



Conferring: The Keystone of Reader's Workshop

Patrick A. Allen, Debbie Miller

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In professional workshops with teachers over the years, Patrick Allen has encountered a list of "counterfeit beliefs" about the process of conferring with readers, including such comments as: "I don't have time, I don't know what questions to ask, It's too hard, I don't know what to write in my notes, I don't even take notes, I don't know how to go deep..." In *Conferring: The Keystone of Reader's Workshop*, Patrick maintains that the benefits of conferring are worth the effort of learning to do it well. Then he sets out to reveal how teachers can overcome their perceived obstacles and make the somewhat intangible aspect of conferring with readers tangible. Just as the keystone -- a symmetrical, wedge-shaped stone at the center of an arch -- forms the foundation of a structure, conferring lays the groundwork for effective reading instruction. Allen defines the word confer as a verb "meaning to consult together, compare opinions, or carry on a conversation." Conferences with students are purposeful conversations that scaffold reading comprehension strategies that guide the reader's progress, and ultimately, through the gradual release of responsibility, create independent readers.

In this book, teachers will discover the strength, power, and necessity of conferring with readers. Patrick begins by explaining what conferring is and what it's not, and then unpacks the essential components of the conferring process: intimacy (the social context), rigor (the cognitive context), and inquiry (the analytical context). He explores the fundamentals of conferring -- including classroom environment, goal setting, instructional points, listening, rapport, challenges, and teacher learning -- and provides prompts that lead teachers through the reader's conference from start to finish.

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