

2017

Conferring in the CAFÉ: One-to-One Reading Conferences in Two First Grade Classrooms

Bethanie Pletcher

Texas A & M University - Corpus Christi, bethanie.pletcher@tamucc.edu

Rosalynn Christensen

Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi, rosalynn.christensen@tamucc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Early Childhood Education Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pletcher, B., & Christensen, R. (2017). Conferring in the CAFÉ: One-to-One Reading Conferences in Two First Grade Classrooms. *Reading Horizons*, 56 (3). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol56/iss3/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Special Education and Literacy Studies at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Reading Horizons by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.





Conferring in the CAFÉ: One-to-One Reading Conferences in Two First Grade Classrooms

Bethanie C. Pletcher

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Rosalynn Christensen

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the teacher/student reading conferences in two first grade teachers' classrooms in one primary school. Sixteen one-to-one reading conferences were recorded and transcribed over a two-month period and coded for content as related to the CAFÉ (Boushey & Moser, 2009) model of reading instruction, which the teachers used daily. We found that the two teachers placed heavy emphasis on students' reading accuracy (the "A" in CAFÉ) and did not spend as much time working on comprehension, fluency, or expanding vocabulary (the C, F, and E in CAFÉ). We suggest teachers work toward balancing instruction in these areas during individual reading conferences with students and that they may benefit from recording and analyzing their conferences for teaching points and related prompts.

KEYWORDS: early reading instruction, conferring with readers, reading strategy prompts

Teachers who meet with students daily about their reading work often wonder, "Am I saying the right things?" and "What should I tell my students in order to move them along as readers?" Johnston (2004) states, "Talk is the central tool of [teachers'] trade" and "with it they mediate children's activity and experience" (p. 4). Such talk occurs during daily one-to-one reading conferences between teachers and students. During these conversations, teachers and students negotiate the meaning of a text through work on skills and strategies. CAFÉ, the reading workshop model used by the teachers involved in this study, is a model for teaching skills and strategies of proficient readers during the reading workshop and is a "flexible system that can be tailored to individual classrooms" (Boushey & Moser, 2009, p. 2). CAFÉ is an acronym for Comprehension, Accuracy, Fluency, and Expansion of vocabulary.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore teacher–student reading conferences in two first-grade classrooms in one primary school. The teacher considers the reading work the child has previously done and determines the

content of reading conferences after listening to the child read. The teacher is then charged with choosing one or two teaching points related to a dimension of the CAFÉ model. We wanted to know on what areas these two experienced first-grade teachers, who have studied the CAFÉ model extensively, chose to focus during their conferences with students and how they went about doing so. The findings from this study will help these teachers enhance the work they are doing in their daily reading conferences. It may encourage other teachers, as well, to reflect on their teaching during conferring time and may support the “development of thoughtfully adaptive teachers” (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 13).

The following research questions guided this study: (1) What is the content of two first-grade teachers’ individual reading conferences as they occur during the independent reading portion of the CAFÉ workshop? (2) What kinds of prompts do these teachers use for their chosen CAFÉ teaching points during these reading conferences?

Theoretical Framework

As teachers meet with students during one-to-one reading conferences, several events are taking place at once: a purposeful conversation between teacher and child, the expansion of the meaning of a text, and the development of reading strategies and skills. The theories that support this study originate from Shavelson (1976, 1981), Ruddell and Unrau (2004), Vygotsky (1978), and Clay (1991, 2001).

Shavelson (1976, 1981), in his research on building students’ self-concept through teaching practices that support student learning, provides a strong foundation for teaching reading through the act of conferring. Further, Shavelson (1981) describes teaching as a “preactive, interactive, and evaluative” process (p. 1). As teachers interact with students and respond with feedback and suggestions for reading improvement, they take part in responsive teaching (Ruddell & Unrau, 2004). Reading conferences provide opportunities for teachers to both interact with students about their reading and gather assessment data for future reading conferences as students converse with them about their reading. Ruddell and Unrau (2004) explain “students see their influential teachers as having clear instructional goals, plans and strategies” (p. 955). These goals, plans, and strategies are shared with students during one-to-one reading conferences.

