

A photograph of a teacher with short brown hair, wearing a dark top, sitting at a yellow table with a group of young children in a classroom. The children are wearing white shirts and are looking at books or papers on the table. The teacher is smiling and looking towards the children. In the background, there are bookshelves filled with books, a whiteboard on an easel, and a bulletin board with various papers and decorations. The overall atmosphere is bright and educational.

# Conferencing

What types exist?

Denee, Emily, Kelly, & Lauren

# What is Conferencing?

**Conferencing is important in allowing for purpose-driven conversation between teachers and students, where the students take the lead role in reflecting on their learning.**

*“The process of conferencing and reporting is changing from a teacher-directed, end-of-term event to a collaborative ongoing process designed to support learning.” (Gregory et al., 2011)*

**Through the collection and sharing of evidence, students are prompted to develop metacognitive skills and teachers can guide them in forming tangible goals for further learning.**

It is important to keep in mind that conferencing is a **teaching** strategy.

*“Conferring is teaching, not troubleshooting” (Ray, 2001, p.157)*

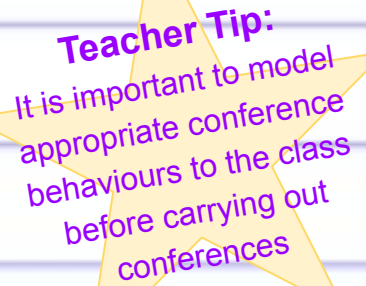
# Why Use Conferencing?

A helpful pre-conference checklist for teachers developing a conference format:

*Does this conference ...*

- Allow students to develop social communication and conversation skills?
- Allow for students to become aware of their own strengths and needs, which leads to them becoming more successful learners?
- Provide students with immediate feedback and clarifications?
- Allow students to take on a lead role in their education? (taking part in reflection, self-assessment, goal-setting, and effective communication of their thoughts and needs)
- Grow the students' metacognitive capabilities?
- Incorporate student in the assessment process? (to foster achievement)

(Taken from Pamela Quigg's "What you need to know about conferencing!")



**Teacher Tip:**  
It is important to model appropriate conference behaviours to the class before carrying out conferences

# Post-Conference Checklist

*Did you, as a teacher, notice the following occurring during/after the conference?*

- Student took a lead role
- Work samples or demonstrations were used to show proof of learning
- Students invited an audience (could be you, the teacher) to participate in the process
- Audiences took an active role and gave specific feedback to learner
- The student emulated the conference behaviors you modelled to the class  
pre-conference
- Student has set new learning goal(s)
- Evidence that the student has developed a sense of academic self-efficacy (connected to strategies learned during the conference)

(Taken from Pamela Quigg's "What you need to know about conferencing!")



**What about pros, cons, and  
bias?**

# Pros

*“Conferences ... provide individualized instruction for each student, provide insight into what the student is doing while reading and writing, help teacher investigate student knowledge, help assess the student, can provide reinforcement or enrichment of skills, and can help students improve their reading level”*  
(Schwartz, Sep 2016 - referring to Reading Conferences)

According to John Spencer  
(*The power of student conferencing*, 2015):

- ★ Get the chance to know the students on a more personal level
- ★ Students feel known on a deeper level - increases trust
- ★ Students empowered to ask questions about their work and reflect on product and process
- ★ (in terms of mini-conferences) - saves time, every conference is ongoing formative assessment → less time grading

- Offer much-needed face-to-face time (with student or parent, etc.)
- Can be done throughout a day
- By using different types of conferencing throughout a year, students can find a way that works well for them and their communication style
- Online conferencing works well for parents and families that may not be available to come in to school
- Wonderful for ELL learners - can ask more specific questions about vocabulary and sentence construction to pinpoint areas of needed focus going forward in order to gain learning in larger group sessions (Sarah Rimm-Kauffman, 2013)

