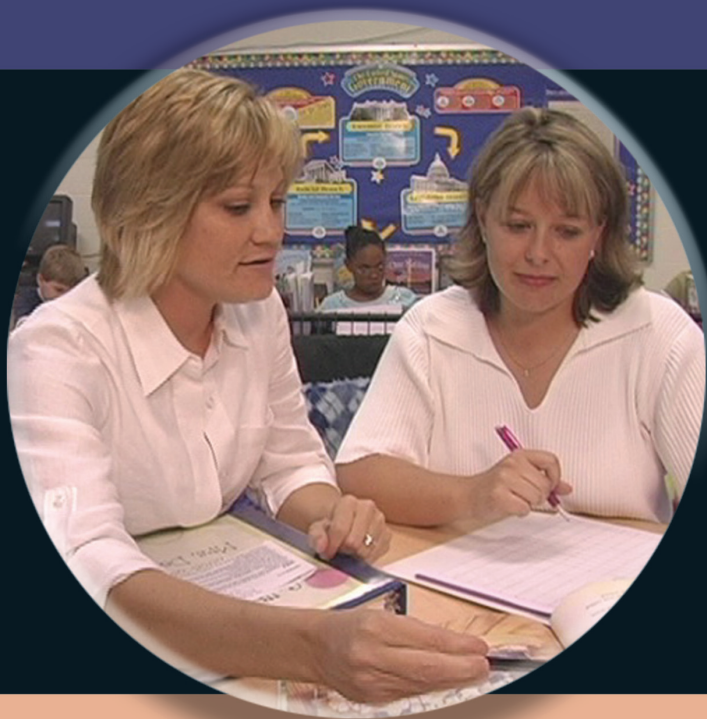


Stenhouse Close-Ups

Collaborative Conferences



LINDA J. DORN & CARLA SOFFOS

WORKSHOP GUIDE

Copyright © 2007 Stenhouse Publishers, Portland, Maine

All rights reserved. This guide may be photocopied for staff development use only.

Collaborative Conferences

Workshop Overview

1. Copy and distribute “Collaborative Conferences” (pages 4–6) to participants before viewing.
2. View the DVD and use the viewing prompts to focus the discussion.
3. Plan a cluster conference to observe a lesson. Use the format in the video to guide the observation.

Collaborative Conferences

by Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos

Teachers spend the majority of their waking day in the school. This is where they practice and refine the craft of teaching; the school therefore must value collaboration as an essential component of professional growth. Teachers acquire learning in apprenticeship settings with more knowledgeable peers; in other words, knowledge is co-constructed through collaboration around common goals. In our work with schools, we have found that teachers desire collaboration, yet scheduling these experiences into the teaching day can be daunting. Teachers agree that the most authentic collaborations occur in the classroom, but this can present an additional challenge for teachers to manage. With these thoughts in mind, let's begin with some prompts to build our background for viewing the video examples. First, what are collaborative conferences? How do they differ from the standard conferences that are part of reading and writing workshops? Also, with the current emphasis on Response to Intervention (RtI), how can teachers use collaborative conferences to support the struggling learner? Why would these conferences be important for both teachers and children? And finally, how can teachers manage collaborative conferences within the school day? These questions will help us balance theory with reality, thereby making the idea of collaborative conferences a manageable goal for all teachers.

What are Collaborative Conferences?

Collaborative conferences are professional learning communities that are structured within the school day to increase teacher knowledge in specific areas. They are brief and

focused discussions among a team of teachers (two or more) who share a common learning goal. The conference includes a pre-conference, a teaching lesson, and a post-conference. In the video examples, collaborative conferences are used to support writing development. During the pre-conference, the student's teacher identifies the instructional goal and asks the observing teachers to notice specific writing behaviors. After the lesson, the teachers engage in purposeful dialogue that aligns with the observation focus. Collaborative conferences allow teachers to pool their knowledge and participate in intentional discourse for supporting young writers. In this video, we provide examples of three types of collaborative conferences: cluster conference, intervention conference, and coaching conference.

