

The teacher-to-teacher initiative was created by the U. S. Department of Education to provide the latest strategies and research on educational practices that work inside a classroom. It's not just purchasing a certain program, but it's really looking at what are our standards, how do we know what mastery will look like, and how are we supporting children to move toward that mastery? We're looking at student work and students are not there, what kind of feedback can we give students to move them along so that big recital – that piece at the end – which is sort of analogous to that big state assessment – there should not be a lot of surprise or anxiety about how that child is going to perform. This series features teachers from across the country who presenting techniques that can be used with students of all ages. It's just one way the Department of Education is helping teachers get the support they need so that no child is left behind.

I'm Holly Searl and I've been working with the Teacher-To-Teacher workshops through the summer. This session is on feedback – on looking at feedback as a powerful tool for raising student achievement. Take a minute to look at our enduring understanding because this is really critical when we think about what do we believe about students and learners and this really shapes my practice as a staff development teacher in Montgomery County Schools. My job is to help work with professional staff and build their capacity to be reflective practitioners and reflective teachers – to analyze their practice, look at student achievement data, and make instructional decisions about moving forward. In order to do that I think we do need to believe that all students can learn rigorous academic material. They need to be given the time, the opportunity, the opportunity to try again – and I think that's really also at the heart of NCLB in terms of we have to believe the students can do it and then we look at owning that work and giving the students the time and opportunity to make those gains and meet with success. Part of this understanding also really relates to experience that I had. And really the experience that brought me here to these summer workshops. About four years ago I was working as an instructional specialist in Montgomery County Schools and I was working for the office of Title I. I had a series of schools that were under my assignment and I would travel around and meet with principals and staff – I'd look at their school improvement plans, help them align practices, look at data – and I was coming off of maternity leave and I said guess what – we've reassigned everyone's schools and you're now going to be going to Broadacre. Well, in our school system – which is a relatively affluent school system just outside of Washington, D.C., Broadacher was our highest needs school – highest poverty school – lowest performance scores across the board – high mobility – high second language learner – and it was a school that no one ever wanted on their case load or assignment, but I was the new kid on the block and of course I had been off for 8 weeks so that was “welcome back”. So I went in and that was a new principal at the time and really looked at what's happening in the building, is this belief and expectation in place, and where are we going to go from here? Well, it was a very exciting time at the school, because the school decided to work collaboratively with our teachers' union and our central office to do what we called an in-house restructuring. Instead of waiting for the state to come in and restructure us, or take us over, we thought we can do this because we've got the power of all the teachers' minds and we're all professionals and we've got the support of the teachers' union and the school system so we will try to do an in-house restructuring. And at that time staff was offered an opportunity to either sign on for a 3-year commitment to that restructuring or to look for another opportunity within the school system. So the first year when we came on board was a whole new staff of 31 people with a variety of levels of experiences – this is what our data

