

IDR Conference Tips

By Stacey Abeyta | Categories: Individualized Daily Reading, Making Meaning, From the Field, Teaching Tips

I have an enormous amount of data on my student readers. They take a district assessment when they enter school in August to see if they have retained what was taught the previous year. Then we take time to assess individual readers with the intention of helping them select “just-right” books when they start to use the classroom library. There is a district assessment in October to monitor their learning, and we have just completed our third district language arts assessment before leaving for Thanksgiving break.

But when I really want to know how a reader is doing, I look to conferring. Talking with my students about their reading lives is where I get to know them well. I also glean information about how well they are incorporating the comprehension strategies we have worked on in class into their own reading experiences during Individualized Daily Reading (IDR) time.

Making Time for Every Reader

I have 29 second-graders this year, nine more than the year before. It took a great deal of thought to structure conference time so that I’m connecting with each reader regularly. I consider how best to implement the strategies provided in my Making Meaning Teacher’s Manual. Here’s how we are doing business now:

- I divide my class into eight groups; that means that I confer with most children every other week.
- I put my strongest readers on Monday. Most holidays fall on Mondays, so if these readers miss a week of conferring I’m less concerned.
- I have two Monday groups of readers, two Tuesday groups, two Thursday groups, and two Friday groups. We alternate weeks for conferring.
- I meet every week with my Wednesday readers. They’re my struggling readers, and I want to keep current about what’s going on in their reading lives.

Conference Structure

Conferences are usually around 10 minutes in length. I use the “IDR Conference Notes” record sheet from my Making Meaning Teacher’s Manual to record what takes place during each conference. This means that there are four parts to each conference:

- First we discuss what the book is about so far. This gives me surface-level understanding about the appropriateness of the text for this reader.
- Next I have the student read a passage from where he is now in the book (usually a page from a chapter book, two pages from a picture book). During this time I’m looking at this reader through two lenses—fluency and comprehension. I ask the reader to share with me what was important in the passage. If the book seems to be a good match, we discuss the book a bit further.
- If we continue to confer about the book, I use different strategies depending on whether the student is reading fiction or nonfiction. With a fiction book, I notice if the reader is at the beginning, middle, or the end.

- If he is at the beginning, we tend to talk about the characters. If he is at the middle, we focus on what is the problem in this story. If he is at the end, we talk about how the problem was solved.
- If a reader is reading nonfiction, we focus on what she is learning and what she is wondering about. We also focus on text features and discuss how they support the reader with her learning.
- Finally I ask each reader whether the book feels like it is the right level. I also probe a bit deeper and ask the student to explain why he or she feels that way. If we come to the conclusion that the book is not a good match, I will usually suggest a title or two on the same subject but at a different level and have the reader read a bit from each title to see which one is the best fit.

There aren't many things I know for sure in life, but this I do know: if children are thinking deeply about their reading during IDR time and can demonstrate this during their IDR conference, they have a much better chance of achieving their assessment goals on district and state assessments.