

Thinking about Reading Conferences: Conferring with Readers

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Conferring: The Keystone of Reader's Workshop

"What Are You Thinking? Conferring in Reader's Workshop" (DVD)

"Fact Finders: Shared Nonfiction Think-Aloud" (DVD)

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Some Thoughts about Conferring with Readers

Conferring . . .

- mirrors rich conversations
- shepherds developing readers and writers
- provides a context for ongoing assessment and responsive teaching

- Conrad and Allen

Conferring is a keystone of effective instruction. Without conferring, my reader's workshop flounders. If I do not have time each day to meet one-on-one with readers, I don't have a clear picture of each reader and who he is becoming as a reader. It is a key instructional strategy that strengthens the community of readers.

- Allen

I have come to realize that in many ways, I don't even think like a teacher in many of my writing (reading) conferences. When I share ideas with a student, it is really very much writer to writer (reader to reader). As I listen to students talk about what's happening with them in their writing (reading), I am listening as an insider, as someone who does this too.

- Ray

Without groundwork, conferences will be for not – we must provide the underlying structures of a working environment, we must explicitly teach strategies to develop conference fodder, we must develop relationships to develop rich conversations, we must show our students that our conversations are important to both them and us . . .

Conferences, like many conversations, have the following characteristics:

- they have a point to them
- they have a predictable structure
- together, we pursue lines of thinking
- teacher and student have conversational roles
- we show students we care

- Anderson

It's not just the final understanding, but the process of seeking what understanding is throughout the process that's important.

- Allen

When we confer with students, we're not standing above them or even leaning over, we're sitting right beside them, shoulder to shoulder. We're digging deeper now, working hard to individualize our instruction and support children as they apply what we've taught them in large- and small-group settings.

- Miller

How should we respond to a look, a piece of blackberry pie, a kiss, a death in the family, a joke, to the sneaky warm of the winter sun when it touches a hand? As a human being. There can be no way—no single, correct, preconceived way—for one human being in the dynamic, ever-changing context of a human interaction to respond to another human being.

- Murray

Listening to children is more a deliberate act than a natural one. It isn't easy to put aside personal preferences, anxieties about helping more children, or the glaring, mechanical errors that stare from the page. I mumble to myself, "Shut up, listen, and learn!"

Through our active listening, children become our informants. Unless children speak about what they know, we lose out on what they know and how they know it. Through our eyes and ears we learn from them: their stories, how they solve problems, what their wishes and dreams are, what works/doesn't work, their vision of a better classroom, and what they think they need to learn to succeed.

- Graves

The more we read, the more we are able to read... Every time a reader meets a new word, something new is likely to be learned about the identification and meaning of words. Every time a new text is read, something new is likely to be learned about **reading** different kinds of text. Learning to read is not a process of building up a repertoire of specific skills, which make all kinds of reading possible. Instead, experience increases the ability to read different kinds of text.

- Smith

We have evidence that opportunities to engage in discussion are related to improved achievement.

- Allington

Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't *hear*. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't my mother's voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. I have supposed, but never found out, that this is the case with all readers--to read as listeners--and with all writers, to write as listeners. It may be part of the desire to write. The sound of what falls on the page begins the process of testing it for truth, for me. Whether I am right to trust so far I don't know. By now I don't know whether I could do either one, reading or writing, without the other.

- Welty

Learning to confer is an art; we know that. It's not easy; it takes practice. But it's one of the most important and beneficial instructional moves I use with my students.