looked like. As you can see here for grade 3 and grade 5 in 2000 we only had 11% of our 3rd graders meeting standard in reading. We had 21% of our 5th graders meeting standard in reading. I mean the scores were absolutely dismal. We were lower than some schools in neighboring counties that had already been under reconstitution at the state level. And then you can see our math at grade three – we only had 5% of our students meeting standard. That was about 5 or 6 students in our whole school. And so we were really facing a time that we did really need to reflect and talk about what is it going to mean if we say we do believe that all children can meet high standards? What is this going to look like? And it's got to be something that needs to be teacher-led, it needs to be collaborative – it needs to be something – it's not just purchasing a certain program, but it's really looking at what are our standards, how do we know what mastery will look like, and how are we supporting children to move toward that mastery. So, I'm here today to talk about feedback because within all of the work we did over the past three years at that school, we did spend time looking and having those conversations within grade level teams and within vertical teams about what is mastery on this indicator of standard, what does it look like, and if we're looking at student work and students are not there what kind of feedback can we give students to move them along and to help do better the next time? So we talked a lot about feedback, a lot about mastery, a lot about crafting the type of work that would help students share what they know and show us what they know. So in 2000 – that's where we were – 2003, after 3 years, we were quite excited – we had made gains – because again we know there's not going to be a quick fix. It takes a lot of time and effort and a vertical model to be put in place to do this, so by 2003 grades 3 and 5 had made gains. We still weren't quite at even half of our students meeting standard yet, but we had made gains and we felt good about that, and we wanted to continue that. Right before our summer – our “summer of love” tour began – in June our results came in for our 2004 tests and we really had something to celebrate. So by 2004 after 4 years of work – with very focused work around looking at the standards, looking at the feedback, looking at student work among other thing – we found that 75% of our 3rd graders were at standard and 60% of our 5th graders. So we do see that we have data to show that what we were doing in-house, teacher-led, collaboration of planning, looking at student work, does make a difference. So, moving right along then our biggest central question would be for today – how are we going to provide specific and timely feedback to students in order to improve their performance – that's our big question. And we've got four outcomes today – we're going to identify two different types of feedback – evaluative and descriptive feedback. We're going to do a quick review of the research related to feedback, because there is a research body out there and our practice does need to be informed by research. We're going to practice doing some creation of descriptive feedback related to a standard. And then we are going to reflect with each other on any new knowledge that we did acquire and really talk about next steps – how are you going to go back and be able to share those with your colleagues and with your staff. We're going to look now and discuss the two types of feedback. There's descriptive feedback and then there's evaluative feedback. What the research has shown is that the descriptive feedback – which is the specific, timely, constructive feedback that offers students an opportunity to improve – that is the feedback that research is showing making a huge difference in students' performance. It's that feedback that you're giving them when they're in the middle of that task – it's that ongoing – so that they can improve. And then there's evaluative feedback, which absolutely has a place in instruction. That's more of that summative piece at the end. The evaluative feedback would be the scores they get back after taking that big state assessment. It's where they are maybe compared to a norm or criterion reference test or assessment, maybe end

of the unit type summative activity is more evaluative, because you know what? The unit of study has passed, we've measured where you are against that standard and we're moving on. It's not as helpful for students if that's what we're waiting for, and we can't afford to wait for that piece of data to come to make big decisions – we've got to make those decisions day by day in our classroom – so we've got to use that descriptive feedback, which is the most powerful. Upon putting this together I thought this graphic or the analogy of the piano teacher and the student is really a powerful way to look at it – take it away from the reading or math or social studies content and think about the fact that when a child has a piano lesson the teacher is side-by-side with the child, giving feedback along the way. The teacher doesn't wait until the 30-minute lesson is over to say “Well back the first couple of minutes of the lesson when you played that chord it was off.” It's always that immediate feedback so the child can correct during the lesson and do better. The piano teacher doesn't wait until the parent has paid for a whole year of lessons and the child's taken a whole year of lessons and the child finishes that little recital piece at the end of the year to give the big feedback. It's every time that lesson is in process throughout the year, so that big recital – that piece at the end – which is sort of analogous to that big state assessment – there should not be a lot of surprise and anxiety about how that child is going to perform – because we've had the feedback and the monitoring along the way. So I think that's really key for us to keep in mind and that's what the research base is showing. In fact, the research is also showing that if we overemphasize the evaluative feedback instead of the descriptive feedback it can almost get in the way of the students' performance. Because they are linking school with going home and crying over a bad grade instead of thinking about well this what I can do well, this is where I need to go next, and how I need to improve. So it's really helping you empower the learner to recognize – this is where I am, this is where I need to be, and my teacher has coached me or given me steps on how to get there, and what I need to do, and my teacher has given me an opportunity to improve and to try again. We are now going to go and look at a definition from Ann Davies of how she's defined descriptive feedback. Ann Davies has written a book called Making Classroom Assessment Work – it is in your reference page – it's a very, very reader-friendly text and she addresses different levels of feedback. There is the student-to-student feedback that's critical in a classroom, there's the student-to-teacher feedback, there's the self-assessment piece – obviously today we're just hitting on what can you do as the teacher in the building and the professional to give that feedback to the student. Those other areas of feedback and student self-assessment feedback could be a whole other workshop session. So let's look at Davies' definition – she does say descriptive feedback does need to be specific, which we agree upon and shared up here – it means to relate direct to the learning – it needs to be in comparison to some models, samples or exemplars – and it needs to be related to performance and not personal. And I think we've also lived and had an experience where feedback that we've received has been more personal, or maybe we haven't had that model or exemplar – we really didn't know what was being asked of us. And then the feedback we felt a little more defensive because we felt like it was more of a personal attack. So it's so critical to have that model, sample, or exemplar and to make sure we're relating our feedback directly to our learning and to what we were teaching. This is what Saphier defines as examples – these examples are examples that he said were more descriptive – that could be descriptive, helpful feedback. One of my personal favorites is the 2nd bullet before the bottom – your back foot is not coming up high enough to clear the hurdle – I love that piece of feedback versus on his next page – think about the position of your body. So again if you're thinking about that coach and you're running track – actually something I absolutely will not be doing – but you know I'm out there

