

CONFERRING WITH ELEMENTARY STUDENTS TO ENHANCE LITERACY
SKILLS

By

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INTRODUCTION

Project Summary

Research Question

Throughout my own experiences growing up, as well as my experiences as an educator, I have seen the value that conferring has on myself and my students. Growing up, I had educators and family members that worked with me one-on-one with my reading development. Through these personal meetings with those close to me, I grew to love reading. As I grew up and became an educator, I learned that these one on one personal meetings had a specific name: conferring. In my classroom, I have seen students grasp literacy skills, feel more confident in their literacy abilities, and fall in love with reading and writing through the use of conferring. Now that I am three years into my teaching career and have tried out a few other ways to help improve the literacy (reading and writing) of students, I am still drawn to conferring. This interest and passion led me to my question: *How does conferring improve the literacy skills of elementary students?*

My project was created to help other educators understand what conferring is and aid them in implementing conferring into their classrooms. In this section, I will describe the details and format of my project as well as the intended audience.

Description of Project

After researching conferring and the benefits of it to elementary student's literacy skills, I decided that this would be very valuable to share with my colleagues. For this reason, I decided to create a professional development explaining what conferring is and how it can be implemented into the classroom. Since conferring has three main components, it was best to create a professional development that spans over three

separate days. Between each professional development, I made myself available to help the educators in any way. I offered my support in these ways: modeling, co-teaching, observing, offering feedback or planning a conference with teachers either individually or in their grade alike groups.

This professional development will have the required text *A Teacher's Guide to Reading Conferences* by Jennifer Serravallo. Some of videos and handouts used in these sessions come straight from the online resources of this book by Jennifer Serravallo so not all videos and resources will be accessible to view.

Session one served as an introduction to conferring as well as highlighting the first major component, assessment. Educators left this professional development with an overarching understanding of what conferring is and what assessment looks like in a conference. They also left with a few tools to help them implement assessment conferences in their own classroom. Session two reviewed the conferring process as a whole but mostly focused on the second component, individualized instruction. Educators left session two with tools for and an understanding of how to integrate individualized instruction into their current conferences. Educators created lists of strategies based on reading and writing skills to help make this process easier to implement. The final session covered the last component of conferring, goal setting. Educators, similar to the last two sessions, discovered what goal setting looks like in a conference and were given tools to help this process in the classroom. We ended our last professional development with a group discussion time to reflect on what was going well and what they needed more help on. This discussion provided a space for educators to share what they were struggling with and for other educators to share what has worked for them.

Project Format

As mentioned above, this professional development took place over three days. Each day will be around three and a half hours each. After researching some major components of effective professional development, I made sure to include these three in my training: active learning, reflective conversations and for the professional development to span over multiple sessions.

Educators, just like students, need to actively engage in the material instead of sitting through a lecture (Taylor, 2006). In order for educators to feel comfortable with the content and applying it in their own classrooms, they need a chance to actively engage in the material (Taylor, 2006). Research says that when educators engage in active learning on a topic, the information will go from just memorizing the content, to actually implementing it into the classroom (Taylor, 2006). In my professional development, the educators are actively involved in the learning by participating in brainstorm sessions and engaging small and large group activities and discussions.

Along with active learning, collaboration is a key aspect in education and therefore should be incorporated in professional developments as well (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). Having collaborative conversations with subject alike peers can be just as beneficial as listening to the leader of the professional development share (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). When teams are given time to collaborate, they can learn from each other and make a plan for how to implement the skill based on what is best for their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Educators should also get the opportunity to reflect and collaborate with the leader of the professional development. Research indicated that when educators get the

opportunity to sit down and reflect with the coach or leader, they are more likely to implement the strategy or skill into their classroom (Peterson, Taylor, Burnham & Schock, 2009). During this reflection conversation with the coach and the educator, they can discuss what their instruction looks like now and how to effectively include the new learnings into their instruction (Peterson, et al., 2009). During these three days of adult learning, educators got the chance to both work with grade alike groups as well as mixed groups that had one member from each grade level. This diversity in collaboration allowed for educators to both gain and share ideas with a variety of other educators. The educators also worked with myself between the sessions while implementing conferring in their classrooms.

The final researched based practice I incorporated in my professional development is to spend more than one session on conferring. In order for professional development to be effective, the training should occur over multiple sessions with time between professional developments where the leaders are available to educators to have those reflective conversations (Porche, Pallante & Snow, 2012). This research backs my decision to break this professional development up into three separate sessions.

Audience

This professional development was targeted for my specific suburban elementary school. This professional development was aimed at the educators that work with students on their literacy growth. This included all grade level teachers, special education teachers, our reading intervention teachers and our English Language support teachers. There were twenty-one grade level educators (grades first-fifth), five special education teachers, seven reading intervention teachers and two English Language support

educators that participated in the professional developments. Other educators, like our specialist teachers, were given the option to attend if they would like more information about supporting the literacy of their students. Two specialist teachers attended.