# Cons

- In terms of parent-teacher conferences - could be seen as a waste of time, especially if only “good” students’ parents participate and there is not much to discuss (Doyne, 2013)
- Teachers may find it daunting - trying to find *time* for conferences with every student (especially with lots of students)
- Not all students feel comfortable speaking about work, can be harder for reluctant, shy, or quiet students (help students by giving them prompts, using anchor charts to help them feel prepared on what is expected)
- Need to be prepared with your own objectives and explain your key focus, otherwise you risk confusing your students on their learning objectives

- Not all students have the same support at home, may not have as much family involvement or feedback
- Pay attention to nonverbal cues and tone of voice
- Not all conferencing types will work for every student
- Easier to conference with outgoing students
- Potentially diminishes students ability to see each other as teachers





**What are some specific examples of conferencing?**

# Reading Conferences

## Reading conferences allow teachers to:

- ★ See what books students are choosing to read & help them adjust the level if necessary
- ★ Determine if students are applying what they are learning during other parts of the literacy block
- ★ Spend one-on-one time with students → build relationships and provide relevant instruction

## Going beyond the reading conference:

\***Check-back conferences:** touch base with student to see if they have been using the strategy they were taught (a little looser)

\***Extended conferences:** rarely used - but if a child is really struggling, spend 5-10 min. working with child's trouble spot (modeling, guided practice, encourage child to use strategy)

## What might a reading conference look like?

- About 5 minutes long
- Good to try to see students once every 2 weeks
- "Standard" conference format:  
*Observe-Compliment-Teach*
- A good conference begins before sitting down with reader - have ideas in mind about what you might want to work on (so you don't go blank)
- Recommendation: have a list of goals for current reading unit, have a list of strategies that are relevant to student's current reading level

# Prepping for Reading Conferences

**Carl Anderson (a guru in conferencing, according to Melissa Schwartz) recommends starting with this plan:**

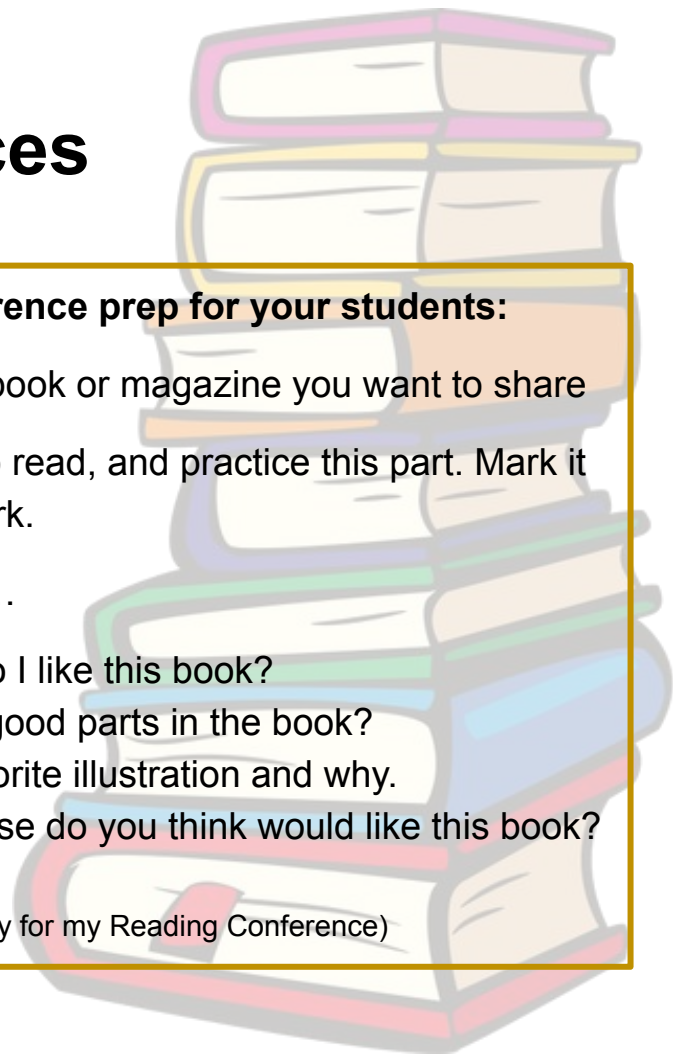
1. Compliment the learner
2. State the teaching point
3. Provide a metaphor
4. Study a mentor text
5. Teach a strategy
6. Practice
7. Keep notes

