduct | | | | | |
| Predicts Outcomes | | | | | | Effort | | | | | |
| Identifies Main Ideas | | | | | | MUSIC | | | | | |
| Follows Plot Sequence | | | | | | Skills | | | | | |
| Uses Decoding Skills | | | | | | Conduct | | | | | |
| Uses Context Clues | | | | | | Effort | | | | | |
| Self-Corrects | | | | | | ART | | | | | |
| Reads Fluently | | | | | | Skills | | | | | |
| Reads with Expression | | | | | | Conduct | | | | | |
| Follows Printed Directions | | | | | | Effort | | | | | |
| Takes Risks | | | | | | Educational and Social Skills | | | | | |
| SPELLING | | | | | | Listens and Follows Directions | | | | | |
| WRITING COMPOSITION | | | | | | Puts Name on Paper | | | | | |
| Produces Pieces of 5 or More Related Sentences | | | | | | Stays on Task | | | | | |
| Flows from Beginning to End | | | | | | Works Neatly | | | | | |
| Edits on Own | | | | | | Returns Homework on Time | | | | | |
| Uses Capital Letters | | | | | | Has Needed Materials Ready | | | | | |
| Uses Punctuation | | | | | | Is Responsible | | | | | |
| Uses Correct Grammar | | | | | | Completes Tasks on Time | | | | | |
| HANDWRITING | | | | | | Is Thoughtful and Considerate | | | | | |
| MATH | | | | | | Doesn't Interrupt | | | | | |
| Understands Addition | | | | | | Works Well in Groups | | | | | |
| Understands Subtraction | | | | | | Progress Report Sent | | | | | |
| Additions Facts Sums to 18 | | | | | | Teacher Requests Conference | | | | | |
| Subtraction Facts to 18 | | | | | | Promoted/Retained/Assigned to | | | | | |
| Understands 2 Digit Add | | | | | | Grade Explanation | | | | | |
| Understands 2 Digit Subt | | | | | | A - 93 to 100 % - Excellent | | | | | |
| Place Value | | | | | | B - 85 to 92 % - Above Average | | | | | |
| Patterns and Graphs | | | | | | C - 73 to 84 % - Average | | | | | |
| Fractions | | | | | | D - 65 to 72 % - Below Average | | | | | |
| Time | | | | | | F - 64 or Lower - Failing | | | | | |
| Money | | | | | | I - Incomplete | | | | | |
| Measurement | | | | | | P - Passing | | | | | |
| Geometry | | | | | | S - Satisfactory | | | | | |
| Problem Solving | | | | | | N - Needs to Improve | | | | | |
| SOCIAL STUDIES | | | | | | Any area not marked was not introduced or evaluated during the grading period. | | | | | |
| Participates in Class Activities | | | | | | Principal's Signature _____ | | | | | |
| SCIENCE | | | | | | Teacher's Signature _____ | | | | | |
| Participates in Class Activities | | | | | | | | | | | |
| HEALTH | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Participates in Class Activities | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Teacher's Comments | | | | | | | | | | | |

Figure 6. A second grade report card.

Figure 7. Attitude Survey.

| 1 | 2 |
|---|---|
| <hr/> | |
| Work not done Spends too little time Sloppily done No improvement shown | |
| 1 | 2 |
| <hr/> | |
| Often fools around Easily distracted Gives up easily Trouble concentrating | |
| 1 | 2 |
| <hr/> | |
| Complains often Shows lack of caring | |
| 1 | 2 |
| <hr/> | |
| Not participating | |

