

Getting Started With Pupil Conferencing: How's It Going?

The Writing For Pleasure Centre – Ross Young

@WritingRocks_17

Principle(s) in focus:

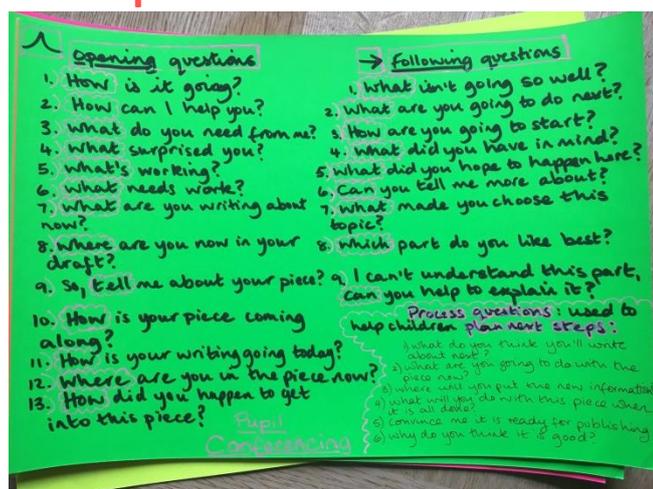
1. Pupil conferencing: meeting children where they are
2. Reading, sharing and talking about writing

Taking inspiration from Carl Anderson's book *How's It Going* (2000), I wanted to start pupil-conferencing with my class during writing time. It was early on in my career and I wasn't too confident so I decided to open each conference with a child by simply asking 'How's it going?' and it is the most brilliant question you can ask.

Aims:

By being a warm and supportive writer-teacher, who was taking interest in my pupil's developing compositions, I hoped to open children up so that I could give them writerly advice and share with them some craft knowledge. I felt that this would increase children's writer identities as they would begin discussing their writing with me writer-to-writer as opposed to just teacher-to-child. This live feedback could also be applied there and then. Finally, over time, I wanted to see children become more self-regulating as they would know what to do and how to do it if the same 'writing problem' came up again.

Description:



As a mini-lesson, I explained to the class that from now on I would be pupil-conferencing during writing time. I explained that pupil-conferencing was an opportunity to meet with me writer-to-writer to discuss how their writing was going. They could share something they thought was working really well, or they could ask me for some advice if they found themselves in a bit of a 'sticky' place. I explained that I would always try and leave them with a piece of advice, a strategy or technique they could try that would help them before moving onto my next conference.

Because I was unsure at first, I made myself this little cue-card to help me early on. However, conferencing every day, I soon found that I didn't need it and that I was conducting my conferences quite naturally. I made sure to always be really open, honest and encouraging. Once the children got used to the idea, they often already knew what they wanted to discuss with me when I came round. This made conferences a lot shorter than they were at the beginning. Finally, I always ended a conference by asking the children if what we'd discussed had been helpful.

Impact:

The impact was incredible. By spending just little moments with individual children every day, and by giving them some individual direct instruction and attention, I felt I was really building relationships with them, that they trusted me and that they appreciated the feedback and advice I was giving them. What surprised me most was when I began to hear children sharing with their peers advice I had been giving out as if it were theirs! Children were learning the craft knowledge, strategies and techniques I was sharing and sharing them with one another. Children were teaching children. As a class, they were becoming more confident and self-regulating. This made pupil-conferencing easier over time.

Finally, I was also able to notice patterns. Advice I had to repeat time and again. I would make a mental note of these issues and this would inform my future mini-lessons. I began to teach more responsively.

Reflection:

I hope to focus on other compositional strategies we use but maybe take for granted and try to make these visible to the children in my class. This way, I think I can improve their feels of self-regulation – the concept that they know what to do and how to do it when they are writing. I hope they can see writing as a craft and not a mystery.

References:

- Anderson, C., (2000) *How's it going USA*: Heinemann