

Workshop 6

Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student

Overview

Because of the personal nature of writing, one of the best ways to teach the craft is to interact directly with individual students. To make these vital student/teacher conferences as effective as possible, teachers need to be intentional in their planning and practice. At the same time, they must balance the benefits of conferencing with the challenges of fitting it into their busy classroom schedules.

“Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student” demonstrates how five teachers—Jenny Beasley, Vivian Johnson, Mary Cathryn Ricker, Laurie Swistak, and Jack Wilde—use conferences to help their students improve as writers. The workshop provides classroom illustrations of several different approaches to conferring with students including formal one-on-one conferences, informal one-on-one interactions, and formal and informal conferences with student response groups.

Through interview and discussion, the teachers reflect on their practice: planning effective one-on-one and group conferences, providing direction without taking over students’ writing, using conferences to assess student learning and communicate expectations, and dealing with classroom management issues related to conferencing. The workshop also features excerpts from interviews with Tom Romano (*Writing With Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*) and Linda Rief (*Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*).

Workshop 6 Teachers

The teachers seen in the video program include:

- Jenny Beasley, Grade 6, Meece Middle School, Somerset, Kentucky
- Vivian Johnson, Grade 8, T.A. Dugger Junior High School, Elizabethton, Tennessee
- Mary Cathryn Ricker, Grade 7, Cleveland Quality Middle School, St. Paul, Minnesota
- Laurie Swistak, Grade 5, Cranston-Calvert Elementary School, Newport, Rhode Island
- Jack Wilde, Grade 5, Bernice A. Ray School, Hanover, New Hampshire

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 6 provided on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/) including the teachers’ reflections.
- Reading the two articles provided under “Related Reading” on the Workshop 6 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the articles in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the “Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 6,” available on the next page and on the Web site.

Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 6

This workshop demonstrates a variety of techniques for responding effectively to student writers. They include:

- Teachers help students write for meaningful purposes, prompting students' interest in developing their writing and establishing a foundation for effective conferences. It is difficult to promote revision when students do not find the writing meaningful.
- Though teachers respond to a particular sample of writing, the goal of the response is not merely to correct or "fix" the individual piece; the teachers focus also on strategies for writing—ways of thinking about writing that can transfer to other writing.
- Teachers organize for response in a variety of ways: a whole-class response; a quick, over-the-shoulder comment; a one-on-one conversation guided by the student's questions and concerns; a small-group conference that focuses on the work of one student but also engages the other students; conference forms; and frequent questioning to help students think and make decisions about their work.
- As students are getting ready to write or are just beginning to revise a draft, the teachers' response concentrates on meaning, purpose, awareness of readers, and methods of support. Mechanics are addressed later, as students edit their work. The response is focused, and teachers do not attempt to "cover" everything.
- In their response, teachers emphasize that students have ownership of their writing; the writer makes the decisions, even though the teacher and classmates may offer suggestions. In responding, teachers do not "take over." Teachers often ask students, "What do you think?" or "What have you decided?" Response is student-based.
- Different kinds of response are offered: description of what is working, questions, suggestions, options, explanations of strategies, personal reactions to the work. Most often the response is oral, but teachers also write notes to the writer, list ideas or techniques on the chalkboard or flip chart, and provide handouts, examples, and other reading materials.
- Listening carefully and patiently to students as they talk about and read their work is important in providing response. Teachers are calm and soft-spoken in their conversations with students, which is especially important with students who are early learners of English. Response occurs in a setting described as a community of writers.
- Though the teachers are alert to the "teachable moment," they also are purposeful in the way they arrange for response to student writers. Routines are established in the writing workshop, and teachers' practices are methodical.
- Teachers maintain positive views of their students. They convey a trust that students can and will think because the students are writing about matters of concern to them. Response is characterized by positive expectations and a view that writing is valuable—what students do as writers is important. The tone of the response is positive, not critical.

Facilitator's Outline: Workshop 6

This outline of the Workshop 6 video contains approximate entry points for each section. Use this chart to help identify the pause points in the Watch the Video section. Zero your VCR counter at the Annenberg/CPB logo at the beginning of the tape.