Assignments

3

4

5

Completes assignments
Spends enough time
Works carefully
Improves over time

On Task

3

4

5

Stays on task
Avoids distraction
Pays attention
Perseveres
Concentrates

Attitude

3

4

5

Positive attitude
Smiles, shares
Shows interest

Participation

3

4

5

Contributing member
Taking part in class
discussion

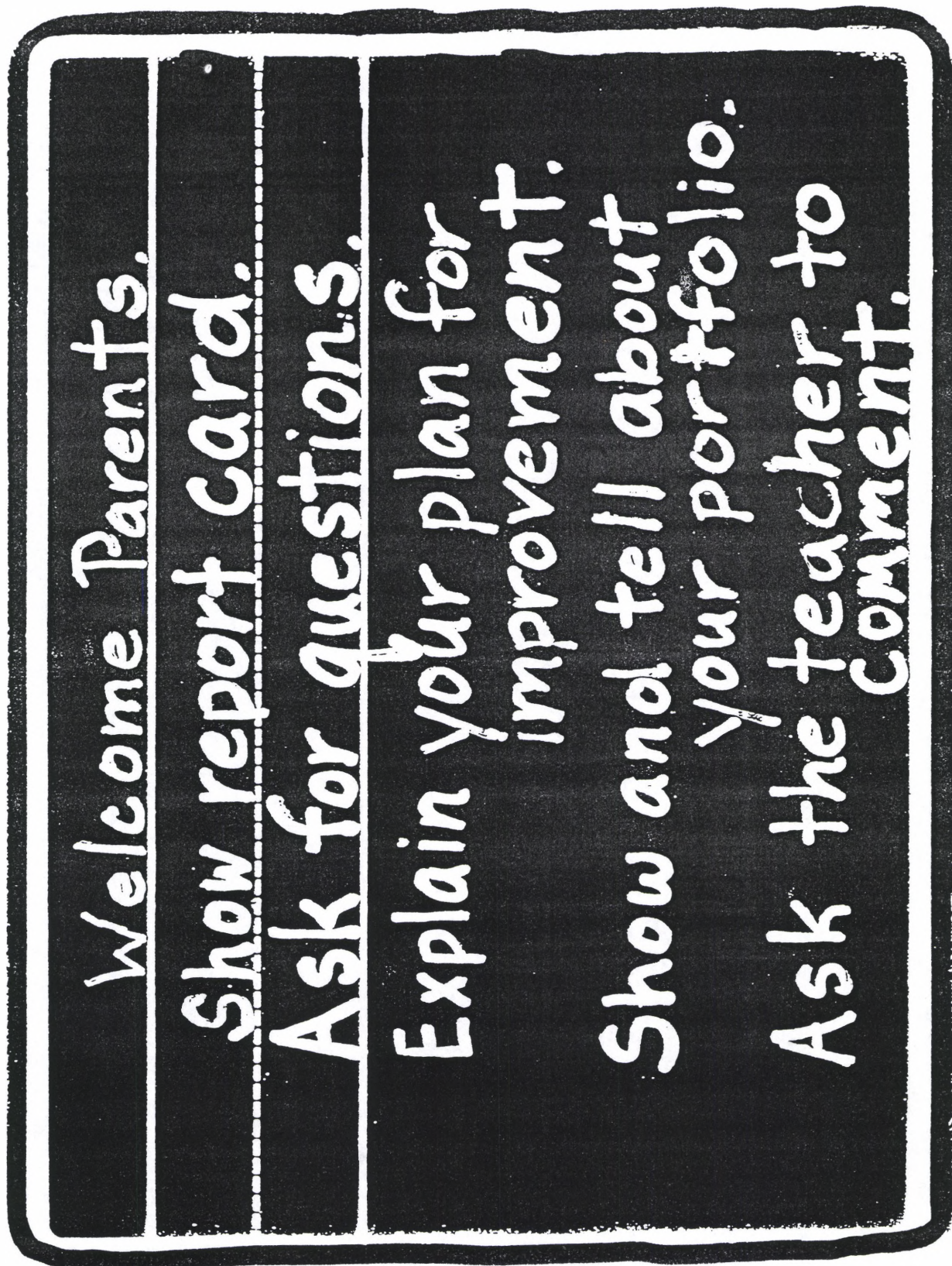


Figure 8. Student-Led Conference Outline

Students were also asked to think about what they were going to say at their conference. An outline of what needed to be included was displayed (see Figure 8).

After this initial conference, the student returned to his or her seat and organized his or her showcase portfolio so that the items were in the order in which they would be presented. The portfolios were collected.

Over a period of several days, when all students completed this initial conference, students rehearsed their conferences with the teachers who played the role of the parent. Suggestions were made, questions asked, giggles erupted, changes were made, and additions were included.

Teacher aids, parent volunteers, and peers then assumed the parent's role while the students practiced their SLC's three times.

Even though, according to research, up to three SLC's could occur simultaneously, these teachers preferred to hold them one at a time (Denby, 1995; Denby, 1996; Johnson, 1996; Potter, 1992).

Typically, SLC's began when the students invited parents to sit down. The students showed a copy of their report card and asked for any questions. They responded to any questions and described their plans for improvement. Showing the portfolio picks and why they were chosen came next. Finally, the students asked the teachers if they had anything to add. The teachers gave a brief summary, if needed, but mostly they praised the students for their accomplishments during the quarter and applauded a conference well done.

Parents were asked to respond to the SLC's by writing a letter to their children concerning how they felt about their learning and/or completing a form that encourages parents to respond to their child's growth. Their responses were heart-warming! (see Figures 9-11).

Parent Response Form

Date: 1-27-97

Name of Student: Dallas Burelison

Please answer the following questions:

Did your child review the portfolio with you? yes

What part of the portfolio did you like best? Where others were describing him

What improvements or areas of growth have you noticed in your child since the beginning of the year? is finally asking for help and doing better.

Do you have any questions about anything in the portfolio? Is he not reading what he writes, a few of his sentences don't make sense.

I have reviewed the portfolio and am returning it with this form.

Giorda Burelison
parent

11/17/96

Dear Dallas,

Your dad and I are very proud of the way you represented yourself at your conference. We were starting to get a little worried there for awhile, but we knew you could bounce back.

We don't expect you to be a straight A student but we do expect you to try your hardest and do your best. We will always love you no matter what.

You do need to start working a little harder on being responsible and concentrating more in class. Don't forget to ask for help. The only way to learn is to listen and ask.

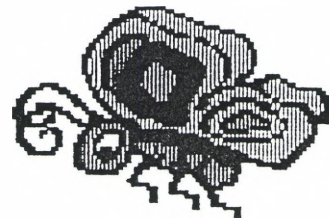
Two of things you need to work on are Writing skills and math facts. We know you can do it, if you put your mind to it.

You have a great personality Dallas and will go far in this world. Please don't ever lose that sensitivity you have for others.

LOVE MOM & DAD



A Parent's Narrative



4-3-97

Academic Areas:

Keep up the good work! Your dad and I are proud of you. Congratulations on upholding the family tradition of winning the school spelling bee!

Behavior/Social Areas:

Don't be afraid to speak up. I'm glad to hear you're sharing your ideas and thoughts. You are a very interesting and humorous person. It's nice to share your personality with others.

Subjects

The subjects for the study were a class of second grade students and their parents and a class of fifth grade students and their parents who all participated in SLC's during the study.

Setting

School. The school which these students attended is the only public elementary school in this midwestern village.

Community. All the students and parents lived in or around the farming community which contained the school. Everyone in this survey lived within a ten minute drive of the school.

Data Collection

Construction of the Data Collecting and Instruments. The instruments were constructed after reviewing the literature which established its content validity. The instrument was a Likert-type questionnaire with forced responses. Several open-ended questions were included. (See Appendix A and B). The skills and attitudes that are needed to participate and hold successful SLC's were examined.

The following topics were used: demographics, comfort level during the SLC's procedure, skills taught during the SLC's process, and attitude toward SLC's.

The instrument was reviewed by an elementary school principal and two classroom teachers who each hold a master's degree. The instrument was field tested during class time in a classroom that also participated in SLC's. This classroom was in the same school as the subject for the study. The instrument was sent home with the students, filled out by their parents and returned to the authors by April 28, 1997. The instrument was then reviewed and revisions were made.

