Conferring with Readers to Develop Reading Proficiency

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Conferring with Readers to Develop Reading Proficiency

By
Sandra Ann Goettelman
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A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
Conferring with Readers to Develop Reading Proficiency

By Sandra Ann Goettelman

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study is to determine the ways in which reading conferences help students develop reading proficiency. Reading conferences are one-to-one work with a student in which instruction is individualized to support the reader and help to elevate the student to be able to flexibly call upon a number of strategies to problem solve. The research questions will focus on the ways in which students incorporate feedback on decoding, fluency, and comprehension in their oral reading. The degree to which the reading conference fosters independence for students will also be examined. In addition, the efficiency and effectiveness of the reading conference will be explored.

The focal students in this study represent varying levels of achievement in reading. They attend a suburban school in Western New York. Their Reader’s Workshop features independent reading, guided reading, and a response to literature block. Data collection methods included audio-recorded transcript of each conference, conference logs, and student interviews. The data collection phase took place over five weeks.

Recommendations from this study tentatively suggest that teachers should utilize reading conferences in their classroom with students of varying reading needs. Teachers should hold students accountable for their learning to help them become metacognitive of their strategy-use. When students take responsibility for their learning, they are able to transfer their knowledge across various domains.
Chapter One

Introduction

There are so many days when I look at the time and realize that another Reader’s Workshop has once again, flown by. In the students’ transition from their independent reading, to guided group, to their response to literature, a quick pace always seems to govern the classroom. Deeply engaged in all components of their reading block, I wonder how I could “freeze” a moment in time to spend quality time with each individual child and engage in an authentic conversation about their reading. Seeing the children lost in the world of books, I wonder how I could possibly get a glimpse into the strategies that are at work for them as they construct meaning. How are they engaging with the text? Are the students flexibly recalling a multitude of strategies to help them problem-solve and make meaning as they read? Can they transfer the skill and strategy instruction we discuss in mini-lessons and in guided groups transfer across texts and across genres? Are they identifying context clues to determine that unknown word they came across? Did they remember to stop and monitor their understanding after each page? As I observe the peaceful, sustained attention my readers give to their texts, I know that I owe it to all of my students to validate their reading lives and give them the tools they need to access text on many levels in a manner that is respectful of their needs as a reader.

While many teachers have become accustomed to conferring in the Writer’s Workshop, conferring in the Reader’s Workshop may be a more recent area of
interest in many schools and classrooms. Conferring in the Reader’s Workshop is in many ways similar to that of a conference in the Writer’s Workshop. Both work to target a child’s needs in that particular time and enable a transfer of a particular skill or strategy to future encounters with text. Similarly, conferring in both areas supports students in ways that are respectful with regard to their needs and development. Thus, the conference is just one of many ways to differentiate instruction and learning in the Reader’s Workshop. According to Goldberg and Serravallo (2007), “reading conferences are one-to-one work with a student in which instruction is individualized to support the reader and help to ‘push’ him/her to the edge of what he/she is ‘just beginning to be able to do’” (p. 13). They help the teacher gain insight into students’ reading behaviors and by extension, their strategies, in an effort to help teachers observe students’ strengths and areas of need so that instruction will target where that child stands as a reader at that particular place in time. According to Keene (2006), “Conferring is one of our most potent teaching tactics. It is indispensable when it comes to assessing a child’s understanding” (p. 5). When utilized effectively, reading conferences can give us insights on the ways readers are constructing meaning. As teachers of reading, we cannot afford to miss an opportunity to engage in an authentic conversation with a child about their reading. We cannot afford to miss the opportunity to listen to a child read aloud and use that time to not just assess their progress, but to also lift that child to higher levels of reading proficiency.
Purpose of the Study:

This thesis is an inquiry into conferring and the ways in which individualized reading conferences elevate students to higher levels of reading proficiency. Reading proficiently requires readers to flexibly call upon multiple strategies to problem-solve. Thus, understanding a child’s degree of comfort and independence surrounding their strategy-use is a critical component of the reading conference. This study explores student accountability and the responsibility students take for their learning in the reading conference. Ultimately, this inquiry into conferring will provide implications for improving reading instruction for all students, based on the findings concerning the study’s focal students.

Through discussions about the text with the child and through close examination of the child’s oral reading behaviors, the ways in which conferring supports students’ reading development will be assessed. The teacher-researcher will observe the ways in which students incorporate feedback regarding decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies in their reading as well as students’ independence and attitudes toward conferences. Students will participate in a series of weekly conferences with the teacher-researcher during the guided group component of their Reader’s Workshop. Each conference will follow the “research, decide, teach” format of conference as suggested by Goldberg and Serravallo (2003). This study addresses the following questions:

- In what ways do students incorporate feedback regarding decoding,
fluency, and comprehension strategies in their reading?

- In what ways does conferring foster independence for students?
- How does the structure of the reading conference support the effectiveness and efficiency of the conference?

**Rationale**

Reading is a complex process that involves a multitude of simultaneous, cognitive strategies that enables readers to construct meaning from printed text. Even the best assessment tools cannot reveal what a student truly understands as he/she reads. In order to gain insights, we must engage in conversation with the child. Much can be gleaned from conferring with readers to determine the strategies they are using as well as the strategies that will require explicit coaching, demonstration, and modeling from the teacher. Knowing which strategies students are using and neglecting helps students become independent problem-solvers who can flexibly call upon a number of problem-solving strategies while reading.

The structure of the reading conference allows teachers to build upon students’ strengths, highlighting what students are doing well as readers to encourage use of effective strategies that are already at work. In addition, the “research” component of the workshop enables teachers to observe an area of need that the teacher can then build upon and coach the student through demonstration or modeling. Finally, the
teacher links the new learning to its’ use in other contexts so the student sees how the strategy can be transferred across texts.

In an assessment-saturated world where students must often demonstrate their understanding of texts through multiple choice and short answer questions, reading conferences help build genuine reading partnerships between teacher and student. These partnerships give students authentic, individualized support to help them become successful, independent readers for life.

Definitions:

Conferring: One-to-one work with a student in which instruction is individualized to support the reader and help to “push” him/her to the edge of what he/she is “just beginning to be able to do.”

Study Approach

Three focal students are the subjects of this study. Each focal student will participate in one conference per week over the course of four weeks in an effort to determine the ways in which he/she incorporates feedback from previous instruction into their reading and strategy-use. Transcriptions from audio-taped conferences with each individual will serve as a window by which the conference interactions can be accurately studied. Anecdotal notes through the use of a conference form will help keep track of teacher observations during individual conferences throughout the study. Lastly, each of the focal student’s will participate in a culminating interview.
following the data collection stage to help the teacher-researcher gain an
understanding of students’ attitudes toward reading conferences and the affect they
impart on students’ reading lives.

Organization of the Thesis

In Chapter one, entitled “Introduction,” the teacher-researcher sets the purpose
for the research study. The problem is identified in that the teacher-researcher wants
to find ways to examine students’ oral reading behaviors to determine the strategies
that are at work for them in order to elevate their learning. The rationale of the study
is that reading conferences give deep insights into a child’s strategy-use. They also
provide a genuine, one-on-one partnership that validates a child’s reading life.

In Chapter two, the conceptual framework and relevant research is explored.
The purpose of conferring, the structure of a reading conference, the various methods
for direct instruction, as well as research-supported methods for teaching decoding,
fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, phonics and phonemic awareness instruction are
explored.

In Chapter three, the teacher-researcher develops the methods used in this
study. The teacher-researcher will use audio-taped conference transcripts, conference
logs, and student interviews. The teacher-researcher will describe the community,
school, and classroom context surrounding this inquiry. An outline of daily
classroom activities is provided. Lastly, the three focal students of this inquiry are
identified and described.
In Chapter four, the results of the data collection are triangulated and organized into themes that reflect the research questions. Data will be organized to showcase the ways in which students incorporate feedback into their reading as well as the ways in which reading conferences move them toward independence. The efficiency and effectiveness of the conference will also be explored.

In Chapter five, the implications of this inquiry will be presented. The teacher-researcher supports the consistent use of reading conferences in the classroom to target students’ reading needs and validate their reading lives.

Summary

This inquiry will explore the ways in which reading conferences impact students’ reading proficiency. The ways in which students incorporate feedback regarding decoding, fluency, and comprehension will be explored. The research will also examine the ways in which conferring supports student independence. The efficiency and effectiveness of the conference for teachers and students will be identified. Students will engage in four weekly reading conferences with the teacher. The teacher will follow the “research, decide, teach” structure of reading conferences and hold students accountable for their learning in the conference. Data collection will take a variety of forms including audio-taped conference transcripts, conference logs, and student interviews. The data will be triangulated to determine the ways in which reading conferences impact students’ reading proficiencies. Implications for future practices will be recommended.
Chapter Two

*Literature Review*

*Introduction*

While much attention has been given to the importance of writing conferences over the past two decades, little research has been conducted on reading conferences and their value for readers. Teacher-student conferences in the writing workshop are vital to the workshop model in teaching writing. As teachers, we listen as children respond to what they have written, and we intervene to demonstrate and extend strategies for students to use (Calkins, 2001). Calkins discusses the common doubt among teachers that reading is as amenable to instruction as writing. While writing is concrete, reading is elusive. Calkins does not purport that conferences with writers are the same as conferences with readers, but believes that teachers cannot give up the belief that conferring with individual readers has the ability to lift them to new levels in their future engagement with reading.

