

Determine Conferencing Practices

Read this description of a parent-teacher conference. Think about how you would organize the meeting and consider how you would react to the challenges that occur.

Part 1: Beginning the Conference

First grade teacher, Ms. Ross is meeting with her student Kim's mother, at a parent teacher conference in March. Kim is one of the more outgoing students in the class, but is reading below grade-level expectations and making slow progress with her writing skills. When reading she demonstrates difficulty in word recognition, decoding, and oral reading fluency. When writing, she frequently confuses letter-sound associations. She does, however, have a great interest in animals, often reading or writing about them. During their November conference, Kim's mother expressed concern when Ms. Ross reported Kim's slow progress. She felt Ms. Ross' teaching practices were not engaging her daughter. At home Kim reads every night, silently, or aloud to a family member, but has mentioned her dislike of this reading time. Her mother reads to her infrequently, believing that it is more important for Kim to practice reading herself than to listen to stories. However, Kim is always an attentive listener when her mother reads to her. Kim's mother continues to feel the school is not meeting the needs of her child and has expressed her frustrations in letters to Ms. Ross.

Below are three steps that will occur during the beginning of Ms. Ross' parent-teacher conference. Think about the order in which you would arrange the steps.

- a. **Identify the child's strengths** and interests, and discuss them with the parent.
- b. **Share observations** of the child's literacy skills beginning with specific strengths and moving to specific needs.
- c. **Inquire about home reading habits** and what the parent has noticed about the child's reading ability.

Here's what happens:

a. Ms. Ross is encouraged by Kim's participation in class. She contributes to discussions and responds to the ideas of the other children. Ms. Ross also talks about Kim's keen interest in animals as evidenced in her journal writing and selection of books during independent reading.

Parent Response

Kim's mother says this is all "well and good" but what is the teacher going to do about Kim's reading?

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Part 1: Beginning the Conference continued

b. Ms. Ross reviews Kim's literacy skills, identifying her reading difficulties in developing word knowledge and oral reading fluency, and her writing difficulties with letter-sound associations. She tells Kim's mother that Kim is not reading within grade-level expectations at this time of the year.

Parent Response

Kim's mother says if she has known Kim is having difficulties all year, why hasn't Ms. Ross done something about it?

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 3.

c. Kim's mother says that they read together on occasion but her primary focus is on having Kim read herself. When they do read together, Kim's mother usually reads the book without pointing to the words or pictures, and Kim listens attentively.

Parent Response

Kim's mother says that her home reading habits are teaching Kim to read better than Ms. Ross' classroom instruction.

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 3.

Beginning the Conference: Did you consider...?

a. Did you consider:

- explaining the importance of interest and motivation in learning to read?
- emphasizing Kim's interest in discussing books in class and how her mother could do the same at home?
- providing Kim's mother with suggested books that match Kim's interest in animals?

b. Did you consider:

- explaining the wide range of reading ability within the first grade, and how some children often need more time to develop all of the complex skills involved?
- supporting Kim's mother by acknowledging her emotional reaction and explaining the instructional interventions you have used to support Kim's learning?

c. Did you consider:

- discussing the importance of reading aloud to Kim, sharing the words and pictures and discussing the story ?
- suggesting a balance between the mother's read-aloud and Kim's reading?
- emphasizing the importance of having Kim read easy books or books she has already read for home reading?

Part 2: Sharing Information

During the conference, Ms. Ross shares work samples and several assessment records from Kim's yearlong portfolio with her mother. Ms. Ross presents the information in chronological order to illustrate Kim's development since September. The monthly Running Records and DRAs from September, November and February show little improvement. In February, her DRA score was still at a beginning first grade level. Her oral reading miscues indicate that she guesses at words based on picture clues rather than using sound/symbol relationships and rarely self-corrects during reading. Selections from her Reading Response journal reveal a reliance on initial and final letter sounds when writing words ("gt" for "get," "wt" for "went.") This indicates some progress since Kim only used initial letters in September, but her writing is still below expectation. In March of first grade, Kim's writing was more detailed when she responded to stories about animals. Kim's reading program includes guided, shared and independent reading. Her writing instruction is based on Writing Workshop and reading responses.

Below are three steps Ms. Ross will take to share information during the parent-teacher conference. Think about the order in which you would arrange the steps.

- a. Clarify assessment strategies** – when and why you assess student performance. Explain the different assessment tools used and how results are interpreted.
- b. Show the parent** the assessment and work portfolio. Discuss the child's skills as identified by the assessment data.
- c. Clarify the instructional program** and identify the teaching practices that work for the child.

Here's what happens:

a. Ms. Ross explains that she takes Running Records during guided reading groups once a month, and DRAs three times a year. The assessments measure a child's word recognition, comprehension and fluency. And the results are used to determine if a child is reading books of an appropriate level, either independently or with guidance.