Vygotsky (1978) developed the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as part of social constructivism, the foundation on which teacher–student reading conferences are built; the ZPD is defined as the “difference between what one can achieve alone and what one can achieve with the help of a more knowledgeable other” (Unrau & Alvermann, 2013, p. 68). The teacher delivers instruction right at students’ points of need, making new learning more accessible and eventually moving this new learning into children’s repertoire of what they can control. During these conversations, children “participate in meaning making through interaction with adults” (Unrau & Alvermann, 2013, p. 70) as they negotiate the texts on which they are currently working. Ideally, the teacher carefully selects the language she or he uses to lift the child’s strategy use to more complex levels. This degree of precision may be difficult to achieve through means other than frequent one-to-one meetings with students.

Teachers meet individually with students to help them build, through feedback and prompting, a self-extending system (Clay, 1991), which occurs as children work within their ZPDs successfully and eventually take the reading process on board. The self-extending system that Clay (1991) describes takes place when students gain the ability to monitor their own reading and correct any miscues or misunderstandings. These corrections can occur through a more fluent rereading of a section or by using the surrounding text to

access other cueing systems. The teacher is responsive in her or his use of language in a way that helps children try on the language as their own, thus building agency (Johnston, 2004, p. 29). Agentive readers use what lies in their control to efficiently problem solve at points of difficulty while reading. Clay (1998) reminds teachers that each child travels a “different developmental path” in learning to read (p. 255), hence another reason for the implementation of individualized reading conferences.

Literature Review

What Are Reading Conferences?

While students are engaged in daily independent reading of self-selected texts in kindergarten through fifth-grade, teachers meet individually with several students. During these meetings, the teacher might listen to the child read from a selection or two, engage the child in a conversation around the text, briefly discuss a teaching point based on the child’s reading, help the child set goals, or assist the child in choosing books from the classroom library. These conferences are venues for the explicit teaching of reading strategies and skills, are designed to meet each child’s needs, and are meant to be “learning conversations” and “cannot be scripted” (Pinnell, 1998, p. 7). It is recommended that teachers hold reading conferences frequently, keep them brief, and maintain copious notes of each one (Boushey & Moser, 2012; Calkins, 2000). Although conferences are informal conversations and may consist of several different interactions, they have a structure that allows the teacher and student to stay focused on the task at hand and keep the conference to a reasonable amount of time, usually no more than five minutes.

Boushey and Moser (2009) recommend, before meeting with the student, that the teacher skim notes taken during prior conferences. This allows the teacher to remember, as well as reflect on, what strategies were attended to recently and enter the conference prepared. During a study of teacher and student reading conferences, Gill (2000) found that teachers take on several roles during each conference, switching seamlessly between each one. One of the roles is that of an observer, where the teacher listens to the child’s oral reading of a text. It is recommended that teachers sit next to students at their particular reading spots (Boushey & Moser, 2009) so that their reading is not interrupted. Nichols (2006) supports this idea by encouraging teachers to create a “physical environment that allows for purposeful talk...through a mix of furniture and space” (p. 39). There are teachers, however, who call students to the front of the room or to their desks for reading conferences, as Brown (2013) noted during a study of the reading workshop. While listening in to the child’s reading, the teacher takes on another role, that of assessor, and narrows in on a skill or strategy that is the best one to be taught at this moment. The teacher then demonstrates the skill or strategy (the role of demonstrator) and requests that the student try it at that moment while the teacher is present as a guide. The two of them form a plan for the next conference, and the teacher departs, but not before delivering a few words of encouragement. These roles will now be discussed as they relate to scaffolding.

Scaffolding

The goal of each reading conference is for the teacher to leave the student with new or extended knowledge surrounding a reading strategy or skill. In order for this to occur, the teacher provides instruction that builds on the student’s strengths while also addressing the student’s needs. Rather than moving directly to a new strategy or skill too soon, the teacher facilitates learning using a gradual release approach (Pearson, 1985). Kim (2010) and Rodgers (2004) provide evidence through their studies of how teachers focused on students’ strengths and delivered instruction to build on those strengths. As a result of this teaching, Kim documented students’ growth in reading level.

These conversations begin with what the child can do with help and end with new learning, as the teacher creates a bridge between the two (Dorn, 1996). In order to move students from what they already know, the teacher carefully scaffolds the conversation. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) define *scaffolding* as the “process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his [sic] unassisted efforts” (p. 90). Others (Dorn, 1996; Gee, 2000; Many, 2002; Pearson, 1985; Wilkinson & Silliman, 2000) describe this process as a social activity, one where the teacher tunes in to the needs of the reader by listening closely and responding in a manner specific to that child at that moment and with that particular text. Long-term scaffolding also occurs, as Kim (2010) recorded while observing teachers as they worked with students during the writing workshop. During the first half of the year, teachers used mostly direct coaching questions. During the second part of the year, however, teachers moved to more collaborative questions and sought student input.