and I'm running track and I've got to do the hurdles, if I come around and the coach just says to me "You know, Searl, you need to think about the position of your body." What is that telling me? I mean, I'm probably going to stand up a little straighter, but I really don't know what he means or she means. But if I go back to "Your back foot was not coming up high enough to clear that hurdle," I know exactly the next time I run in practice I've got to get my foot up higher – that was the problem – it was my back foot that's tripping me up. So it's that specificity so that I can do something a little differently next time. So if you do this activity or share this back with your staff – and you're welcome to – you might want to also point out some of those parallels between these two lists. But we've got to be able to look at some examples and decide is it or is it not before we go on and try to match it to a standard. And we're going to do a quick run through the research world related to feedback. What does the research say? There is a research base. We're first going to look at this little statement from Ken O'Connor. Ken O'Connor wrote a book *How To Grade For Learning*. It's very popular right now – especially if you're working in a system that has kind of moved toward a standards-based report card. Ken O'Connor says that clear, concise feedback matched to standards will promote student achievement. So again, it's not just about giving that specific feedback – it's got to be matched against the standard. And the implication for that is really that you have to know those standards, and know what students are being expected to do at the different grade levels. You've got to know what those standards are before your grade level and beyond your grade level in a vertical fashion. Because what are you going to do with the children who already demonstrate that they have mastered that standard? You've got to give them feedback and an opportunity to move on. I think that's one part of NCLB that maybe is not widely understood. It's not just about leave no child behind – it doesn't mean all the children who are close to standard or beyond standard are going to just sort of hover here and wait while we bring everyone else up to standard. It's we're moving every child – no matter where they are – to a higher level of achievement. And so it's knowing the standard – and O'Connor is really interesting. The whole way he got into this – this area of grading and reporting – he is a consultant – and his 3rd grade daughter came home one day with a failing mark on a paper and got a failing mark on a writing assignment and it had nothing to do with the quality or the craft of her writing at that grade level or indicated level – it was because she didn't follow the directions correctly and fill out the worksheet correctly. So, again, what was the actual standard? And he was just a concerned parent and he went diving into this world of grading and reporting and standards and evaluation and feedback and his book is very user-friendly – interesting. Next we've got Marzano, Pickering and Pollock – their research has shown feedback can produce positive results if you manage the form it takes. So, again, knowing when do I need to give that descriptive feedback matched to that standard to give the child an opportunity to move on and when is my feedback really evaluative at that summative point. And they wrote a book – *Classroom Instruction At Work* – different strategies you can use in your classroom that promote achievement. And again, knowing that we've got to be really focused and efficient because we don't have all the time in the world – they highlighted the ten strategies that were most efficient and assersive for promoting student achievement, and feedback was 7 on that list of 10 – so feedback did make that top 10 list. Ann Davies again – we looked at her definition of descriptive feedback earlier – she said that the specific descriptive feedback that focuses on success and points the way to improvement has a positive effect. Again it's really about helping the children take ownership of their learning and empowering them that "You know what – I know I've got a ways to go, but my teacher is helping coach me along the way and giving me some feedback that will help me do better the next time." And this is my