Administration of the Data Collecting Instrument. On May 1, 1997, the instrument design for students was administered during class time. The instrument

design for the parents was sent home with the students on May 1, 1997. The results were returned by May 5, 1997. The surveys were completed anonymously to encourage spontaneous responses. Therefore, there was no way of tracking who had or had not returned surveys.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Presentation of the Results

The Likert portion of the instrument was illustrated in graph form. Graphs are illustrated by percentage of each response to indicate attitudes toward SLC's. Separate graphs illustrated differences in responses between gender and age (see Figure 12 - 24). These will be examined in the Discussion of the Results.

Following are the responses to the open-ended questions:

"I like my child's attitude about the conference but did not feel we (the teacher and I) could discuss any short comings [sic] or problems without hurting the child's feelings. My child shows me his work all the time not just at conference. I do feel he was excited about the lime light [sic] and showing off his best work. I have mixed feelings about these types of conferences."

"I thought it was great."

"I was just surprised that my child was so shy and quiet during the conference. Because she's definitely not quiet at home and I'm sure she participates well in class but when she gets with us together she's a different person. I hope by continuing the child participation conferences that she'll learn to open up a little more."

"Teacher A has done an excellent job."

"I like the computers in the classrooms and so does my child. Technology is great but so are mental skills used by themselves."

"The work my daughter chose as her favorite [Question # 13] surprised me. The conferences are a great idea. I hope you keep doing this."

"Great Job Teachers!"

Discussion of the Results

After the authors analyzed the responses to the questionnaires, the following conclusions were reached. Overall, the students and parents were very favorable toward SLC's. When responding to the statement "I like the new SLC's format", forty percent of

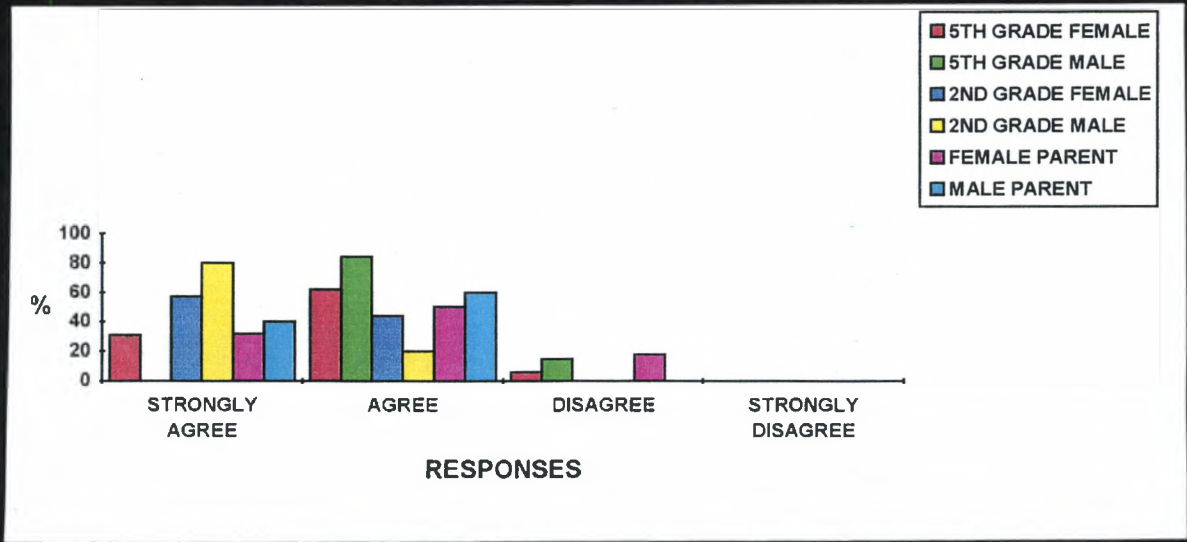


Figure 12. I like the student-led conference format.

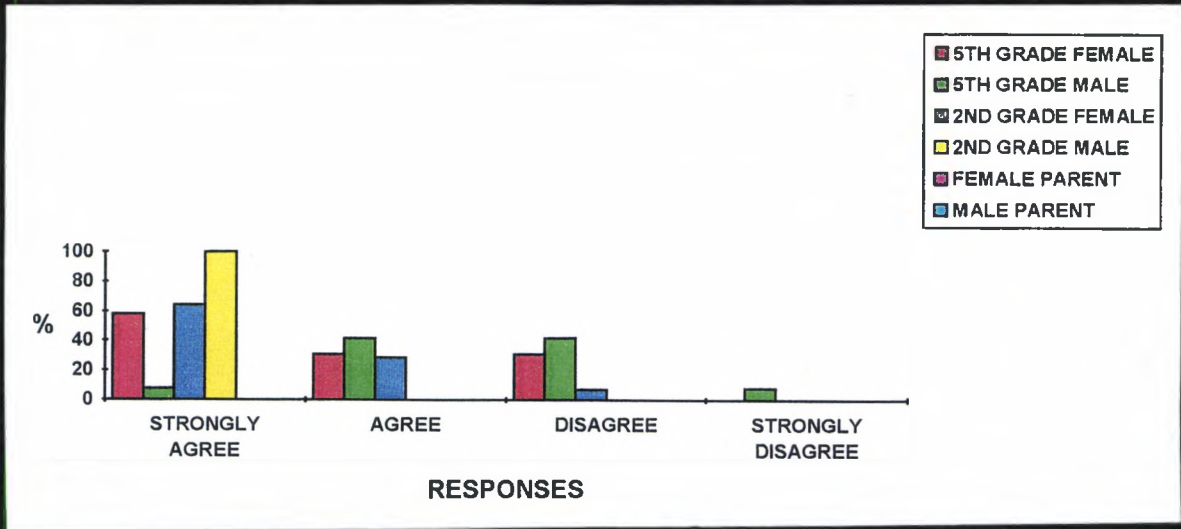


Figure 13. I want to have student-led conferences next year.

