

# Digging Deeper into Conferring: One School's Journey in Year 1

By Lauren McCaw | Categories: Writing

As we know, coaching conversations—when targeted and purposeful—can be so powerful! This is example of how targeted, purposeful coaching conversations can support teachers' development of writing instruction, through implementing the *Being a Writer* program.

Several conversations occurred with the school administration to determine the learning focus and supports for the professional learning for the year. An area of focus was conferring, specifically using the self-assessment rubric to support student voice and ownership of their work.

## Collaborative Planning Process

Grades 4 and 5

We were looking for a way to dig deeper into *Being a Writer* while also honoring teacher requests to focus on instructional planning leading up to the statewide writing assessment. A professional learning plan was formed that would allow us to gather and organize data for analysis, model how to use the self-assessment rubric, help students use the self-assessment rubric to take ownership of their writing, and allow teachers to plan for instruction based on their data and student needs.

Lesson Study was the determined format for professional learning and our area of focus was conferring with the self-assessment rubric. During the lesson study process,, a conference was modeled, then all teachers pushed into one classroom to practice our conferring skills around the self-assessment rubric. Then, teachers used their personal classroom data to determine focus areas for instruction

Through this experience, teachers were able to see how self-reflection tool can be a bridge between what we are asking students to do as writers, and what our state requires from 4th- and 5th-grade writers.

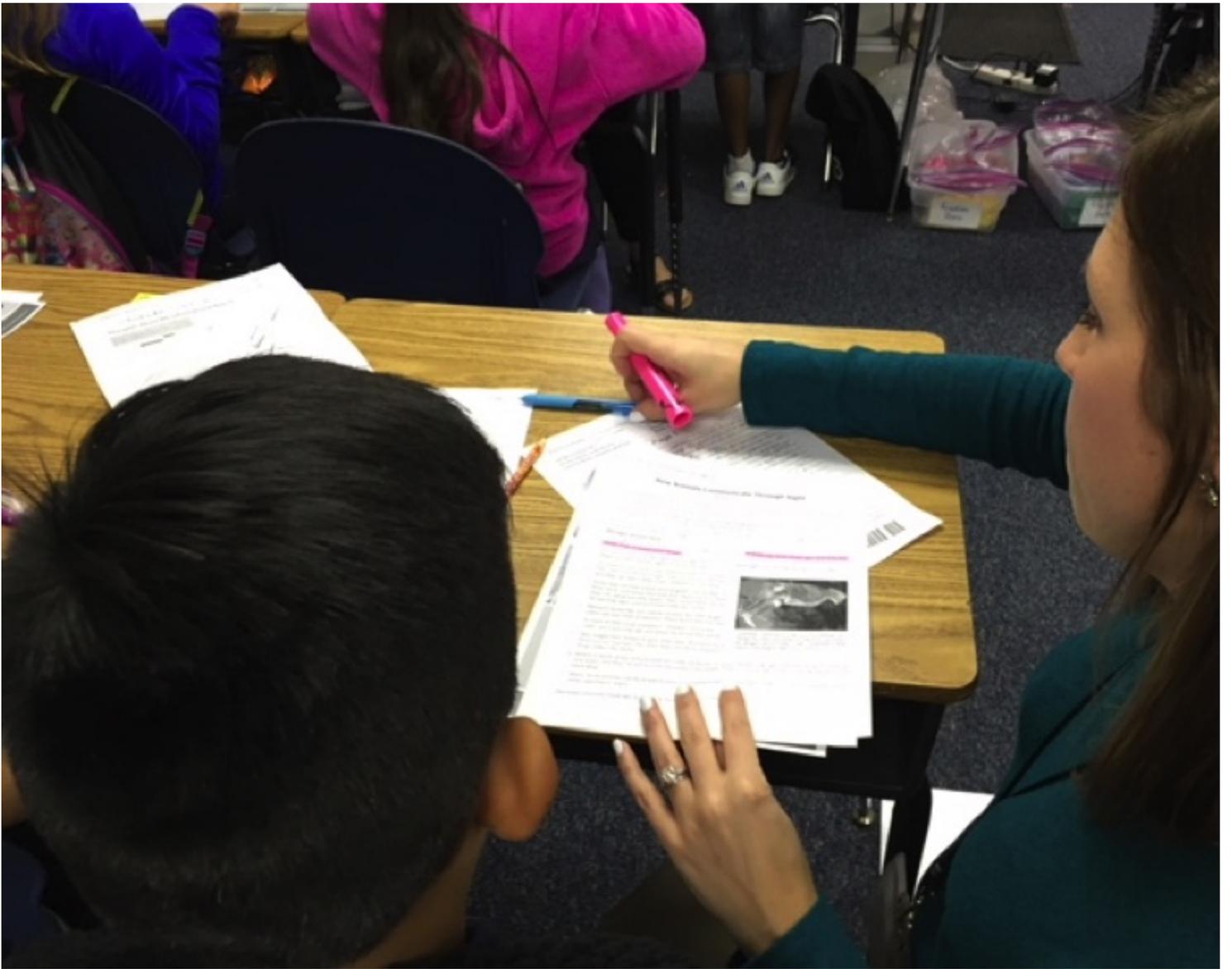
Self-Assessment:

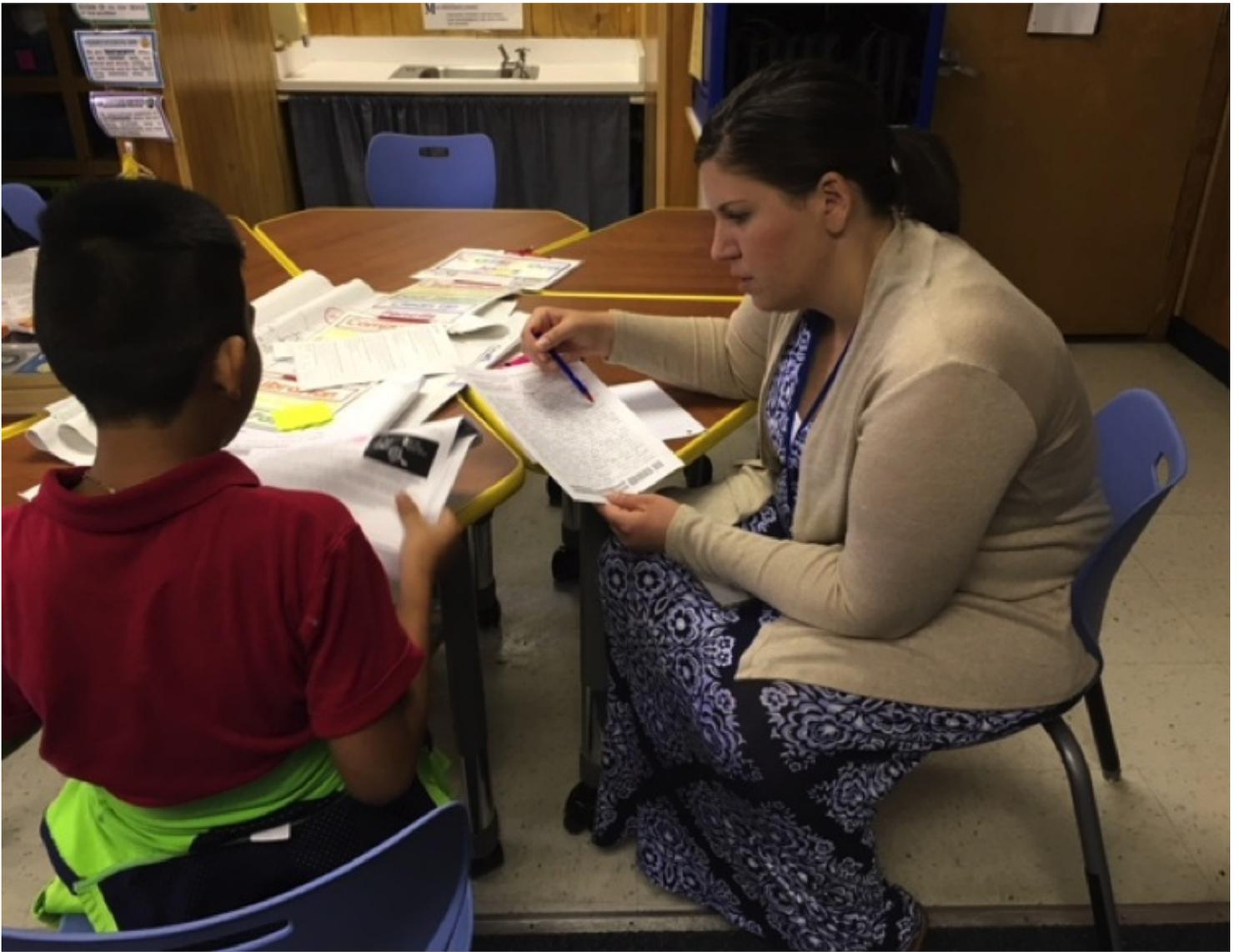
Things to look for in my writing:	I did it!	I did it some of the time.	I'm still working on it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I wrote an informational <sup>essay</sup> about a topic that <del>_____</del> I read about.</li> </ul>	✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My writing is clear. It is easy to tell what my writing is about, and my piece makes sense from beginning to end.</li> </ul>	✓	✓	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My writing is fun and interesting.</li> </ul>		✓	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I included many facts, details, definitions, and other information, with evidence from the text.</li> </ul>		✓	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have proofread my writing. I checked for:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- punctuation (. ? ! "Hi!" said Adam.)</li> <li>- capital letters (Betty lives in Austin, Texas.)</li> <li>- spelling .</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			✓