Conclusion

This professional development was designed to explain what conferring with readers and writers is, what it looks like in the classroom, and provide tools to help educators implement conferring in their classrooms. In the following sections, I will provide the agendas, handouts, presentations and script notes for each of the three sessions.

Session One

Session One: Assessment Conferences

September 1st from 8:00-11:30

Learning Targets:

Educators will...

- Identify the main components of conferring.
- Explain the role assessment has in conferring.
- Obtain tools to help aid assessments in the conferring process.
- Create grade level criteria for basic reading skills.

Agenda:

8:00-8:15	Introductions and Learning Targets
8:15 - 8:45	What is Conferring?
8:45 - 9:15	Brainstorm Activity - What does it look like in the classroom?
9:15 - 10:00	Assessment Conferences
10:00 - 11:00	Level “Look-Fors” Small Group Activity
11:00 - 11:30	Ending Notes

Required Materials (for the participants to bring):

- Required Text: A Teacher’s Guide to Reading Conferences by Jennifer Serravallo
- The Next Steps in Guided Reading by Jan Richardson
- Five-Six children’s books at the level your students should end the school year at.
- School computer

Required Materials (for the instructor to bring):

- Required Text: A Teacher’s Guide to Reading Conferences by Jennifer Serravallo.
- [Session One Slideshow](#)
- [Session One Script Notes](#)
- [Level Look-Fors recording document by grade level](#)
- Large Chart Paper ([This](#) is the chart paper I used)

- Markers
- Post It Notes
- Resources from the Required Text (these are only accessible using the access code inside the book):
 - [Assessment Conference Note Taking Form](#)
 - Video – “[Video: Assessment Conference \(Jan\)](#)”

After the session:

- I will need this [Level “look-for” progression document](#) to compile the work done by the educators in this session. I will compile all of their level look-fors into this progression so all educators can see where students should be at for each skill at the end of their grade level.

Session Two

Session Two: Individualized Instruction in Conferences

October 9th from 8:00-11:30

Learning Targets:

Educators will...

- Identify the main components of conferring.
- Explain the role individual instruction has in conferring.
- Obtain tools to help aid individualized instruction in the conferring process.
- Create a diverse range of strategies for literacy skills.

Agenda:

8:00-8:15	Introductions and Learning Targets
8:15 - 9:00	Review of Conferring and Reflection
9:00 - 9:45	Individualized Instruction in Conferences
9:45 - 10:45	Strategy Small Group Activity
10:45 - 11:15	Independent Activity to plan for Individualized Instruction
11:15 - 11:30	Ending Notes

Required Materials (for the participants to bring):

- Required Text: A Teacher's Guide to Reading Conferences by Jennifer Serravallo
- Reading Strategies book and Writing Strategies book by Jennifer Serravallo
- Next Steps in Guided Reading by Jan Richardson
- Assessment conference notes from 2-3 student conferences
- School computer

Required Materials (for the instructor to bring):

- Required Text: A Teacher's Guide to Reading Conferences by Jennifer Serravallo.
- [Session Two Slideshow](#)
- [Session Two Script Notes](#)
- Poster brainstorms from session 1 on individualized instruction

- [Level “look-for” progression document](#) with the compiled work from last session.
- [Small Group Activity Share Out](#)
- Video – [“Research-Design-Teach Conference”](#)
- Post It Notes

Session Three

Session Three: Goal Setting in Conferences

November 6th from 8:00-11:30

Learning Targets:

Educators will...

- Identify the main components of conferring.
- Explain the role goal setting has in conferring.
- Plan individual goals for the educators' students.
- Gain organization tools/ideas to implement conferring in the classroom.

Agenda:

8:00-8:15	Introductions and Learning Targets
8:15 - 8:45	Review of Conferring and Reflection
8:45 - 9:45	Goal Setting in Conferences
9:45 - 10:30	Independent Activity to plan for Goal Setting in Conferences
10:30 - 11:15	Whole Group Discussion/Share-Out
11:15 - 11:30	Ending Notes

Required Materials (for the participants to bring):

- Required Text: A Teacher's Guide to Reading Conferences by Jennifer Serravallo
- Reading Strategies book by Jennifer Serravallo
- Writing Strategies book by Jennifer Serravallo
- Conference notes from 2-3 student conferences
- School computer

Required Materials (for the instructor to bring):

- Required Text: A Teacher's Guide to Reading Conferences by Jennifer Serravallo.
- [Session Three Slideshow](#)
- [Session Three Script Notes](#)
- Poster brainstorms from session 1 on goal setting
- [Level "look-for" progression document](#) with the compiled work from session one

- [Small Group Activity Share Out](#) from session two
- [Padlet](#)
- Grades K-2 Video – [“Goal Setting Conference – Writing – First Grade”](#)
- Grades 3-4 Video – [“Assessment Based Conferring to Raise the Level of Narrative Writing so the Writer can Convey Events Precisely \(3-5\)”](#)
- [Goal Setting Organization Form - Student](#)
- [Goal Setting Organization Form - Teacher](#)
- [Google Form reflection](#)
- Post It Notes

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