This type of teaching interaction allows teachers to differentiate in ways that would not be possible with whole-group, or even small-group, instruction. For scaffolding to be effective, teachers must know all children in the classroom as readers and “provide varying amounts of scaffolding for some students as simultaneously other students are applying the same new knowledge independently” (Many, 2002, p. 401).

Teaching Points and Prompting in the Reading Conference

The art of scaffolding includes knowing what kinds of teaching points and prompting to provide as well as how and when to provide them. Teachers take notice of miscues, which are “necessary for learning” (Rodgers, 2004, p. 525); then, using what they know about the reader and the reading process, they prompt the child to try out a strategy. The prompt might be a statement or a question, but is always a “call for action to do something within his [sic] control” (Clay, 2005a, p. 39), something that the child can work on under the teacher’s counsel. What the teacher is counting on is that the child then internalizes these prompts and calls them up as needed (Johnston, 2012). Teachers must take into consideration their prompt choices, for it is the careful selection of what to attend to that will have the most payoff. Boushey and Moser (2009), Calkins (2000), and Clay (2005a) agree teachers should think about possibilities for teaching beforehand and choose a prompt on which to focus. This helps to create a clear line of thinking for the child and avoids too many interruptions during the act of reading.

A few studies highlight the prompting behaviors of teachers during their one-to-one work with children. Rodgers (2004) observed 164 Reading Recovery© lessons and found that expert teachers provide prompts that are precisely matched to individual students’ needs at a moment in time and that the teachers varied their prompts. In their analysis of 4,500 miscues during oral reading, Hoffman et al. (1984, p. 382) found that teachers had a set of “routines” when it came to prompting, including using wait time and saving prompts for times when students’ errors interfered with the meaning of the text. Brown (2013), however, in her research with English language learners, observed that students were interrupted and asked to correct errors if they made sense but were not visually correct, thus placing a high degree of importance on error-free reading.

Method

In this qualitative descriptive case study (Merriam, 1998), we analyzed two first-grade teachers' independent reading conferences in order to describe their content and related teacher prompting. This method allowed us to be the “instrument[s] of choice” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and to “focus on the complexity of classroom life” (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999, p. 14) by spending extended time in their classrooms during the independent reading block of the CAFÉ workshop. During this study, we collected observations, recordings, transcripts, and interviews as data sources, thus permitting us to use language as a tool of research (Hoffman & Sailors, 2011).

Participants and Setting

The participants for this study were two first-grade teachers at Baymont Primary School (all names are pseudonyms), a school in southern Texas that serves 480 students in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade. The school's student population is 55% Hispanic, 39% White, and 5% other, and 56% of students are economically disadvantaged. The teachers were purposefully chosen because they have been working with the CAFÉ model for 2 years, and they were willing to open up their classrooms to us. The culture at Baymont encourages teachers to develop themselves professionally and seek instructional methods that work for their students.

Both teachers are women and will be referred to as such. One teacher, Sam, had taught in some capacity for 22 years. The other teacher, Fina, had taught for 12 years. Both Sam and Fina had been in their current positions and had taught next door to one another at this school for 12 years. Each of their classrooms contained 18 students. These teachers were also friends and worked together closely to plan and discuss teaching and learning in their classrooms. They had spent the past 2 years studying the Daily 5 (Boushey & Moser, 2006) and CAFÉ (Boushey & Moser, 2009) models, including participating in webinars, Internet discussion forums, and workshops provided by Boushey and Moser themselves. They were enthusiastic about the daily literacy work they did with children and subscribed to these models for many reasons, mainly because they “make sense” (interview with Fina, 5/10/2016).

Both classrooms were happy, calm, and inviting environments. The students responded positively to Fina and Sam, and while visiting their classrooms during the independent reading block, it was evident that students were aware of procedures for conferring with their teachers and locating books and other materials for their self-selected work time. Both teachers and their students used an interactive CAFÉ menu board, where they recorded strategies they were learning. During one-to-one reading conferences, Fina and Sam sat across from their students, with Fina calling students to her kidney table and Sam sitting wherever the students sat, whether at a student work table or on the floor. Both teachers used soft voices when discussing texts with children and held steady eye contact with them. Through observations and interviews with Fina and Sam, we learned that their students looked forward to these meetings with their teachers and that they “love[d] the one-on-one” attention (interview with Fina, 5/10/2016). Both teachers used a notebook (called a “pensieve” per the CAFÉ model) and relied on this tool for scheduling and planning conferences and recording the teaching that took place during conferences. Boushey and Moser (2009) say they chose *pensieve* as the word for the notebook because Dumbledore, a character in the Harry Potter books, by J. K. Rowling, uses one to hold his important memories (p. 16). The conferring notebook has several sections: scheduling information, strategy focus group information, data on reading levels, and specific conference sheets for individual students.

