

TEACHER TO TEACHER – 2005
HOLLY SEARL 1 – Need For Instruction

HS: It's great to see everyone here. I'm Holly Searl and the session today is writing at high levels in the intermediate grades. And based on our sticky dot chart over here we have a number of years of service and education in this room. I am here today just to try to share one success story from an experience I had last year at my school. And we'll go ahead and get started. And our enduring understanding today and the whole session is really predicated on the belief that every student needs focused direct instruction in writing. I know we all probably are in agreement that we need that for our students in reading and math, but for whatever reason writing sometimes has taken a backseat. So we're really looking at ways to balance being respectful of the process of writing along with knowing that the students do need that direct instruction with the craft of writing and along with the conventions of writing. So that's what we'll be talking about today. And our essential question then is how can this focused writing instruction help our high achieving readers perform and write at high levels? Because for my story that I'm gonna share with you I was coming from a high achieving school this past year and so my data is going to demonstrate that. And the story I'm gonna tell you is really gonna be linked to those students that we were working with. Our outcomes today, we'll look at the reading performance of those students that we worked with; we'll quickly look at some writing research related to, you know, where we are as a nation; we will look at some national and state standards; we'll do a modeled writing lesson; and then we'll reflect on our new learnings.

Let's look now at our activator. Our activator today is gonna be a five words/three words. It's an activator by John Saphier. He's written a book of activators and also a book of summarizers. So if you take a minute and look at the directions on the

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- screen... Okay, so go ahead and think about those five words that come to mind when you hear the term “advanced reader”. They can be words or phrases.
- FS: They have a strategy, they have a way where they go about trying to unlock meaning, they’re independent, they don’t really need help, they self-correct errors.
- FS: Intelligent, interested, well-rounded cause they usually have plenty of reading ability and they’re interested in everything, self-starter and very verbal.
- FS: Okay. Between the two of you you’ve almost taken all my answers. I also put that they had the ability to understand things and that they were capable of learning. So those are two additional words that you hadn’t mentioned.
- FS: And adding to what all three of you have said, I added a large vocabulary.
- FS: And I have a decoder, fluent, great comprehension, expanded vocabulary and they’re above level, above their grade level.
- HS: This table up here seems to have a lot to say so we’ll let this table begin and share first with us. What did you come up with for—were the three words you agreed upon that—to activate... Yes.
- FS: Independent, connectors and creative.
- HS: Okay. Great. Thank you. I’ll put those up on our chart. Independent, connectors and creative. Okay. It’s always exciting. This is the first city that I’ve had the connectors come up. So it’s always exciting to see what people come up with city to city.
- FS: We have reads for understanding, fluent and independent/ motivated.
- HS: So reads for understanding. So understands that reading should be meaningful, independent and motivated and fluent. Okay. Terrific.

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FS: We have extensive vocabulary, strategy util—strategy utilization and enjoys reading or avid reader.

HS: So reading a lot. And I heard that from some other tables as well, that these are kids who read a lot and so then they build a lot of their background knowledge through that reading and life experiences. Strategy utilization (that was a mouthful) for sure and extensive vocabulary. Okay. Wonderful. So we know when we're talking about our advanced or high level readers, which were the readers that we were primarily working with at my previous school, that these are some words that come to mind. Now we know that reading and writing are reciprocal processes and so we're hoping that some of these strengths that we know that our advanced readers have we can build upon to help them improve their writing, because we know writing does typically lag behind reading instruction. But what we were finding at our school was a much wider gap than we wished that we had. Typically you've got stronger readers and the writing takes a little longer to catch up. And that was what we were exploring a little bit in our building.

And was that a function of the fact that we weren't teaching enough direct writing, we didn't have enough writing time? You know, what was that? Had we not been paying enough attention to planning our writing instruction? And that's a little bit about what I'll talk about today. So we've got some of these words that we all agreed on, at least at a large table level, that we think describe an advanced reader, and then we'll try to go back as a little benchmark and touch back on these later when we talk about writing.