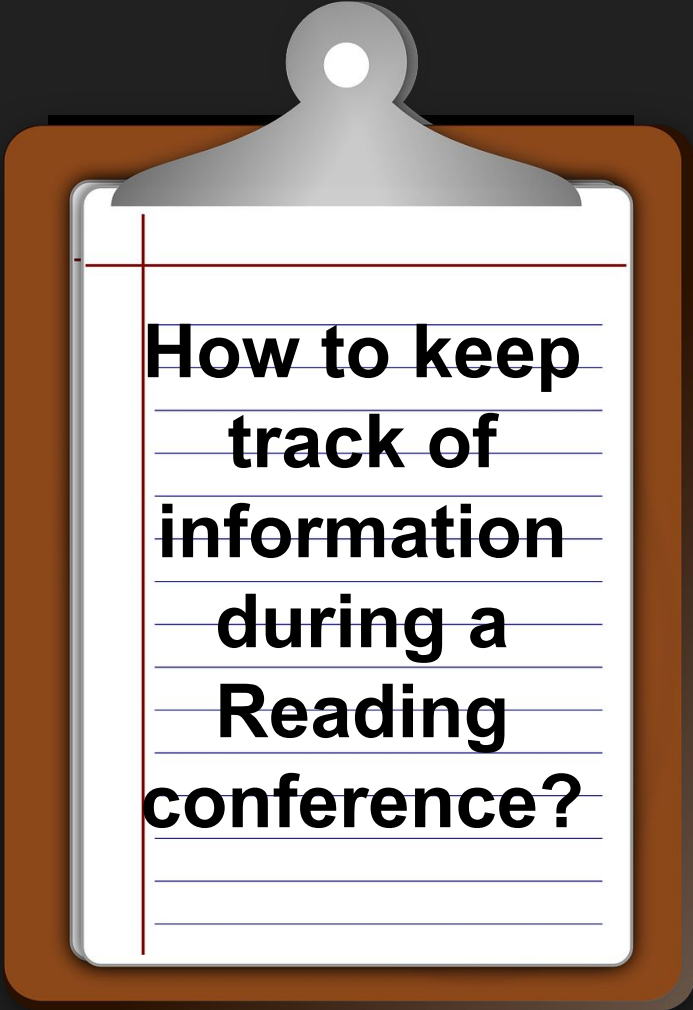
(Source: Schwartz, Sep 2016)

## Suggested conference prep for your students:

- Choose the book or magazine you want to share
- Pick a part to read, and practice this part. Mark it with bookmark.
- Think about...
  - ◆ Why do I like this book?
  - ◆ Other good parts in the book?
  - ◆ My favorite illustration and why.
  - ◆ Who else do you think would like this book?

(P. Quigg. Getting Ready for my Reading Conference)





# How to keep track of information during a Reading conference?

---

*“Research is one of the most important aspects of the reading (and writing) conferences. This is the time when you are learning about what the student is already doing and what skills he or she has. You can take these skills and determine where he or she needs support.”*

(Schwartz, Sep 2016)

- Keep a student checklist
- Melissa Schwartz suggests making a sheet with a table for each student - which you can then organize into a binder (example on next slide)

# Sample Reading Conference Note-Taking Template

Reading Conferences for \_\_\_\_\_ Page[s] \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEW/READ ALOUD/RECORD	INSTRUCTION/INSIGHTS/INTRIGUE	PLAN/PROGRESS/PURPOSE

Additional Comment(s): \_\_\_\_\_

# Schwartz's Reading Workshop Format (Aug 2016)

*“The goal of a reading workshop is to create lifelong readers through authentic reading instruction. The reading workshop structure allows students to pick their own books based on their reading levels.”*