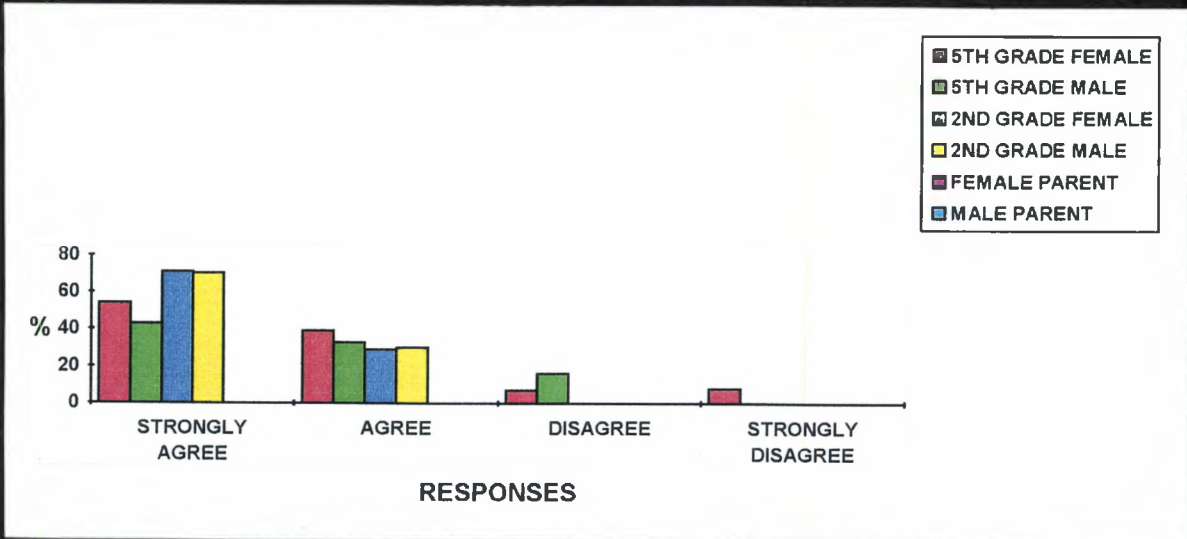


Figure 14. I like being in charge of my conference.

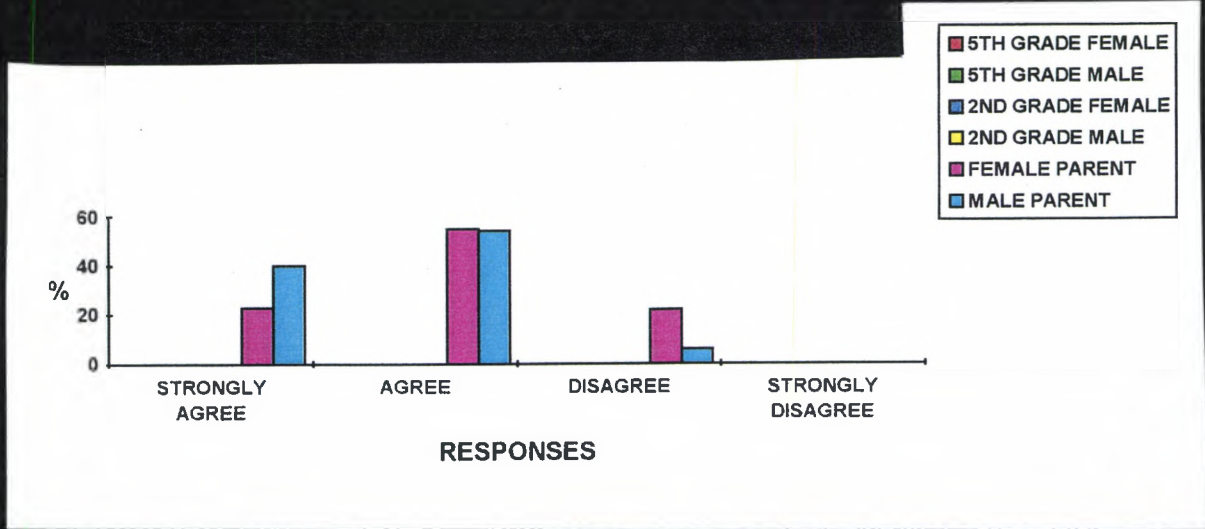


Figure 15. I learned more about my child through student-led conferences than from most other parent-teacher conferences.

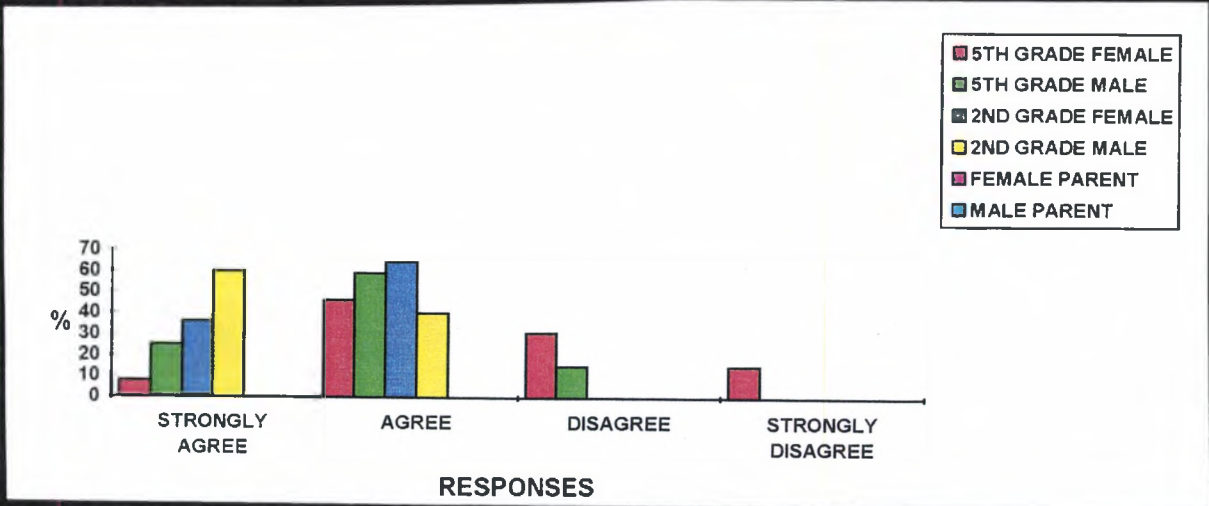


Figure 16. I learned about myself while preparing for my student-led conference.