So where are we as a nation with writing? Well, it's really difficult to tell because one of our main measures for that would be our NAEP assessments that are given in

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fourth grade and eighth grade across the country to select groups of students. Now we know that about 32% of our nation's readers are proficient as measured by NAEP less ,28%, are proficient in writing as measured by NAEP. So the data's really not pretty right now concer—you know, concerning a big national snapshot.

The previous decade, this 1996 study by NAEP shows that only about 20% of our students were doing well and were proficient in writing. So we have made gains over the past two decades but they still—we still don't have our students where they need to be. Another big point from this study in the late '80s was that many students were having difficulty organizing their thoughts coherently. So, again, you have these advanced readers, they are avid readers, they've got the extensive vocabulary, they are motivated, but it was just organizing all of that on paper in a coherent fashion that was a challenge to them.

And that was another struggle that we had at our school. So when we were deciding, you know, where we are as a nation again, we looked not only at the NAEP, which is more of a just strictly education, but we also looked at the National Writing Commission and some of the work they've done. And they just recently published a report called "Writing: It's a Ticket to Work or a Ticket Out". This was an interesting study because they surveyed 120 of the nation's blue chip business leaders and businesses.

They did not include the retail sector, they did not include government. But we're talking about the blue chip companies in the nation who really recruit from some of our elite liberal arts colleges, some of our elite ivy league schools. So they are hiring what are considered some of our best and brightest students coming out of colleges.

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And the feedback that they gave us from this survey was that the employees are not able to demonstrate the strong writing skills that they are desiring.

They told us that about 51% of them do take writing skills into consideration when they hire and that corporations as a whole are generally dissatisfied with the quality of writing. So not only do we know this from an instructional standpoint, elementary through high school, but even when some of our brightest students who are graduating from ivy league schools go on and are hired by some of these top companies, they're not able to demonstrate the writing skills that are necessary to move on.

There were three main educational implications that came out of that study. The first one was that writing is a marker. That writing is a way that people can move forward in their career. That income levels can be linked to your writing skill, and to your vocabulary skill, to your ability to really communicate effectively and coherently in written form. The flip side of that then would be that writing is really a gatekeeper for many of our students. And if we look at how our nation is growing in terms of our second language learners and look at how our school demographics in many areas are changing, writing is what's keeping some of our students then from being able to break through those economic barriers and have a better life in our country.

And then the third huge implication was really that schools need to devote more time to writing instruction and that it needs to be viewed as a K-12 issue. You know, it's not that we wait til they're in middle school or high school, it's not that we wait til they're on grade level reading in third grade, but we've gotta look at it really as a K-12. I would even argue really K-16, that we still need to really be actively

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teaching—directly teaching the craft of writing, you know, in the college courses as well because our students need to be able to demonstrate those skills coming out of school.

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HS: Now if you look around the room there are four posters written in blue ink similar to this over here. This is gonna be a modified four corners activity because all of the corners in this room are taken up with other equipment. I want you to take a minute to read those four posters around the room. So let's take—let's have a three minute discussion and then we'll go around and share.

FS: We know that the brain learns by making connections, and I think the writing makes it—an abstract idea a little bit more concrete. So it makes it easier for students to see those connections and, as you said, to hopefully really master them and retain them.

FS: And I think if they can write what they've learned, then that's the final step in assessing that they have a full understanding of everything and that they do really know what it is that they've been taught.

FS: Many employees don't understand the need for an appropriate level of detail, reasoning structure and the like. And I just went to this one first because I was reading the *Washington Post* Business Section on Sunday and they were talking about the resumes and cover letters. And there was an employer who was saying that he was getting resumes and cover letters with gross errors in them. These are people applying for jobs. And one of the jobs that they—that he was interviewing for was for an edit—editing position.

So I just say as I'm interviewing teachers for next year (I'm a principal at an elementary school), as I interview teachers, I look at their cover letter and their resume and if they don't have the appropriate level of detail that I'm looking for, even the structure in their writing, I—you know, I don't interview them.

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FS: Just that writing is—helps students connect everything in their lives. Not just in the language arts, not just in the English, but it has to go to every single subject, every single aspect of their life. Not just at school, but, as you said, even after they get out of school, you know, with their professions. And when you see a teacher who misspells a—the name of their school on their application, that's not good. So, you know, this is going to help the students connect everything in their lives.