Role of the Researchers

Bethanie, the first author, had worked with Baymont Primary School for over a year before this study began, both as a consultant and as a university partner, helping to train and recruit pre-service teachers as after-school tutors. She developed a friendly working relationship with each teacher involved in this study and spent hours in both classrooms outside of this study. Rosalynn, the second author, assisted with the data collection and analysis.

Data Collection

Four sources of data were collected during this study in the form of observations of reading conferences, audio recordings and transcripts of those recordings, interview recordings and transcripts of one interview with each teacher observed, and researcher field notes.

Classroom observations of reading conferences. We observed a total of 10 hours of classroom instruction in the form of reading conferences in these two classrooms over the course of 4 weeks (2 weeks in November and 2 weeks in February of the same school year), spending 6 hours in Fina's classroom and 4 hours in Sam's, the difference due to schedules and when each teacher held one-to-one reading conferences throughout the day. A total of 16 conference recordings were observed, recorded, and transcribed: 12 from Fina and four from Sam. The students with whom the teachers conferred were chosen by the teachers based on their normal weekly conference schedules. Although it is recommended that the length of these conferences be kept to 5 minutes or less, there were several instances when each teacher spent more time with students, usually to assist the student with book selection. There were also times during the conferring period when the teacher paused to provide a mid-workshop teaching point or was interrupted by other school personnel. We used an iPad application to audio-record each conference, and we then transcribed and printed out each one for analysis purposes. Other informal general classroom observations had occurred prior to the onset of this study, as the first author spent time in these two classrooms as a consultant.

Teacher interviews. At the conclusion of the 2 months, we interviewed each teacher once and audio-recorded the interviews (see Appendix). These interviews occurred prior to full analysis of the data, so the questions we asked pertained to their general reflections on their reading conferences as a whole over the past few months. These interviews were also transcribed and printed.

Data Analysis

To answer the research questions (What is the content of two first grade teachers' individual reading conferences as they occur during the independent reading portion of the CAFÉ workshop? What kinds of prompts do these teachers use for their chosen CAFÉ teaching points during these reading conferences?) we first perused all conference transcripts to gain an overall sense of the conversations and to pre-code large sections of the conferences for first noticings (Saldaña, 2013, p. 19). This is referred to as "lumper coding" and is a more holistic approach to coding large sections of data (Saldaña, 2013, p. 23). These first noticings included the various teaching points in each conference as well as possible general categories of prompts and teaching points (e.g., comprehension, accuracy). Next, data reduction was applied to remove student responses. We then performed an initial *a priori* coding of each transcript by hand to break the transcription into bits by conference content. The five focus areas of the CAFÉ model (comprehension, accuracy,

fluency, expansion of vocabulary, and finding “good fit” books for independent reading) became the elements of the conferences that were analyzed by section. After applying initial coding to the sections listed above, the coded data were placed into categories. The transcripts were checked again for prompts related to each category, and focused coding was used to place those prompts into “the most salient categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). We used the teacher interview transcripts to code for attributes, gain insight into the teachers’ views, and collect information related to their professional development in the area of implementing reading conferences via the CAFÉ model.

Strategies for Validating Findings

To ensure trustworthiness, we implemented several measures. First, extended time was spent in each of the classrooms studied. Second, several data sources (classroom observations, recordings and transcriptions of reading conferences, and teacher interviews) were considered to triangulate collected information. Third, transcripts of interviews and conference recordings were e-mailed to the two teachers for their review as a form of member checking. Finally, we both worked together frequently to provide checks on one another throughout the transcription and coding process.