Segment 1 (0:00–19:07)	Introduction (beginning at 0:00)	
	In the Classroom (beginning at 6:16) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conferencing with a group 	Vivian Johnson
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 17:17) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for focused and productive conferences 	Vivian Johnson and Mary Cathryn Ricker
Segment 2 (19:08–31:45)	In the Classroom (beginning at 19:08) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one conference 	Jenny Beasley
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 28:03) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making time for conferences 	Jenny Beasley, Laurie Swistak, and Jack Wilde
Segment 3 (31:46–45:34)	In the Classroom (beginning at 31:46) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal conferences (group and individual) 	Jack Wilde
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 38:37) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading papers aloud 	Jenny Beasley, Laurie Swistak, and Jack Wilde
	In the Classroom (beginning at 43:02) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving students ownership of ideas during prewriting 	Laurie Swistak
Segment 4 (45:35–end)	Interview (beginning at 45:35) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The reluctant student 	Linda Rief
	Teacher Discussion (beginning at 47:28) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging communication 	Vivian Johnson and Mary Cathryn Ricker
	In the Classroom (beginning at 49:34) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapting the conference 	Mary Cathryn Ricker
	Interview (beginning at 33:41) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiating instruction 	Linda Rief

Workshop Session

Discussion and Sharing (15 minutes)

- In “The Art of Response” (available on the Web page for Workshop 6), Deborah E. Crone-Blevins addresses the tension between grading student writing and giving students positive and challenging feedback that helps them grow as writers. In your workshop journal, jot down your responses to the following: How has the tension between grading and other forms of responding manifested itself in your classroom? Have you discovered one or two strategies or practices that have helped you balance the two? Share your observations with your fellow teachers.
- In your workshop journal, describe the most recent writing conference you had with a student: its purpose, its length, when it occurred in the student’s writing cycle. What did you learn about the student as the result of the conference? What do you think the student learned? What might you do differently the next time you have a student conference? Share your responses with your colleagues.

Watch the Video (60 minutes video plus 30 minutes discussion)

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment (see the Facilitator’s Outline on the preceding page for help locating the pause points). If you are watching the workshop on your own, use your workshop journal to respond to two or more discussion questions from each of the four segments.

Segment 1 (0:00-19:07)

[Pause point: After the teacher discussion on strategies for focused and productive conferences.]

- Name at least three strategies Vivian Johnson uses in the group writing conference that would help students advance as writers. Explain why these strategies are particularly effective.
- What strategies does Vivian use to make the group conference more student-centered and less teacher-directed? In what ways does the conference benefit all the student participants, not just the writer?
- In their discussion, Vivian and Mary Cathryn share their strategies for ensuring that their conferences are focused and productive. How do you decide what to focus on in your own conferences? How do you know if your conferences are productive? How do you keep track of your interactions with students and their outcomes?

Segment 2 (19:08-31:45)

[Pause point: After the teacher discussion on making time for conferences.]

- Analyze Jenny Beasley’s one-on-one conference with her student. What strategies do you observe Jenny using with the student? How does Jenny demonstrate her respect for the student and her work? How might Jenny approach the conference differently if the student was at an earlier stage in her writing process?
- Jenny records comments on sticky notes and places them on the student’s paper. Likewise, Vivian makes notes about her student’s poem on sticky notes. Why would teachers choose this option rather than writing directly on students’ papers?
- During their discussion, Jenny Beasley, Laurie Swistak, and Jack Wilde share classroom management techniques that help them fit conferencing into their teaching schedules. What are some of the strategies they mention? Do you feel that you have been successful allowing time for conferences? What strategies do you use to address the time crunch and to make sure the rest of the class remains productive while you’re talking with individual students?

Workshop Session, cont'd.

Segment 3 (31:46-45:34)

[Pause point: After the segment in Laurie Swistak's classroom.]

- We observe Jack Wilde conducting two different types of informal conferences: sitting in briefly on a peer conference and working with an individual student on his draft. What do you think Jack wants to accomplish in each instance? What is the focus of each conference? What outcome(s) would you expect from these interactions?
- In their second discussion, Jack Wilde, Jenny Beasley, and Laurie Swistak return to the topic of having students read their work aloud. In your experience and/or opinion, what are the benefits of this strategy? The challenges? Think back to Jenny Beasley's one-on-one conference with her student. How would it have been different if the student were the one reading the paper aloud?
- In Laurie's classroom, we see her conferring informally with student response groups while the class is still in the prewriting stage of the multigenre research papers. What are the benefits of conferring with students at every stage of the writing cycle? Is one point of the cycle more crucial than another?

Segment 4 (45:35-end)

[View to end of program.]

- As we observe in Mary Cathryn Ricker's classroom and hear in the teacher discussion and the interview with Linda Rief, not all students welcome conferences with their teachers. Share an experience with a student who resisted conferencing and any strategies you've developed for overcoming this problem.
- Discuss how Mary Cathryn Ricker adapts her conferencing approach to meet the needs of the English language learner with whom she is working.