FS: Writing is the gatekeeper. That students who have good oral communication and written communication skills are going to have an advantage in the economic marketplace like everyone else has been talking about. That good writing skills is go—are going to enable them to move ahead.

FS: Here we summarized this. You spend money now or spend money later. The remediation monies could better be used for salaries, thus boosting the economy, thus decreasing the national debt.

HS: Thank you. Yep. Pay me now or pay me later. So sometimes it's awfully late to try to remediate, you know, students whose parents have put themselves in debt and the students are in debt for these educations and they're still not able to write. Really, this national call and responsibility in terms of where our children need to be to be able to compete, to be able to, you know, help us realize our potential as a nation with our—you know, and help our children be those competitors in the future. And that report gave us a little context really this past year when we were trying to look at how to improve the writing. So let's look a little bit about my story. As I said earlier when I introduced myself, I spent 16—the past 16 years teaching in Montgomery County, Maryland. Do I have any Montgomery County people in here? I know I have one. I saw Silver Spring. Hi, Kathryn. Montgomery County, if you

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don't know anything about it, has traditionally been considered a very affluent county.

It's sort of the country club county in the past years. I mean, we're—we have been very well funded. We usually have very high achieving students, you know, blue ribbon schools, merit scholars. Well, over the past 20 years our demographics have really shifted. We now are really only growing through children who are impacted from poverty and through immigrants. And so with that demographic shift has really—you know, we've had to have some long, hard looks at our curriculum, at our instructional practices, at how we're meeting the needs of all of our students to really maintain that strong school system.

So I've spent most of my career working at very high need schools, schools impacted by poverty, students learning English as a second language. And just this past year I went to what was considered one of our high performing schools, one of our affluent schools. Of course, it was time to redo our school improvement plan. I'm sure many of you have those that you have to do every two or three years. And, you know, staff, we were sort of feeling at a loss. Well, you know, we're high performing, we do everything well. What can—what can we possibly write goals around? So we started looking at the data and sometimes you have to look beyond the data. We all know the data's just numbers but let's really look at what our students do well, let's look at their student work. And we really found that writing was an area that we needed to focus on. So that's... I'm gonna start now telling you a little bit about my story. And here's the data that we looked at at the beginning of the year when I started working on the school improvement plan.

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Now coming after being 15 years in very needy schools, you know, I looked at this data and I was blown away. I mean, we had 95.8% of our third grade students at proficient or advanced levels. So we had less than—you know, fewer than five percent of our students who were not meeting the needs set forth by our state assessment. And our state assessment does require, in addition to the selected response, the multiple choice responses, our state assessment at third grade does require written responses to reading and math, brief constructed responses, and it requires our third graders to summarize with some type of theme statement or connection, which typically summarizing in written form doesn't occur nationally till fourth grade on many assessments. So it is considered a—you know, a rigorous assessment. We also give what's called the MAP-R, the measure of academic progress in reading. That's a computer-adaptive assessment where students will take a test on the computer and it will start out, for example, with fourth grade students with fourth grade text and fourth grade level questions linked to our state outcomes.

However, if the student begins to miss a number of those questions, the computer will adapt down to easier levels of text and questions at the third grade and second grade. And, likewise, it will adapt up if a child is getting all the questions correct. So our fourth graders' mean writ scores on that MAP-R test in the Fall were really similar to what sixth graders were doing. So, again, we had these very high performing students. We were fortunate. We had met AYP, you know, in every category.

So here we were and so it's really difficult to have those conversations with staff about the fact that we still need to improve and look for ways to improve because

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people are not really necessarily gonna come together around the results. They're not... You know, it's easy to come together as a staff when you're in fear of the state's gonna come in, you know, if we don't get these scores up. But when you have this type of data, it was more of a challenge. And so we started looking at student work. And, really, what we found was the greatest academic concern in our building was the quality of the student's writing. And so we started thinking about three things that we needed to do. And the three things we needed to do is really think about the results that we were gonna be looking for, a process we could put into place to get there, and all the while knowing that the relationships with each other in the building, our professional relationships were really gonna be key to getting that work done.