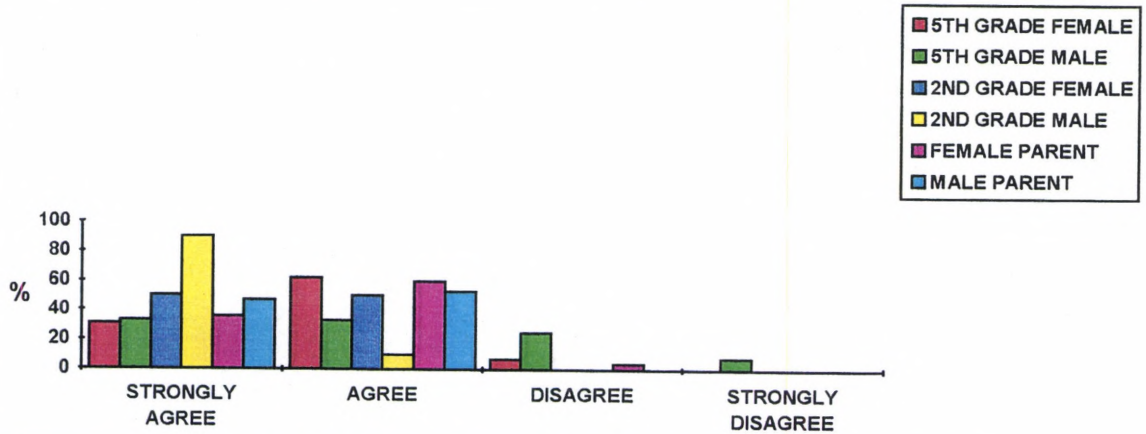


Figure 17. I felt comfortable having my child lead the conference./ I felt comfortable during my conference.

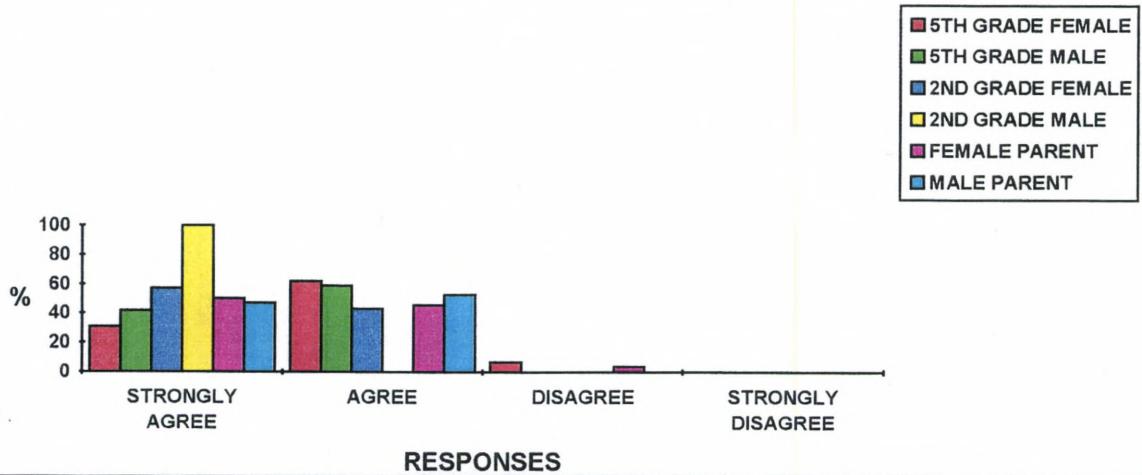


Figure 18. My child felt good about himself/herself during the student-led conference. / I felt good about myself during my conference.

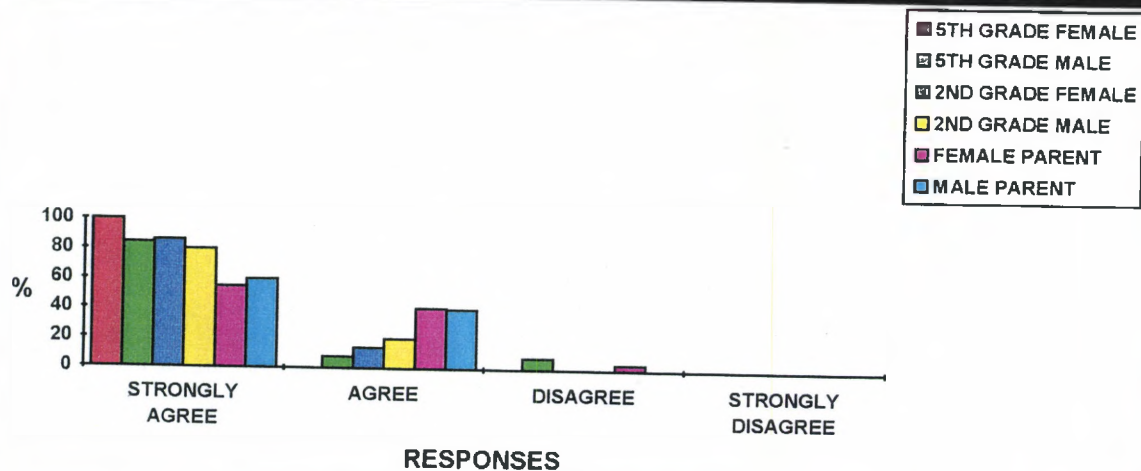


Figure 19. Children should be accountable for their work. / I should be accountable for my own work.

