

Reading Conference Architecture

Conferring Tips:

While students are working independently, the teacher spends time conferring with individual students. A conference should feel like a conversation between teacher and student. Although conferences are brief, ranging from two to five minutes in length, they are incredibly productive since they focus on the specific needs of one student or a small group of students. Conferences are a critical component of the workshop because they can be aimed at providing a student with support and extra practice on a previously taught strategy but can also be used to provide enrichment for students who have already mastered a certain strategy. Although conferences are responsive and each conference is unique, they nevertheless do have a predictable structure. The architecture of the conference is outlined below.

Conferring Architecture:

- **Research:** Teachers begin a conference by researching what students know. Teachers observe, interview and review artifacts of student work [*note taking, reader responses, letters*] as ways to understand what the student is trying to do as a reader. By interviewing or asking the student questions, the teacher is able to glean more about the student's intentions. A teacher may begin a conference, for example, by asking, "How is it going?", or "Can you tell me what you're working on as a reader today?" (also see *Guiding Readers and Writers*, Fountas & Pinnell, pp. 140).
- **Compliment:** The teacher will name a specific strategy that the student has been able to do as reader to show that the teacher values and hopes the student will continue to use that strategy. Compliments are most effective when they are used as a teachable moment, in other words, when teachers give specific compliments that explicitly name a strategy, such as, "*Awesome job making the character sound frustrated here. Good readers infer character emotions when they read,*" rather than giving a generic compliment like "Good job."
- **Decide:** Based on the research the teacher decides one strategy to teach the reader and how she/he will teach it. Often there will be many possible teaching points--however weigh the possibilities and select the one which will advance the work of the reader the greatest at that moment.
- **Teach:** The teacher explicitly names the strategy that the student will learn as well as its purpose (i.e. why readers use this strategy). The teacher demonstrates the strategy, narrating each step and drawing attention to each step by using language such as "Watch me as I show you...", and "Did you notice how I..." The teacher then offers the student guided practice, or coaching, while the student practices the strategy in his/her book. (This is similar to the teaching and active engagement components of the mini-lesson.)
- **Link:** The teacher ends the conference by renaming for the student the strategy learned and reminding the student to use it often in his/her reading. The goal of any conference is to teach the reader a strategy that he/she can transfer to other texts he/she reads.