very favorite study here – Black and Willam have this article published – it's call Inside The Black Box – back in 1998 in Phi Delta Kappan – they did this incredible study – this meta-analysis – international study – looking at what were the practices that really resulted in student achievement. You know if we can only capture a couple of things – and it's not about what program do we have to purchase, what wholesale training do we have to do? – but what is the practice inside the classroom that the teacher can own and implement to move students forward and they found overwhelmingly that it was descriptive feedback linked to formative assessments in the classroom that got amazing results – not only for the children that we deem at-risk, or what's the term I heard today from Susie – the naïve learner – what is it? – yes instructionally naïve – but again we've got this limited time. We want to maximize every minute, every student, every interaction – it's the descriptive feedback linked to that formative assessment. I really recommend that you get a hold of that article and give that article a quick review because it's really where we're headed nationally in terms of what's the standard, what are those little checkpoints along the way to make sure students are on the road and on the route and moving them and accelerating them forward. So the implications – the big question is – what are the implications? If we know this – we've played around with looking at what descriptive feedback might look like and might not look like – we've defined what we think it should look like – and we've seen a definition – we know there's a research base that we've just briefly visited – so what are the big implications then for classroom instruction and assessment?

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It's interesting – we have the same aha – Cheryl and I worked together at this school on this 3-year project and we sort of had the same thing where the first year or two we felt like we were spinning our wheels, collecting work, collecting data, teaching harder, teaching harder, I mean we all know we're working really hard. You know what else could I do? And then we started having conversations with our teams – vertical teams and grade level teams – and we realized that once we scored papers together and looked at student work we all went back again and sort of did our own thing in terms of reteaching, but we never had that conversation as a team about well what kind of feedback are we giving the students about this work? We knew to share the good model – what's the feedback. Well, when you start having that conversation with your team you really find that some people are not really confident about what that feedback might look like. And that's okay, and that's where we really had opportunity for professional growth and development. You know, what might it look like? Well, you know what? Next week let's bring some work and let's work on making some feedback together at the table that we can share and let's think about will this feedback result hopefully in a better product the next time. It's that whole two-way street that when we are walking around, we need to be walking around giving that immediate verbal before we give the written and if the majority of the kids are not getting it we can't go back into that model of blaming the kids – Oh, they can't do it. But it's really about our instruction. So, again I think this practice as we internalize it and begin to transfer it into our work really requires us to be much more reflective about our practice and really helps us to collaborate more with our peers – because you do need to go as a professional to that teammate to other people in your building and talk about this lesson really didn't work – and how are you –

if you're looking at the data – well how did she get this data or these numbers and what are you doing and what are you saying that I'm not doing or saying? And so I think it also builds that collaborative, professional, learning community. I think another implication that we learned from the Black and Willam study is the fact that in order to apply the feedback we have to build in time for students to try again. And that's another big paragonship for us as educators because we're moving on – we're planning, we're moving on – and not to say that we don't have to have that end-point if you're using the understanding by design – the backward mapping – you know where you want the students to go and you know that you can't just go on and on and on and on without a point where you're going to check and do some summative work, but we've got to build in time in that instructional day and in our planning to be able to reflect and re-teach – let them try again – let them use the feedback. And I know what really worked for us is when we would share the work and the feedback and on our Maryland state assessment – that was our MSA that was on that data – the children have to do something called a brief constructed response. So unlike some other states where students are just doing the selected response or the multiple choice – our students do a mixture of both in reading and mathematics – we don't have a writing test, but they must respond in written form to a reading text. And so we practice that a lot – summarizing text, identifying theme – and once we put feedback on student work and gave it back to the student, they had an opportunity to re-do that immediately. Because if they're not given the time during the class it's easy for them to shove it in their desk, take it home, it goes in the backpack, you never see it again. But that immediate – do you know now what it might look like to improve this? You've seen a model, you see the feedback. Nine times out of 10 they say well I know what I need to do to make it better, so then build in the time to let them do it immediately. And I think that really then also empowers to feel that “Well, I can do this.” So the frequent formative assessments I think are key. So, where to begin, if we know this, what does this look like? It really helps us to go back to Richard DuFour's four critical questions – we think about where to begin. We need to know what we want students to know and be able to do and that really takes us back to our standards. What are our standards? What do students need to know and be able to do? And my course of study in my classroom in this particular content area. The second one – how are we going to know if they know it? So what's our little assessment going to look like? And we can't just keep teaching and teaching – you know my ancient Rome unit, and then when I've finished doing all the activities I did around Rome and got tired of Rome, make a little test up the night before and give it – we can't teach that way anymore. So it's up front – this is what they need to know and be able to do – this is how I'm going to assess that with my little formative checks and my summative. And then what are we going to do about the kids who haven't learned it? There's that whole feedback piece. And then also what are we going to do with our students who already know it? How are we going to accelerate their learning and move them forward? So that's really where we need to begin and that whole backwards design – I don't know if any of you in your district are using that understanding by design when you're planning, and really up front before you start planning your activities, planning your assessment piece up front and it really helps with your instruction and building in those formative assessments. So, what did it look like in our school? We're briefly going to look at what a sample test may have looked like and some of our authentic student feedback – I have to say it was our personal best at that day in time and point in the school year – we keep learning and growing every time I get the opportunity to come and meet with people from around the nation in these conferences I learn new things and adapt and grow. So, part of our standards in Maryland for grade 5 are that students need to comprehend, interpret and analyze text, they