The next section will discuss the purpose of conferring in Reader’s Workshop, and the implications of the conference on instructional decision-making. It will also explore the structure of the reading conference, as well as the various methods through which teachers can engage in direct teaching through the reading conference. Lastly, this section will explore research-supported methods by which teachers can directly teach fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and phonics and phonemic awareness instruction to students.
The Purpose of Conferring

Reading conferences must serve to elevate students reading for futuristic purposes. In essence, teachers must “teach the reader, not the text” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 138). Teachers must help students learn more about being a reader, not simply helping him/her read a particular book. Calkins states that teachers of readers can confer in ways that support them “today and tomorrow” (Calkins, 2001, p. 101). Calkins extends this comparison by extolling the notion that students in writing conferences are not meant to have the child write well during the conference. In effect, conferences must serve as a lever to raise the child’s quality of writing long afterward. The conference therefore has a lasting impact on the child as well as his/her reading. Thus, teacher’s interactions with readers during reading conferences must be directed toward changing how a student reads after the interaction is complete (Calkins, 2001). Fountas and Pinnell (2001) suggest four main purposes of the reading conference:

• Engage in meaningful interaction that supports the reader’s ability to process a text with understanding and fluency.

• Teach the reader, not the text—that is, your focus is on helping this student learn more about being a reader, not simply helping him read this text.

• Become a set of ears, a guide, a sounding board.
• Help the student solve problems. (p. 138)

Thus, the reading conference serves to transfer learning beyond the current text and to elevate students to independent application of problem-solving strategies. The next section will discuss the teacher’s role in supporting students’ reading development in teacher-student conferences.

Conference Structure: Research, Decide, Teach

The teacher’s primary role in the reading conference is to help the reader with any problems he or she is having and to also learn about the reader through the important information the conference yields. Such information has significant implications for instructional decision-making, including implementing guided reading groups, choosing appropriate text levels and minilessons, and establishing flexible groupings (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Thus, the structure of the conference must be efficient and effective to yield such valuable information. According to Calkins (2001), conferring with young readers first involves “research” in an effort to learn where the child is as a reader as well the child’s intention. Teachers must then “decide” what should be taught to the reader at that particular place in time. Finally, teachers then need to “teach” in a manner that can influence what the child will do in the future with a different text.

In the research portion of the conference, the teacher can utilize observation as well as the child’s oral reading to determine which goals the child is approximating, those in which he/she is ignoring or not attempting, or those goals for which the
teacher must discuss with the student because progress toward the goals can not be told from observation alone (Goldberg & Serravallo, 2007). Conversations about the reader’s process can yield valuable information to the teacher in the research phase. The teacher can then begin her conversation with the reader by asking questions regarding what was observed or not observed. The reader can talk about the reading process he/she is undertaking before asking him/her to undertake a particular skill. Once the teacher has researched the reader in terms of how he/she is progressing, the teacher then decides what to teach the reader. This portion of the conference usually begins with noticing and supporting readers’ intentions and the directions of their work (Calkins, 2001). Following this compliment, the teacher must then prioritize the new skill or strategy to be taught, weighing the teaching options. The teacher must examine which option will have the greatest payoff for the reader; the one that will teach for transfer. Once this decision has been made by the teacher, the last step is for the teacher to decide on a method of instruction. Serravallo and Goldberg (2007) suggest a menu of teaching methods; demonstration, example and explanation, and coaching. These methods are decided upon based on how the reader learns best as well as the ways in which the reader has responded in the past. The method of instruction is also decided based on the level of support a reader needs with the particular strategy the teacher sets out to teach.

Boushey and Moser (2009) suggest a similar conference process. In The Café Book, the teacher-researchers outline seven elements of successful conferences. In the first step, the teacher checks his/her calendar for appointments that have been set
to confer with the child. It is crucial to keep accurate records of students and the
dates of previous conferences with the child in an effort to track progress as well as to
ensure students are conferring on a regular basis. According to Boushey and Moser,
fair is not always equal, and therefore, some children will need more conferring than
others (2009). At-risk students will often have more conferences with the teacher
than higher functioning students, however, it is important not to neglect those
students who are higher-functioning. All students deserve one-on-one time with the
teacher, therefore, it is critical to keep updated logs to help teachers track meeting
times.

The second step in the seven-step process is to take time to prepare for the
conference. During this time, the teacher checks his/her notebook to review notes
from the last conference. The teacher needs to determine the teaching point as well as
the takeaway or follow-up the child should be working on between conferences. This
helps the teacher start the conference calmly and purposely, so that students feel we
are truly present with them and focused on their needs (Boushey & Moser, 2009).

The third step includes close observation of the student. The teacher
physically moves to the student to conference, rather than having the student move to
him/her. This causes fewer distractions for the student and the class at-large
(Boushey & Moser, 2009). While listening to the student read, the teacher is seeing
whether or not the student is applying the strategies toward a goal set in a previous
conference. The conference is very focused around one or two strategies of which the
student has deemed as important in helping him/her reach their reading goals. After observing, the teacher writes down the text they were reading and adds notes related to the goal (Boushey & Moser, 2009).

Next, the teacher must decide what he/she will teach at that particular moment in time. The teacher may continue with the same goal or adjust it based on what was observed thus far. The teacher should always begin by telling the student they noticed about him/her thus far. Then, the teacher instructs the student by explaining a strategy explicitly and modeling it for them (Boushey & Moser, 2009). Or, the teacher can talk about the strategies in specific ways, in relation to texts they are reading.

The following step is to observe the child practice the strategy. This helps the teacher determine whether the child really understood what we’ve taught and whether he or she needs more coaching and support.

The sixth step involves planning the next steps and course of action. This is the point at which new conference times may be set. In deciding whether or not to move on to a different strategy, Boushey and Moser (2009) suggest using a check mark system to keep track of the number of times the student uses their strategy effectively. Once four or five “touch-points” are marked, the student is ready to move on. Using a menu of strategies, the teacher then chooses with the student which area to highlight next and practice.
Lastly, the seventh step is taking time to pause with students and savor through growth through positive praise. According to Boushey and Moser, “These final words, which are specific to the text and strategy the child has been working on, are the imprint we leave with that child of how we see him or her as a learner” (Boushey & Moser, 2009, p. 66). In an effort for the child to gain the sense of power, responsibility and growth that comes from taking ownership of their learning, the child must articulate the goals and strategies they are working on. This last step helps the student move forth in a positive manner and builds their accountability for their learning. The next section will discuss techniques for direct and explicit instruction in reading conferences.

Direct Instruction Through Multiple Methods

Struggling readers are more likely to learn critical reading skills and strategies if the instruction is direct and explicit. This type of instruction requires the teacher to impart new information to students through meaningful, teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance (Blair, Nichols & Rupley, 2009). Research has shown that explicit, direct instruction in reading skills and strategies are critical in the teaching of the five major components of the reading process—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The key to direct/explicit instruction is the active communication and interaction between teacher and student. Different types of instruction require varying degrees of teacher directness and explicitness. Thus, this dynamic and interactive relationship requires flexible and responsive instruction.
Serravallo and Goldberg (2007) suggest the following methods of instruction to teach readers a particular skill or strategy during the reading conference. These include demonstration, example and explanation, and coaching.

**Demonstration Teaching**

In demonstration teaching, the teacher shows the student the strategy step-by-step by thinking aloud. The teacher tells the student up-front what to notice while he/she demonstrates the strategy. The teacher can pick a familiar book to the student and show him/her the thinking behind the strategy. After the demonstration, the teacher coaches the student to try the same strategy in his/her own book (Serravallo & Goldberg, 2007).

**Example & Explanation Teaching**

In this type of instruction, the teacher reminds the student of the strategy from previous teaching. Instead of showing the child the strategy step-by-step, the teacher references previous teaching and reminds the student of the strategy with an explanation and visuals. The example and explanation method can only be used if the strategy has already been taught previously, typically during a minilesson or read-aloud (Serravallo & Goldberg, 2007).

**Coaching**

In a coaching conference, the teacher need not give a demonstration or give an example. The teacher just helps the student try the strategy. The teacher will ask the
student questions to help the student with all books, rather than just the current text. Coaching sets up the reader to have success and carrying their learning across all texts (Serravallo & Goldberg, 2007). The next section will discuss the five major areas of reading instruction and the associated research-supported techniques for instructing students in these areas of need.

Strategy Instruction

The teacher of literacy must be equipped with research-based techniques and strategies to be able flexibly call upon based upon student need. The 2004 National Reading Panel Report provides analysis and discussion of five major areas of reading instruction: Text comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and phonics. It is important for teachers to thoroughly understand each component of reading as well as the associated strategies for helping readers improve their skills in a particular area. Strategies backed by evidence of success are critical to a comprehensive reading program. Using research-based strategies and techniques ensures teacher feedback to students is meaningful, targeted and explicit. Such feedback supported by research helps elevate students to higher proficiency levels in reading.

Comprehension

Researchers have made great progress in our understanding of how human beings make meaning when they read, write, and speak. Without comprehension, reading for pleasure and enjoyment is unattainable. Comprehension is the active
process by which readers construct meaning from a text and involves accessing previous knowledge, understanding vocabulary and concepts, making inferences, and linking key ideas (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Many of the strategies employed in today's classrooms are taught to students through teacher modeling of the explicit comprehension and critical literacy processes they use while reading including connections made to the text, themselves, and the world (Vogt, 2007). When strategies are taught, modeled, reinforced, and practiced with sufficient scaffolded support, students' comprehension improves. Children become better at comprehension if they are taught to use the active comprehension processes that skilled readers use. Students do not discover comprehension strategies through immersion in reading alone (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004).

Comprehension instruction requires a series of strategies that influence understanding of text. Reading comprehension includes the following:

- Applying one's knowledge and experiences to the text.
- Setting goals for reading, and ensuring that they are aligned with the text.
- Using strategies and skills to construct meaning before and after reading.
- Adapting strategies that match the reader's text and goals.
- Recognizing the author's purpose.
- Distinguishing between facts and opinions.
• Drawing logical conclusions (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004, 99).

Therefore, the teacher’s role is to ensure students are actively participating before reading, obtain the skills and strategies to use during reading, and are able to try to make sense of the text by recognizing the author’s intention by bringing their own experiences to draw meaning from the text. In 2000, the National Reading Panel published a synthesis of reading comprehension intervention strategies associated with effective outcomes based on their review of over two-hundred research-based articles. The Partnership for Reading’s synthesis of these research-based strategies summarizes the panel’s findings. The strategies include the following:

• Providing students with guided practice and suggestions for how to monitor their comprehension and adjust how they read when difficulties arise.

