

Introduction

We believe in the power of studying together and practicing our teaching together within a community of learners. For that reason we have put together a study guide in order to help groups of teachers use the tips and strategies in our book, *Conferring With Readers*. We can't imagine taking on the challenge of learning how to confer with readers all alone and we encourage you to read a chapter, discuss it together, and then try out conferring in your classrooms amongst each other.

We suggest your study group sets aside time out of the classrooms for a discussion and also time to go into classrooms together and practice conferring with the support of each other. As we learned to confer as classroom teachers, we were both lucky to have principals who set aside grade level common planning time, and we took advantage of voluntary after school "Leadership Groups" at Teachers College. In these meetings, it would be common to find us bringing in transcripts of our own teaching for analysis and feedback, watching videos of each others' conferences, and studying books like *Conferring With Readers* for insights on how what other educators have learned along their own journeys. Opening up your classroom (literally or with transcripts and videos) provides endless opportunities for thoughtful reflection and revision of best practices.

And now in our work as staff developers, we facilitate "lab sites" in which a grade level team comes together for 45-55 minutes in a classroom with children to practice teaching in front of and with each other. When practicing reading conferring, a teacher will sometimes find himself stuck mid-conference and will converse with a colleague to get un-stuck. It's not uncommon to hear "wait, let me try that again" and to watch a teacher re-wind her conference to

the beginning to refine her demonstration. Teachers in labsites research together, think together, teach together, and learn together.

It is with these models of our own learning as teachers, and of our teaching of teachers today, that has lead us to the creation of this guide. What we hope you find is an easy-to-follow guide to give you ideas for conversations, activities, and practices that will strengthen not only your ability to confer with readers, but one that will strengthen collaboration with your colleagues.

Ideas for Studying Chapters 1-3

You'll probably want to read the first three chapters and hold your first discussion around the themes, questions, and ideas that arise. You'll first want to clarify what you believe makes a good reader and good reading instruction. It's ok to have different opinions but you'll probably want to either use our tenets or come up with your own. This will give your group a common language and set of beliefs to work from. Once you've agreed upon some common beliefs you'll want to discuss the structures and management that makes conferring possible. You might end the meeting or start the meeting by visiting a classroom and examining what structures are in place and how they are working to support students' independence.

After reading chapter 3 you can try the following suggestions:

* Decide on a predictable structure for your reading time. If you'll follow a reading workshop, you may want to look into other resources like *The Art of Teaching Reading* (Calkins 2001) where these structures are described in more detail.

- * Create a classroom library that is clearly labeled and has a lot of books, a large portion of which are labeled with the reading level. Decide on a system for borrowing books that is fast and effective.
- * Decide upon ways your students will write about their reading, and keep track of the quantity and types of books they've read.
- * Think about ways you'll explicitly teach students to be independent. Troubleshoot problems by thinking about what you can do proactively.
- * Consider where you'll confer, what you'll need with you, and perhaps even a schedule to ensure you see everyone equitably.

Ideas for Studying Chapters 4-9

At the end of your first discussion meeting we suggest you look at chapters 4 through 9 and decide as a group which chapter you'd like to study next. Your decision will likely be based on the purpose for conferring that you'd all like to work on in your classrooms. For example, if you are finding it difficult to move students from one reading level to the next you'll want to read and discuss chapter 7. Of course you can also read each chapter in order, but we don't suggest you read several chapters on different purposes for conferring all at once. Instead, you'll want to read a chapter on one kind of conference, discuss it, and then implement it in your own classroom before moving to the next chapter.

We recommend that each study group, when possible, spend some time in a classroom with children and some time in meetings to plan, discuss, and de-brief. When the meetings are held during a time when children are not available, you could decide to bring in transcripts or videos to use to complement your discussion. As you look across the list of ideas for each chapter, try to think about what kind of work lends itself to work in a classroom, and what kind

of work would be best done in a meeting. Below is one suggestion for how the first two meetings of a study group might go. Notice that each “session” lasts for about 2 hours; the pre-meeting, classroom work, and post-classroom meeting may be split up over the course of many days if necessary.

Session 1 (2 hours):

- Prior to meeting: Read chapters 1-3.
- Pre-classroom meeting (40 minutes):
 - Hold a discussion around your beliefs and philosophies.
 - Decide on your own set of tenets or agree to adopt the ones in the book.
 - Create a list of “lenses” to use when looking at classrooms to see evidence of an environment that is set up to facilitate conferring.
- Work in a classroom (40 minutes): Visit a few classrooms and study the structures that the teachers have in place or could put in place to support conferring.
- Post-classroom discussion (40 minutes):
 - Name out the structures you will put in place in your own room.
 - Decide on the kind of conference you’d like to study next and choose the next chapter to read.