Findings

Conference Focal Points

Our first research question was concerned with the content of each reading conference, as evidenced by the skills and strategies on which the two teachers chose to focus. After combing through the reading conference transcripts and searching for focal points related to the CAFÉ model, it was apparent that both teachers spent more time on accuracy than any other area. Although this finding is not surprising since the grade level under consideration is first grade, and the texts found in many of the students’ book boxes ranged from early through late first-grade reading levels, most of the conversations centered on reading the words correctly in each text, even with children who were reading more complex texts. Teachers focused on comprehension next, but not with nearly as much instruction as in the area of accuracy. The least amount of attention was devoted to fluency instruction, with finding “good fit” books and expanding vocabulary falling in the middle. This emphasis on accuracy in almost every conference recorded indicates that these teachers placed a substantial amount of weight on their students’ error-free reading of text. In the CAFÉ model, the C is first, and we think this is intentional since making meaning of text is paramount. Yet comprehension instruction trailed accuracy during these one-to-one reading conferences.

Both teachers indicated during interviews that they review their conference notes frequently to determine what to teach during each conference. They also said it is “so individual” and that they listen carefully while children are reading out loud so that they can “use this to diagnose where to start” (interview with Sam, 5/10/2016). It is important to note that there was rarely an occasion when either teacher chose to focus on just one area of instruction; rather, they switched the content one or two times over the course of almost every reading conference we recorded. For example, within one conference, Fina asked a student to retell the story’s problem (comprehension), discussed a new vocabulary word (expanding vocabulary), and congratulated the student on going back to reread a sentence to make sure it made sense (comprehension and accuracy). Although teachers may touch on several components related to the child’s reading during one conference, it is important that they “set some priorities as to which kinds of new learning [they] will attend to...and let the other behaviors...go unattended” (Clay, 2005a, p. 44). Calkins (2000) concurs by

suggesting that when teachers coach toward several goals, they are diverting children’s attention to too many items at once.

Teaching Points and Prompts

We then turned to the teachers’ prompting as related to their CAFÉ focal teaching points for each conference, searching for evidence of the teaching of related skills and strategies. Again, as the emphasis for most of the conferences was accuracy, the two teachers scaffolded students’ reading with calls to action related to ensuring correct responses. We chose to categorize the prompts and questions by CAFÉ model topics and present them here in the CAFÉ acronym order (see Table 1 for transcript examples of teacher prompts). We want to make sure that the reader understands, as Calkins (2000) attests, that a “magic list” of prompts does not exist, and teachers have to experiment every day during conferences to find what works with each reader.

Table 1
CAFÉ Components and Examples of Each From Recorded Conferences

Theme	Transcript Example
Comprehension	“Use your schema—what you already know.” “Can you tell me what happened at the beginning of the story?”
Accuracy	“Did you use your picture? Did that help you?” “So what does ‘sneaky e’ make the a do?”
Fluency	“I like your expression.” “Listen to your reading.”
Expanding vocabulary	“Do the pictures give you a clue?” “How did you figure out what that word meant?”
Finding “good fit” books	“What’s the first thing you look at when you pick a ‘good fit’ book?” “Would you like me to recommend one?”

Comprehension prompts. The teachers addressed comprehension a total of 18 times during reading conferences by asking students to think about story elements. For example, Sam asked one student to discuss the main character in the story and explain this character’s feelings after an event (11/12/2015). Fina asked a student to tell her “what happened at the beginning of the story” and the problem the main character was experiencing (11/12/2015). In addition to story elements, both teachers encouraged students to activate prior knowledge before reading. Consider the following transaction between Fina and her student (2/10/2016):

[The child chooses a new book from his book box to read.]
 Fina: Before you start let’s think about what you know about [the topic].
 Use your schema. What you already know. Who’s gonna be in there?
 Child: The boy.
 Fina: What does it look like he’s doing?
 Child: Splashing, a little bit of toys.
 Fina: Yes.
 Child [reads accurately and fluently]: Mom says it’s time for my bath. I get into the tub. I go splash splash.

Fina skillfully boosted the student's confidence by prompting him to use what he knew to read the text. Sam did something similar when she told a child during a conference, "These are titles of the chapters. I always read them....I'm already predicting what's going to happen next" (11/12/2015). Their prompts were both specific and encouraging, inviting the students to become part of the conversation around the text they chose to read. It is evident that both Fina and Sam quickly determined, during each conference, a comprehension issue and taught it "in a way that can influence what the child does on another day with another book" (Calkins, 2000, p. 102).