Parent Response

Kim's mother questions Ms. Ross about the amount of time she spends assessing Kim's reading instead of teaching her.

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 6.

Part 2: Sharing Information continued

b. Ms. Ross reviews Kim's literacy skills, identifying her reading difficulties in developing word knowledge and oral reading fluency, and her writing difficulties with letter-sound associations. She tells Kim's mother that Kim is not reading within grade-level expectations at this time of the year.

Parent Response

Kim's mother is confused by all of the assessment data. She just wants to know if her child is going to learn to read and write.

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 6.

c. Ms. Ross explains that Kim's reading program allows Kim to work with different groups of children for different reading purposes. Kim finds reading easier when the text is read to her first, or when its pattern is more predictable. Kim writes better when assisted in sounding out the letters in words and when using the Word Wall.

Parent Response

Kim's mother thinks the varied reading instruction may be confusing for Kim and asks Ms. Ross why she doesn't stick with one reading group.

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 6.

Sharing Information: Did you consider...?

a. Did you consider:

- explaining that assessments help determine the appropriate instruction and materials for the child?
- explaining that Running Records do not take time from instruction since they are taken during guided reading groups?

b. Did you consider:

- reviewing the expectations for first-grade students in March of the school year and explaining how Kim's results correlate with these expectations.
- acknowledging that these assessments may be confusing but provide important information about Kim's progress and the instruction that best meets her needs?

c. Did you consider:

- acknowledging her concerns but explaining that different grouping options for reading actually promote reading achievement?
- explaining how different grouping options and instructional formats address children's individual needs and allow them to demonstrate their literacy strengths?

Part 3: Ending the Conference

As Ms. Ross ends the conference, she outlines her goals for Kim and how she intends to help Kim reach them. By the end of the year, Ms. Ross would like to see Kim reading texts at her instructional level more fluently and with effective strategies for decoding unknown words. Her instruction will focus on increasing Kim's sight vocabulary and teaching Kim specific strategies for identifying unknown words. She also will plan instruction to enhance Kim's understanding and use of letter/sound associations when she writes. For the rest of the year, Ms. Ross plans to improve home-school connections with a home journal for the class. Her students will take turns writing about their after-school activities. Ms. Ross also has several home literacy activities for Kim to practice at home. These include sending home books read in class for Kim to reread to her mother, word activities prepared and practiced in school, and a list of books for Kim's mother to read to Kim.

Below are three steps that Ms. Ross will use to wrap up the parent-teacher conference. Think about the order in which you would arrange the steps.

- a. Share your goals** for the child. Outline specific instructional practices you planned to support Kim's literacy needs.
- b. Review home literacy assignments** that will be presented in class. Discuss how you will support the child in class and how the parent can better prepare the child at home.
- c. Suggest home literacy activities** that will support the child's learning in terms of the parent's goals and the classroom curriculum.

Here's what happens:

a. Ms. Ross details the reading level she hopes Kim will attain by the end of the year, and the writing skills she hopes Kim will master. She targets the specific strategies that should improve Kim's weak areas.

Parent Response

Kim's mother wants to know how Ms. Ross will update her on Kim's progress since this is the last conference of the year.

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 9.

Part 3: Ending the Conference continued

b. Ms. Ross describes how the home journal will be shared with the class. She also explains how Kim's mother can help Kim prepare at home, by guiding her writing and practicing what she will present.

Parent Response

Kim's mother stresses again that it is the school's responsibility to teach her daughter and she should not be required to help with that job.

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 9.

c. Ms. Ross suggests the variety of home literacy activities and reviews how they are aligned with the Kim's mother's goals. She details how mother and daughter should practice each activity, in order to support Kim's learning in school.

Parent Response

Kim's mother wants assurance from Ms. Ross that the school will teach her daughter how to read and write

What would you do in this situation? Write in your response below.

Compare your response with "Did you consider" on page 9.

Ending the Conference: Did you consider...?

a. Did you consider:

- suggesting a home-school notebook, sent home every Friday? Ms. Ross would comment on Kim's weekly performance and Kim's mother would return the journal with her comments on Monday.
- scheduling another conference in May to discuss Kim's progress once more before the end of first-grade?

b. Did you consider:

- sharing how home-school reinforcement help Kim improve faster with the consistent support.
- explaining that most of the home activities Kim could performed independently supported by a simple review from her mother.

c. Did you consider:

- acknowledging that both of you have the same goals for Kim and you will assess her performance routinely through the rest of the year to assure that these goals are met.
- suggesting that if Kim does not make the expected progress, you will consult with the school Reading Specialist to have a more formal evaluation done on Kim.