Because if you don't have respectful, positive relationships in your building built on trust and honoring each other and being open, you're not gonna get the results you need and your processes are not gonna be as strong. And so we had to think about what results are we looking for. You know, where are our kids? What results are we looking for? What do we want them to be able to do? And so we started having some conversations. We started asking a lot of questions.

Were we really expecting our advanced readers to naturally be—just become good writers without a lot of instruction? Because, face it, do we all have a lot of extra time in the day? No. I mean, we're all crunched thinking we can't possibly do one more thing. We don't have enough time as it is. We had to think, you know, and ask ourselves did we spend enough time teaching writing. We really didn't know from grade level to grade level how much time had been devoted to teaching writing.

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Was our instruction aligned with state and national standards? Now we knew our curriculum had recently been revised and that was in alignment with state standards, but how comfortable were people with what those revised indicators and outcomes really meant? You know, at what level of thinking were we? And were we continuing to teach vocabulary at high levels and hold our students accountable for using that vocabulary at high levels? Because, again, when you've got these advanced readers with this extensive vocabulary, they're making connections, it's easy to think you don't need to continue teaching that vocabulary and pushing that vocabulary.

And so these were some of the questions that came up through our conversation.

And we started thinking about the results we wanted and when we thought about the results we wanted, we decided, because we don't have a writing test in Maryland at the elementary level, we were gonna have to figure out how to sort of measure our own results in-house. We decided that we were going to give a writing prompt, K-5 in our whole building, three times a year. That we were going to not only give the prompt but we were going to then score it and do the double scoring so that each—the whole grade level team then would get together and at least two sets of scoring would be done with those prompts.

And we were gonna track all of that data and we were gonna use that performance data to help guide some of our instruction and our focus. Because, again, we can't do it all. We had to really have that direct focused instruction in our areas of need for our students. Now when we did our double scoring of our work, we used the six traits of writing in Montgomery County. And so we were double scoring the work against those six traits. And I'll stop for a minute and show you some of our data.

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This is how we collected our data last year and we just decided... Because, again, this was in-house data, that we were building this process on defining these results ourselves. And across the six traits in writing we collected Fall data, Winter data. I don't have the Spring data on here because this tour started the summer before I had a chance to do that. I have got to do the data in my building. So this is one of my tasks. But you can see the gains that the students made just between Fall and Winter across the six traits in fourth grade.

So I'm sharing fourth grade data with you. And then if you look at our fifth grade, some interesting questions would come up, you know, between fourth and fifth grade if we go back to our process relationships results. So we knew what we wanted our results to be. We wanted our results to be that 90% of our students in the building, at least 90%, would earn a three or a four on that four point rubric on the six traits. So those were the results we were aiming for and we were trying to measure that with these three writing prompts a year double scored.

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HS: Now to get those results we had to put a process in place to do that. What was our process going to be? We weren't gonna get anymore time, you know, from anywhere to do this. We weren't gonna get anymore money from anywhere to do this. So we had to look at existing time. We had to look at existing resources. We do receive a number of substitute days from our school system that each building can use for professional development during the school day. So we're not asking teachers to stay late after school for that or come in on Saturday mornings or whatnot, all the crazy things that we're always expected to do as educators. And so we decided that part of the process would be that instead of having two faculty meetings a month, that we would continue to allow our administrator to have one faculty meeting a month, but we wanted that other faculty meeting time during the month to be devoted to writing. And he was amenable to that because it was aligned with our goal for school improvement. Instead of just the administrivia, it was really talking about what was going on in our classroom. And we—and we would have one person... Our reading specialist would usually take the kindergarten, first and second grade teachers and I would work with third, fourth and fifth grade teachers and we would start having conversations. And it was interesting. You know, one grade level would say to another grade level, "Now how many days a week do you teach writing? Oh, well, we only teach it this many days a week. Or now what rubric are you using in the classroom?" You know, we had lots of assumptions in our building about what people were doing and what they were using, and that was a very small school. We only have two or three people at a grade level. So, you know, you would assume that those conversations had been happening.