A *cluster conference* includes at least three teachers with a common interest, generally from the same grade level. One teacher agrees to teach the lesson, which is based on a specific teaching goal, while the other teachers observe. During the lesson, the group records specific behaviors that align with the teaching purpose. After the lesson, the teachers use their notes to engage in deliberate dialogue around this goal.

An *intervention conference* is designed to support a particular student who is receiving supplemental services in addition to the classroom program. This helps to guarantee a seamless alignment of instructional support across multiple programs. Intervention conferences are a critical component of the Response to Intervention (RtI) approach, using teacher collaboration as a tool for meeting the needs of a particular student. Prior to the intervention conference, the classroom teacher schedules a meeting with the student's specialty teacher. During the pre-conference, the classroom teacher shares her teaching goal and seeks feedback from the specialty teacher. During the lesson, the specialty teacher collects observational evidence to support the teaching goal.

During the post-conference, the two teachers collaborate on the efficacy of the lesson and plan future goals for the student.

A *coaching conference* includes a classroom teacher and a literacy coach. The structure of this conference is similar to the intervention conference. As with all collaborative conferences, the ultimate goal is to increase teacher knowledge, which, in turn, influences student achievement.

How Can Teachers Manage Collaborative Conferences?

Most collaborative conferences occur within the natural context of the reading and writing workshop. Of the three types, cluster conferences require more preplanning, simply because they involve several teachers at each grade level. Many teachers incorporate cluster conferences in their school improvement plan, including hiring substitutes and scheduling common planning times. For instance, at Sallie Cone Elementary in Conway, Arkansas, which is featured in the video examples, the school hired a substitute teacher to rotate through classes at thirty-minute intervals, allowing the teachers to participate in cluster conferences throughout the year. Regardless of the plan, it is critical that the conferences are brief, focused, and relevant. To ensure relevancy, conferences are scheduled to address specific issues that are important to teachers at that time. Depending on the management structures, the frequency of cluster conferences can range from monthly to several times a year. On the other hand, intervention and coaching conferences are easier to manage, simply because the scheduling involves specialists who are not responsible for the classroom. Thus, these conferences are scheduled frequently, based on student data and teacher decision-making.

Video Background and Discussion Prompts

In this section, we'll introduce the three video examples, including background on the teaching and learning goal. Each example will be followed by specific prompts to guide the discussions among the video viewers.

Example One: Cluster Conference

Prior to the conference, the third-grade teachers at Sallie Cone Elementary participated in literacy team meetings on the writing process. During these meetings, Dana Autry, a third-grade teacher, shared with her peers that she had been using mentor texts to illustrate how good writers combine sentences to improve their writing. This discussion became the stimulus for scheduling a cluster conference. In the video, in addition to Dana, the conference includes two specialists, Mary Yarbrough, Reading Recovery teacher, and Cindy DeRose, ELL teacher, and three third-grade teachers, Sandy Adkisson, Melanie Wilson, and Betty Ann Scaife. The specialists are included because the student is an English language learner and a former Reading Recovery student. The mentor text used in the collaborative conference is *Saturday and Teacakes* by Lester Laminack and Chris Soentpiet (2004).

Pre-Cluster Writing Conference

1. How does Dana set the purpose for the writing conference? How does she use a professional text to focus the teachers' attention on a particular writing strategy?

Teacher/Student Writing Conference

2. How does Dana scaffold Kaylee in applying the writing strategy? What do you think the teachers are recording during the conference?

Post-Cluster Writing Conference

3. How does Dana get the discussion going? How do Dana and the teachers use their observational notes?

Example Two: Coaching Conference

The coaching conference involves Janet Connolly, a fourth-grade teacher, and Vicki Atland, the school's literacy coach. In addition to her coaching responsibilities, Vicki works with an intervention group daily. Vicki and Janet have been collaborating on Ladasha's writing progress throughout the year.

