

**FINE-TUNING OUR  
INDIVIDUALIZED TEACHING**  
Some Common Conferring Pitfalls and How to  
Avoid Them

## CHECKING IN

- What role does one-to-one teaching play in your literacy time?
- How do you manage your time in an individual conference?
- What are your biggest concerns, complaints, difficulties, or problems with one-to-one teaching?



### WHEN IS CONFERRING MOST USEFUL?

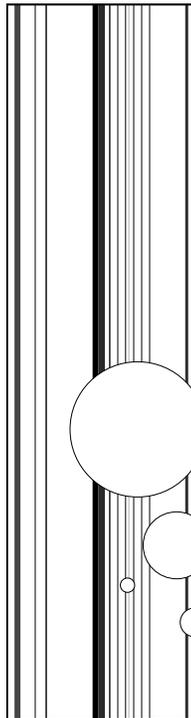
- Conferences are quick, just 5-8 minutes
- Conferences are a powerful opportunity to assess individual needs, strengths and habits
- Conferences provide an opportunity to coach children in the act of reading or writing
- Conferences are a way to teach the small steps it takes to meet a larger goal
- Conferences require a system for keeping a record of our assessments, goals and teaching



### CONFERENCES ARE NOT...

- Remind, remind, reprimand
- A one-shot deal
- Just checking in
- Repeating or reviewing the lesson
- Meant to address needs shared by several children





## **THE PITFALLS**

**The most common laments about conferences-gone-wrong and some ideas about how to avoid them**

- The Lament: He can do it when I sit with him, but as soon as I walk away he goes right back to his old habits
- The Hard Question: Are you letting the child do the work while you coach and offer support? Or are you actually doing the work for the child? If so, he will never be able to do it when you walk away.

**THE FIX: LET THE CHILD DO THE WORK**



- The Lament: She can tell me what she's supposed to do, but I don't see it happening
- The Hard Question: Are you teaching skills readers and writers have (fluency, for example) or specific things readers and writers do (visually scan across a line of print, letting your internal voice say the words as you go along). Skills are too big and general for a conference.

**THE FIX: TEACH A STRATEGY, NOT A SKILL**



- The Lament: He's got so many issues with his reading/writing, how can I pick just one?
- The Hard Question: Is your glass half empty? Are you naming what the child is doing well and teaching into that, or are you focusing on remediating where the child is lacking? Naming strengths gives us a place from which to build

**THE FIX: TEACH INTO WHAT CHILDREN CAN DO, NOT WHAT THEY CAN'T YET DO**



- The Lament: I can't figure out what to teach that's new when I have to remind children of so many things they should already know
- The Hard Question: Are you starting to teach before you have even had a chance to observe the child? Do children know to continue with their work as if you weren't there when you are observing them? Do you allow them to struggle or do you intervene at the first sign of difficulty?

**THE FIX: DON'T START TEACHING DURING YOUR RESEARCH**



- The Lament: I don't know what to teach him, he's already doing such a good job at everything
- The Hard Question: Are you focused on needs more than on strengths? Do you have trouble knowing what comes after children reach benchmarks and end-of-year goals, even if they reach them ahead of schedule?

**THE FIX: HAVE A VISION FOR WHAT COMES NEXT**



- The Lament: I've taught it to her at least ten times, but she still doesn't do it
- The Hard Question: Have you really *taught* it ten times? Or have you told it, stated it, reminded her of it, and nagged her about it? Teaching it means saying not just the **what**, but also the **how**, and even the **why**. These are essential for children to internalize our teaching

THE FIX: TEACH FOR TRANSFER



FOR ALL OF THESE...

- We can't address real needs in just one tiny conference. We need to use our assessments to help us set long-term goals for readers and writers, and address these across several conferences
- It helps to look at the whole reader or writer- not just how they decode or encode but also how they make meaning

