Conferring with Student Writers

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Conferring with Student Writers

- My experiences as a student
- The evolution of my teacher-student writing conferences
- Models of teacher-student writing conferences
- A short introduction peer conferences
- Peer conferences in my elementary school class
- Peer conferences in secondary school

Some Thoughts on Writing Conferences:

“The purpose of the conference is not to praise or judge the quality of the writing, but rather to encourage students to pursue ideas, feelings, or merely a sense of things which they may not have been able to express, but which may emerge into language between us.”

Terry A. Moher

“Good conferring, like good teaching, relies on your ability to communicate effectively with children, and the skills you develop as you learn to confer will improve your teaching abilities in all areas...”

Lucy Calkins

My Own Experiences with Writing Conferences as a Student...

- Line of students at teacher’s desk
- Written feedback, sometimes very vague, mostly focused on fixing errors (fixing errors to make the paper match the teacher’s ideas)
- Rarely happened unless there was a problem (on-track students rarely conferred with teachers)
- ‘Grading’ peer papers, editing for mechanical & spelling errors (no training for how to do it) everyone wanted to work with smarter student so they could tell you what to fix

The Evolution of My Writing Conferences with Student Writers
the beginnings of my writing conferences...
- Students were pulled over to the side table away from peers to conference with me
- I never wrote along with my students
- I had contact with 2 students a day during writing time

Goal: Making Conferencing More Effective
- Researching and trying different types of conferences
- Finding a way to meet with students more frequently
- Collecting a list of good questions to be used during conferences
- Establishing a better system for record keeping

The Books I Read...

What I Learned...

Decisions to Make About Conferring
Where should we conduct conferences?
What tools do we need to help us?
What do students need to have with them during conferences?
At what point (or points) in the writing process should we confer with students?
Who will initiate conferences?
How much time should we devote to conferences?

Different Types of Teacher-Student Conferences
- Pre-writing check-in
- Small group skills conferences
- One to one teacher-student conferences

Pre-Writing Check-In
- Check-in with 3-5 students
- Ask them what they will be working on today
- Help them 'name' the part of the writing process in which they will be engaged
Small Group Writing Skills Conferences

Teacher created passage for editing capitalization

I knew a pig named Jerry who liked to sing, you wouldn't believe the songs he sings, my pig sings songs from famous operas, he even sings in Italian!

Then students apply the practiced skills to their own work by themselves or with the teacher's help.

Student edit of passage

One to One Teacher-Student Conferences

Can I read your writing back to you two different ways?

‘Intervention’ Conference

Every page was a picture with no writing!
A sustained storyline for three pages!!!

Some of the Questions I Collected

During Conferences:
- What would you like to work on today?
- How can I help?
- Can you tell me what you've been thinking and what's giving you trouble?

Questions the Author Can Ask His/Her Audience:
- What did you hear?
- What did you like?
- What else would you like to know?

Questions to Ask to End a Conference:
- What's your next step with this piece?
- What do you plan to do with this piece?

Formal Goal Setting Conference

Goal Setting Conference

Record Keeping

Student Goal Setting Sheet Based on 6+1 Writing Traits

Peer Writing Conferences

Editing and Revising
History of Peer Conferences
- Introduced as part of the Writing Workshop process in the late sixties
- Consisted of small groups of students working together to discuss, revise and improve their work with the help of peers.
- Inspired a number of empirical studies that showed Peer Editing groups performed significantly better than groups using traditional writing methods.

Peer Writing/Editing Conferences in My Classroom

Editing or Revising?
- Editing is usually understood as correcting writing mechanics
- Revision is usually understood as making writing better
- The underlying meaning of a story can be changed through editing

The Author’s Chair
Another Way to ‘Confer’ with Peers

Jane Hansen

What I Found with my Students
- The work to establish social behavior norms helped to create a positive situation in which I never heard arguments.
- Looking over the journal entries from the peer conferences it was evident that corrections and changes were made to each selection either by the author noticing the need to do so herself during the course of the session or as a result of the prompting of the peer.
- No student avoided the process and most were eager to edit their work with a peer. When asked to explain why, students had several insightful comments. One child said, “It’s helpful to edit with someone else because they might have different mistakes than you so you learn to edit different things.” Another student stated, “It was very helpful. People helped me fix lots of things. It made it easier to remember things when I had a helper.”

Added bonus for me and my students...
- My students were empowered as authors
- My students began to recognize the author’s craft in books they read
- I learned to respect my students as authors and trust them to make their own choices in their writing
The Importance of Writing Conferences

“If a teacher can listen to a writer talk about her writing . . . and intervene in ways that lift the level not only of the piece of writing but of the child’s work on future pieces, that teacher’s conferences are a Very Big Deal.”

Lucy Calkins

Resources


Questions?

A Short Overview of Revision

Based on ideas from Jane Hansen and Georgia Heard

Some General Thoughts About Revision:

Revision is to Re-see

- we revise only a portion of our drafts
- we revise the drafts we think have the most promise
- we revise the drafts we want to revise
- there is sort of a sequence to revising (add, delete, reorganize)
- revision takes time!

Make Sure To:

- Bring Revision and Process to the Forefront of the Writing Workshop
- Discuss Students’ Thoughts and Feelings About Revision
- Teach and Demonstrate Specific Revision Strategies
- Expose Students to a Variety of Good Literature
- Teach Mini-Lessons
- Have Students Revise Writing Inspired by Self-Chosen Topics
- Help Students Continue to Develop Confidence and Independence as Writers

From The Revision Toolbox by Georgia Heard
Some Important Areas of Focus for Revision

Words
- look for words that clarify
- look for ways to create vivid images
- look for unusual ways to express yourself

Structure
- rearrange the order of events
- start the piece in three different ways
- check to be sure writing is focused

Voice
- add dialogue
- rewrite in a different genre
- change the point of view

More from The Revision Toolbox by Georgia Heard

Some of Georgia Heard’s Books on Writing

Georgia will be with the Central Virginia Writing Project at UVA on Thursday, November 13. She will describe how writing poetry can be a foundation from which all other writing genres can be learned.

Register for PD Days
http://curry.virginia.edu/gateway/professional-learner/cvwp/opportunities/november-2014

Upcoming Events
Writing and Thinking: A Toolbox for Social Studies and Science Classrooms (Grades 5-8) Presenters: Barb Ashbach and Stephanie Hammer (VSUP)
CVWP Webinar: Evaluating Writing with Pat Cunningham November 4th
Fall PD Days with Georgia Heard Nov 13th and Tom Romano Nov 14th