Session 2 (2 hours):

- Prior to meeting: Read chapter 7.
- Pre-classroom meeting (45 minutes):
 - Hold a discussion to clarify some of the ways in which your research in a conference will be angled to decide what to teach to move children to the next level.

- Study a few texts that are representative of the levels of the students in the classroom you'll be visiting to familiarize yourself with text difficulties.
- Create conferring menus (see Appendix B below) to feel more prepared when conferring.
- Classroom visit (45 minutes): Go into a teacher's classroom together and practice conferences that help move students to the next reading level together. Teachers could be paired up to trouble-shoot glitches as they arise.
- Post-classroom meeting (40 minutes):
 - Review some of the challenges that you faced and solutions that you came up with.
 - Discuss how the conferring menus helped with the work you were doing with each students.
 - Make a commitment to try some elements of what you practiced today in your own classroom – what artifacts from conferring will each person bring to the next meeting to be studied (notes? Conferring menus)?
 - Make a plan for the next chapter to study.

In the following sections we suggest a series of activities or discussions you might want to have with your colleagues. You will want to pick and choose amongst them to create your own pre-classroom meeting, classroom work, and post-classroom meeting.

* Make it your goal to help readers find books they will feel successful with as early in the school year as possible. Plan out how you will conduct quick assessments from the very first days of the school year.

* Consider multiple approaches to getting information about your students as readers. Students are more than just reading levels. They have histories with books, attitudes about reading, and passions that are waiting to be uncovered. Learn about them through conferences that get at their reading behaviors and processes. Bring these to your meeting and assess them together.

* Encourage your school to have a building-wide plan or form for communicating about your readers from one grade to the next. On this communication form, you might include information about their reading levels as well as the kinds of reader that you have found them to be. This information will help the students' subsequent teachers to match them to books quickly.

Chapter 5

* Practice observing students from afar and near. Jot down notes about what students are able to do or trying to do.

* Practice having conversations with readers about their strategies and look for what students are approximating.

* Keep a written or mental checklist in your head of the parts of a conference. Remember to describe the strategy's steps, explain why it is useful, and make it transferable. These three parts will help the compliment "stick" with readers.

* Try both individual- and table-compliment conferences. Move around the classroom thinking, "Who could be the model reader(s) at this table?" Make a point of making every reader a "model" at some point in the month.

Chapter 6

- * Sit with grade-level colleagues and plan out a whole-class study. Read professional books along with your district standards to create a few big goals for the study.
- * Create strategy overviews that list the big goals for the study along with a few possible strategies that go with each goal.
- * Use the strategy overview sheet to plan for the kinds of conferences you may have this month.
- * Look at the overview sheet and ask yourself whether there are strategies that represent each level of reader in your classroom. If not, brainstorm other strategies that match the range of reading levels in your classroom.
- * Consider how much support your student needs before deciding on a method of instruction. Keep in mind the reader's history and to what you think he or she will best respond.

Chapter 7

- * Study the levels of the books in your classroom. Having a sense of the characteristics of a reading level makes it a lot easier to confer when you aren't familiar with the text.
- * Know difficulties to introduce to help to make a student's transition to the next level smoother.
- * Transfer your knowledge of reading levels to a conferring menu. This will help you to have planned out the research questions to assess for particular skills, and will provide you with a menu of possibilities for strategies to teach if you notice they're not showing evidence of a skill.
- * Think about the method of instruction that makes the most sense to help a student move to a new level. If what the reader most needs is instruction around a strategy, consider a research-decide-teach conference. If there is a book that poses some particular challenge that's unique to

the book—for example, it's written about a time period that the reader doesn't have knowledge of—you might consider using a method borrowed from guided reading and plan to introduce the text.

Chapter 8

- * Start taking notes while you confer. Write down what you teach the reader. After a few conferences, look to see if you tend to bounce around from skill to skill or whether you stick with one skill over a few conferences.

- * Sit with colleagues and create lists of several strategies for the big skills you are teaching. Use the list as a menu of possible strategies to teach in conferences.

- * Practice rereading your conferring notes and then beginning your conferences by asking readers to show evidence of how they tried the last strategy you taught them.

- * Jot down the method of instruction you use in your conferring notes. Then look for patterns. Do you always coach? Do you always demonstrate? Push yourself to try new methods of teaching.

- * Carry a read-aloud book with you while you confer so you can refer back to it in an example-and-explanation conference or demonstrate from it.

Chapter 9

- * Choose a partnership and study it for a few days. Take notes and transcribe what the students say and do when they talk. Then bring these notes to a grade-level meeting and discuss what you could compliment and teach the partnership.

