

Goal:

I will learn how to have meaningful, one-on-one reading conferences during Reader's Workshop in a more systematic and routine manner, and I will learn to create flexible, differentiated Guided Reading groups that meet routinely. As a result, my students will spend more time reading and learning, will have more opportunities to receive individualized instruction during conferring and Guided Reading, and will show growth as a reader.

Initial Summary:

I find that individualized reading conferences and guided reading groups are not occurring as much as I would like. I also notice that I don't have clear documentation from these meetings. This data could help me with grouping students into an appropriate reading group, tailor instruction to each student's individual needs, or give me more information to share at an in-district meeting about students' academic strengths and areas of improvement. I have tried taking conferring and Guided Reading notes, but haven't found a way to do it consistently and meaningfully. I meet with small groups for reading, but in an inconsistent manner. I find that reading groups take too long and that my time is not used efficiently. I find that some students are engaged, while others can't keep up. I have struggled with implementing the basics of conferring and Guided Reading in a routine manner that has students working on their own individualized goals. I would like to improve on these skills. Additionally, my students have needed many reminders to stay on task during independent reading time. They have not been held to any further accountability nor had opportunities for the type of differentiation that would occur during a reading conference. They meet in Guided Reading groups in an inconsistent manner, and therefore are not getting the individualized instruction they need. With the right research of best practices and

support from my mentor and colleagues, I will meet my students' needs by having daily conferences and a routine schedule of Guided Reading.

Reflection:

After reading the Connecticut Common Core of Teaching (CCT) “Instruction for Active Learning” indicator 2, I realized that during Reader’s Workshop I was differentiating the level of books that the students were reading independently, but I was not as effective differentiating instruction and providing interventions. Based upon the performance profile, I found that I only “occasionally provide supplemental intervention for students who need academic support...” and that my “...intervention (is) not provided in a systematic or routine manner.” I also found that I was not “routinely providing intervention based upon data related to students learning needs.”

I decided to start researching best practices for conferring and implement them immediately. I felt that effective conferring notes would help me gain data about my students’ reading abilities and allow me to intervene accordingly. That same day, I started taking notes while the students read to me. I found very quickly that I needed to consult a resource that would guide me through this practice. My notes from day one were on lined paper with comments such as “read fluently”, “made two errors”, “enjoyed book.” When asked “what are you working on?” the students replied “reading.” I noticed the students were unsure of what both of our roles were. I also found that my notes didn’t make sense and held no valuable data about my students. I didn’t have a system of who I would confer with, in what order and how I would know who I hadn’t met with yet. I consulted with my Teacher’s College (T.C.) Reading Project Institute Binder to find out more information about conferencing.

After reading the section about conferring in my binder, I discovered that there are many different types of conferring. I learned that there is a different approach to conferring, depending on the needs of the child and goal of lesson. It featured an

effective lesson plan format for having a conference. This would help me to plan an effective conferring session. It emphasized the need to establish a “teaching point”, something I had lacked before. The conferring sections had suggestions on ways to take brief notes and the kinds of things to take notes about. T.C. even suggested a one-paged, boxed template for note-taking. This template made it easy to organize student data on one piece of paper and track participation and academic progress over time. The binder went on to give sample conferences, complete with teacher and student scripts, so you could get a good idea of how a conference might go. The T.C. binder proved to be a valuable resource. It helped me format and record my conferences efficiently and effectively.

Another resource I used was a conferring information packet that the Reading Specialist at my school had given to the faculty. It gave some great ideas for starting conferences, asking higher-order thinking questions and suggestions of how to fit conferring into the literacy block.

In order to learn more about Guided Reading and grouping students for instruction, I first reviewed Guided Reading by Foutnas and Pinnell. This book taught me the basics of forming reading groups based on data from assessments and conferring.

The Continuum of Literacy Learning, Grades K-2 by Foutnas and Pinnell taught me the types of skills to teach reading groups at different levels. This further helped me gain ideas of how to differentiate my instruction further. Before reading this book, I never realized that each level had certain skill sets associated with them.

