

CONFERENCE APPROACH TO WRITING without parent help.

One person's experiment.

Biruta McLaughlin

Conference Writing

OR

Process Writing

OR

The approach good writers use intuitively

BEFORE

Taking on Conference Writing I considered

(A) HOW IS THIS PROCESS GOING TO HELP EACH CHILD IN MY CLASS?

- . I am in a Priority School with a focus on Language.
- . My students range from a student who would be equivalent to a very poor Year 3 to one student who joined a Gifted and Talented programme the following year.

(B) How is this process going to affect me and my teaching style?

- . Being perfectly honest with myself, approaches I had used previously made very little difference to the end product.
- . What does this "process" have to offer that hasn't happened before?
- . If it means more work with the same results I'm not interested.
- . How does this use my time more efficiently?
- . Do I need more practise in marking, punctuation, spelling or editing skills?
- . Who owns the writing? Is it mine or the child's? Or both?
- . Who needs to learn and develop their writing? The child or me?
- . Why are we writing anyway?

## LESSON ORGANISATION

for 3 writing lessons per week about 60 minute duration.

10 MINUTES: "TWO MINUTE WRITING" and reading out.

15 MINUTES: FORMAL - may include formal teaching or reading to class from literature or other more formal needs e.g.

- . Teaching of grammar points as they arise in writing which need to be treated with the whole class.
- . Reading out children's work which illustrates a particularly effective form of writing or "new" discovery. e.g. Development of characterization, use of vocabulary.
- . Formal teaching of new points of grammar, word usage, similes, style.
- . Variations in forms of writing eg. introduce to non-rhyming poetry, mystery stories, factual writing.
- . Brainstorming sessions eg. what makes a good story, words related to a topic, inventing "new" names.

30 MINUTES: WRITING - Day 1

- |          |                |  |
|----------|----------------|--|
| Group 1. | Conference*    | During these 2 sessions students are expected to draft, edit and do a final copy if good enough. (judged by the child) |
| Group 2. | Draft          |  |
| Group 3. | Formal English | if work completed earlier, student may go on to other writing.   |

\*ALTERNATE SUGGESTION for conferencing

10 minutes Conference those at risk (i.e. those not likely to settle or may need extra help to get started).

15 minutes Urgent concerns

10 minutes Conference according to schedule (use class list to tick off as each student has a conference. Date. Some children may choose to defer conferences - especially some of the very good writers.

Have a "sharing" time at the end of the lesson - of ideas, problems, concerns, draft copies.

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SOME RULES AND HINTS

RULE : (To the teacher) GO SLOWLY, "master" a few steps at a time.  
DON'T GIVE UP - There are always teething problems -  
most can be solved in time or with help.

Two-Minute Writing

- also known as "think writing"
- . Write on own topic or if can't think of one, use one suggested by teacher.
- . Write continuously for given time.

RULE : Keep writing, from time asked to start till asked to finish off.

- . Topics for those who have no idea may be general or something highly topical e.g. Rain, Hot Day, First Swimming Lesson, Lunch Time, Noise, The Banging Outside (workmen outside) Cold Day, Things I like, Me, My Pet, Flooding (river overflows near school) The Rescue, Water Over the Bridge, The Bush - actually going out for "2M" writing - write about sounds, feelings, smells, make jottings. The "tortoise" brought in by one of the children.
- . "2M" writing may be a new topic each day or a continuation from yesterday like a serial.
- . Topics don't have to be terribly exciting but of interest to the children hence topical things are great.
- . Share "2M" Writing - a MUST - read out best, selected number of individuals read out to whole class, read to groups thus everyone gets a turn but no compulsion. Some may choose to miss a turn and that has to be respected.

- . "Dot System" of editing - place pencil dot at beginning of each line that has a grammatical error, spelling error or is not clear. "Corrections are done by the writer in any work that is not an editing exercise.
- . After "dot" editing review own writing, change, alter, correct, ask if in doubt, re-draft if necessary, start again if unhappy. There are choices that each child can and will make.

### Good Copy or Publishing

- . When completely happy, prepare work for publishing - Write out carefully, add illustrations. Choose paper. Type or get typed.
- . Define early in the year what you expect in a "good copy".
- . When "good copy" completed hand in for marking, recording and evaluating.

### The Conference

- . A one to one discussion between teacher and student.
- . A conference is a private, one to one sharing.

RULE : absolutely no interruption during conference.  
Appoint people who can be contacted in case of need.

- . Sit where some privacy will be possible e.g. back of the room with two chairs of same size.  
I use adult chairs and work from teacher's table but have worked at a "special" desk.
- . Work to be discussed always in front of the child.

- . The child does his/her corrections
- . Have scrap paper handy to illustrate or explain spelling, grammar etc.
- . With spelling errors ask the child to tell you about it. Often picks up own error when directed.
- . The explanation piece of paper - the child may choose to take with him.
- . A child must bring to each conference a draft copy, or notes, personal record sheet, pencil or pen, as well as anything else the child may wish to discuss.
- . Teacher records or notes any point covered - anything which may be of help. Make notes extra brief and only if necessary.
- . Refere to "Guidelines" for specific points which may be adequately explained there. e.g. Show the child the page, go over if necessary, let him take it back to seat and absorb.
- . Tick off each child's name as conferenced.
- . Ask what he/she will ~~go on~~ to next.

#### Recording and Evaluating

- . Most of this is done when "published" works are handed in for marking.
- . A comment responding to the child's writing may be written at the end or on a separate piece of paper.
- . Tick off as point discussed.

As a bonus invite a writer to talk about his or her writing.

Video tapes are also available with interviews. These vary and are more effective if used after a writer's visit.