• Encouraging cooperative learning practices for reading.

• Using graphic and semantic organizers that help students draw conclusions, relationships, and word meanings.

• Designing questions that address story structure.

• Providing extended feedback for student responses.

• Allowing students to elaborate on one another’s responses to questions.

• Preparing students to ask and answer their own questions about what they read.
• Teaching students to write key information about what they’ve read while they are reading and to summarize these key points after reading longer passages.

• Teaching students strategies that can be combined to understand text.

(National Institute for Literacy, 2006)

Teachers of literacy must be equipped with effective, research-based strategies that help students become mature comprehenders. Teachers must be skillful in their instruction and must flexibly respond to students’ needs for instructive feedback as they read (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). Thus, teachers must thoroughly understand the strategies they are teaching to readers and call upon them flexibly based on student need.

**Fluency**

Fluency is the accurate and rapid naming or reading of letters, sounds, words, sentences, or passages. When students are able to perform reading and reading-related tasks quickly and accurately, they achieve fluency. In essence, fluency is the by-product of comprehension and mature reading (Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004). According to the National Institute for Literacy (2006), fluency is the bridge between word recognition and comprehension. When readers do not have to focus on decoding the words, they can more closely follow what the text means. Thus, the fluent reader simultaneously recognizes words and comprehends as he/she reads.
Penner-Wilger (2008) describes the essential components of fluent reading that build upon each other in succession to produce fluent reading:

- Accuracy of word decoding
- Automaticity of word recognition
- Prosody of oral text reading

(Penner-Wilger, 2008, p. 2)

These fluency indicators are a departure from earlier notions of fluency, which centered solely on word recognition. All three of the indicators work together and lay the foundation for success in each successive indicator. Accuracy of word decoding refers to the ability to correctly formulate a phonological representation of the word. The ability to formulate the phonological representation of the word stems from the reader’s ability to recognize the word as part of her collection of sight words or apply a decoding strategy to solve the word. Such strategies may include using alphabetic principles, blending the sounds, using cues to identify the words in the text, and maintaining a large sight word vocabulary (Penner-Wilger, 2008). Accuracy is needed to build automaticity of word recognition.

Automaticity refers to the ability to automatically call words with little cognitive effort or attention. It requires quick and accurate identification of individual words as well as connected text (Penner-Wilger, 2008). When
automaticity is achieved, it frees the reader’s cognitive resources to concentrate on other tasks, such as reading comprehension.

Lastly, both accuracy and automaticity are required to build prosody. Prosody refers to the ability to read with proper phrasing and expression with pitch, volume, intonation, and stress. Prosody reflects a reader’s comprehension of the text and indicates that a reader is constructing meaning as she reads the text (Penner-Wilger, 2008).

Targeted, research-based strategy instruction is needed to help students become fluent readers. Students who read and re-read passages orally with teacher feedback become better readers (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). Repeated oral reading improves word recognition, speed, accuracy, as well as fluency. In addition, models of fluent reading provide students with examples of how a reader’s voice helps make sense of the text. Such models help readers understand how a fluent reader should sound as he/she reads.

**Vocabulary**

An important aid in reading comprehension is vocabulary. Vocabulary consists of the words needed to communicate effectively. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies comprise our knowledge of words in the orthographic system.
Research points to instructing students to build their vocabulary base through indirect and direct methods. Indirectly, teachers can help expand students’ vocabularies by:

• Engaging in oral language conversations, especially with adults so they may build their word knowledge.

• Listening to adults read books and then engaging in conversations about books in an effort to help children build new words and relate them to prior knowledge and experiences.

• Allowing children to read extensively on their own to encounter more words and build word meanings.

(National Institute for Literacy, 2006)

Even though an extensive amount of vocabulary can be learned indirectly, some vocabulary must be taught directly. The National Institute for Literacy (2006) suggests that students need to be provided with specific word instruction as well as equipping students with word-learning strategies. These direct methods of vocabulary instruction include:

• Teaching specific words the child will encounter in the text.

• Giving students opportunities to actively engage with words.
Providing students with extended instruction that enables them to apply their vocabulary in various contexts, including their texts.

(National Institute for Literacy, 2006)

Students also require word-learning strategies to help them problem-solve when they independently encounter words they do not know. Such strategies include teaching students how to use dictionaries and other reference sources to determine the meanings of unknown words, showing students how to use the meanings of word parts to find the meanings of words in text, such as common Latin and Greek affixes, and finally, instructing students how to use context clues to determine the meanings of unknown words (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). Texts often contain numerous words that are unknown to readers. It is not feasible or necessary for teachers to directly teach students all of the vocabulary they will encounter in the text. Equipping students with the strategies they need to determine word meanings fosters an independent, active awareness over one’s comprehension and word knowledge.

**Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Instruction**

Phonemic awareness is the understanding that the sounds of spoken language work together to make words. Phonics is the direct connection between phonemes and graphemes and that letters represent those sounds in written language. Effective phonemic awareness instruction is needed for students to realize that language is made up of specific sounds. Students need to notice, think about, and manipulate sounds in words. Teachers can instruct students on phonemic awareness through a
variety of phonemic manipulation activities including phoneme identification, segmentation, isolation, categorization, blending, deletion, addition, and substitution (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). Phonemic awareness instruction is most effective when children are taught to manipulate the phonemes using the letters of the alphabet and when instruction focuses on only one or two types of phoneme manipulation rather than several types of phoneme manipulation.

The goal of phonics instruction is to teach students the predictable and systematic relationship between sounds and letters. Knowing the relationships that exist amongst sounds and letters helps students solve and decode words in print. Knowledge of the alphabetic principle greatly contributes to a child’s ability to accurately read in isolation and in connected text. Research points to the importance of systematic, explicit phonics instruction. A systematic phonics program will introduce a carefully-selected and useful selection of phoneme-grapheme combinations. The instructional sequence may include relationships among smaller units of sounds, such as those associated with single letters. It may also include those correspondences associated with larger units of sound, such as combinations of letters and spelling patterns (National Institute for Literacy, 2006). Explicit instruction provides students with practice to develop the relationships they are learning. Thus, systematic phonics instruction improves a child’s word recognition, spelling, and reading comprehension.
Summary

It is therefore critical to this study to consider the research surrounding the purpose of conferring as well as the advised conference structures. Exploring various types of direct instruction and research-based methods for teaching the critical components of reading are central to the design of this study and form the basis for teacher-student interactions.
Chapter Three

Study Design

Introduction

This study attempts to determine the ways in which reading conferences impact students’ reading proficiency. This study takes place in a large suburban school district in western New York. Nineteen students comprise the class, and three students serve as the focal students. In this chapter, the teacher-researcher will introduce the focal students as well as the context in which the research will take place. In addition, the teacher-researcher will introduce the study’s methods as well as the data collection process.

Contextual Information and Participants

District/School

The focal school is located in Western New York. The population of the district’s community totals 23,913. The district’s total enrollment for 2010-2011 was 3,708. There are a total of 904 students enrolled in kindergarten through grade three. It is currently a district “In Good Standing” making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Per pupil expenditure in this district totaled $17,560 for the 2010-2011 school year. District wide, the largest ethnic group represented is Caucasian. 79.5% of the population identifies as Caucasian, followed by an 8.6% Black/African American representation, and a 7.3% Hispanic/Latino representation of students. 111 students participate in the Urban-Suburban Transfer Program across the district.
The focal school is one of six “neighborhood” elementary schools that hosts two classrooms per grade from Kindergarten to third grade. Students then feed into two separate middle schools located at the north and south quadrants of town and host grades four through six. After middle school, students filter into one junior high and high school. In 2009-2010, the focal school’s student population totaled 147 students; a drop from enrollment in the 2008-2009 school year, which totaled 164. Five students participate in the Urban-Suburban program, an initiative that enables students living within urban perimeters to attend suburban schools. The focal school reflects similar trends with regard to ethnic populations as the district. The Caucasian population is 86%, followed by Black/African American at 8%, and Hispanic/Latino at 6%. 1% of students are Asian or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. The following chart describes the population of the focal school’s ethnic populations:

Table 3.1: Colebrook Elementary’s Student Ethnic Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Origin</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the New York State Report Card for the 2009-2010 school year, 0% of students were eligible for free lunch, however, lunches are not provided by the school as it does not participate in a lunch program for any students. Currently, 16 students qualify for free or reduced priced milk sold at lunch. The Annual Attendance Rate for the 2008-2009 school year was 96% and the percentage of student suspensions was 0%.

The total number of teachers is 8, with a total of 9 classes. All teachers are considered highly qualified. 38% of teachers had fewer than 3 years of experience and 0% of teachers were teaching out of certification or without appropriate certification. The turnover rate of all teachers is 22%.

**Class**

This study takes place in a third grade classroom with a total of 19 students. Eleven girls and eight boys comprise the class. One student participates in the Urban-Suburban Program. The children’s abilities range from first grade reading levels to sixth grade reading levels. Six students receive Chapter 1 Support in Reading or Math, which involves a targeted, twenty-minute lesson in a small group or 1:1 setting with a teaching assistant.

The district uses the Houghton Mifflin Reading Series and daily, specific Reader’s Workshop and Writer’s Workshop routines. Each day, the students engage in twenty minutes of Word Study. Word Study is differentiated according to student needs. Word Study is followed by a twenty-minute Reading Block that adheres to the
Workshop Model. Reader’s Workshop begins with a ten-minute mini-lesson, followed by three blocks including Independent Reading, Guided Group, and a Literature Experience block. Students are accountable for active engagement while reading; taking notes, filling in charts, making inferences, etc., and also respond to prompts about their reading in their Reader’s Response Journals. These are broad questions that enable students to express their comprehension of the text and demonstrate higher level thinking skills. During Guided Group, students engage with leveled texts and are taught strategies to elevate thinking and improve their reading proficiency. In addition, the teacher individually confers with readers at this time to determine the types of reading strategies students are employing. The teacher then determines specific areas of focus to teach the reader. All reading conference notes are kept so that teachers can follow-up with the reader to determine whether the student independently took on the teaching point.