I also had the opportunity to observe my school’s Reading Specialist and my mentor teacher in two separate guided reading lessons. Both of these observations helped me to see how to format a guided reading lesson, how to record data and how the teacher has room to be flexible to meet the needs of their students.

All of my resources gave me a good foundation of information to help me differentiate instruction through conferring and Guided Reading. All of these new resources would help me reach my goal of providing “differentiation that includes flexible grouping, targeted levels of assignments and modified content.” and “routinely providing intervention based upon data related to student learning needs for students that need academic support” as stated in CCT module 3, indicator 2.

The first changes I made based on my new learning was to create a template for conferring notes. I also started approaching conferences differently. I let the student lead by reading and used my professional judgment from what I learned to steer the conference in a direction that would be most beneficial for the students’ learning. I created a clipboard of conferring templates and conference starters to help target my instruction when I was conferring. The first day I started conferring I met with three students in 20 minutes and felt confident that I taught them each a strategy that would help them to become better readers. The improved notes were more concise and had relevant data I could use about their performance and to drive instruction. The notes contained phrases like “word-by-word reading”, “no self-correction”, more specific miscue analysis (said “babies” for “Bobby’s”/ said “my” for “the”) and most importantly TP for “teaching point.” I also noted the skill(s) I taught and how the student performed. This would help me show student progress over time. Formatting the lesson based on the students’ need was beneficial my students. By using this newly learned method, the students were learning new and relevant reading skills specific to their needs. Learning about the different types of conferring methods helped me make my conferences efficient and effective. I was able to choose the type of conference that would be most effective for each child. Over the next few days, I noticed that students seemed more engaged during post-mini lesson, independent reading time. I had to stop fewer times to re-direct students that were getting off task. I attribute this change in reading engagement to more teacher-student interaction through conferring and higher expectations of the teacher and students. The students knew I was holding

them more accountable for their reading, and in were reading for longer durations to be better prepared to conference with me at any time.

With a daily routine of conferring occurring, I began to analyze my notes from my conferences and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) scores I had recorded for each student. After analyzing the data, I used what I learned from the Fountas and Pinnell books to find the patterns of skills amongst a large group that I had read about. I was able to see how students reading at comparable levels were working on similar skills. I used these patterns to group students working on like skills or reading levels together. I recorded individual student data from the DRA and took notes on each student using my new conferring template. The weaknesses I found would become some of my new “teaching points” for conferring and Guided Reading. This data helped me to drive differentiated instruction geared towards my students’ needs. My DRA and conferring notes were a helpful tool on my conferencing clipboard. I could always refer to this sheet during conferences to remind myself of student weaknesses and target skills that each individual child was working on. My new way of recording and organizing data would prove to be an effective way to differentiate my reading instruction.

Based on my new knowledge, I split my class of 19 students into four groups. My first group consisted of four students that were just below or exactly meeting first grade benchmark. They were all working on similar skills, such as decoding strategies, self-correction, retelling and making connections. My next group consisted of four students that were one level above first grade benchmark. They were working on similar strategies as the first group, just in a higher level book. Group three also had four students that ranged about three to five levels above benchmark, but had the same skill needs. Lastly, my fourth group had six students, all high achieving readers. I would need to challenge and prepare this group for reading chapter books. Overall, I was very happy with the way I formed my groups.

The next day, I started meeting with my first groups. My goal was to use my 30 minute Guided Reading group to meet with two groups. I found that in order to do all the things I wanted to teach them, I would need 2 sessions to make the lesson meaningful. I decided I would do all my pre-reading activities in the first session and then my reading and post-reading activities in the second. The advice of my colleagues “to stay flexible” helped me to come up with this plan. At the end of my Guided Reading block, I reflected on my lesson and what I would do next time. I realized I would need a place to record data about skills taught and student performance. I referred to the books I read about Guided Reading and recalled my experience observing my colleagues. I created a template to plan Guided Reading lessons and record student data.