- * Step back and observe a partnership and try becoming the ghost partner. Don't become a third partner, but instead whisper the prompts you want to say to one of the readers. Let the partners try out your suggestions for themselves.
- * Practice your demonstration teaching with a partnership or club. Remember the structure is the same as an individual-demonstration conference.
- * Participate in a conversation by becoming a proficient partner. Model conversational or reading strategies for students. Remember to name the strategy at the end of the conference so students can replicate it when you are gone.
- * Videotape a strong partner conversation or book club and watch it with colleagues. Think about what strengths the group has in terms of both conversational skills and reading skills. Then create a strategy overview based on what you saw so you can teach others to do the same things.

Ideas for Studying Chapters 10-12

Chapter 10

- * Reflect on your own reading behaviors in order to get ideas for what to teach students. Pick a text and “spy” on yourself as you read it.
- * Get to know the levels of the students in your class very well. Take a few books at each level and study them, asking yourself, “What skills does this level demand?” and plan for the things you might teach a student at that level.
- * Put all of your note-taking and running records to good use. Use them to plan for what you might teach individual students. Having a game plan might help you to feel more confident when you're first learning.
- * Use your student assessments to look for patterns, to develop theories, and to craft long-term goals for individuals.

- * Don't be afraid to reuse teaching demonstrations from past lessons! Repetition will help you to fine-tune your teaching and feel more equipped in a conference.
- * Have a text that you and your students know (perhaps a past read-aloud) marked up with places where you could do an impromptu demonstration.
- * Internalize a conferring structure. You may start by "boxing out" the parts of the conferences in the appendix, and then move to transcribing and analyzing your own conferences.

Chapter 11

- * Put to use all of those notes that you spend so much time taking! Mine your conference notes and running records for trends across your class. Sort students into groups based on a few categories that are aligned with your goals.
- * When you spend time checking in on your students' written artifacts (such as book logs, reading notebooks, and Post-it Notes), you also might consider sorting them into categories based on what you notice. A small amount of time doing this sort of assessment will help you to plan a week's worth of small groups.
- * Keep a few categories in mind when doing quick assessment in the midst of reading workshop to form small groups. Having more focus will help you to see evidence more quickly.
- * Try to stick to a predictable structure with your group conferences, just as you would with minilessons or individual conferences. This structure will help your groups to run smoothly and will keep you on a schedule.
- * Be sure to have a plan for how you'll balance small-group and individual time. Keep in mind that small-group conferences take longer, about eight to ten minutes, so plan to do only one or two per workshop period to allow for some time also to see students as individuals.

Chapter 12

* Plan out a record-keeping system. Plan to have records that track individual progress across time, as well as whole-class at-a-glance records. Don't forget that you also want to keep track of your students' reading levels and the dates that you see them in conferences.

Ideas for Using the Appendix

The appendix is full of conference transcripts. Some teachers like to read each transcript and use it to envision what conferring looks like, sounds like, and feels like. You might role play a conference in your study group where one of you is the teacher and one of you is the student. This helps you imagine the conference. You also might want to choose a student in your classroom who seems like the student in the transcript and practice having the conference yourself. Of course, you won't just read our words but you'll use our ideas and make them your own. Finally, you can transcribe your own conferences and lay them next to ones in the appendix and discuss what is similar or different.

Blackline Masters and Reproducibles

End-of-year communication form:

Name: _____ From class: _____

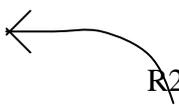
Student reading level: ____

ECLAS levels: _____ State Assessment: _____

Books this student likes to read:

What is this student like in partnerships and clubs?

Running Record Notetaking
Adapted from Marie Clay

✓	word read correctly
<u>Mother</u> (word read by child) Mom (word in text)	word read incorrectly
<u>Mother SC</u> Mom	self-correction
<u>Mother A</u> Mom	appeal for help
<u>Mother T</u> Mom	teacher told student word
<u>M-m-mahh-mom</u> Mom	sounding out behavior
	child repeats
- <u>mom</u>	deletion (child skips a word)
<u>mom</u> -	insertion

Conference Notetaking Form

Name: _____

<u>Student Has Under Control</u>	<u>Student can Use More support With</u>

Sorting Students for small Group lessons:

Support needed with:	Support needed with:	Support needed with:
Names:	Names:	Names:
Support needed with:	Support needed with:	Support needed with:
Names:	Names:	Names:
Support needed with:	Support needed with:	Support needed with:
Names:	Names:	Names:

Group Conferring Notes

Week of: _____

Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:
Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:	Name:

Weekly Conferring Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Guided reading	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:
Group conferences	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:
Talk time (club/ partnerships)	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:
Individual conferences	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:	Time:
	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:	Names:
Totals:					

Conferring Strategy Menu

Unit of Study: _____ Dates: _____

Skill/Goal:	Strategies to teach that skill:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤➤➤➤➤
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤➤➤➤➤
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤➤➤➤
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤➤➤➤➤