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They really hadn't been. So having a process in place helped build the relationships to move us toward those results we wanted. We also used those substitute days that we had to build in looking at student writing with grade level teams. And that was really important. So people aren't burned out all the time at the end of a school day, but we would build in the substitute days where teachers could plan with the curriculum, look at their student writing and talk together as a grade level team. And that was important because it was during the school day. It was during their working hours. They had a longer block of time to do that when they were a little fresher and not so worn out. So that was another part of the process that was really important. Now you can imagine if we assumed teachers were talking and they weren't, then you can imagine questions that were going through some teachers' minds when you looked at this data and this data. What questions do you think were going through the fourth and fifth grade teachers' minds?

Other questions that came up were, "Well, gosh, you know, how much time are you spending in writing? You had such great gains". Well, we found then that one team was doing writing for a little longer block of time twice a week. This other grade level was doing writing every day. Well, that's a huge difference. You know, those little things. It's one thing for an administrator to stand up there and say, "You need to do writing everyday", it's very different when it comes from teams.

And, again, it's the exchange between the teachers because, you know, we can't afford to continue having everyone from on high come down and tell us what we need to do. But it's working at teams to determine that and build that together. And so those conversations were, were interesting. And it was really interesting, as well, to start moving from not wanting to be defensive about the data but just talk

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about, you know, “This is what it is. What can we do about it”? So another piece of the process was really looking at some state and national standards.

And I’m gonna share with you some state and national standards. And we’re looking at the persuasive writing standards from the state of Maryland and 3.5.7... That five in the middle, that means fifth grade. So by the end of fifth grade that’s where students should be. And then likewise down here this eight in the middle means by the end of eighth grade. That’s where students should be. So these were the NAEP requirements for persuasive writing from the nation’s report card.

And this is part of their scoring guide. And we felt that this really helped us match up with the six traits. These are informational writing standards again for fifth grade and then for the end of eighth grade. Now remembering that we had these advanced readers, these kids who were proficient or advanced, which is why I did not include by the end of third grade. We were looking ahead. If we had an entire third grade class that was, you know, not only all but four were maybe identified GT but they were all ahe—above grade level in reading scoring at the advanced level, we needed to be looking ahead at those fourth and fifth grade indicators for the writing and the reading and not, you know, holding them back but continuing to accelerate them.

So we looked ahead at fifth and eighth grade. So we looked at the standards and, again, you know, so what. There’s a lot in there. What do they really mean? We started talking about what are the levels of thinking involved in those standards and within those standards. And it really helps to sort of break those standards down. And this is something that’s helpful you can do with your staff or you can do with

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parents at a—at a parent or PTA meeting. We're gonna do a little bit of this process right now.

We're gonna think about the standards in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy.

And there is some conversation... You know, when Bloom did this, this was back in the '50s. We know a whole lot more about, you know, brain research and learning than we did 50 years ago. There is some discussion that synthesis and evaluation have been transposed or flipped around. So I've heard that in many states. But another—a nice little mnemonic I used to help myself remember this, I think of the word "ca-a-a-se" and I stretch out the "a".

With a silent "k" you really have the word "ca-a-a-se". And then I remind myself that application and analysis are not in ABC order. We're gonna think about Bloom and what we know about these levels of thinking connected to what the standards are demanding. So let's just... if we look back, what reading skills do those standards demand? Without even thinking about the writing, if we just think about the reading skills those standards demand, they demand some pretty strong reading skills.

They demand a high level of vocabulary and they demand knowledge of some organizational structures of text. So in order to get that high level of writing, we've gotta make sure within our reading we are teaching the vocabulary at a high level and that we are teaching the students the text structures. So let's go ahead then and think about some of these standards linked to the—to Bloom. Now if you look at this sheet, this is really—it could be a whole other workshop but I'm just gonna talk to you a little bit about the process because I think it's so valuable to take back to

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your staff or your team or, like I said, even your parents depending on what kinds of demands you address with your parents at some of your meetings.