Pre-Coaching Writing Conference

1. How does Vicki get Janet talking? Why is it important to keep the pre-conference short and brief?

Teacher-Student Writing Conference

2. How does Janet use language to help Ladasha understand the power of editing? How does Janet scaffold Ladasha in applying the writing strategy?

Post-Coaching Conference

3. How does Vicki use language to validate Janet's teaching decisions? Why is it important for Ladasha to summarize her learning from the conference and to clearly articulate her next steps?

Example Three: Intervention Conference

The intervention conference includes Dana Autry, a third-grade teacher, and Cindy DeRosa, the English language learning (ELL) teacher. Both teachers have been collaborating for two years on the writing progress of Kimberly, an English language learner. During the pre-conference, Dana sets the purpose for the observation, which is carried through the teaching demonstration, and revisited during the post-conference.

Pre-Intervention Writing Conference

1. How does Dana set the purpose for the writing conference? How does Cindy use data to provide additional information about Kimberly's learning?

Teacher-Student Writing Conference

2. How does Dana scaffold Kimberly in applying the writing strategy? What do you think Cindy is recording during the conference? Why is it important to record observations?

Post-Intervention Conference

3. How does Cindy use her knowledge of how students learn language to validate Dana's teaching decisions? How do Cindy and Dana use their understanding of language development and observations from the writing conference to plan next steps?

References

Dorn, Linda J., and Carla Soffos. 2001. *Scaffolding Young Writers: A Writers' Workshop Approach*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Laminack, Lester, and Chris Soentpiet. 2004. *Saturday and Teacakes*. Atlanta, GA: Peachtree.

The extract from *Saturday and Teacakes*, by Lester Laminack and Chris Soentpiet, appears in the video by permission from the publisher, Peachtree.

Books and Videos by Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos

Books

Apprenticeship in Literacy: Transitions Across Reading and Writing. By Linda J. Dorn, Cathy French, and Tammy Jones. 1998. Stenhouse.

Scaffolding Young Writers: A Writers' Workshop Approach. By Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos. 2001. Stenhouse.

Shaping Literate Minds: Developing Self-Regulated Learners. By Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos. 2001. Stenhouse.

Teaching for Deep Comprehension: A Reading Workshop Approach. Book and DVD. By Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos. 2005. Stenhouse.

Videos

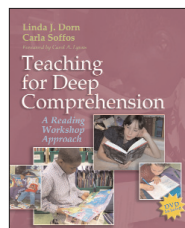
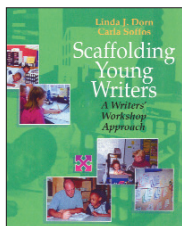
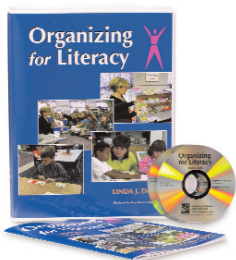
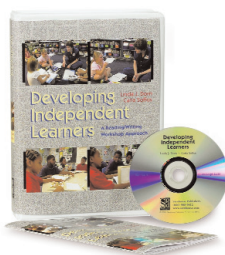
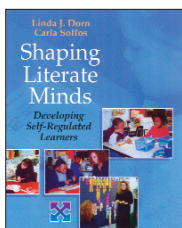
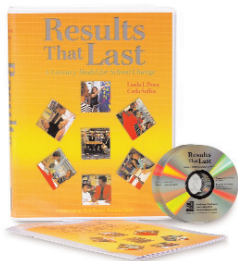
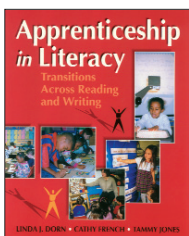
Developing Independent Learners: A Reading/Writing Workshop Approach. DVD or VHS. By Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos. 2003. Stenhouse.

Organizing for Literacy. DVD or VHS. By Linda J. Dorn. 1999. Stenhouse.

Results That Last: A Literacy Model for School Change. DVD or VHS. By Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos. 2003. Stenhouse.

Books and Videos

by Linda J. Dorn and Carla Soffos



Stenhouse
PUBLISHERS
www.stenhouse.com