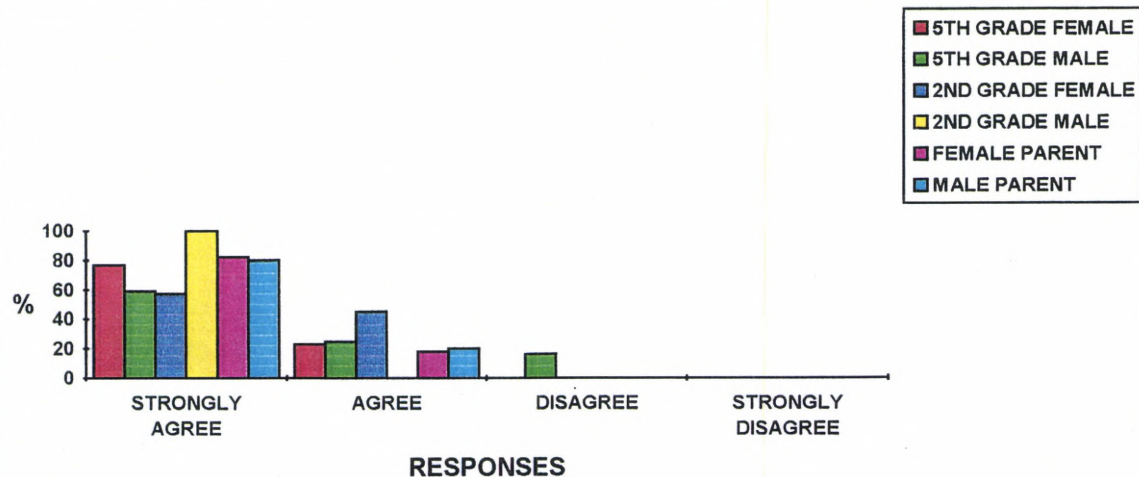


Figure 20. Children should communicate about their learning with parents. / It is important to talk about my learning with my parents.

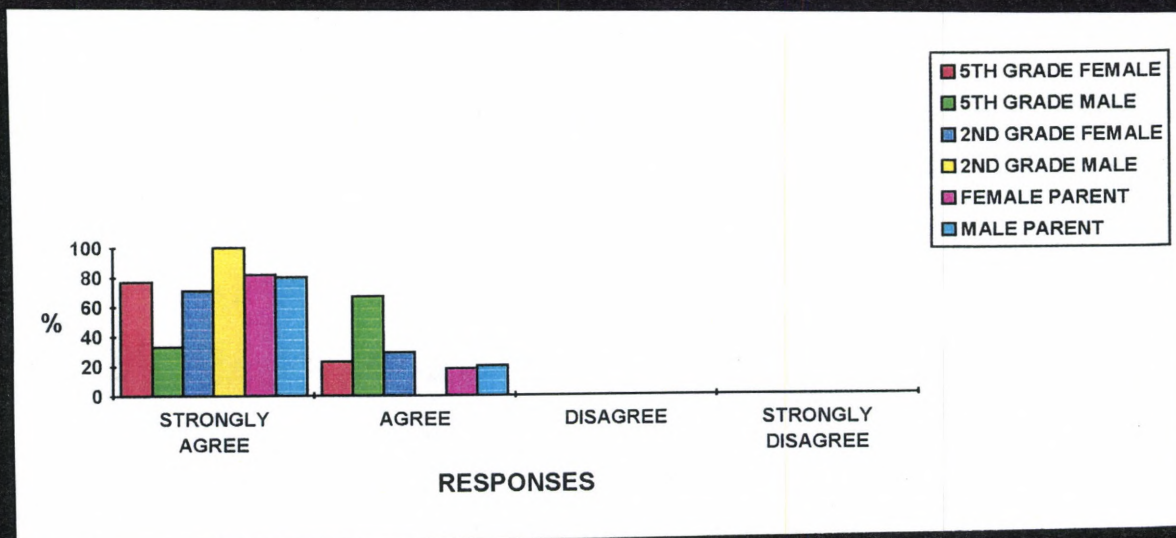


Figure 21. Children should set goals for their school work. / I need to be able to set goals for my school work.

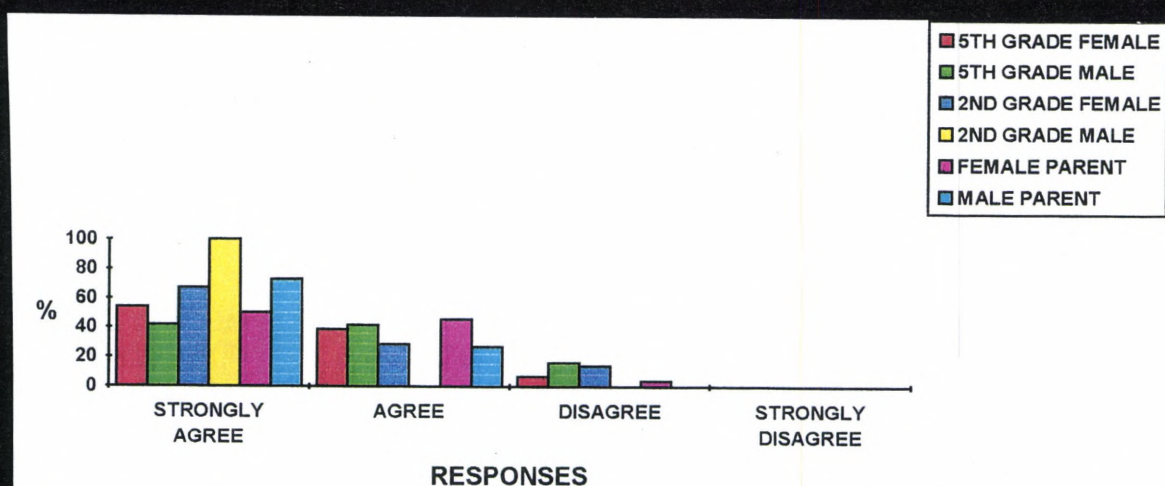


Figure 22. Children should make their own plans for improvement. / I should help make plans for my improvement.