We've got Bloom's levels here and then we've got the skills that each level demonstrates. Now an activity that's very helpful is if you take one of your state standards or take one of your school system's standards, pull some language out from the standard, think about which skills that language, you know, is demonstrating, and which skills students need to demonstrate to meet that standard and then what level of thinking is that. So, for example... And I usually look at—for a verb within the standard to start with.

So for language from this standard, if we looked at persuasive writing, we could look at... Let's look at this little phrase right here – “supports the position with organized and relevant evidence”. If I took on the bottom of my form here language from this standard and wrote down “supports the position with organized and relevant evidence”, think for a minute and talk at your table. What skills do the students need to demonstrate in order to just meet that piece of that standard?

And at what level of Bloom are they then functioning at or expected to function at? What did people find in terms of the level—the skills demonstrated and the level of thinking necessary for a piece of that persuasive writing standard? There's no one right or wrong answer. There's lots of different...

ALL: (Inaudible).

HS: No. No. But I mean there's lots of, you know...

FS: Well, my fifth graders need to know all of this, I mean, if we're just looking at like a little part of that. But they need to know—they need to define what they're going to be persuading someone to do.

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HS: Okay. So we're—you're really demanding that these children—the students are gonna have to go through every one of these levels and demonstrate a wide variety of skills at a wide variety of levels in order to meet the requirements in this standard here. So as... In fifth grade, right? By the end of fifth grade. So, you know, the back story, like they say in the film and TV industry, "The back story is"... I mean, when you think about the level of planning and instructing and the time it's going to take to address these different levels, this is huge.

There's a lot that goes into that. And we're expecting students to operate and function at a very high level. It's a rigorous standard. And, again, to be able to communicate to parents what the demands are in, you know, a persuasive writing essay, a persuasive piece, there's many levels of thinking. Did somebody wanna comment over here?

FS: We also discussed where the evidence was coming from. Was the evidence in, say, the article or some of the background information or were they having to create the piece from scratch? And as you mentioned that, if this is a standard for the year, those could be progressive pieces.

HS: Yes.

FS: When you do it the first time, you provide these pieces. When you do it the second time, you don't provide as much. And you keep moving. So, really, if you're talking about using all of the Bloom's levels, it may be over time.

HS: Uh huh. Absolutely right. Yes. It's definitely... Yes. It's definitely by the end of fifth grade, by the end of eighth grade. Our standards are written by the end of third, by the end of fifth, by the end of eighth. Yes. So it is over that time. Again, over time means we've gotta have processes in place and make sure we've got those

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relationships to know that it's happening over time, to make sure that fifth grade is talking to fourth grade and knows that they ended the year on this piece or that the skill level, you know, was attained to really move in.

Because do we have time to keep re-teaching at the beginning of the year? We don't. We've got to make sure... Unless we have a highly mobile population where we're not sure, you know, coming from other districts, if you have a number of your students in your building from year to year, you've gotta have those relationships and processes in place to communicate about that. It is over time. Yes. It's very rigorous. And, yes, they do need to be able to research their evidence by the end of fifth grade, that it cannot be, you know, developmentally in third grade when they're working on persuasion and fourth grade. Definitely in third grade they're not doing as much research. A lot of it is their own thinking process and support because it's something more personal to them. They're more egocentric. But by fifth grade it's got to be a researched piece that they're doing for the persuasive writing. NAEP requires 60% is really informational in persuasive writing, which is why we looked at those standards the most.

And we decided to focus most of our instruction and our discussion around persuasive informational writing. Our staff felt comfortable with the memoir, with the personal narrative, going through that process, but we really felt that based on the new demands of our curriculum that we needed to focus more on having the children be able to write interesting, informative pieces and persuasive pieces that did address, you know, real issues with research. And so that's where we focused a lot of our time and energy.