I continued meeting consistently with groups during my Guided Reading block, using my new lesson plan format and breaking each lesson into manageable parts. My groups at the highest reading levels had no problem attending or keeping up and were learning new skills quickly. I even had the written data to prove it! I soon began to have concerns with my group containing the lowest level readers. I found that the students’ attention spans were low overall. One student hesitated to speak, one of the students was impulsive and interrupted the rest, one had special needs and was hard to keep focused, while the other student got lost in the group. The students were having trouble answering my questions and were not able to apply the skill I had just taught when they read independently. It seemed that my instruction was ineffective for this group of students. I started to wonder if this was an incompatible mix of personalities and needs to all be in one group. With this being a group where academic intervention was strongly needed; I considered all the grouping options I had learned about. I thought maybe I might need to work individually with each student instead of in a small group to ensure the success of all of them. I consulted my mentor teacher as well as my administrators. We discussed the needs of the students as well as the pros and cons of working in small groups versus individually. We devised a plan to re-group in order to effectively meet the needs of all the students. I decided that depending on the

lesson content, I would sometimes meet individually and other times meet with the students in a small group. I had read about this being an option in Fountas and Pinnell's book. They had said that while it was a rare option that might not be as practical, it might be helpful in some cases. As I started this plan, I found that I could teach all of the pre-reading skills whole group, but could meet individually or in groups of two for the reading and post-reading activities. This seemed to work better. After trying this, the students seemed less distracted and were able to spend more time reading and learning a skill that was individualized to their needs.

My thoughts about the success of this new method were reaffirmed when I re-assessed these students. Two students improved three DRA levels in two months! The others all improved at least one level and met late fall's benchmark. I could tell that the differentiation during conferences and small group instruction was working.

My focus on reading instruction and differentiation over the past couple months has truly been an eye opener for me. Once I learned best practices for differentiating through conferring and Guided Reading, I was able to drastically help improve my students' reading performance. I focused on getting organized to plan the lesson format and the way to record data from conferencing and Guided Reading. These improvements allowed me to meet the needs of my students by working with them individually and in small groups. The planning has helped me to be a more focused and confident teacher, and in turn meet more consistently with my students. I am also able to better meet their specific needs by using the data I take during conferences and small group instruction in conjunction with formal assessments to drive instruction. I noticed that my students have greatly benefitted from the instructional and planning changes I have made. Students are reading for longer periods of uninterrupted time and are more focused readers. They understand the idea of conferences and that they have a purpose when they are reading each day. This is reinforced by conferring with them daily. My students are taking more responsibility for their own reading and can tell me the skills they are working on when I ask. They also feel comfortable asking for

help on problems they encounter when reading. Since I have better planned and executed Guided Reading, my students are meeting in small groups more often and thus are receiving more targeted instruction on skills they struggle with. Overall, they are getting additional time reading, which is imperative at this point in reading development.

This experience has allowed me to grow as a reading teacher. Targeting skills using data from conferences, the DRA and my Guided Reading notes has also allowed me to differentiate instruction for all my students. While I still have a lot to learn, my goal is to keep my planning, conferring and small group instruction consistent. I have already seen great improvement in my instruction and the students' learning by doing this. I would like to improve my practice further by watching sample sessions of conferring and Guided Reading on video and reading more professional texts about these topics. I am also seeking continued guidance from our school's reading specialist as well as my mentor teacher. We plan to have another observation opportunity and debriefing session on how to teach decoding and comprehension Guided Reading lessons. Some of my next steps to fine tune my reading group practice will be to identify some key texts to teach specific strategies and skills at a variety of levels and write more detailed plans for each of those texts. I would also like to create some enrichment material and lesson plans for my advanced readers. This will help me to meet their needs better. I hope to continue to build on these newly developed skills to positively impact my students' reading growth in first grade!