Focal Students

Three focal students were selected at random across the three differentiated reading groups. Two girls and one boy at various reading levels were selected to participate.

The first focal student is a female student who lives in a bilingual household. She is of Puerto Rican descent. She is currently a child identified as “exceeding standard” in reading. She is enthusiastic about reading and literacy activities. She takes great pride in her writing about reading and enjoys talking about and sharing her
insights with others and with the teacher-researcher. For the remainder of the study, she will be referred to by the pseudonym, “Gabriella.”

The second focal student is a female student reading at grade-level expectations or “meeting standard.” She is a Caucasian student who is supported by her family at home. Due to summer regression and low standardized achievement scores at the end of her second grade year, the focal student who will be referred to as “Eva,” a pseudonym, receives Chapter 1 Support Services in English Language Arts. Her instruction in Chapter 1 focuses on building comprehension and monitoring strategies, as well as substantiating from text.

The third focal student is a Caucasian, male student who is considered “approaching” grade-level reading expectations. Attention deficits have created significant gaps in his learning. He requires intensive 1:1 work with the teacher in all subject areas to build his understanding and transfer of knowledge. He receives Chapter 1 Support Services in both English Language Arts and Math. The focus of Chapter 1 Services in English Language Arts is word building, comprehension, and reading rate. Through Chapter 1, he receives skill support in the Fundations program. He will be referred to as “Patrick,” a pseudonym, for the remainder of this study.

Teacher/Researcher

The teacher-researcher, Sandra Goettelman, identifies as Caucasian and is a first-year teacher simultaneously earning her master’s degree in Childhood Literacy through the College at Brockport. The teacher-researcher earned her Bachelor’s
degree in Childhood Education and Special Education at SUNY Geneseo. She is certified in New York State to teach students with disabilities (1-6), childhood education (1-6), and early childhood education (birth-grade 2). As a first year teacher, she is particularly interested in Reader’s Workshop and creating opportunities for students to increase their independence in their ability to flexibly call upon strategies when problem solving. She is also interested in fostering genuine teacher-student partnerships about reading through the Workshop model.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection will consist of a variety of instruments intended to help answer the research questions. Observation field notes, interview data, and audio-taped conferences will be utilized in this study to triangulate the data to provide for reliability and validity. Observation field notes will be used to note reading behaviors during the students’ conference with the teacher during the guided reading block. Observation notes will also be recorded during the conference to keep track of the child’s oral reading behaviors as well as the strategy taught to the student. The students will also answer interview questions following data collection stage.

Interviews

Focal students will partake in one interview with the teacher-researcher following their participation in four reading conferences. These interviews will help to determine the level of the child’s interest and perception of reading as well as their
view of the effectiveness of the conference itself to foster independent reading and problem solving.

*Field Notes*

The conference log will also serve as field notes for data collection. On this form, the teacher-researcher will keep track of strategies the child is using well. The teacher-researcher will also note feedback for the child as well as a link to teach something he/she is neglecting in an effort to improve the child’s strategy usage.

*Audio-taped Conference Interactions*

When working with the focal students, the teacher-researcher will use a tape-recorder to keep track of oral reading behaviors. This will help determine what types of reading behaviors the focal student is using following the teacher-researcher’s feedback and direct teaching during the conference. These will be recorded in transcript form in an effort to help code the collected data for themes relating to the research questions.

*Table 3.2 Data Collection Procedures*

*Weekly Research Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1    | • Inform parents and students that data collection will occur over the next four weeks  
      | • Collect conference logs from focal students |
| 2    | • Audio-tape first conference with each focal student  
      | • Observe oral reading behaviors using the conference logs |
| 3    | • Audio-tape second conference with each focal student  
      | • Observe oral reading behaviors using the conference logs |
| 4    | • Audio-tape third conference with each focal student |
Observe oral reading behaviors using the conference logs

Audio-tape second conference with each focal student

Observe oral reading behaviors using the conference logs

Conduct interviews with each focal student regarding their views of their reading and the reading conference process

Procedures

The purpose of this study is to determine the degree to which reading conferences improve students’ reading abilities. Since reading is complex and features an array of “in the head” processes, students’ oral reading behaviors will be drawn upon to give insight to the child’s strategy use.

In the Reader’s Workshop, teacher/student reading conferences are brief, and typically last no more than five minutes in length. To uphold the integrity of the conference as well as the frequency with which conferences typically occur in classrooms, the teacher-researcher will meet with a different student each day of the week and will conference with the same child on the same day the following week. Throughout the duration of data collection, the teacher-researcher will have conferred with each of the three focal students four times.

Each conference will be audio-recorded to help the teacher-researcher scribe oral reading behaviors to improve the teacher-researcher’s accuracy in determining what strategies the child is using and neglecting. The teacher-researcher will also record all conference notes on a form that will keep track of improvement over time.

Data Analysis

All domains of data will be collected and analyzed. These domains will then be
coded based upon the degree to which conferring helps students' reading development. By closely examining students' oral reading behaviors through interactive student conferences, the teacher-researcher will determine the ways in which conferring supports students' reading development. The teacher-researcher will determine the ways in which students incorporate feedback regarding decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies in their reading as well as students' attitudes toward conferences.

Observation field notes, audio recordings, conference logs, and student interviews will be triangulated to determine the degree to which they show evidence of the research questions. Evidence of the types of feedback incorporated in the student's reading will be coded as "1." Evidence of independence in reading will be coded as "2." Evidence of the effectiveness and efficiency of the conference will be denoted with a "3." Evidence of decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategy-use discussed in reading conferences will be coded as "d," "f," and "c," respectively.

Reliability and validity of a study is increased by triangulation across multiple domains. Efforts will be pursued to ensure this study is both valid and reliable. Five focal students of varying reading abilities will be chosen to partake in this study in an effort to show the ways in which conferring impacts the reading abilities of readers with varying needs. Multiple conferences will ensure that students have multiple chances to demonstrate whether or not they incorporate the direct teaching and strategies learned in the conference to their actual reading.
Summary

This action research study investigates the ways in which reading conferences support students’ reading proficiency and independence in reading. Research will be conducted in a third grade classroom in Western New York. The district in which the research takes place is located in a large, suburban community and is considered “in good standing.” Research will be conducted during Reader’s Workshop “guided group” component of the “Nine-block.” Data collection instruments include audio-taped interviews, conference logs, and student interviews. Of the nineteen students who comprise the classroom, three will be the focus of this study to track reading development. Students will be asked to independently apply the new learning from the conference into their independent reading and show evidence of their strategy-use at the next weekly conference. Data will be analyzed, triangulated, and coded for themes.
Chapter Four

Findings

Through this research inquiry, students’ reading development through weekly reading conferences was explored. The purpose of this study was to determine the ways in which reading conferences heightened students’ reading proficiency. In particular, students’ ability to independently apply their new learning was examined, as well as the ways in which reading conferences were efficient and effective for the teacher and student. In this section, three focal students’ conference transcripts, conferences records, and interview data will be analyzed in an effort to respond to the questions posed at the beginning of the study. Research questions will be examined according to themes that emerge from the data, and focal students will be examined in relation to those themes.

**In what ways do students incorporate feedback regarding decoding, fluency, and comprehension strategies in their reading?**

In this section, I will focus on the ways in which the three focal students incorporated feedback regarding these aspects of reading into their reading in the conference setting. The first of the four student conferences served as an initial goal-setting conference. Oral reading behavior was observed for about a minute, while the teacher-researcher simultaneously scribed notes about a compliment and feedback she would give the reader. After making the decision, the teacher-researcher identified an area of need that the child would attempt in his or her reading for the next time. The
teacher would provide guided practice with the child beforehand to ensure he/she understood the strategy so he or she could use it independently. The teacher then marked the strategy on the child’s goal-setting sheet so that he/she could visually see the goal she worked on and refer to it in the future. The teacher-researcher outlined for the student the expectation that whenever he/she used this strategy in his/her independent reading, he/she would mark it in her book and bring to the next weekly conference. In Eva’s first reading conference, this conversation following the Eva’s oral reading of her guided reading group text took this form:

Sandra: You know, you do a really nice job using word parts when reading and really working through some difficult words, like Madagascar (points to page) and “container.” You are building your strategies very well. Something we can work on is reading the text to make our voice sound really smooth by phrasing all our words together. So when you finish reading you can go back and make your voice sound really smooth and phrased together. Um, so for example, on the last line you read, “There are more than thirty kinds of lemurs;” and there is a semicolon there and it tells us to pause a little bit. [Continues reading] They all live on the island of Madagascar—and then there is a comma—little pause, near Africa and then there is a period and you lower your voice there. So why don’t you try reading that sentence now making it sound really smooth

Eva: (phrases words, paying attention to punctuation).

Sandra: Beautiful. Your voice sounded really smooth. Think of it as reading to your little sisters.

Eva: Yeah, that’s true!

Sandra: And when you read to them, you really want to make your voice sound really smooth almost like a teacher reading (laughs).

Eva: Yeah! (smiles, laughs).

Sandra: So I am going to mark on your strategy sheet that we are going to work on re-reading pieces of our text to make our voices sound fluent (writes down date and strategy on FACE sheet under ‘F’). And I’m writing this down
under the “Fluency” section because fluency means, “I can read accurately, with expression, and understand what I read.” You can mark when you use that strategy in your guided reading book, in your purple book, or with your partner. And you might just re-read to make your voice sound really fluent. And every time you do that, you can put a post-it on that page. When we check in next Tuesday, you can show me places where you re-read to phrase and pull the words together. Does that make sense? Does that sound good?

Eva: Sounds good. Can I take the blue ones? (picks blue post-its and puts in guided reading folder with strategy sheet).

