COLLABORATING WITH TEACHERS TO CREATE PEER OBSERVATIONS AS A MEANS OF EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological, action research study engaged a sample of teachers from a large middle school in northern South Carolina in developing a protocol and recommendations for the use of peer observations that would provide meaningful professional development for teachers at this school. Data collection methods consisted of interviews, focus groups and trial observations. The study addressed two key research questions, what factors do the teachers see as important when completing a peer observation, and do they perceive the peer observation method as meaningful professional development that promotes teacher growth. The findings confirmed that, among this sample of teachers, peer observation is seen as an effective form of professional development which can be beneficial to both the observer and the observed teacher. The participants stressed, however, that this is only likely to be the case if peer observation is implemented as a professional development tool and not as a teacher evaluation method, and with adequate time made available for participation in the observations and follow up work. Recommendations and a proposed plan of action for the development and implementation of a peer observation tool at this school are set out. The study also contributes to the wider educational literature by demonstrating the effectiveness of this methodological approach for conducting research into peer observation as teacher professional development in the middle school setting, and by highlighting the relevance of adult learning theory to this area of research.