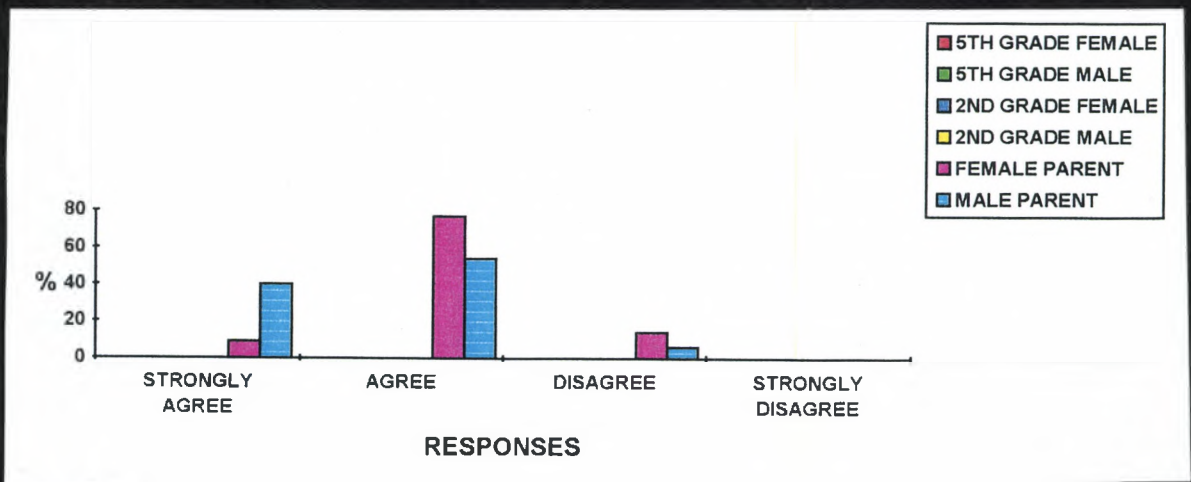


Figure 23. My child has taken ownership of his/her learning more than ever before.

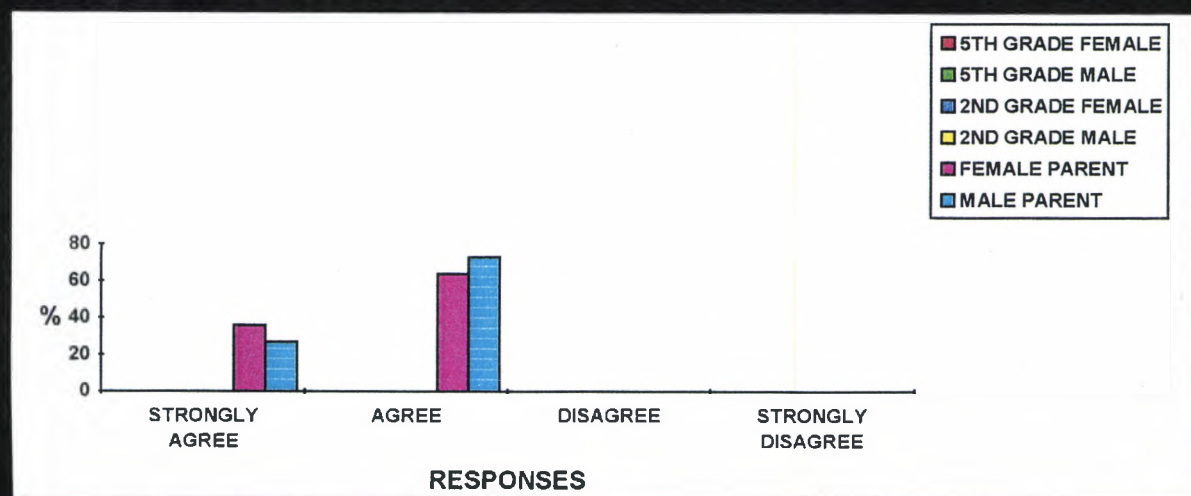


Figure 24. My child will need the skills practiced in student-led conferences in the future.

the male parents strongly agreed and sixty percent agreed. Eighty percent of the second grade males reported they strongly agree while fifty-seven percent of the second grade females strongly agreed. Eighty-four percent of the fifth grade males agreed with the item stated. Only eighteen percent of the female parents, six percent of the female fifth graders, and fifteen of the male fifth graders disagreed. No one strongly disagreed (see Figure 12).

Additionally, when students responded to "I want to have SLC's next year" one hundred percent of the second grade males strongly agreed. Sixty-four percent of the female second grade students strongly agreed. Thirty-eight percent of the female fifth graders also strongly agreed. Thirty-one percent of the fifth grade females, forty - two percent of the fifth grade males and seven percent of the second grade females disagreed, while eight percent of the fifth grade males strongly disagreed (see Figure 13).

Interestingly, the student responses to the statement "I like being in charge of my conference" were more favorable. Only seven percent of the fifth grade females and sixteen percent of the fifth grade males disagreed, while eight percent of the fifth grade males disagreed (see Figure 14).

The parents held mostly positive opinions toward the statement " I learned more about my child through SLC's". Twenty three percent of the females and forty percent of the male strongly agreed. Fifty-five percent of the females and fifty-four percent of the males agreed. While only twenty-two percent of the females and six percent of the males disagreed. No strongly disagree responses were recorded (see Figure 15).

The students also maintained a positive attitude toward a similar statement, "I learned about myself while preparing for my SLC". Sixty percent of the second grade males and thirty-six percent of the second grade females, twenty-five percent of the fifth grade females and eight percent of the fifth grade males strongly agreed. Forty percent of the second grade males, sixty-four percent of the second grade females, fifty-nine percent

of the fifth grade males, and forty-six percent of the fifth grade females agreed. Surprisingly thirty-one percent of female fifth graders disagreed and fifteen percent strongly disagreed (see Figure 16).

