Literacy: It All Connects

Content Conference
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Content Conference

Teachers work with all of students throughout the writers' workshop. After writing a story, sharing with the class, answering questions about the story, and adding to their story, it is very important for students to sit down with their teacher and talk about their progress. Usually about two children are ready for a content conference every day.

Some important points to remember when meeting with students:

1. **Keep a nurturing tone.** Avoid the tendency to take over the conference and get right into correcting the story. Remember that the student may be resisting changes to his or her writing so start each meeting with a positive thought.

2. **Give students time to think.** During a writers' workshop, try to walk around the classrooms and see how things are going. Ask questions of each student, such as "Would you like to talk about your idea?" or "I noticed that you are adding dialogue, do you need help?" Then wait. Avoid the impulse to fill the silence with suggestions. When students have a chance to think through their writing, their responses are more thoughtful. A key goal of conferencing is to let students develop their own problem-solving skills and instincts about their work.

3. **Follow up with more questions, not answers.** Asking, "What do you think?" will help the child to develop their own inner voice.

4. 

5. **Set goals.** After we have talked, be sure to set up their goals for the story. Teachers also need to list those goals and follow through during the next few days.

Here's an example of a typical teacher-student conference exchange relating to the student's story about her grandfather.

TEACHER: "How is your story going?"
ESTHER: "Fine." (Wait a bit more to see if she will say more). "I think I am ready to type the story."
TEACHER: "What is the story called?"
ESTHER: "I don't have a title."
TEACHER: "Okay..."
ESTHER: "I can ask around for a title." (This indicates that she acquired this strategy from a mini-lesson on titles.)
ME: "That sounds great. Let me know the title for your story after you find out."

Esther then listed some titles and asked other children which one they liked best.
Conference Guidelines for Students

• Come with materials
• Make eye contact
• Take time to think
• Ask questions when you don't understand
• Help set reachable goals
• Call for follow-up meetings if you feel you need them

Conference Guidelines for Teachers

• Create a relaxed atmosphere
• Make eye contact
• Be positive; help students identify their strengths and progress
• Listen carefully
• Let participants do most of the talking
• Ask questions that help participants think about difficulties they're having
• Take notes during the conference
• Encourage participates to discover strategies for themselves
• Offer choices when setting goals
• Close with an upbeat comment, and make students aware of your support

Esther

Esther had been working on a story about her grandfather. She wrote the story, shared, added to the story, and added the title. She was then told to go ahead and type the story as is and to meet with the teacher for a content conference.

When the teacher looked through the typed story, he saw that the order of the story was confusing. Thus, he sat down and asked her about the four areas in her story. As he wrote, she told him that the story was about when her grandfather was young; when he was in the Navy; when he was married; and when he retired.

The student, with the teacher's help, then made a web for these four areas.
Afterwards, the teacher asked Esther to go through every page of her story and list each sentence as being 1 (young), 2 (Navy), 3 (married) or 4 (retired). Once that was done she would do paragraphs on the four parts of her story.

Once day my grandfather was navy.
He become old, he drives ship for war.
(He died on March 3, 1995). Because he worked hot pipe in boat basement stop war Japan was give up later fine then can I breathe doctor found out from bomb hot pipe. Later was night sleep in my home.
Sean
Sean often writes one word per line, but during the sharing phase, he can always tell a complete story. Here is Sean’s first draft:

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Mom Dad
Cook
Bake
Eat
Sleep
Cried
Drank
Cocoa
Meal
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During the second draft (revision), the teacher encouraged Sean to make a web in order to get all his ideas on paper. Sean’s web and second draft follow:

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I'm in the mom
I'm in the dad
I'm in the cat
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During the content conference, the teacher asked Sean what each sentence meant. Sean then revised his story again.
Sean, like Esther and the other students, were now prepared for self-editing and an editing conference with their teacher.

For more information about conference check out the following title:

The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center is comprised of two federally mandated demonstration schools for students from birth through age 21 who are deaf. Located on the campus of Gallaudet University, these schools work in collaboration with a national network of exemplary programs and professionals to identify, research, develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative curricula, materials, educational strategies, and technologies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Clerc Center also provides training and technical assistance to families and programs throughout the United States, and serves as a model individualized educational program, working in close partnership with its students and their families.

Working for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Throughout the United States