This type of introduction to the student accountability piece of the conference was introduced to the other two focal students as well at the first reading conference. The degree to which students needed teacher guidance to help them grasp varied among the focal children. Encountering difficulty with self-monitoring, Patrick’s goal centered on developing the ability to stop when something did not make sense. Here is an excerpt of the direct instruction and goal-setting portion of the conference that followed Patrick’s oral reading:

Sandra: So we always have to stop ourselves when something doesn’t make sense. We first stop and then think about a strategy we could use. You can use word parts. What else could you do?

Patrick: Cover it up.

Sandra: Yep—using word parts. You could also re-read and think about what makes sense there. I want you to read the next page and try stopping when something doesn’t make sense. Okay?

Patrick: (Begins reading. Stops at hard word).

Sandra: So did you stop at that word?

Patrick: Yeah.

Sandra: And what did you do there?

Sandra: Good!

Sandra: I like how you are stopping there. What strategy are you going to try to use to solve that one?

Patrick: Cut in half. Rack. Ons. Rack-ons?

Sandra: So let’s re-read that sentence using the first word part. (Patrick re-reads, using the first part and accurately decodes raccoons).

Sandra: Good! So do you see how re-reading and using the word parts to solve words helps you?

Patrick: Nods.

Sandra: So what we’re going to do is write down your strategy and today’s date. We are working on an accuracy strategy—to stop when words don’t make sense. So anytime you’re reading and you don’t know that word or it doesn’t make sense, you’re going to make sense. What are you going to after that? The first step is to stop. What is the second step?

Patrick: To go back and re-read.

Sandra: Mhmm. To go back and re-read and use parts. But this is going to be what we are focusing on—the stopping part. Anytime you do this as you read, you are going to mark where you do that—where you stop and use this strategy. You can do this in your own reading or in your guided group reading. So can you bring these with you to guided group so you can show me where you did that at our checkpoint?

Patrick: Yeah, okay.

Sandra: Does all of that make sense?

Patrick: Yep! Mhmm.

The following is an excerpt of the direct instruction and goal-setting portion of Gabriella’s first reading conference after the teacher-researcher has observed her oral reading behaviors:
Sandra: So where is this story taking place?

Gabriella: At a raptor center.

Sandra: At a raptor center. And what do you think happens at the raptor center?

Gabriella: It's kind of like the Helmer Nature Center, I think. They like take injured animals and help them.

Sandra: Mhmm, right. So, a center often treats injured animals and it's also a way for the public to come in and see animals, too. (Reads sentence aloud; "They continue through the gate to a high wooden fence to the infirmary."

What do you think the word infirmary means?

Gabriella: Like a place where they like keep some animals or something?

Sandra: Well we could read on. Sometimes one of our strategies that we can use is to keep reading to figure out what that word means. So why don’t you read from here (points to beginning of sentence that uses “infirmary”) to the end (one sentence past the sentence that uses “infirmary”). And let’s try to figure out what that word means.

Gabriella: (Reads both sentences).

Sandra: So what do you think that infirmary place is?

Gabriella: I think it’s like a place where they see what was wrong with the animals.

Sandra: Mhmm. So because why? What are they doing for the animal there?

Gabriella: They’re giving them a physical exam.

Sandra: Yep and who gives physical exams?

Gabriella: Doctors. So it’s kind of like a doctor’s office.

Sandra: Right. Except here they’re not treating people, who are they treating?

Gabriella: Animals!

Sandra: Exactly. So do you see how reading-on can help you understand what words mean? So I’m going to continue to have you try using that strategy and I’m going to write it down here under “Expanding Vocabulary” (writes date and strategy on “FACE” strategy sheet). We also call this strategy using context clues. And what you are going to do as you are
reading this week is anytime you use strategy I want you to mark it in your books. I want to see you practicing that.

Gabriella: So you want me to leave it in the page?

Sandra: Yep! And then you can bring the book to show me at our next checkpoint. Sound good?

Gabriella: Mhmm! (laughs)

The degree of support offered to the focal students when learning to attain a new strategy varied among the children based on the observation of the child during their oral reading as well as the degree of interaction that took place during the dialogue. Different methods of direct instruction were used to help the students in different situations. To consider the degree to which students incorporated feedback regarding decoding, fluency, and comprehension skills in their reading, the oral reading portion of subsequent conferences would highlight whether or not students were incorporating the learned strategies in their reading. Thus, the conference logs proved a valuable tool in identifying the types of strategies and skills the focal students were using and neglecting.

_Students require differing degrees of support in strategy-use_

As seen with Patrick, self-monitoring when a word did not make sense in his reading would become the focus of the following conference. Patrick’s subsequent conference logs show a lack of self-monitoring:
With three miscues on a single page, it was evidence that the focal child was not incorporating the teacher-researcher’s feedback regarding decoding strategies in his own reading. The teacher-researcher needed to provide further scaffolds to help Patrick understand where to stop and how to problem-solve. The following is an excerpt from Patrick’s second conference:

Sandra: Is there anything on that page that didn’t make sense to you?

Patrick: (Looks over page).

Sandra: Anything that didn’t quite make sense that you hadn’t heard of before?

Patrick: Yeah, maybe this one (points to “human”).

Sandra: Yeah! That’s the one I was thinking of too. So when you said that word you said “they were looking for a permit baby.” That doesn’t quite make sense, so let’s put a sticky note there to remind us to stop. Next time, when you get to a word you don’t know, you just stop.

So what could you do at this point to solve this word?

Patrick: I don’t know. (Pauses). I know it has “man” at the end of it.

Sandra: Yeah! So you see the word part, “man.”

Patrick: Mhmm. Looks like herman.

Sandra: I see. So what letters would you expect to see at the beginning of “herman?”
Patrick: h-e-r.
Sandra: Do you see the letters h-e-r at the beginning of this word?
Patrick: No.
Sandra: So it’s got to be something different.
Patrick: huh-man?
Sandra: Does that word make sense?
Patrick: No.
Sandra: Yeah, I haven’t heard of that word either. So we know the word begins with /h/ and we have tried using word parts. So now what is another strategy we could use that we used last time we met?
Patrick: Umm. (pause). Don’t have any other strategies to use.
Sandra: Can I remind you of a strategy?
Patrick: Sure.
Sandra: So you got back to the beginning of the sentence and you re-read it, then when you get to that word you make the first sound.
Patrick: (Re-reads sentence, solves on second attempt)
Sandra: Ah! Does that make sense now?
Patrick: Yes!
Sandra: See how we sometimes have to do some problem solving?
Patrick: Mhmm.
Sandra: So the first time when we tried to solve this word, what strategy did we use?
Patrick: Word parts.
Sandra: Then what did we do?
Patrick: Went back and re-read.
Sandra: So now we have two strategies. Remind me what those are.
Patrick: Going back and re-reading or splitting the word apart.
Although Patrick does not yet show mastery of self-monitoring and reading for meaning, he does show an ability to identify word parts when the teacher-researcher asks him what he could do to solve the identified word, “human:”

Patrick: I don’t know. (Pauses). I know it has “man” at the end of it.”

This shows evidence of Patrick just beginning to use the strategy. He requires further guidance and teacher questioning to help him see how the strategy will work for him and improve his reading.

By the third conference, Patrick is able to decode a multi-syllabic word and verbalize how to use word parts:

**Figure 4.2: Patrick’s Conference Log—1/31**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Touch Point</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following transcript is an excerpt from Patrick’s third conference with the teacher-researcher following his oral reading:

Sandra: I like how you paused to figure out the meaning of this word (nocturnal). What helped you figure out the meaning of this word?

Patrick: Well I covered up the parts I knew and then tried to figure it out and I got it.
Sandra: That’s great. So, you paused to figure out what that word meant and used word parts to solve it. I like that you are showing me how you can use your strategies.

How about this word? Could you use word parts or re-reading to figure out this word?

Patrick: (Begins breaking word up, re-reads).

Sandra: Exactly. It sounds right and makes sense. We just have to make sure that we are stopping every time a word does not make sense in our reading. I am going to mark this spot with a sticky note to show where we stopped because the word did not make sense.

The fourth conference shows further evidence of Patrick’s ability to include feedback from the previous three conferences into his oral reading. The conference log is followed by the transcript.

Figure 4.3: Patrick’s Conference Log—2/7

Sandra: Patrick, can I listen to you do some reading?

Patrick: Mhmm (begins reading) Self corrects x 3, slow, deliberate reading (reads for 1 min)

Sandra: (Assists with “inclined” Have you ever seen one of these [an inclined plane] before?)

Patrick: You mean the ramps?

Sandra: Yeah!
Patrick: Yeah, our U-Haul had one of these (points to inclined plane on the back of a truck).

Sandra: Yeah, they really help you to move heavy things from one place to the other without having to lift them onto the truck. You can kind of just push them up the ramp. And that’s an inclined plane—a simple machine.

Patricia: (continues reading).

Sandra: I’m just going to stop you for a second. I was really happy with how you stopped yourself over here when something didn’t sound right. You said, “You need to put a large heavy box into” and you stopped yourself and realized it was “in” and corrected what you said. That was very good. There was also a place where you corrected “I” for “that.” That shows me that you’re stopping when a word doesn’t make sense and that you’re fixing it. And that’s very good.

By the fourth conference, the teacher-researcher was able to see consistency with Patrick’s self-correcting. With persistent teacher support, Patrick was finally self-monitoring as evidenced by multiple self-corrections. At this point in the conference, the teacher-researcher felt comfortable helping Patrick move toward another reading goal.