I think im very good  
 With writing what  
 The artical Explains,  
 or what I Just

fun ar  
 e duri

I Need help with  
 Punctuation and  
 Capital letters Also  
 Spelling, because





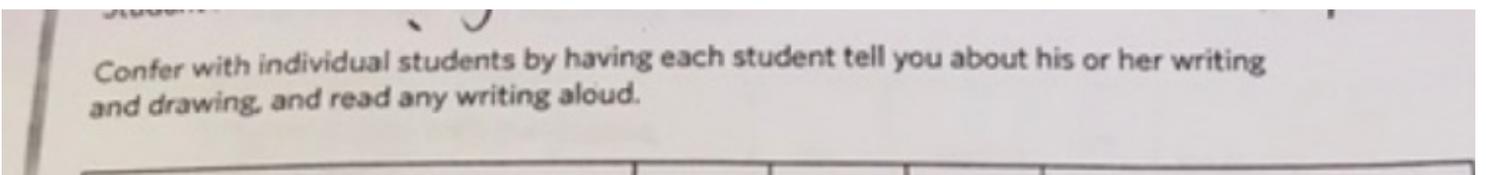
After seeing how powerful the conferring professional learning was—both for teachers and students—we knew we wanted to provide a similar experience across the grades.

#### Grades K, 1, 2, and 3

The focus with these groups was “drilling down” during a conference by using the conferring forms and conference notes. A shared video experience was the determined format for the professional learning. We utilized the conferring videos on the Learning Hub, in the *Being a Writer* online course on the Learning Hub as our model.

After the video experience, all teachers pushed into one classroom to practice using the conferring forms and notes based on the needs of the writer. We discussed, and tried, asking students “*What do you need help with?*” We discovered that students, even our youngest writers, were often able to verbalize where they were struggling as a writer. The power held within a writing conference was evident and was the focus of our debriefing conversations.

Conference notes:



As you confer with the student, ask yourself:	Yes	No	Not evident	Evidence:
• Does the student write, or attempt to write, sentences?	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grapes have in them.</li> <li>• Grapes are chocol</li> </ul> <p>what do we at the en</p> <p>are=or have=hav</p>
• Do the student's illustrations match what he or she wrote?				
• Does the student attempt to <u>capitalize</u> the first letters of sentences and use <u>periods</u> at the ends?		✓		
• Does the student sound out words and use the word wall?		✓		
• Does the student tell more in his or her writing by adding to his or her writing or drawing?		✓		

Things you can do to support a student during a conference:

Ask the student questions to elicit more ideas.