Accuracy prompts. Fina and Sam frequently (38 instances total) encouraged students' use of cueing systems to produce accurate word-level responses while students read out loud during reading conferences. Both teachers mostly brought students' attention to visual cues to assist in producing accurate reading. Fina often told students to "sound it out" when they were stuck on a difficult word and followed students' correct responding with specific feedback, such as "I like the way you sounded that out. Good job" (2/16/2016). Although "sound it out" was a frequent prompt, Fina understood that this strategy is "not a routine response used by an efficient reader" (Clay, 2005b, p. 168). She also pointed out digraphs (/wh/) and blends (/dr/) as well as rimes (/ay/). Both teachers emphasized spelling "rules," such as "sneaky e" and "two vowels go walking" in order to help students produce an accurate reading of the text. Attention was also given to contractions and compound words. While these prompts involved the teaching or reinforcement of phonics skills, they were so specific that the emphasis may have been placed on rendering a perfect reading of that particular text versus encouraging the child to call up strategies needed to word-solve. The latter aligns with Clay's (1991) notion of helping the child build a self-extending system.

In addition to providing prompts related to visual cues, Fina encouraged students to check meaning cues at points of difficulty with the prompts "Let's see if that makes sense" and "Did you use the picture? Did that help you?" (2/11/2016). In this instance, the teacher directed the child's attention to something specific, the use of semantics, to help the child read a word correctly (Clark & Graves, 2004; Clay, 1991). Fina praised one student's self-monitoring by saying, "I noticed you went back and reread" (11/18/2015). Here, the teacher named an effective strategy for the student, which is a scaffold that will encourage the child to use that strategy again (Brown, 2013; Clark, 2004; Reznitskaya, 2012). The following interaction shows Fina's use of prompting to encourage the child to cross-check two cues against one another (11/12/2015):

Child [reads]: --- out and play [omits the word *come*].

Fina: What would someone say? /k/ out and play [articulates the first phoneme in *come*].

Child: Come. Come out and play.

Fina: Come out and play. So when you get to a word like that, you tried to sound it out. Keep digging and go back and to find a word that makes sense.

This act of cross-checking helps children move through the text smoothly, rather than slowing down by using one cueing source at a time.

The two teachers were skillful in the ways they worded many of their prompts; however, it seems as though they did indeed have "routines" when prompting their readers (Hoffman et al., 1984, p. 382). For example, the prompt "Sound it out," or some version of it, was used frequently during the recorded reading conferences. There was an overuse

of prompts toward accurate reading by way of the use of visual cues, even in cases where the miscue fit semantically in the text. Brown (2013) contends that by focusing on accurate reading, teachers may subliminally send the message that reading is first about reading the words correctly, then making meaning from text.

Fluency and expanding vocabulary prompts. Sam and Fina addressed fluency in four of the recorded conferences, mostly by pointing out signals such as question marks and exclamation marks and demonstrating their uses. For example, Fina asked one student, “Do you know what that symbol is right here? That’s an exclamation point and when you see it you have to say, ‘LOOK!’” (*with expression*; 11/12/2015). The development of vocabulary was somewhat emphasized (a total of six occurrences), with both teachers pulling out words and prompting students to search for their meanings. Sam asked questions such as “Do the pictures give you a clue?” (11/18/2015) and “*Aided*—what’s that mean?” (11/12/15). She continued the discussion by prompting the student to “back up and reread” and carefully consider the context to derive the word’s meaning. These questions and prompts, although minimally occurring in the conferences studied here, are part of the CAFÉ model and assisted students’ overall comprehension of text.

Prompts for finding “good fit” books. Both teachers included brief conversations about finding “good fit” books in six conferences when they noticed students were choosing books that were too easy. They were explicit in their directions for reviewing the books in students’ book baskets and locating books that matched students’ instructional reading levels. The teacher language surrounding this topic included “We need to talk about ‘good fit’ books that are too easy” and “We’re really gonna work on picking ‘good fit’ books.” These statements imply that the students were choosing books that were not appropriate choices for independent reading time and that the teacher was going to spend part of the conference helping to steer them in the right direction. In an attempt to understand a child’s book choices, Sam asked, “What’s the first thing you do when you look for ‘good fit’ books?” (11/18/2015), hoping to teach from the child’s response. Although this topic deserves attention, at times it seemed as though conversations about finding “good fit” books focused on reading level, perhaps neglecting the consideration of students’ interests.

Discussion

Research Purposes and Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the reading conferences of two first-grade teachers, mainly in the areas of concentration as related to the CAFÉ model and the ways in which the two teachers chose to teach into those areas. After observing conferences in person and listening to and transcribing these same conferences, we saw a pattern of overreliance on the teaching for accuracy emerge. This finding is similar to those of other studies (Brown, 2013; Hoffman et al., 1984). However, the two teachers also devoted time to teaching for comprehension, fluent reading, strategic action on vocabulary, and strategies for finding “good fit” books as they worked to meet students at their particular points of need (Kim, 2010; Rodgers, 2004). The observations captured during this study provide additional evidence that teachers, even those with several years of focused experience conducting reading conferences, tend to turn to prompting practices that promote accuracy over other aspects of the reading process.