Both Eva and Gabriella’s incorporation of feedback from previous teaching was noticed in their oral reading and conversations about their oral reading each time they conferenced. Unlike Patrick, Eva’s goals and Gabriella’s goals changed more frequently as they were able to “master” their strategies at a faster rate. The following conference logs show a steady progression from one goal to the next:
Figure 4.4 Gabriella and Eva’s Conference Logs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Touch Point</th>
<th>Observation and Instruction</th>
<th>Next Steps to Meet Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/17</td>
<td>+ attention, to express, determine rate</td>
<td>The context clues in independent reading this week (read before and after the word)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/24</td>
<td>Demonstrate understanding of &quot;cautiously&quot; using context clues. Compare and contrast characters in SARS to better apply in reading.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>Simultaneous compare and contrast by George and Eva helped Gabriella get a better sense of each vector. Interact and participate more in discussion. Infer characters' feelings by closely examining their actions applied to real life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>Support evidence with examples. Continue to build inference. Gabriella can verbalize and demonstrate strategies.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since strategy-use is an “in the head” process, it can be difficult to observe whether or not a student has really “mastered” a particular reading strategy, especially if it is not readily apparent in a child’s oral reading. Thus, student accountability is paramount. Each focal student was charged with coming to the next weekly conference with evidence of how they used their strategy in their independent reading.
To measure true independence with their strategy, the students’ presentation of their efforts toward independent application of their reading goal can be used to answer the following research question:

**In what ways does conferring foster independence for students?**

After a week of using and applying their new reading strategy, students were asked to come to the conference with evidence of progress toward their reading goal. The following is an excerpt from Eva’s second conference, when she is asked to show how she used her strategy of re-reading to make her voice sound smooth:

Sandra: I’m excited to see that you marked where you used your re-reading strategy this week in your independent reading. What made you re-read both of those parts of the story again?

Eva: Because I didn’t really understand at first. But then I re-read, like I saw what he was trying to say. I could see how each of the parts of the sentence fit together when I stopped at the punctuation.

**Independence Enables Transfer Across Texts**

By verbalizing her strategy-use and her motivations for using the strategy, Eva could see how the strategy worked to make her a better reader. By independently applying her strategy to her independent reading outside of guided group, the teacher-researcher could observe the students’ transfer of feedback across texts. Eva continued to show accountability for her reading strategies across the next two conferences. In the second conference, the teacher-researcher and Eva worked
together to understand how to use context clues to determine the meaning of unknown vocabulary. The following is an excerpt from Eva’s third conference at which she shares the ways in which she applied context clues in her independent reading:

Sandra: I’m wondering, because I see some sticky notes, if you brought anything with you today to show me how you have been doing with your strategy for this week?

Eva: Yes! I used context clues to figure out words I didn’t know. Like I didn’t know this word, “uneasily” (points to word).

Sandra: Oh I see. So what did you do?

Eva: I re-read the sentence. And I thought about what was happening. So like Kyo doesn’t want to help George with the cage so he probably wasn’t sure if he wanted to help. So he didn’t really want to go help his uncle.

Sandra: I think you’re right! So how was he feeling?

Eva: I think he was a little worried. I think that’s what “uneasily” means.

Sandra: I love how you used context clues to figure our what “uneasily” meant. That is such a smart strategy because sometimes we don’t know all if the words in our reading, but there are clues like these ones to help us figure out what the word means.

Similarly, in the fourth conference, Eva was able to verbalize and demonstrate her using word parts to solve unknown words; a strategy set forth in her third reading conference. Following her oral reading, Eva showed independence with this strategy when prompted to tell the teacher-researcher about her progress:

Sandra: Exactly! So what strategy have you been working on this week?

Eva: Looking through the words and using word parts.
Eva: This word—“outwardly”

Sandra: Very good! Show me how you could use your fingers to cover up word parts you know.

Eva: (Demonstrates using fingers). And then I used word parts for this word (points to “destination”). I knew “nation” so I covered it up and got “destination.”

Sandra: I love how you used word parts and used your sticky notes to show me where you used word parts to help you as a reader.

Demonstrating how and why she used her strategy in her independent reading helped the teacher-researcher make decisions regarding where instruction would move to next for the student. Both Eva and Gabriella were able to work toward new goals on a weekly basis. Such accountability placed upon the girls from the teacher-researcher helped the girls become metacognitive of their strategy-use and see the transfer of these strategies across texts. Similarly, Gabriella was able to transfer her goal set forth in the first conference to utilize conference goals when she came back the next week for her reading conference with the teacher-researcher.

Gabriella: Um, so I was reading the book (Secret of the Seal) and I just looked at some words I thought I would forget would that mean or I didn’t know what they mean and so first I saw the word “cautiously.” I remembered what it means but I wasn’t sure if I was going to remember it so I just remembered it meant “carefully” so that’s what I wrote on the paper. And then I read again and I saw his harpoon. (Sandra: Oh) And I didn’t know what harpoon meant so I kept reading a little and I knew that it was a type of weapon.
Sandra: How did you know that?

Gabriella: Because it says “Every few steps he tested the strength of the snow-covered ice with his harpoon.” So I thought it was like a sharp weapon.

Sandra: Yeah because he’s able to cut through the ice with it, right? Good thinking. I like how you went back and re-read. Wonderful!

And then I saw a “small slab of nice nearby.” I didn’t know what slabs means so I was reading on and it said, Carried it away from the hole and laid down on his belly. So I thought it was like a little hill of ice. So I wrote down hill.

Sandra: Oh I see. So, (Re-reads sentence substituting “hill” for “slab” Gabriella joins in). So what do you mean by “hill?” Are you thinking like a sledding hill?

Gabriella: I mean like a small, little…bump!

Sandra: Yeah, like a little mound, right? Something he can walk with because he can pick it up. What made you think it was small?

Gabriella: Because it says small Kyo found a small slab of ice so I thought the object would be small like that.

Sandra: And it has to fit in hand, too because he carried it, right? Good job. I’m going to take a just quick look at other things you marked “baffled— very good. This is very good evidence of using context clues. So do you now understand how we use context clues? Going back and looking forward when you read to figure out the meaning of words we are unsure of?

Gabriella: Mhmm! (nods head proudly)

Sandra: And I think these sticky notes show how many times us readers use context clues when we read. You have done a beautiful job using this strategy. Would you like to do some reading for me from the story?

With a plethora of sticky notes attached to her chapter book, it became evident that Gabriella was able to transfer this strategy across domains. She could visually see the ways in which readers use context clues throughout a text to problem solve around determining the meaning of new words. Gabriella excitedly displayed her strategy-use and showed accountability for her learning. The teacher-researcher felt
comfortable moving Gabriella forward with another strategy to increase the extent to
which she thought about the characters in the book. At the second conference,
Gabriella and the teacher-researcher worked together to define “comparing and
contrasting” characters to increase her comprehension of the story. In the following
excerpt from Gabriella’s third reading conference, it becomes evident that Gabriella
had a firm understanding of how to use comparing and contrasting in her reading to
heighten her comprehension:

Sandra: Now, I notice you have some post-it notes in your book. I was
hoping you could share with me how you used your strategy this week!

Gabriella: So I was comparing and contrasting, and I compared and
contrasted George and Kyo. They are the same because they are both family
and they want the seal. But I contrasted because they want the seal for
different reasons. George wants to find the seal to take it back to the zoo and
Kyo wants to protect the seal because he wants to be friends.

Sandra: Yes, so they are acting very differently from each other because they
both have different reasons for being on this trip. How do you think Kyo is
feeling right now?

Gabriella: Maybe a little worried.

Sandra: I agree! Why do you think he’s worried?

Gabriella: He wants to protect his friend.

Sandra: Yeah, and what in the passage shows that?

Gabriella: (pauses while searching, points out characters’ gestures and facial
expressions).

Sandra: Good, so the text can really help us see how the character is feeling.

Again, Gabriella came to this conference with multiple sticky notes emerging
from her chapter book. She excitedly presented her findings to the teacher-researcher, who validated her strategy-use.

*Students require differing amounts of exposure to a strategy to help them reach independence, dependent on the complexity of the strategy and student readiness.*

The next excerpt is from Gabriella’s fourth reading conference. The teacher-researcher made a decision to stay with the goal set in her third conference, to use inferences to determine characters’ feelings for her next conference.

Sandra: Did you bring anything to show me how you used your strategy to infer the characters’ feelings in your other books this week?

Gabriella: I marked Kyo. Like he didn’t want George to hunt Tooky, so he took him to another fishing place. He made a friend out of Tooky.

Sandra: So even though the story doesn’t say he is worried, we know he doesn’t want George to find Tooky because we can infer his feelings about this. You knew what he was feeling based on his actions and what you know in your mind when someone does those things.

This is a very big goal and we are going to continue with this goal. You are doing a nice job showing me your thinking. I want you continue to work on this goal this week, to infer characters’ feelings. I would like you to infer the feeling, and then support the feeling with evidence from the text.

Thus, even though Gabriella showed a degree of independence with this strategy, she did not demonstrate substantiation from text that supported the character’s feeling. Still, Gabriella was accountable for her strategy and independently applied it to her reading. Further teacher support was needed to move
When Patrick did not come to his reading conference prepared with ways in which he incorporated his strategy in his independent reading, it was not readily apparent whether or not he was able to transfer strategies across texts independently. Patrick’s goal centered on self-monitoring strategies. After the first conference, Patrick was asked to come prepared with ways in which he utilized the stopping strategy to stop when a word did not make sense in his reading. At the second conference, Patrick did not have any sticky notes in his book:

Sandra: Did you mark any places where you used your strategy that we talked about last week in your reading?

Patrick: There were no parts where I re-read.

Coupled with the observation of Patrick’s oral reading where he made three miscues on a single page, it became evident that Patrick was still not fully reading for meaning. He had also forgotten the critical component of his strategy—the stopping part—to ensure self-monitoring. He only verbalized “re-reading” instead of stopping first, and then choosing a way to problem-solve. This signaled to the teacher-researcher that more work would need to be done through demonstration and guided practice with this strategy.

In the third conference, Patrick was able to show a sense of independence with his strategy during his oral reading, but did not show evidence of using the strategy during his independent reading:
Sandra: Can I listen to you do a little reading?

Patrick: Sure (reads aloud 1 min, 4 seconds).

Sandra: I like how you paused to figure out the meaning of this word. What helped you figure out the meaning of this word?

Patrick: Well I covered up the parts I knew and then tried to figure it out and I got it.

Sandra: That’s great. So, you paused to figure out what that word meant and used word parts to solve it. I like that you are showing me how you can use your strategies.

