

Practicing Parent Conference Assignment - Keezel - pg1

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Practicing Parent Conference Assignment

In order to learn and practice parent conferencing, I chose a 16 year old 10th grade female and her immediate family to work with. This was beginning to look like a “black hole student” in the sense that her name was on my attendance roll, yet she was never present in class. When present, however, she was very interactive and able, achieving good grades on the assessments. Absences and missed work was beginning to pile up towards dangerous levels. I wanted to call home to alert her parent/guardian to situation and to make sure they understood that there were firstly, unexcused absences, and secondly, to be excused required a parental note or phone call to the school with an explanation.

The conference was held over the phone. A checklist before the conference included an outline of material to address during the conference and a list of questions to be raised to the student's parent/guardian. First in the plan was to meet with the particular student during class time (outside of the classroom quietly) to ask about her absences and alert her to the dangerous consequences with collecting too many unexcused. I was told by the student that she had been dealing with family emergencies and then became ill and was hospitalized. Such situations warrant an excused status, in my opinion, and pushed me to make a conference even sooner. The second step I took was to email the student's family and schedule a meeting. Email was then sent, and returned with a request for a personal phone call; the parent was extremely busy and told me they could not come in for a physical conference. Two days later, at the request of the parent, I called home around 300pm after school. Conference calls are made at a telephone in the teachers' lounge. I took my checklist, outline, and Co-

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operating Teacher to the lounge to begin. My Co-operating Teacher was present in order to provide moral support and feedback by listening to my conference on speaker phone.

The conference began easily enough with your typical “ring, ring, ring”, hellos, how are you, etc. I tried to model the “warm” and “cool” comments to pull me through our dialog. “I just wanted to call to talk to you about _____ (student). She's such a wonderful and fun student, but we've missed her in class lately. Her grades are beginning to fall behind and I believe this does not accurately reflect her ability. The point of this conference was to work out her absences so the school does not punish her. I also was wondering if you wanted to help with a plan that schedules her missed instruction and work back on track?” The parent told me that indeed, they had been dealing with sickness and emergencies the past month; everything had been so crazy, contacting the school had gotten away from them. I let her know the state requires parents to contact in order for every student to eventually acquire state necessary school hours and could get upset with HER, the mother, if the absence excuses were not documented. We discussed the best way to catch up their student. I ended the conference by stating that “I was sorry things had been so hectic for the family and that we (CT, students, and I) were very happy to have _____ (student) back in class. I thanked her for her time and help, and calmly hung up the speaker phone.” The conference had taken about 10 minutes.

The biggest emotion I felt throughout the conference was shock, to relief. The parent was shocked at how many unexcused absences her daughter had. She was also shocked at the fact that the school and state held consequences for students and parents that receive too many unexcused absences. The emotion quickly moved to relief as we discussed how to address the state's requirements and records, as well as, how to catch her daughter up on school work. There was no conflict or even aggressive/defensiveness in the conference. This could be due to opening the dialog with a “warm” comment and mood. It alerted the parent's impression to the fact that I CARED about the well being of the student, not just my paycheck or data. I believe that the conference went well because no conflicts

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arose and all issues planned to be discussed were; solutions were also found for each issue. My Co-operating Teacher felt good about the conference because its planning cleared her attendance records and caught a failing student back up in her grade book. Her feedback revolved primarily around my word choice and tone. She noted starting quieter/calmer moving from war to cool, back to warm, was a useful process of brining up concerns with anyone, not just parents or in conferences.

Through this experience I have learned several things. Firstly, I learned that it is very difficult to set up parent conferences as a secondary instructor. Parents just do not have the time, and most believe conferences are pointless unless requested by administration over suspendable or expellable behavior. Email and phone calls seem to work much better with parents in New Kent. I have learned that speaking with the student about the issue before calling home is a great way to prevent surprise or conflict later. Writing an outline with a checklist of questions helped keep me on track, calm my nerves, and boost my confidence. Most importantly I learned as a full time teacher it's a good idea to keep regular contact with parents through out the school year. This contact builds relationships that make it very easy to contact parents about anything good, bad, or both.

In my first year of teaching, I hope to contact every parent/guardian at least once a month to maintain rapport. Hopefully my 1st year will allow time to do such a thing. Once teaching becomes easier, however, I hope to contact parents/guardians at least once every two weeks. Overall, I have learned creating and maintaining rapport with students is essential to classroom management and student achievement; rapport with parents makes it all that much easier.