Going Further (15 minutes)

- In "Conferring: The Essential Teaching Act" (available on the Workshop 6 Web page), Katie Ray Wood writes: "Conferences need to be kept short, not necessarily because that's the best way to teach an individual, but because we have lots of individuals to teach. A good conference lasts anywhere from about two to seven minutes." Based on what you've observed in the five classrooms featured in Workshop 6 and on your own experience, comment on Wood's assertions.
- In your workshop journal, record two or three changes you would like to make in the way you conference with students and then share your ideas with your colleagues.

Before Next Week

Homework

- Complete your exploration of the Web pages for Workshop 6—looking at materials, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues.
- Implement at least one of the innovations you recorded in your workshop journal and report back to the group on the results.

Background Reading for Workshop 7

Before coming to the workshop session, you should prepare to participate by:

- Reviewing the materials for Workshop 7 provided on the Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/) including the teachers' reflections.
- Reading the article provided under "Related Reading" on the Workshop 7 Web page and highlighting two or three sections that strike you as particularly useful or insightful, that raise questions in your mind, or that relate to your own practice. Record your responses to the article in your workshop journal.
- Reviewing the "Key Practices To Observe in Workshop 7," available in this guide and on the Web site.

Selected Sources for “Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student”

Note: For more resources related to conferencing and responding, consult “Selected Sources” for Workshop 7: “Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer.”

Anderson, Carl. *How’s It Going? A Practical Guide to Conferencing With Student Writers*.

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN: 032500224X.

Atwell, Nancie. *In the Middle: New Understanding About Writing, Reading, and Learning*. 2nd Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. ISBN: 0867093749.

Bardine, Bryan A. et al. “Beyond the Red Pen: Clarifying Our Role in the Response Process.” *English Journal* 90.1 (September 2000): 94-101.

Bissex, Glenda L. “Writing Conferences: Alternatives to the Red Pencil.” *Learning* (November 1982): 74-77.

Calkins, Lucy M. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986. ISBN: 0435088173.

Crone-Blevins, Deborah. “The Art of Response.” *English Journal* 91.6 (July 2002): 93-98.

Elbow, Peter. “High Stakes and Low States in Assigning and Responding to Writing.” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (Spring 1997): 5.

Ferris, Dana R. *Response to Student Writing: Implications for Second Language Students*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003.

Freedman, Sarah, with Cynthia Greenleaf. *Response to Student Writing*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1987. ISBN: 080583656X.

Gilbert, Mike. “Responding to Writers: What I Value.” *English Journal* 79.5 (September 1990): 49-52.

Glasswell, Kathryn, Judy M. Parr, and Stuart McNaughton. “Four Ways To Work Against Yourself When Conferencing With Struggling Writers.” *Language Arts* 80.4 (March 2003): 291-298.

Graves, Donald. “Six Guideposts to a Successful Writing Conference.” *Learning* (November 1982): 76-77.

Graves, Donald. *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work: 20th Anniversary Edition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. ISBN: 0325005257.

Hansen, Jane. “Authors Respond to Authors.” *Language Arts* 60 (November/December 1983): 970-976.

Hodges, Elizabeth. “Negotiating the Margins: Some Principles for Responding to Our Students’ Writing, Some Strategies for Helping Students Read Our Comments.” *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* (Spring 1997): 77.

Jago, Carol. “Responding to Student Writing: Keep Pedaling.” *Voices From the Middle* 9.1 (September 2001): 56-58.

Kaufman, Douglas. *Conferences & Conversations: Listening to the Literate Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN: 0325002711.

King, Thomas and Mary Flynn, eds. *Dynamics of the Writing Conference: Social and Cognitive Interaction*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1993. ISBN: 9993876623.

Kirby, Dan, Tom Liner, and Ruth Vinz. *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*. 2nd Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. ISBN: 0867092254.

Murray, Donald. *A Writer Teaches Writing*. 2nd Edition. Boston, MA: Houghton-Mifflin, 1985. ASIN: 0395354412.

Ray, Katie Wood and Lester L. Laminack. *The Writing Workshop: Working Through the Hard Parts (And They’re All Hard Parts)*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2001. ISBN: 0814113176.

Selected Sources for “Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student,” cont’d.

Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts With Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992. ISBN: 0435085980.

Romano, Tom. *Clearing the Way: Working With Teenage Writers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1987. ISBN: 0435084399.

Russell, Connie. “Putting Research Into Practice: Conferring With Young Writers.” *Language Arts* 60.3 (March 1983): 333-340.

Thomason, Tommy. *Writer to Writer: How To Conference Young Writers*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon, 1998. ISBN: 092684279X.

Wilde, Jack. *A Door Opens: Writing in Fifth Grade*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993. ISBN: 0435087614.

Zemelman, Steve and Harvey Daniels. *A Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988. ISBN: 0435084631.