END OF SEGMENT

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HOLLY SEARL 4 – student samples

HS = HOLLY SEARL; FS = UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE SPEAKER

HS: I've given you a couple student work samples that are persuasion pieces that our students did this year. Some of them do meet standards, some of them do not. And you can see that some of them are lengthier and cite sources, some of them do not. So you can see sort of the developmental... Persuasion Sample One is fourth grade. It's about midway through fourth grade. Whereas Persuasion Sample Two is the end of fifth grade. A technique we use to study author's craft in feature articles and those lessons are what led us—you know, led our students to write similarly to the quality of this piece in "White Rhino".

It's in more of a feature article form. It starts on page 23... because we wanted our students to be able to write informational pieces that were actually enjoyable to read and not boring, not that encyclopedic... You know, for these purposes teaching them different crafts that they could use to make something interesting to read. You can see that he used a variety of skills and author's techniques. We're gonna look at some sample lesson of how we did that and what we found great success within our school.

You've got a feature article called "The Comeback Humpbacks" by Adele O'Connor about humpback whales in our ocean and you've got this four square focus sheet here. It's just a sheet with four squares that has focus in each box. We found that when we used feature articles—informative feature articles as part of our direct instruction in writing, that our students were really able to use those author's techniques and crafts more purposefully in their own writing, and their writing really improved. It became more interesting to read. They were taking risks with some of the style and we were holding them more accountable for vocabulary because when

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we were teaching from these informative feature articles, the authors were using the rich vocabulary connected to their topic. And so in our upper grade level curriculum our students do need to research and write expert pieces. But we... And those pieces are self-selected. The topics are. But we expect them to be something enjoyable to read.

I mean, we've all read... How many people have spent a lot of time reading really boring pieces of writing and research reports? I mean, they're deadly. They don't hook the reader. No one wants to read them. They're not enjoyable. But we found through the feature article that it really opened up a whole new world of expressive, enjoyable, informative writing for our students. And we enjoyed reading it. This piece comes from the National Geographic archives.

There are a number of places where you can access feature articles to use in your classroom. The websites over there, it's magma.nationalgeographic.com. And you can just go into their archives. Ranger Rick has a number of rich stories. "Time for Kids". There are many feature articles that you can get if you go on the internet. And they're available for classroom and educational use.

On your four square piece for your focus we're gonna have two different areas of focus today. Now, again, typically you know your students. You might be focusing on one area of focus with an article a day. Depending on the pace and what the focus is, you might be doing two or three. But we're gonna look at two today. So you're gonna write "defining vocabulary in context" in one of your boxes and "using subheadings to organize information" in the other. And we know that our students need to include an appropriate level of detail in their writing.

We talked about how we're not seeing that and we're not seeing that even in job applications and when—and college graduates. So going back to that appropriate

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level of detail, linking it to the extensive vocabulary that we know many of our readers have, we need to look at ways to have our students study how real authors use that rich vocabulary in the context of their writing so that our students can then employ those same techniques. And what jumps out at me in the very first paragraph was how she defines breaching.

And it starts out, "Humpback whales are great acrobats. Using their powerful black and white speckled tails they leap out of the water and flop on their backs. This is called breaching". "Leap out of the water and flop on their backs", and then she uses a second sentence after that, "This is called breaching". That's one way she's used the vocabulary in context. She could have just said, "Humpback whales are great acrobats. They breach". And we all know that we have students who would give us that in their writing. That doesn't give us an appropriate level of detail. It hasn't defined for the reader what breaching is. But she has skillfully done that. So we would point that out to the students in using that feature article as a model, and then we would write it on our chart. They've seen it from the feature article that they had and then we've put it in the box to remind them.

Now can you look at the feature article and find another example of where the author has defined some vocabulary or used some vocabulary in context?

FS: She uses the word in the sentence and then she describes exactly what it is. So, "Some scientists say humpbacks breach because it helps them get rid of whale lice and barnacles" and then she goes on to define "Barnacles are tiny shellfish that bore headfirst into their skin".