- **Setting up a reading workshop classroom:**
  - ◆ Collect books for classroom library
  - ◆ Organize classroom library
  - ◆ Create comfortable space for students
  - ◆ Establish a routine
- **Assessing the students on their levels** - you can use the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) or other assessment types
- Have a *mini-lesson* at the beginning of each reading period

**Note:** ideal amount of time to have for reading is forty minutes to an hour.

## Break-down of the reading time:

- Mini-lesson (8–10 minutes)
  - ◆ Connection
  - ◆ Teaching Point
  - ◆ Teach
  - ◆ Active Engagement
  - ◆ Link
- Independent Reading/Individual and Group Conferences (30–40 minutes)
- Closing (5 minutes)

# Tips for Doing Reading Conferences from a Grade 3 Teacher

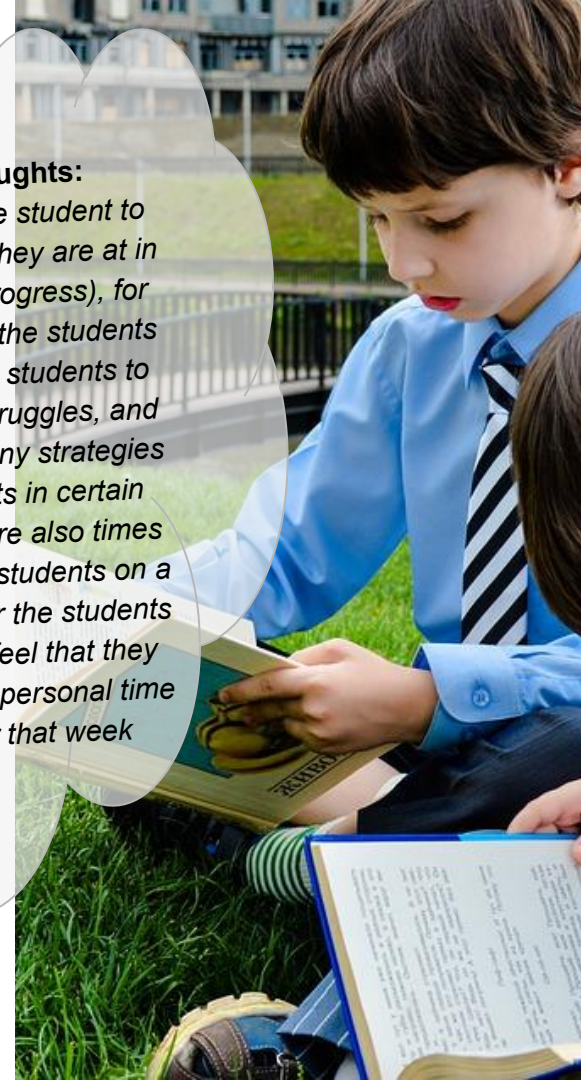
- ★ Assess skills formally at beginning of the year to know where your students are at
- ★ Carry out short, informal reading conferences weekly with each student during “centre time” (about 4 students a day)
- ★ Refer to BC Performance standards for specific grade level → create rubric you can use to highlight where the child falls in terms of reading level
- ★ Do not only check in with the *struggling* students, but give everyone personal one-on-one time

(See sample attached for reading conference outline & question prompts)

(Source: Michelle Bevan, Wishart Elementary)

## Michelle's thoughts:

*This is a time for the student to let her know where they are at in their books (their progress), for her to see what the students are reading, for the students to voice any of their struggles, and for her to offer any strategies or encouragements in certain directions. These are also times for connecting with students on a deeper level and for the students to feel heard and feel that they have had sufficient personal time with the teacher that week*





# Sore Knee Conferences

Involves the teacher kneeling down at a student's desk to see how they are doing on an activity or project. A short conversation to ask and answer questions or provide further explanations if needed. Over the course of a day, there would be several chances to do this, hence the 'sore knee.'

