

Teaching a Peer Conference Protocol: “Receiving the Piece”

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Third Grade
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Background

Community building starts on the first day of school in Jeanne’s classroom, so her students are already comfortable sharing their work and talking about writing. However, up to this point, they have not participated in formal peer conferences.

Jeanne’s lesson is an introduction to “Receiving the Piece,” a protocol for writing conferences developed by Donald Graves and described in his book, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Heinemann). In “Receiving the Piece,” the writer reads his or her story to a partner, who listens carefully. The listener repeats what he or she has heard back to the author; asks a question about the writing; makes a suggestion, which is usually related to the question; and offers specific praise. Then the partners switch roles.

Jeanne has used “Receiving the Piece” as a peer conference protocol for several years. She believes that it is a critical part of the writing process in her classroom because it helps students have an audience for their writing beyond the teacher. Jeanne has created an inviting display that illustrates each step of the process.

For their first experience with “Receiving the Piece,” the students share drafts of personal narratives with each other.

Instruction and Activities

Jeanne begins by gathering her third-graders on the rug in front of an easel with a display illustrating the steps of “Receiving the Piece.” She leads a discussion of what it means to listen and pay attention, using a personal anecdote to demonstrate what good listening is and isn’t.

Jeanne introduces “Receiving the Piece” as a way the students can listen to each other’s stories and help make them even better. She describes each step of the process, and then answers questions the students have about how each step works.

Jeanne has invited two former students, now fourth-graders, to model “Receiving the Piece” in a “fishbowl” demonstration. After the demonstration and further questions, the students pair up to practice “Receiving the Piece.” Jeanne moves around the room, listening in on conferences and guiding when necessary. The older students also walk around the classroom, answering questions and offering guidance. Jeanne feels that using the older students as models and mentors reinforces to her students that the teacher is not always the expert.

After they practice “Receiving the Piece,” Jeanne asks her students to talk about what they liked and didn’t like about the process. She also describes how “Receiving the Piece” will now be a regular part of the writing workshop.