How about this word? Could you use word parts or re-reading to figure out this word?

Patrick: (Begins breaking word up, re-reads).

Sandra: Exactly. It sounds right and makes sense. We just have to make sure that we are stopping every time a word does not make sense in our reading. I am going to mark this spot with a sticky note to show where we stopped because the word did not make sense.

Did you bring me anything to show me how you used your strategies this week?

Patrick: There were no parts where I had to use word parts.

Sandra: None at all in your reading?

Patrick: Nope.

With guided practice, Patrick was able to process through his strategy, but still did not show independent application and meta-awareness. Given that Patrick was still making some miscues, the teacher-researcher did not feel comfortable moving Patrick to a new goal without being completely sure that he was able to apply similar strategies to his independent reading. By the fourth conference, Patrick did come to
his conference with a sticky note. Here is an excerpt from Patrick's fourth conference, after he completed his oral reading:

Sandra: I'm just going to stop you for a second. I was really happy with how you stopped yourself over here when something didn't sound right. You said, “You need to put a large heavy box into” and you stopped yourself and realized it was “in” and corrected what you said. That was very good. There was a also a place where you corrected “I” for “that.” That shows me that you're stopping when a word doesn't make sense and that you're fixing it. And that's very good.

Now, did you bring anything to show where you stopped?

Patrick: You mean my sticky notes?

Sandra: Yeah. Was there any place in Secret of the Seal where you stopped and used the stickies?

Patrick: Well, only one place.

Sandra: Good! Do you want to go back and show me where that was?

Patrick: I didn’t know that word. (Points to “fidgety”)

Sandra: Ok good. So you stopped. What strategies did you try? Do you remember?

Patrick: Try sounding out. But there wasn’t no words, like, no compound word or anything like that.

Sandra: So there weren’t any word parts that you sure about?

Patrick: No.

Sandra: Sometimes you will just have to try your best with it. What word did you think it was?

Patrick: Well I couldn’t sound it out, and it didn’t even sound like a word when I tried, so I decided to skip over it.

Sandra: Okay let’s look at the first sound together. What is that sound?

Patrick: /f/ /i/

Sandra: Now let’s re-read the sentence and make the first sound.
Patrick: (Re-reads sentence and makes first sound, but still poses difficulty)

Sandra: That word is “fidgety.” Have you heard that word before?

Patrick: Yeah, like you’re scared.

Sandra: Yeah, you can definitely be fidgety when you’re scared! You’re moving a lot when you are fidgety. They might be little small movements.

How does this show what he (Kyo from Secret of the Seal) is feeling?

Patrick: Scared, maybe cold.

Sandra: Yeah, I think so! I’m glad that you stopped there and showed me where you stopped yourself. I like that you stopped yourself and tried to problem solve.

It took Patrick four conferences to see the transfer component of the reading strategies practiced in the conference and the application to his independent reading. Educators have long known that children develop on different timelines. While one child may readily incorporate feedback, others may need re-teaching and reinforcement to reach independence. This was evident in the range of abilities found in the focal students.

*How does the structure of reading conference support the effectiveness and efficiency of the conference?*

*Time and Instruction*

The target duration for each reading conference was between three to five minutes. The total conference time per child averaged 4 minutes, 10 seconds. Each conference followed the “research, decide, teach” format. In the research phase, the
child would read aloud for approximately one minute. In the decide phase, the teacher-researcher thought about the students’ oral reading, as well as evidence to show their strategy-use. In the teach portion, the teacher-researcher chose a method of direct teaching to instruct the child; demonstration, example and explanation, and coaching. The teacher made this decision based on the child’s familiarity with the strategy. For example, in all of Gabriella and Eva’s conferences, the teacher-researcher used the coaching method to help each student try the strategy. The following is an example of the coaching strategy at work with Gabriella during her first conference:

Sandra: (After Gabriella’s oral reading) So where is this story taking place?

Gabriella: At a raptor center.

Sandra: At a raptor center. And what do you think happens at the raptor center?

Gabriella: It’s kind of like the Helmer Nature Center, I think. They like take injured animals and help them.

Sandra: Mhmm, right. So, a center often treats injured animals and it’s also a way for the public to come in and see animals, too. So in the last line you read, it said when birds. Read the sentence here. Which word shows you where they treat animals? (Reads sentence aloud; “They continue through the gate to a high wooden fence to the infirmary. What do you think the word infirmary means?

Gabriella: Like a place where they like keep some animals or something?

Sandra: Well let’s read on. Sometimes one of our strategies that we can use is to keep reading to figure out what that word means. So why don’t you read from here (points to beginning of sentence that uses “infirmary”) to the end (one sentence past the sentence that uses “infirmary”). And let’s try to figure out what that word means.

Gabriella: (Reads both sentences).
Sandra: So what do you think that infirmary place is?

Gabriella: I think it's like a place where they see what was wrong with the animals.

Sandra: Mhmm. So because why? What are they doing for the animal there?

Gabriella: They’re giving them a physical exam.

Sandra: Yep and who gives physical exams?

Gabriella: doctors. So it’s kind of like a doctor’s office.

Sandra: Right. Except here they’re not treating people, who are they treating?

Gabriella: Animals!

The teacher-researcher was helping Gabriella utilize context clues in her reading. This type of teaching helped Gabriella problem-solve with the teacher and gave her practice so she could then do it independently.

Since Patrick required re-teaching at the majority of his conferences, the type of direct instruction he received was through example and explanation teaching. In this instruction, the teacher-researcher referenced previous teaching and helped the focal child grasp the concept through further explanation. A typical example and explanation conference is shown below. At his second conference, Patrick decoded the word “human” and “huh-man” using word parts. When Patrick and the teacher-researcher establish that they have never heard of the word before, the teacher-researcher references the strategy used at a prior conference through example and explanation:
Sandra: Yeah, I haven’t heard of that word either. So we know the word begins with /h/ and we have tried using word parts. So now what is another strategy we could use that we used last time we met?

Patrick: Umm. (pause). Don’t have any other strategies to use.

Sandra: Can I remind you of a strategy?

Patrick: Sure.

Sandra: So you got back to the beginning of the sentence and you re-read it, then when you get to that word you make the first sound.

Patrick: (Re-reads sentence, solves on second attempt)

Sandra: Ah! Does that make sense now?

Patrick: Yes!

Sandra: See how we sometimes have to do some problem solving?

Patrick: Mhmm.

Sandra: So the first time when we tried to solve this word, what strategy did we use?

Patrick: Word parts.

Sandra: Then what did we do?

Patrick: Went back and re-read.

Sandra: So now we have two strategies. Remind me what those are.

Thus, teachers must understand their children and use the “research” portion of the conference to make the decisions regarding the way the child will receive instruction.

Student Attitudes

When asked in an interview how they felt reading conferences helped them as
a reader, the focal students seemed to recognize the accountability and expectations on their part to make them better readers. For example, Eva answered:

“They help me because when I read without the sticky notes I didn’t have control like I do now, I didn’t really go back and understand anything like I do now. I really didn’t understand some of the things that were confusing.”

Noticing how she gained control over her reading proves that she was aware that the strategies she learned would help her make meaning. This is central to understanding that reading is a process by which we make meaning through print, rather than merely decoding the words. The sticky notes served as a constant reminder for Eva to be “meta-aware” of her strategy use. Gabriella commented on how talking about reading made her happy:

“I like how we get to talk about reading because reading is one of my favorite things. I can understand the book better.”

Despite the difficulties Patrick faces with reading, he had a positive outlook on conferring:

“I like it how I feel about it [reading], I like how I feel during a reading conference. I feel happy.”

These comments show the ways in which reading conferences validate a child’s reading life. Children come eager to converse with teachers about their reading. By spending just a few minutes with a reader, we can equip them with powerful tools that
will help them make meaning of their reading and instill with them a lifelong love of books and learning.

The study supports the use of reading conferences in Reader's Workshop. Students incorporate feedback with regard to decoding, fluency, and comprehension into their oral reading. Students also take accountability for their learning by demonstrating coming to conferences with evidence of their independent use of the strategies taught. Students have a positive outlook on reading conferences and look forward to the time spent individually with the teacher to discuss their reading and learning.

Summary

The study found that students incorporate feedback regarding decoding, fluency, and comprehension in their oral reading. The timeline by which students independently apply strategies that work to develop these components of reading vary according to the needs of the child. In this study, some students only needed a week, while others needed more time as well as re-teaching of the strategy. Students became independent in their strategy-use by coming to the conference prepared with evidence of how they applied their new strategy to their independent reading. Reading conferences help to validate a child's reading life and help children gain control of their reading.
Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This study examined the ways in which reading conferences impacted third grade students' reading proficiency. Students engaged in four reading conferences over four weeks with the teacher-researcher to see the ways in which students incorporated feedback into their oral reading, how reading conferences fostered independence for students and the effectiveness and efficiency of the conferences were also studied. Three focal students formed the basis of this study. Through triangulation of the data sources, it was found that reading conferences can have a significant impact on students’ reading and their ability to take accountability for the strategies that help them become better readers.

Conclusion

Teachers need to be aware of the impact their one-to-one targeted support can have on a child. Children learn best when they have scaffolded support to help them achieve their goals. The strategy of scaffolding instruction to meet students’ individual needs originates from Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory and his concept of the “Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).” “The zone of proximal development is the distance between what children can do by themselves and the next learning that they can be helped to achieve with competent assistance” (Raymond, 2000, p.176).
A teacher’s attention to their student’s ZPD enables them to structure scaffolded support to meet their needs. A quick three-to-five minute conference can yield valuable information about a child’s reading and the strategies they are using and neglecting. More importantly, reading conferences help students become more responsible for their reading. By holding students accountable for independently applying strategies outside of the reading conference, students become more aware of the strategy and are able to see the ways it works for them across contexts.