Forty-seven percent of the male parents, fifty percent of the second grader females, and ninety percent of the second grade males strongly agreed to the statement "I felt comfortable during the SLC". Only four percent of the female parents, seven percent of the female fifth graders, and twenty-five percent of the male fifth graders disagreed, while eight percent of the male fifth graders strongly disagreed (see Figure 17).

"I felt good during the SLC" and "My child felt good during the SLC" elicited more positive responses than the previous statement. One hundred percent of male second graders strongly agreed. Only four percent of the female parents and seven percent of the female fifth graders disagreed. No one strongly disagreed (see Figure 18).

Parents and students overwhelmingly strongly agreed or agreed to statements that pertain to skills utilized during the SLC process (see Figure 19 - 24). Only four percent of the female parents and eight percent of the male fifth graders disagreed with the statement "I should be accountable for my work" or "Children should be accountable for their work" (see Figure 19).

One hundred percent of the second grade males, fifty-seven percent of the second grade females, fifty-nine percent of the fifth grade males, seventy seven percent of the female fifth graders, eighty percent of the male parents and eighty two percent of the female parents strongly agreed. Only sixteen percent of the male fifth graders disagreed with the statement "Parents and children should talk about children's learning" (see Figure 20).

One hundred percent of the second grade males, seventy-one percent of the female second graders, thirty-three percent of the fifth grade males, seventy-seven

percent of the fifth grade females, eight percent of the male parents, and eighty-two percent of the female parents strongly agreed to the item. No one strongly disagreed or disagreed to the item. "I should set goals for my school work" or "Children should set goals for their school work" (see Figure 21).

Responding to the statements "I should make plans for my improvement" or "Children should make plans for their improvement", one hundred percent of the second grade males, sixty-seven percent of the second grade females, forty-two percent of the fifth grade males, fifty-four percent of the fifth grade females, seventy-three percent of the male parents and fifty percent of the female parents strongly agreed. While only four percent of the female parents, seven percent of the female fifth graders, sixteen percent of the male fifth graders and fourteen percent second grade females disagreed (see Figure 22).

All but fourteen percent of the female parents and six percent of the male parents disagreed with the statement "My child has taken ownership for his/her learning more than ever before" (see Figure 23).

However, no parent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "My child will need skills practiced in SLC's in the future" (see Figure 24).

Interestingly, not one parent strongly disagreed with any item on the instrument. Second grade boys had positive responses to all statements on the instrument. Female parents and fifth graders were more likely to disagree with an item. Only two "disagree" replies were made by male parents compared to sixteen "disagree" replies made by female parents. Parents reported more favorable responses to items pertaining to skills used during the SLC process compared to the SLC itself.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study explored the concept of SLC's by surveying the attitudes of parents and students who have participated in them. Comparing these attitudes to the research has indeed provided interesting results. This study noted similarities and differences of attitudes toward SLC's by gender and attitude.

The purpose of this study was to analyze the responses of students and parents toward SLC's. The results were interesting and showed favorable opinions toward SLC's.

The teachers felt the SLC's were valuable and are looking forward to trying SLC's again next year.

Conclusion

As a result of the study, the authors concluded that SLC's were successful. Of the total responses, ninety-six percent as strongly agreed or agreed. Parents reported more favorable responses to items pertaining to skills used during the SLC process compared to the SLC itself. The older students and the mothers were more critical of SLC's than the younger students and fathers. The fifth grade boys enjoyed being in charge of their conferences more than fifth grade girls enjoyed being in charge.

Recommendations

The authors recommend that parents need to be more aware of SLC's. Perhaps teachers could consider sending more than one parent letter describing in detail the process of SLC's. Informing parents that parent-teacher conferences are available either before or after SLC's may alleviate parents' concerns that certain issues are not being addressed. The parents also need to be more informed as to the amount of student thought and energy, as well as the amount of teacher instructed time - the behind the

scenes work - that goes into SLC's. Perhaps the portfolio/SLC process should be discussed thoroughly at the fall open-house and handouts should be distributed.

The students should not only discuss what they learned, but also what they learned about themselves - how they think and learn. This could be discovered with the help of a teacher developed instrument to aid students in discovering their learning styles.

Appendix A
Parent Questionnaire

Dear Parent(s),

Thank you once again for taking an active role in your child's education. You are such an important part of everything your child does, and your participation in this conference has helped to reinforce to your child that his or her education is important, not only to you, but to his/her future.

Please take a moment to fill out this questionnaire and return it by May 5, 1997. Your feedback is very important in helping us to plan for next term. Please feel free to make comments on the back. Thank you very much. This planning helps our school meet the needs of our students and parents.

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey!

Sincerely,

Appendix B
Parent Questionnaire

Directions. Please read the following statement referring to Student-Led Conferences. Circle the number that best describes your opinion.

1. I like the new student-led conferencing format.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

2. Children should be accountable for their own work..

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

3. My child has taken ownership of his/her learning more than ever before.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

4. I learned more about my child through this student-led conference than from most other parent/teacher conferences.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

5. My child will need the skills practiced in student-led conferences in the future.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

6. I felt comfortable having my child lead the conference.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

7. Children should communicate about their learning with parents.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

8. Children should set goals for their school work.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

9. Children should make their own plans for improvement.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

10. My child felt good about himself/herself during the student-led conferences.

| | | | |
|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

11. _____ Male _____ Female (check one)

12. Have you ever participated in a teacher/parent conference? Yes No Circle One

13. Did anything surprise you during the student-led conference? Yes No Circle One

If yes, please list on back. If not, go on to #14.

14. Do you have any comments or suggestions? Please explain on back.

Appendix C

Student Questionnaire

Dear Student,

Thank you once again for taking an active role in your education. You know the importance of what you do everyday, and how your leadership in the conference helped you to explain to your parents the way you learn and what you have learned. You also know the importance of what you do today reflects on what you will do in the future.

Please take a moment to fill out this questionnaire. Your feedback is very important in helping us to plan for the next term. Please feel free to make comments on the back. Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

Sincerely,

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