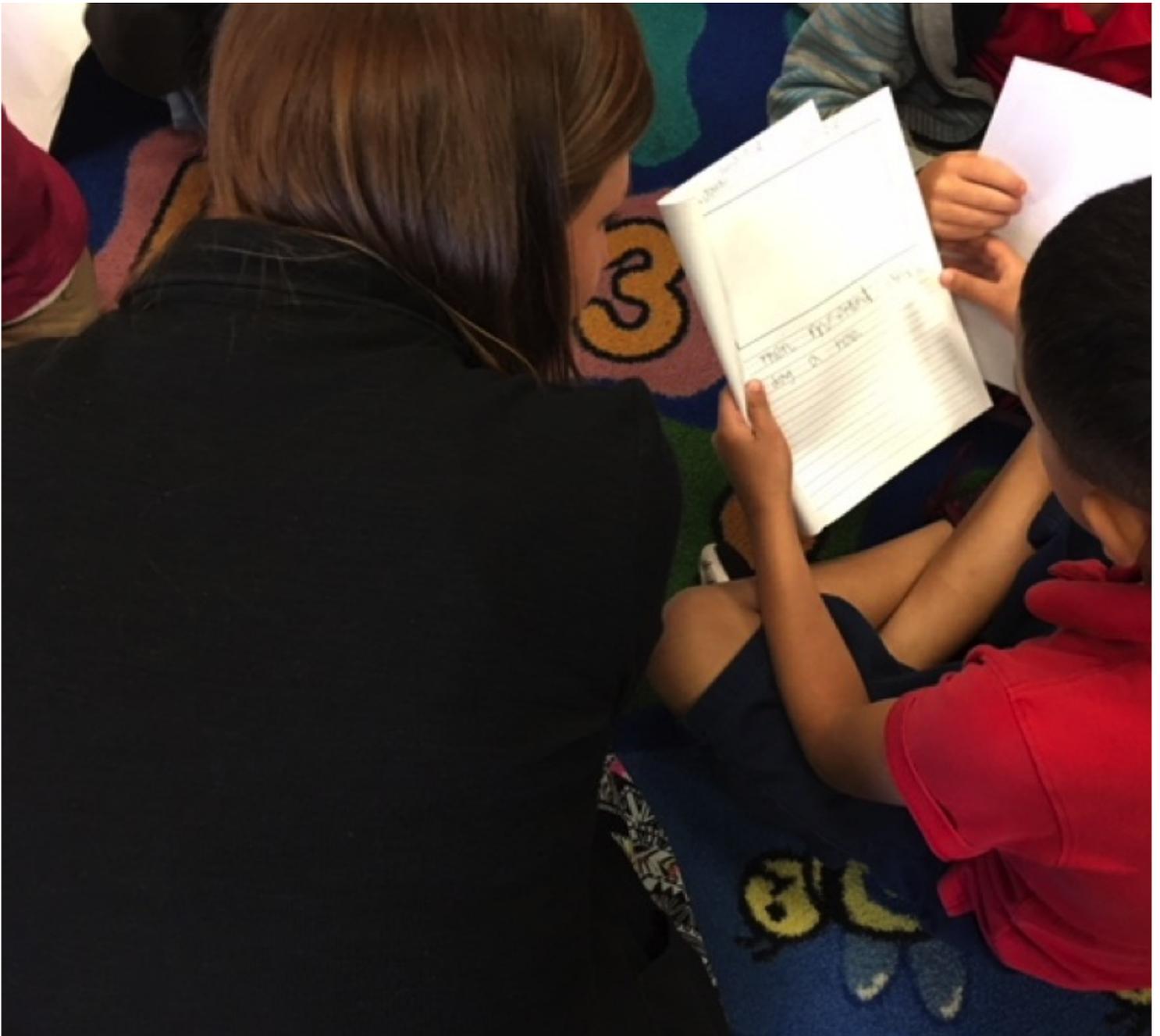
Approximate the spelling of unfamiliar words with him or her.

Point out words on the word wall.

If the student struggles to write anything at all, provide a sentence starter or transcribe the first few words of his or her writing as the student dictates it; then have the student copy what you wrote and continue writing and drawing independently.

rozin look like my  
GHEPIS POOP BEKUS  
the are rad.





The goal of these days was to dig deeper into *Being a Writer*, while strengthening our teaching practices. The further we dug into conferring, the more power we discovered, and after putting this new learning into practice, teachers had the tools and confidence to make adjustments within their classrooms, to support targeted conferring.

Here are some teachers' reaction to the professional learning experience:

*"I appreciated that I was able to see a model conference, and then apply what I learned in a classroom with students. That really helped me feel confident going back to try it on my own."*—Enza Parker, 4th grade teacher, Moody Elementary

*"It [conferring] helped me get a more intimate look at the students writing needs."*—Deb Montgomery, Kindergarten Teacher, Moody Elementary

And on moving from Professional Learning to Application during the week:

*"This week my conferring provided an opportunity for me to learn more about my students as a writer, and learn more about what*

*they need. Writing can be overwhelming to teachers and students, but conferring allows you to zoom in and pinpoint what a student needs right in this moment. The students' self-assessment rubric provides the focus for the conference, to both myself and the students.*"—Danielle Herrmann, 5th grade teacher, Moody Elementary

*"It is truly a collaborative experience between the teacher and student. By asking what do you need support with we give students a voice in their own learning."* —Jennifer Bates, Kindergarten Teacher, Moody Elementary