need to be able to determine a theme – whether it’s implied or stated directly. When students are scored on the state assessment they are not scored for the craft or quality of their writing – it is the content of their response – we’re looking for reading comprehension – we’re looking for does this child have a general or full understanding of the text – so in terms of sentence structure, spelling, grammar – we’re not looking at that at the state level, so there’s another bias that we come to with our student work – we really need to look beyond that and look at did they get the story? And with the themes, I talked briefly with Shirley, there are layers of themes and texts. So what is the most powerful theme, or based on your own experience there might be one you connect with a little more than... It’s your ability to carefully identify a theme and be able to support it well enough that the reader thinks you do have the complete understanding of the text. So we’ve spent a lot of time in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades summarizing texts, identifying themes, supporting evidence of the theme, and we always use grade level appropriate text when we do this with students, because they deserve a chance to handle that rigorous standard grade level-specific curriculum. So for *The River Never Sleeps* we always set up our practice formative and summative where students will respond in a box, because on the state assessment they must write in a box with 8 lines for their text, so we did also model the format of the state assessment in our daily practice so we did not go into test-prep mode a month before the assessment – that’s the way we taught the whole year. So I did re-type this, but I kept all of the students’ spelling, grammatical, and syntactical errors to maintain integrity of the work, but our prompts for the passage or the text “*The River Never Sleeps*” was – what is the theme of the story, use evidence from the text and your own experience to support your answer. So we would agree as a team – a vertical team for 4th and 5th grade teachers – that we’re going to start teaching theme and these are our resources and this is how we might do it and this is what our little formative assessment is going to look like. So we would get together and write that formative assessment and pick the text together collaboratively as a group and then we would give the assessment to the children – the little formative check – and we would come back and look at the papers together, score them together, and decide on some feedback. So these first two samples are from “*The River Never Sleeps*” – that’s a story about two boys, they live in a village in Alaska, and they are going out – it’s the time when the ice is starting to break, ice flows – I have a great resource here – in Alaska they’ve been warned not to go out on the ice, because don’t forget that’s how your uncle died, you know when the ice broke and the ice flows and don’t go out on the ice with your fishing, and they went that day and they even had their deceased uncle’s special fishing equipment with them and they were going to fish. Well of course you can predict that the boys did disobey and go out on the ice and got themselves in a jam and they were able to survive, but they lost their uncle’s fishing equipment through their survival. So the children had to read this and come up with what is the theme of the story? So you can see two different examples on pages 9 and 10 of what the students did right and then what our feedback against the students’ work was. And we did attempt to recognize a strength to point out something the students did if it was there, and then some type of statement about what they still were missing. Not really wordy. But this was really a shift for many teachers on our staff. We have a 3-point rubric that we use at the state level – a 3 is considered advanced proficient, where the students have answered the question at a rigorous level – 2 is proficient – that’s really the goal at our state in terms of making AYP – a 1 would be minimal and a 0 is completely off-topic. So while we did have some teachers – and we were collecting that rubric data, the scores – we still had some students who were just getting papers back with a number on them and then teachers were moving on. So then going back from does the 3 or the 2 or the 1 really give the students the information they need? Or is it some specific

feedback? You know, if we're just looking at our class data and just looking at 3's and 2's and 1's, yes I can count how many students are proficient, and advanced proficient, and how many are not, but again it didn't tell us as much as if we could give feedback to students. Well it's time really for us to begin to reflect and close out today. What did you learn today? How might this be changing your current practice? How are you going to go back and continue the conversation? I've really enjoyed talking and working with all of you today and I've enjoyed your participation.

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