**Generally the shortest, most informal conference type**

- No pre-planning is necessary
- One-on-one conversations at student's desk, can happen any time throughout an activity
- Provides clarification and instant feedback
- Important to float around class, give equal time to students
- Do not rely on memory, make notes on who you have spoken to
- Teachable moments





# Sore-Knee Continued ...

Use prompts to guide conversation:

“Tell me more about...”

“I noticed...”

“May I show you...”

“What about...”

“I’m wondering...”

“I’m thinking...”

\*see handout for list of verbal prompts



# The Benefits of Check-in and Mini-conferences

- Works well with younger students who may not be able to provide large amounts of detail in one sitting
- Lends itself to long-term projects where weekly check-ins or group brainstorming meetings could help students stay on track
- Universal Design: many students may feel unsure or overwhelmed at the idea of a more formal conference; they might provide greater details if quick conferences occurred while they are working and actively engaged in the process.
- An opportunity to provide feedback once a project is underway



# Writing Conferences



**Teacher tip:** writing conferences need to give room for reaction time with younger students, since they can often verbally communicate stronger than they can write

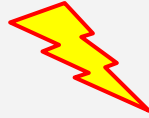
**Ask them:** “Can you share what this piece of writing is trying to show?”

This conference type is your opportunity to teach a new teaching strategy in depth to a student, not a chance to edit their current work. By scaffolding this new technique you actively promote future writing improvements.

## Tips for *leading* a successful writing conference:

- ❑ Predictable writing routine essential for student direction and efficiency, allowing you to better assess their work and allows student to focus on writing instead of conference logistics
- ❑ Make room for student reaction time to writing samples
- ❑ Make it short and scaffold writing stamina over time. Share writing organization strategies (Ayres, 2010)

**Stimulate  
pleasure in  
writing**



**Encourage use of  
vocabulary  
appropriate for  
writing**

**Permit role  
reversal**

**Characteristics  
of a successful  
writing  
conference**

**Have a predictable  
structure**

**Focus on a few  
points**

**Demonstrate  
solutions to  
students' problems**

**Donald Graves,  
1982.**



## Anderson's Writing Conference Model

**Main concept:** spend weeks on the same assignment, and confer with students over long time frame to see what strides they are making on a piece of writing when given time to explore it deeply.

### **Learning outcomes:**

1. Teaching writing process
2. Learn qualities of good writing
3. Become, and learn about, initiators of writing

### **Steps:**

1. Start with an **open-ended prompt** to identify area of need
2. Teach a new strategy and **practice it together**
3. Name the strategy and explain **why it is important** to learn



# Writing

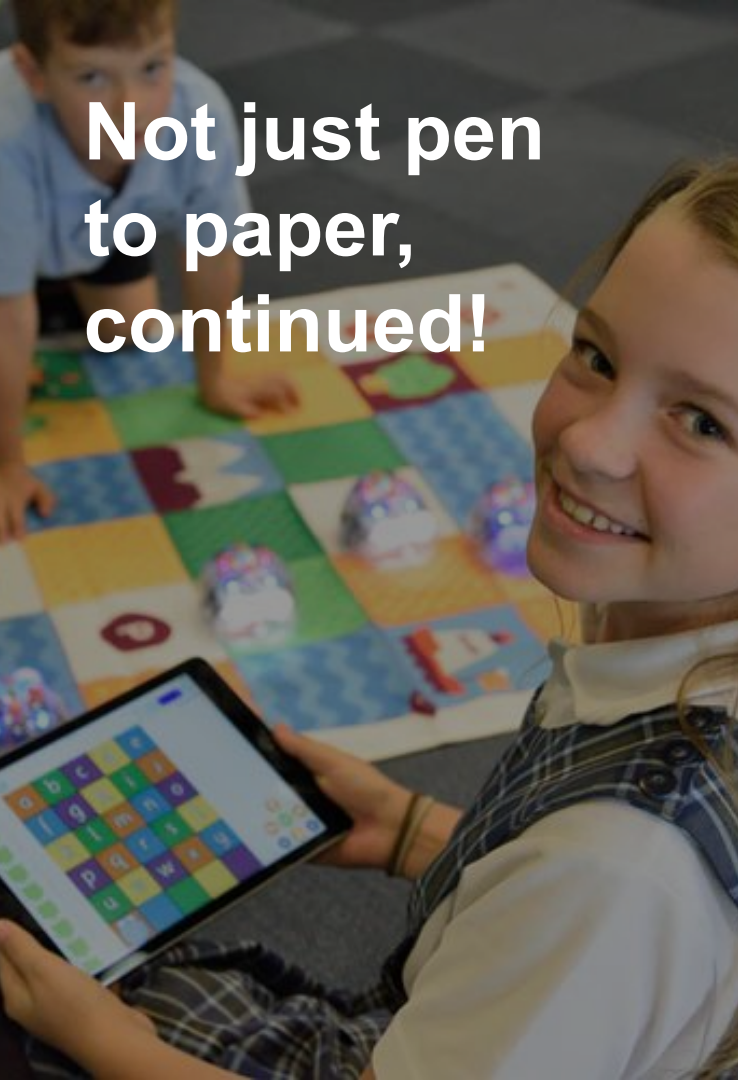
## Conferences:

### Not just pen to paper

#### Case 1: Differentiated instruction

- Provide different writing choices for ELL learners, children with developmental delays or students still developing their writing skills
- Have a writing station where students can write a story, book, card, list of things they like, or musing on whatever they choose, giving ample choice and room for different abilities, drawings, typing...





**Not just pen  
to paper,  
continued!**

## Case 2: Recognizing visual literacy as writing literacy

### Ask yourself...

- Can a student connect a picture to a story?
- Can they sound out words based on a picture?
- Does this sample use techniques that are building towards formal writing?

**...If so, this student is well on their way to seeing the value of writing**

# Writing Conferences

## Key takeaways

- ❑ Have a clear procedure in place so students can focus on writing itself
- ❑ Allow for flexible expressions of written literacy
- ❑ Teach a clear strategy and work with student to practice it prior to setting it as their writing goal

**Teacher tip:** Anne Davies' book 'Conferencing and Reporting' has lots of awesome examples of templates to use during writing conferences, including,

1. Subject station response sheets (pp. 26)
2. Goal envelopes of writing samples (pp.23)
3. Exit slips as valuable conferencing tools, called 'personal newsletters' (pp.35)



# Possible video clip to show class

Example of writing conference:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njLGV3drzRo>

Have class discuss at table and look for

- \* non-verbal cues (tone and body language of teacher and student)
- \* what kind of questions the teachers ask
- \* any strategies that work, any that didn't



**What does conferencing  
look like across grade  
levels?**

# Grade 8

(Middle years)

Knowing your students and setting a class culture of belonging is vital to successful conferencing and getting students comfortable to talk and share their work. Making yourself available before and after school for casual check ins and conversations can help when time constraints are a factor.

## Teacher tips:

- Use self-evaluation and goal setting forms so students get a chance to reflect and prepare before conference
  - Do check-ins, sore-knee conferencing daily
- Group conferencing can work with lit circle groups (writing and reading)
- Online conferencing ~ students create digital portfolios to showcase work and share with family at home. Parents get feedback form to complete



# Grades 4-5

(Intermediate years)



## ***Tip from a grade 5 teacher:***

Conference with parents at beginning of year, but try not to do too many formal conferences afterwards.

This is to help stay focused on classroom environment.

Conferencing becomes more informal and is often student-initiated. Teachers interviewed preferred the sore knee conference approach, indicating that their focus was on the organic needs of the room.

**Emphasis: conferencing to understand larger community context of student needs.**

- ❖ Focused on letting students who would like to share to choose when conferencing is necessary
- ❖ Leaves room for solo-problem solving
- ❖ Less scheduled to follow their authentic academic journey
  - Does not busy the day of the student who needs more independent processing time.