Implications

The findings presented here have several implications for instruction during reading conferences. Before and during individual reading conferences, teachers make quick decisions about focal points and even quicker decisions on what prompts and questions to

use to address those focal points. What teachers have as their focus will most likely be what students have as their focus, as students tend to place emphasis on the same areas teachers do. Johnston (2004) claims, “Words and phrases exert considerable power over classroom conversations, and thus over students’ literate and intellectual development” (p. 11).

It is paramount that teachers keep careful records regarding teaching points used in conferences and review them frequently so that they do not over-rely on certain aspects of the reading process or, in this case, on the reading instruction model that they are using. Our two teachers, Fina and Sam, kept track of their teaching in their “pensieves” and reflected on their content during the interviews we held with them. During these interviews, they did not suggest that many of the recorded conferences held accuracy as the main focus. However, as we shared our observations with them, they were receptive and expressed their desire to be mindful of this during future conversations.

Another implication concerns staying focused on one or two teaching points per conference. Teachers enjoy discussing books with students and may not realize that a good amount of time has passed. There are many roads a teacher may take, and swiftly choosing one that is based on a student behavior is a challenge. Calkins (2000) suggests using a “research, decide, teach” model, which can aid the teacher in being intentional with the use of prompts and teaching points. This model also helps the teacher consider what the child needs at that point in time in order to meet her or his ZPD and provide appropriate scaffolds.

We suggest that teachers audio- and/or video-record several of their reading conferences throughout the school year and note the teaching foci and the accompanying prompts they give students. Listening to samples of these conferences while considering areas of instruction (such as the CAFÉ areas) might reveal which receive heavy or light attention. Teachers might consider things such as who is leading the conversation, how frequently they switch teaching points, and the length and variety of prompts. They can then work on refining reading conferences and building a larger repertoire of prompts, thus working toward the goal of streamlined conferences. These are necessary elements in order for teachers to make the best use of time during the independent reading portion of any reading workshop model and craft conferences that lift students’ strategic reading in the moment.

Limitations

There are several limitations to consider relative to the methods of this study. First, the two teachers knew they were being audio-recorded and therefore may have altered their conferring style and structure and may have pulled certain children, with the best intentions, to confer with those whom they thought would yield more information for the researchers. The teachers may have felt that their instruction during the reading conferences had to be “perfect” because someone was observing. Second, due to time constraints and scheduling, the number of conferences recorded was small and came from only two teachers in one school. Being able to meet with them again to review conference transcripts would have been powerful. Finally, since the teachers followed a specific model for reading conferences, we used an a priori coding method rather than keeping options open for other possible themes.

Directions for Future Research

One-to-one student–teacher reading conferences open up a world of possibility in regard to what can be studied. Several questions emerged during the analysis of conference recordings and transcripts. What is the conversational dynamic of reading conferences in

first-grade classrooms? Who is leading the conversation, who is doing most of the talking, and how does this change over the course of a school year? Researchers might also study teachers' word economy, or lack thereof, by considering the length of each prompt. We might also look at the focal point(s) for each conference as we delve deeper into this area by exploring how often a new topic is presented in a reading conference. Addressing questions such as these will add to the literature and provide practitioners with ideas about holding reading conferences that develop proficient readers.