HS: So in this case she's used the vocabulary in context a little differently. She's first used it in a sentence and then she's gone on for another sentence and clearly defined what those barnacles are. So she's got that appropriate level of detail in

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there. Students then are learning something new. They've learned the definition of a new word. They know exactly what barnacles are and then why barnac—or why the whales are breaching. So she's connecting it back to that first paragraph. Okay. And then there's another way that she does it on another page when she talks about the baleen on 423 at the top. She says, "Fisherman also wanted the humpbacks baleen. These are stiff strips that hang from a humpback's upper jaw and take the place of teeth". So sometimes she uses the vocabulary word a second time, other times she does not, which is important for the children to see a variety of ways that that—that that term is gonna be defined, because you don't want them to think there's just one way to define the vocabulary. So this is what we would do in terms of focusing the students on that focus area of defining vocabulary in context. We actually use the feature article. We had read through it once for pleasure to talk about it. But then we go back to it as a teaching tool. We... you know, it might be a week or two that we get out of one feature article looking for the different pieces of the author's craft.

Now another thing that Adele O'Connor does well in this piece, and this might be where your children are in terms of their writing, is that they need to start organizing their information with subheadings. Again, how many of us have students who just run everything together? They haven't really broken it out and they don't give us helpful enough subheadings to guide the reader. So Adele O'Connor does that in "The Comeback Humpbacks". Let's look at ways she's used subheadings to organize information.

... right here at the beginning. "They're back." Just setting the context that, you know, in 1965 there were 30,000 less humpbacks than there are today. So that there—there's this return of this whale. She's got "flying leaps", "deep sea singing".

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So she even uses a little bit of alliteration in that subheading. Okay. “Coming up for air”, “going the distance” helps the reader find certain pieces of information and helps focus the reader on what they’re gonna read about next.

That’s a skill our students desperately need. They sort of run everything together.

We would look at our student’s writing first to see what is in the student’s writing that they’re not doing that we want them to do? And then when we found a feature article, we would look for the aspects in that feature article that the author used that would help us demonstrate that skill. We would still use our typical model, the Writer’s Workshop Model, of the mini lesson first, and it would be this focused direct writing.

The students would then have independent writing time to go back and apply the new lesson, and then we would do sharing time at the end. But that’s the process we used with that. And if we go back to the “White Rhino”, what could some of those focus lessons maybe have been in this piece?

FS: Transition phrases to help the reader follow along but keep the interest.

HS: Okay. So transition phrases. Do you wanna give us an example?

FS: “Quick, what does a rhino eat”, and then goes on to explain... Kind of gets your attention.

HS: All right. Okay. So little leads that catch—that catch the reader and then follows up. Okay.

FS: Well, another example would be, “Now that you know what a white rhino looks like, where are you likely to find one”? That’s a good transition as well.

HS: Uh huh. Exactly. And learning that some of those transitions could be in the form of a question. Okay. The humor that he used, that was another focus that the author used. If you look at some really interesting feature articles, the authors use humor

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within their writing. They take risks. That makes it enjoyable. It makes us sort of chuckle or smile a little. He really tried to take a risk and put some of those little sprinklings of humor in this piece. That had been a skill that had been taught to him.

Now this was interesting. At the end of fifth grade the teacher actually held the students accountable for matching their sources to what they—what they learned about the white rhino. So you can see that notation. This was—this was something that we found very helpful and beneficial in terms of our informative writing issue, that use of those feature articles and knowing that the students were really comfortable not only reading (so they were getting more of the reading and reading about real things, real topics), but then very comfortable trying to benchmark against those published authors and try that craft. And it was really helpful to them. You are free to use the different student samples this year. There's also a sample from NAEP in your hand outs, a persuasive writing sample on page 13. This is a persuasive writing sample from grade eight's NAEP. This is what the prompt or the demand would be at the eighth grade level. Turn to page 26. That's your summarizer today. It's the two-word strategy. I don't know if anyone's familiar with this strategy from "Revisit, Reflect and Retell" by Linda Hoyt. It's a great book of different ways that you can help students go back and reflect and retell and summarize their learnings from really related to reading in many content areas. But in the two word summarizer you think of two different words that summarize your new learnings or ideas from today's topic or workshop. And then after you identify both words you write about why you selected those words. Thank you. Thank you. Okay. Thank you. Well, thank you so much. It was wonderful to work with all of you today. And...

END OF SEGMENT