

## Conversation, Conference, and the Constructive Learner

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## Examples of Conferences

- Parent conferences
- Doctor conferences
- Clinical conferences
- Principal conference
- Teacher conferences
- Student conferences
- Peer conferences
- Conference calls

What do they  
all have in  
common?

## Environment for Conference

- Conference room
  - How does the meeting room facilitate constructive conversations?
- Conference table
  - How does the meeting table facilitate constructive conversations?
- Conference structure
  - How does the conference format facilitate constructive conversations?

## Predictable Structure

- Keep it short
  - Writer comes prepared to learn from the conference
- Have a focus
  - Strategies, skill, process, craft
- Put the writer in charge
  - How's it going? How can I help you?

## Characteristics of Writing Classrooms

- Teachers make writing an everyday experience
- Teachers model the writing process
- Teachers immerse the class in great books and beautiful language
- Teachers invite students to spend time with books and authors

## Characteristics of Writing Classrooms

- Teachers present the skills and conventions of writing in context
- Teachers help young writers find an audience
- Teachers guide young writers to examine techniques used by writers they are reading

## Writing Climate

### Writing Partner

- Sits beside child
- Sits near to child
- Shoulder to shoulder
- As close to child's height as possible
- Eye contact
- Child holds writing

### Writing Adversary

- Sits opposite child
- Does not sit near child
- Towers over child; chair too high
- Ignores eye contact
- Teacher holds writing

## The Conference Tools

- Talk becomes the tool for enabling the writer to improve
- Good texts become the examples for creating, comparing, and reflecting on the process
- Predictable routines and structures free the writer's mind to focus on the content and strategies
- Supportive environment promotes the risk-taking behaviors for the writer's self-improvement

## Expert Versus Novice

- The most effective conversations include a more knowledgeable person who can lift the learning of the novice.
- The least effective conferences include two or more learners at the same level of knowledge.

## The Helping Nature of Talk

- How might my talk help the writer?
- How might my talk hinder the writer?
- Am I promoting dependency or independency behaviors?

## Getting the Child to Talk

- Follow the child
- Ask questions you think the child can answer
- Use slightly different phrasing to prompt the child to expand
- Help the child to focus

## Focus on Writing or Writer?

### Learning for Today

Focus on Product

Accuracy

Short Term

### Learning for Tomorrow

Focus on Process

Problem-Solving

Long Term



### Guidelines for Writing Conferences

- Writing must be meaningful
- Writing develops best in a climate that encourages risk-taking and honors initiative
- Writing is more learned than taught
- Writing improves by improving the writer, not the piece

### Types of Writing Conferences

- Rehearsal Conference
- Drafting Conference
- Organizing Conference
- Revising Conference
- Editing Conference
- Portfolio Conference

### Rehearsal Conference

Goal is to help students

- ✓ Find ideas
- ✓ Organize thoughts
- ✓ Gather information
- ✓ Brainstorm topics

### Coaching During Conferences: Leading From Behind

- Sharing models and examples
- Demonstrating effective techniques
- Prompting for problem-solving strategies
- Intervening and redirecting
- Encouraging and enabling success
- Providing constructive feedback
- Guiding through the process

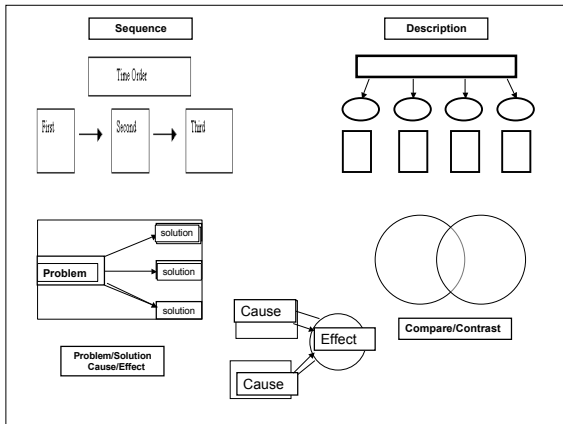
### Drafting Conference

- Goal is to help the student develop the big idea
  - ✓ Deciding which genre and structure to use
  - ✓ Developing the content
  - ✓ Keeping the ideas flowing
  - ✓ Focusing on the message

### Organizing Ideas

The goal is to help the writer graphically organize ideas into meaningful and logical representations

- Text maps
- Outlines
- Drawings
- Timelines



## Revising Conference

- Goal is to help student improve the draft
  - ✓ Clarify big ideas
  - ✓ Consider whether the writing reflects the quality of the appropriate genre
  - ✓ Rethink the sentence structures
  - ✓ Craft the writing
  - ✓ Add or delete content
  - ✓ Make sure the writing makes sense

## The Structure of Language

- Goal is to help student use conventions of language
  - Combining sentences
  - Using transition words
  - Balancing short and long sentences

## Editing Conference

- Goal is to help student become a better editor with conventions of language
  - ✓ Spelling
  - ✓ Grammar
  - ✓ Punctuation
  - ✓ Paragraph structure

## Portfolio Conference

- Goal is to help the student develop self-reflective knowledge
  - Compare and analyze pieces
  - Evaluate progress over time
  - Recognize strengths and needs
  - Make decisions about writing pieces

## Putting the Learner in Charge

- How's it going?
- What are you doing today as a writer?
- What do you need help with today?
- What would you like to work on today?

### Prompts for Expanding and Elaborating

- What do you mean by that?
- Can you say more?
- Could you explain this to me?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?
- Please help me understand this part here.
- Is this another way to say this that might help your reader understand it better?

### Prompts for Applying the Process

- Have you planned out your draft?
- What's the focus on your writing?
- How will you organize your ideas?
- What kinds of revisions have you made?
- Have you edited your work for spelling?
- Which piece would you like to publish?
- What is your favorite piece in your portfolio? Why?

### Prompts for Strategies

Why have you tried so far?  
Is there something else you can try to help yourself?  
Why is this easy for you to do?  
What is making this so difficult for you?  
What do you need to work on?  
How can you improve this part?  
What do you know that can help you?

### Prompts for Analysis

- I noticed an earlier place where you used varied sentences. Can you find another place to do this?
- Have you ever encountered a problem like this before? When? How did you go about helping yourself?

### Prompts for Self-Reflection

- Which pieces would you like to publish?
- What is your least favorite piece? Why? Can you improve it?
- What are you now able to do as a writer that you couldn't do before?
- How has your writing changed?
- What is it about this topic that interests you?
- Let's compare this piece with another piece.
- What would you like your parents to understand about your portfolio?

### Peer Conference Prompts

- Ask your partner to listen carefully as you read your rough draft out loud.
- Ask your partner to help you improve your writing by responding to these questions.
  - What did you like best about my rough draft?
  - What did you have the hardest time understanding about my rough draft?
  - What can you suggest I do to improve my rough draft?

Guthrie & Cox. (1995). *Teaching every child every day: Learning in diverse classrooms*. In Harris & Graham. Brookline Books.