References

- Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2006). *Daily 5: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2009). *The CAFÉ book: Engaging all students in daily literacy assessment and instruction*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Boushey, G., & Moser, J. (2012). Big ideas behind Daily 5 and CAFÉ. *The Reading Teacher*, 66, 172–178.
- Brown, S. (2013). An analysis of the discourse and actions of reading conferences with English learners: A situated perspective. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 52(2), 130–149.
- Calkins, L. M. (2000). *The art of teaching reading*. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Clark, K. F. (2004). What can I say besides “sound it out”? Coaching word recognition in beginning reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 57, 440–449.
- Clark, K. F., & Graves, M. F. (2004). Scaffolding students' comprehension of text. *The Reading Teacher*, 58, 570–580.
- Clay, M. M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (1998). *By different paths to common outcomes*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2001). *Change over time in children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2005a). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals, Part I: Why? When? And how?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Clay, M. M. (2005b). *Literacy lessons designed for individuals Part II: Teaching procedures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Dorn, L. (1996). A Vygotskian perspective on literacy acquisition: Talk and action in the child's construction of literate awareness. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 2(2), 15–40.
- Duffy, G. G., & Hoffman, J. V. (1999). In pursuit of an illusion: The flawed search for a perfect method. *The Reading Teacher*, 53, 10–16.
- Gee, J. P. (2000). Discourse and sociocultural studies in reading. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol 3, pp. 195–207). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Gill, S. R. (2000). Reading with Amy: Teaching and learning through reading conferences. *The Reading Teacher*, 53, 500–509.
- Hoffman, J. V., O’Neal, S. F., Kastler, L. A., Clements, R. O., Segel, K. W., & Nash, M. F. (1984). Guided oral reading and miscue focused verbal feedback in second grade classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 19, 367–384.
- Hoffman, J. V., & Sailors, M. (2011). Researching the teaching of reading through direct observation: Tools, methodologies, and guidelines for the future. In M. L. Kamil, P. D. Pearson, E. B. Moje, & P. P. Afflerbach (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 4, pp. 3–33). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Johnston, P. H. (2004). *Choice words: How our language affects children’s learning*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Johnston, P. H. (2012). *Opening minds: Using language to change lives*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- Kim, Y. (2010). Scaffolding through questions in upper elementary ELL learning. *Literacy Teaching and Learning*, 15(1), 109–137.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Many, J. E. (2002). An exhibition and analysis of verbal tapestries: Understanding how scaffolding is woven into the fabric of conversations. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37, 376–407.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Nichols, M. (2006). *Comprehension through conversation: The power of purposeful talk in the reading workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Pearson, P. D. (1985). Changing the face of reading comprehension instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 38, 724–738.
- Pinnell, G. S. (1998, fall). The language foundation of Reading Recovery. *Network News*, pp. 6–9.
- Reznitskaya, A. (2012). Dialogic teaching: Rethinking language use during literature discussions. *The Reading Teacher*, 65, 446–456.
- Rodgers, E. M. (2004). Interactions that scaffold reading performance. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 36, 501–532.
- Ruddell, R. B., & Unrau, N. J. (2004). Models of reading and writing processes. In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (6th ed.) (955–1126). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Shavelson, R. J. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research*, 46, 407–441.
- Shavelson, R. J., & Stern, P. (1981). Research on teachers’ pedagogical thoughts, judgments, decisions, and behavior. *Review of Educational Research*, 51(4), 455–498.

- Unrau, N. J., & Alvermann, D. E. (2013). Literacies and their investigation through theories and models. In D. E. Alvermann, N. J. Unrau, & R. B. Ruddell (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (6th ed., pp. 47–90). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wilkinson, L. C., & Silliman, E. R. (2000). Classroom language and literacy learning. In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (Vol. 3, pp. 337–360). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Wood, D., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 17, 89–100.

Appendix A

Teacher Interview Protocol

- How many years have you taught, total?
- How many years have you taught at this school?
- What other grades have you taught?
- How long have you been using the CAFÉ model to teach reading?
- How long have you been holding one-to-one reading conferences?
- About how many students do you meet with for reading conferences in one day?
- How long do your reading conferences usually last?
- Who initiates each reading conference?
- What kinds of training have you had on the CAFÉ model?
- What kinds of training have you had on preparing for and holding individual reading conferences?
- What model of reading instruction did you follow before you started following the CAFÉ model?
- How do you decide on teaching points for each reading conference?
 - Before you meet with each student?
 - And in the moment?
- How do you record your teaching prompts?
- What have you done to professionally develop your teaching as it relates to prompting during one-to-one reading conferences?
- What are some topics you usually cover with students during one-to-one reading conferences?

About the Authors

Bethanie Pletcher is an assistant professor of literacy education and the undergraduate reading program coordinator at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. Prior to this position, she was a classroom teacher, literacy coach, and Reading Recovery© teacher. She presents workshop sessions at conferences, serves as a consultant in local schools, and is a co-editor for a state literacy journal. Dr. Pletcher’s research interests include teacher and student discourse during reading instruction and literacy coaching.

Rosalynn Rowan Christensen is a visiting assistant professor at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, where she teaches early literacy and field-based reading courses. Dr. Christensen taught in the public school system, where her research interests in early literacy developed. Her relationships with her students and the schools with whom she works continue to hone her interests in developing literacy skills in young students.