# Grade 3

(Primary years)

*This information was obtained from one teacher's experience within a grade 3 classroom setting*

## Conferencing in the form of weekly, brief, informal check-ins works well with this age

### Suggested Technique:

- Create both a math centre time and literacy centre time during a school day, where 5 groups of 4 rotate to different activities
- One group is always available for teacher check-ins during this time
- This is an organized way to ensure you are checking in with each student every week

**Main focus:** Math conferences and Reading conferences

### From the perspective of the teacher:

Conferencing allows her to connect with her students and get to know which students are at what levels, and decipher who needs a bit more teaching.

This time is an opportunity for students to feel they can connect with her individually. Often, other topics from outside of school will pop into conversation and she ends up getting to know her students on a deeper level.

### Tips from the teacher:

- Keep a list of student names and place a checkmark next to students that have been met with that week
- Prep by having a folder with a calendar for each month for each child, so that you can keep track of where the students are in the books they are reading (for reading conferences)
- Have question prompts ready

# Kindergarten

(Primary Years)

Conferencing for early grades includes videos and photos to capture understanding. It often occurs in groups and is brief. Having young students draw or create while telling what they know allows their ideas to flow easily.

## Example: Story collage



Introducing a concept, then having students model it for the group. This allows the teacher to know if the students understand, or if she needs to clarify or change her approach before they work independently.

Each child develops a scene or picture out of loose parts bins. The teacher briefly asks each student about their scene, gaining information on their ability to create a story.

Students are asked who would like to share their scene with the group. They are reminded that sharing ideas is good and are encouraged to look for ideas from their classmates for next time.







*“It’s funny how much can be accomplished with a simple five-minute conversation. It can be a chance to guide students in self-reflection, help provide needed advice, or provide a chance to review mastery of standards”*

- Spencer, 2015

*“Conferencing should truly be conversations about learning. Conversations that draw on the students’ ability to discuss their work and goals, while strengthening student-teacher trust.”*

- Emily Shorthouse, 2019

**Conferencing should be a regular part of your teaching practice.**

# References

Alison. (2018, September 8). How to Conduct Individual Reading Conferences in K-2 [Blog Post]. Retrieved from: <https://learningattheprimarypond.com/blog/how-to-conduct-individual-reading-conferences-kindergarten-first-second-grade/>

Davies, A. (2011). Making Classroom Assessment Work. Courtenay, BC. connect2learning.

Doyne, S. (2013, November 14). How Important Are Parent Teacher Conferences? [Blog Post]. Retrieved from: <https://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/14/how-important-are-parent-teacher-conferences/>

Gregory, K., Cameron, C., Davies, A. (2011). Knowing What Counts: Conferencing and Reporting, 2nd Ed. Courtenay, BC. connect2learning.

Krulder, J. (2018, August 29). The Unexpected Power of Reading Conferences [Blog Post]. Retrieved from: <https://www.edutopia.org/article/unexpected-power-reading-conferences>

Schwartz, M. (2016, August 18). Ready, Set...Reading Workshop! [Blog Post]. Retrieved from: <https://teacher-blog.education.com/ready-set-reading-workshop-f947c3666110#.kgrah4tap>

Schwartz, M. (2016, September 8). Conferencing: The Heart of Reading and Writing Workshop [Blog Post]. Retrieved from: <https://teacher-blog.education.com/conferencing-the-heart-of-reading-and-writing-workshop-ca2fb7b70b2a#targetText=What%20Is%20Conferencing%3F.individualized%20instruction%20for%20each%20student.>



# References continued ...

Spencer, J. (2015, April 9). The Power of Student Conferencing [Blog Post]. Retrieved from: <http://www.spencerauthor.com/the-power-of-student-conferencing/>

Ray, K.W. (2001). Conferencing: The essential teaching act. *The writing workshop: Getting through the hard stuff. (And it's all hard stuff)*. Urbana, Ill. National Council of Teachers of English. Retrieved from: <https://www.learner.org/workshops/middlewriting/images/pdf/W6ReadConferring.pdf>

Quigg, P. Getting Ready for my Reading Conference (handed out in class)

Quigg, P. What you need to know about conferencing! (handed out in class)