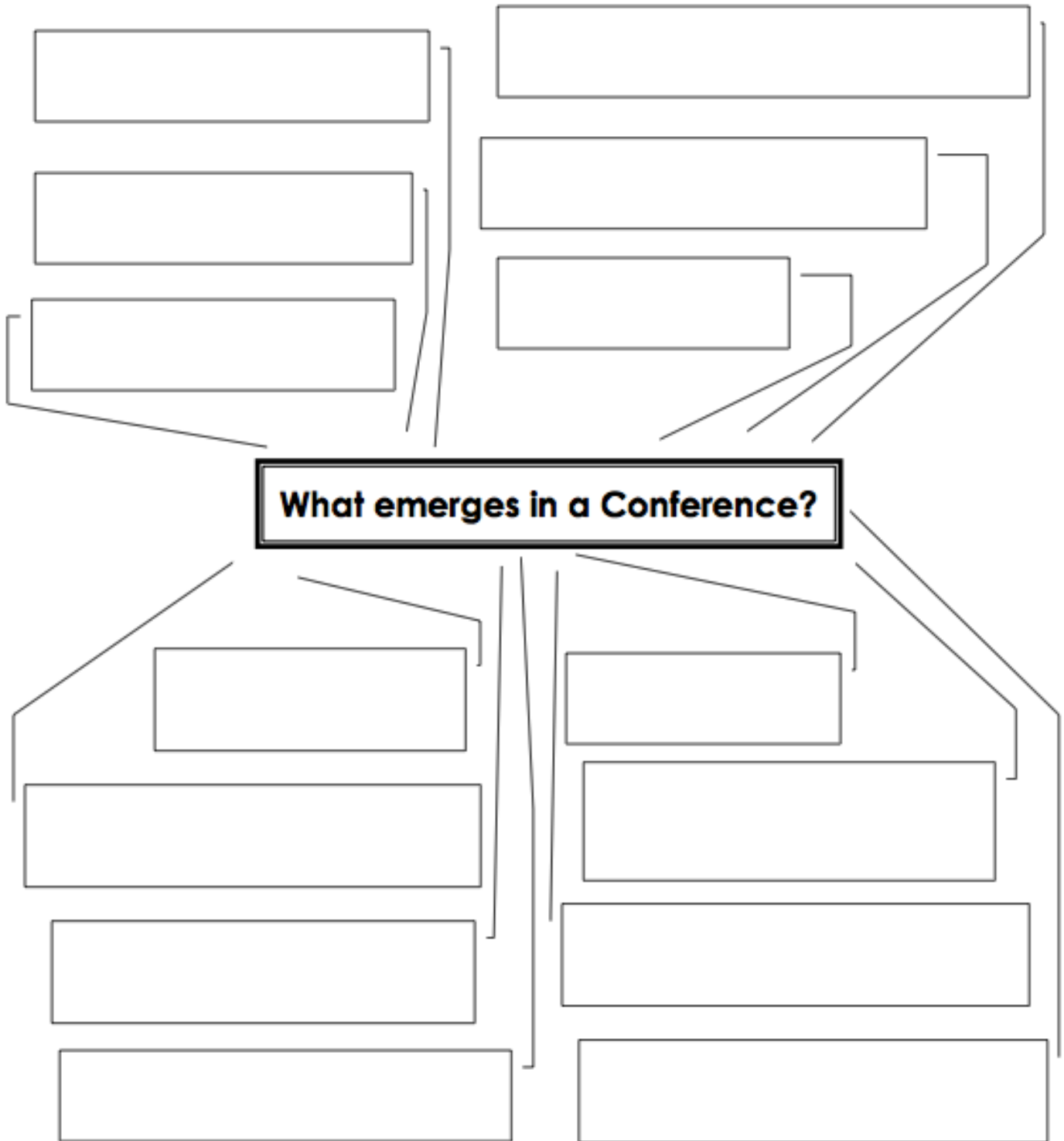
- Allen

Our disposition when we interact with students is crucial. This goes back to bonding: students achieve more when they trust us and feel comfortable with us.

- Routman

During the children's independent reading workshop, teachers have very challenging work to do, too. While the children read privately or with partners, the teacher moves around the room providing direct instruction. In order to do this, we need to know our students as readers, a variety of ways to support their reading development, and how to teach the strategies they need to grow as readers.

- Collin



Authentic rituals and routines
lead to
committed, proficient, independent readers and writers
while *false rituals and artificial routines*
lead to
classroom mindlessness and uninspired,
dependent readers and writers.



Ashlar 1: Defining Trust, Respect, and Tone

Ashlar 2: Strengthening Endurance and Stamina

Ashlar 3: Discussing Purpose and Audience

Ashlar 4: Exploring the Gradual Release of Responsibility Model

Ashlar 5: Focusing on the Structure of Reader's Workshop

Cultivating Rigor

The **Cognitive** Context of Conferring

- How do we uncover students' strengths, struggles, and genuine wonderings?
 - How much do we listen?
 - How much do we teach?

Nurturing Inquiry

The **Analytical** Context of Conferring

- How can we find specific patterns of growth and need – including elements of strong literacy craft?
 - How might we make note of what we see and what we learn?
 - How might we match students with mentors they can learn with or from?

Developing Intimacy

The **Social** Context of Conferring

- Who does the talking?
 - Who owns the text?
 - Where do I sit?

Bella: Thinking Through Personal Connections to Text

In this conference, Bella shares her excitement about the book *The War with Grandpa* (Smith 1984). During the conference, we see Bella thinking through the characters and her personal connections with the story. She makes predictions about the story based on events in the story and shares her point of view about the story elements.

Reading Conferences for Bella

Date 9/15 Title The War With Grandpa Page[s] _____

REVIEW/READ ALOUD/RECORD	INSTRUCTION/INSIGHTS/INTRIGUE	PLAN/PROGRESS/PURPOSE
:jumps right into text retell vt . "laughing" enjoying text- retells w/ joy and animation T/ "How to retell?" s/ referred back to text and notebook T/ "How to keep important thoughts?"	s/ "Writing them down so I can remember..." "That's a whole different story..." (s/ language) • Notice lots of inferring i.e. Peter's room, sounds she heard, etc. • Refers often to text T/ "There's something that's connecting you..."	s/ "I'm really nosy about the characters..." (possible crafting?) • Tells story about her being "nosy" - possible writing topic T/ ? "Habit of nosy?" • Figure out why you doing that helps you relate to character...
Additional Comment(s): <i>reading wider diet; expanding thinking; using craft of book shopping and notebook; joyful!</i>		

Essential Snippets of Conferring Language

- Ⓐ How were you able to remember so much?
- Ⓐ How are you keeping track of those important details, other than keeping them in your head?
- Ⓐ When do you think that's going to happen?
- Ⓐ How do you take that habit of being nosy and put it into a book?

Conference Discoveries

- Ⓐ Bella knew that book choice plays an important role in her reading diet.
- Ⓐ Bella knew that inferring helps a reader understand text.
- Ⓐ Bella knew that joy and laughter are attributes of a reader.