Metacognition has generally been defined as one’s capacity to "think about thinking.” Metacognition is key because it shows that if students learn how to control their thinking they become more autonomous and self-regulated learners (McComb, 2009). Having students keep track of their strategies on a goal-sheet keeps students oriented and focused. Students are able to see their growth as readers and truly become independent learners. When students come to the conference, they are held responsible for demonstrating their proficiency in the particular strategy. This high level of accountability for students helps them strive toward a high level metacognition, thus lifting the expectations we have for our students. In this sense, the reading conference helps students transfer their strategies across domains, helping them see the application of their learning across their reading lives.

Reading conferences therefore become fluid teaching and learning moments that string together into a cohesion of meaningful parts. Documentation of the teaching from each conference ensures the teacher will be able to “pick up” where she/he left off at the last conference. Narrowing the strategy focus to one strategy
that serves as the primary focus helps the child concentrate on one component at a
time, enabling him/her to master the strategy and become independent with it before
moving to another.

**Implications for Future Teaching**

The findings from this study will inform my teaching in numerous ways. I
will continue to utilize reading conferences in my classroom and will also continue to
have students use the student accountability system to further transfer their
knowledge and strategies.

To help further develop students’ internalization of the strategy, I will
consider utilizing a way to communicate with families about the students’ strategy-
use. More than 35 years of research has proven the positive connection between
parent involvement and student success. Schools with high quality family
involvement see higher graduation rates and better test scores (Forum on Educational
Accountability, 2007). Linking home and school to communicate reading goals may
be an area I will explore in the future. This may take the form of a simple card that
has the strategy the student is developing in their reading for that particular week.
Parents could then assist students in their independent application of their strategy
across contexts. This would further develop a child’s ability to evaluate their
strategy-use and would give them an authentic audience to whom they could “teach”
their strategy.
A rubric could also be developed to assist in students' understanding of what proficient strategy-use looks like. It may help some students understand what level of understanding they will be expected to strive toward in order to achieve “mastery.” Students would then understand where they are in their strategy-use and what they still need to do. For example, a reader may understand what a strategy is, be able to demonstrate it in a text with teacher support, but has difficulty independently applying the strategy across contexts. Having consistent language with the students would allow for the teacher and student to be on the “same page” and students would have a clear direction for where their thinking needs to be in order to fully master each of their goals.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

One area to consider for further inquiry would be to analyze the various ways teachers utilize reading conferences in their classrooms. It would be informative to teachers to see the ways in which other teachers record and document the reading conference in order to develop efficient conferring systems of their own. Implications from such an analysis of the ways different teachers conduct effective reading conferences would give insights into ways to improve the conference to meet the needs of teachers and students at that particular place in time.

This study explored the ways in which reading conferences impacted students’ reading proficiency. There are areas that can be developed further for future research. One area to consider would be the ways in which students at other grade levels,
including those below and above third grade, would respond to reading conferences and what types of accountability systems would help students move toward independence. It would be of interest to study the various timelines through which students develop and the types of teaching that most effectively supports accelerated progress.

Limitations in this study include a small sample size of students at the third grade level. Only three students served as the focal students of this study. This inquiry did not take into consideration students at other grade levels, and therefore cannot be generalized across ages and grade levels. The research also took place in a suburban district, so rural and urban contexts were not studied.

Recommendations for Literacy Educators

It is advised that practitioners become aware of the ways in which they provide feedback to students. Practitioners who are not currently utilizing reading conferences in the classroom would benefit from taking the time to consider how targeted reading conferences could meet the needs of their students. Because efficiency is a concern to many teachers, we must also consider the ways current teachers are utilizing reading conferences and work to make the documentation and conference process both effective and efficient. I would argue that reading conferences must become a core component of any reading workshop. When appropriately scaffolded, the valuable one-on-one time spent with a child targeting that child’s particular needs helps elevate their thinking to new levels. Teachers
must act with patience and recognize that each learner will develop according to his/her unique timeline. According to Genishi and Dyson (2009), diversity is the new “norm.” Too often, teachers utilize a “one size fits all” curriculum that is then assessed using standardized tests. As teachers, we realize that it is impossible to standardize learning to meet our students’ needs. Structuring conference instruction with the learner in mind ensures the conference teaches to that specific child’s strengths and needs.

Teachers also need to consider the ways in which they hold students accountable for their learning. Are students currently metacognitive of their strategy-use? Are they internalizing their strategies so they are able to transfer their knowledge across domains? Teachers must create effective systems that hold children responsible for their learning to promote retention and transfer. Teachers must also be aware that students develop across various timelines and that re-teaching will be necessary for certain students. Thus, teachers must act with patience and persistence to help students develop as readers. Reading conferences will not be effective if they serve as isolated teaching moments that do not tie together in a meaningful way. Students need to flexibly call upon a number of strategies while reading in order to problem-solve. In this way, children must be able to see the fluidity that exists between strategies in order to become more effective readers and learners.
It is my belief that the aforementioned recommendations will help future researchers and practitioners engage in dialogue about the utilization and improvement of reading conferences in their elementary school classrooms. With patience and systems for accountability, teachers can utilize conferring to individually support students on the path to reading proficiency.
References


Appendices

Appendix A: Blank Conference Log Sheet

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Touch Point</th>
<th>Observation and Instruction</th>
<th>Next Steps to Meet Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Touch Point</td>
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# Appendix B: Conference Log Sheet (Eva)

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Touch Point</th>
<th>Observation and Instruction</th>
<th>Next Steps to Meet Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/17</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Reads, &quot;Mamagay&quot;</em></td>
<td>Re-read pieces of text to make voice sound fluent. Pay attention to punctuation/phrasing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Reads text, engages work on improving phrasing and fluency.</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/24</td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrated understanding of phrasing worded赋予词语, helped but understood word work they were trying to say was words. Read before and difficulty understanding words after the word. Apply good context clues together.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/31</td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrates understanding of context clues in 50%, 4 words missed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrates using word parts for vocabulary.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7</td>
<td></td>
<td>Demonstrates using word parts for &quot;skunk-like&quot; and &quot;recognized.&quot; Eva expressed her goal to practice reading more fluently. The student demonstrated apply to join.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The GRL® Cues: Enhancing All Students in Early Literacy: Assessment and Instruction by Gayd Bradley and John Morin. "The States." Copyright © 2009, Scholastic Publications.
# Appendix C: Conference Log Sheet (Patrick)

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Touch Point</th>
<th>Observation and Instruction</th>
<th>Next Steps to Meet Goal</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>Touch Point</td>
<td>Uses initial consonant-just beginning to look through multi-syllabic words, does not make sense.</td>
<td>Stop when something does not make sense. Mark where you stop and then re-reading and using in independent reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/24</td>
<td>Touch Point</td>
<td>Doesn't notice stopping and then re-reading. Uses parts to solve word, but does not remember what didn't make sense.</td>
<td>Stop when something does not make sense. Work on parts of word, and using strategies to solve using strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/31</td>
<td>Touch Point</td>
<td>Together use word parts, looks for evidence of word application to new vocabulary. Review and demonstrate.</td>
<td>Work in independent setting. Track where you need to stop and problems you solved using strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/7</td>
<td>Touch Point</td>
<td>Brings evidence of using strategies for &quot;highly&quot; complex words. Works on rate, re-reading in independent setting, for fluency and expansion reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Goals**
- Self-monitoring
- Using word parts

**Student Strengths**
- Attention to beginning and middle sounds

---

This activity is designed to support Patrick's development in reading comprehension and fluency.
## Reading Conference Log Sheet (Gabriella)

### Goals and Student Strengths
- Extending thinking beyond the text
- Comprehension
- Fluency (using expression)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Touch Point</th>
<th>Observation and Instruction</th>
<th>Next Steps to Meet Goal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1/17</strong></td>
<td><strong>Touch Point</strong></td>
<td>Use context clues to determine meaning of &quot;infirmary&quot;</td>
<td>Use context clues in independent reading this week (Read before and after the word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1/24</strong></td>
<td><strong>Touch Point</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrated understanding of &quot;cautiously&quot; using context clues</td>
<td>Compare and contrast characters in S.O.S. to understand them better. Apply to ind. reg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1/31</strong></td>
<td><strong>Touch Point</strong></td>
<td>Demonstrated compare and contrast of George and Kyo; helped Gabriella get a better sense of feeling through understanding</td>
<td>Infer characters' feelings by closely examining their actions. Apply to ind. reg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2/7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Touch Point</strong></td>
<td>Supports inferences with text examples</td>
<td>Continue to look for &quot;clues&quot; in Characters' words and actions to help us infer feelings. Gabriella can verbalize and demonstrate strategy reply to ind. reg.</td>
</tr>
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The FACE of a Reader:

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<tr>
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<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Comprehension</th>
<th>Expand Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can read accurately, with expression, and understand what I read.</td>
<td>I can read the words</td>
<td>I understand what I read</td>
<td>I know, find, and use interesting words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies:</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/17: Re-read word parts.</td>
<td>1/21:</td>
<td>1/24: Use context clues to figure out the meaning of new words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences to make voice sound smooth.</td>
<td>Notice punctuation and change voice at different parts.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/17:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Good Readers...**

Get started right away. Stay in one place. Work quietly. Read the whole time. Work on stamina. Read Good Fit books.
### The FACE of a Reader: **Patrick**

<table>
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<th>Expand Vocabulary</th>
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<tr>
<td>2/7 - Reread to make words sound smooth</td>
<td>1/17 - Stop when words don't make sense.</td>
<td>1/17 - Stop when words don't make sense.</td>
<td>1/31 - Stop when words don't make sense.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Good Readers...**

Get started right away, stay in one place, work quietly, read the whole time, work on stamina, read good fit books.
### The FACE of a Reader: Gabriella

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th><strong>Comprehension</strong></th>
<th><strong>Expand Vocabulary</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can read accurately, with expression, and understand what I read</td>
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<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/24: Compare and contrast within and between text</td>
<td>1/17: Read on and use context clues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Good Readers...

Get started right away, Stay in one place, Work quietly, Read the whole time, Work on stamina, Read Good Fit books