

Teacher Commentary Transcript

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Prior to the Lesson 1

P: We started the process of organizing our how-do videos. So I had a mini-lesson with them on how to organize their information. If you have all this information but you don't know how to categorize it, it can be difficult to explain to someone else. So I told them the purpose of making these how-to videos was to explain this information, but we wanted to make sure that the viewers understood. So I had them organize their information based on the appearance of their severe weather, the location, damage and safety procedures they had researched.

We also looked at some cause and effect relationships, specifically between the severe weather and the damage it could cause, or the effects that may come from it. So for example this group doing lightning said if you see lightning, you want to go in a building or a car; because lightning is as hot as the sun, it can strike a house, and then the house will catch on fire, so they had already seen those connections that were forming, and then lightning hits the highest spot so stay away from trees and buildings. So they had already started making those cause and effect relationships within informational texts.

J: And they're actually as they're making those, they are inferring what those effects are from what they have read.

P: And it's not just giving them a sentence and saying telling me what is the cause and effect relationship, they're actually realizing, oh if this happens, then this can happen. That's that application I'm looking for. I'm not just looking for recalling, but application.

J: And understanding that comes along with that. Because sometimes those effects are more complicated, or the causes are more complicated, and then they have to realize that it's complicated so they have to go back and understand better

P: And some causes will have several effects, and that's important to notice too. It's not just one cause and one effect. Sometimes there's several things, or several causes for one effect, so that's important for them to notice as well.

J: Not just getting caught up in this little terminology game but really what this means. This is a great unit to do it with, because the effects of severe weather –

P: It really lends itself to it, yes. There's not a lot of tugging and pulling to get information out of kids, because they'll tell you right away, if this strikes my house, my house is going to go on fire. They realize that very quickly.

PRIOR TO THE LESSON 2

J: They did some writing in here, in the process also?

P: They did. Right before we got ready to do our how-to videos, and the organization of creating the video, I was interested to see what they had picked up. So I asked them to do what we call a cold write, where essentially I give them a question and I ask them to write me some information for that question. So the question I gave my students was "We've researched information about a specific severe weather. Articulate an in-depth understanding of your research topic. And then I gave them some questions to pair with that to jog their memory. Some of those questions were, "What does your severe weather look like? How is it formed? What damage can it cause? What would you need to do in

order to stay safe if the weather was approaching.

I think doing a writing sample like this, especially when I reflect back on we as a district have been doing monthly writing samples for a long time now and sometimes it's very difficult to get an accurate sample from children, because if they're not interested in the topic you give them, or they're simply just don't know anything, they just don't have much to write.

P: The reason that I felt like my students were successful with this was that they already had a bank of knowledge to pull from. Because they had had conversations about it, it was really ingrained in their brains. They didn't have to think about it too much, they just had to think about the process of putting it on paper.

P: And I think children need that, they need to time to share with each other, did you know this? Or this is what this says, my book says this. I think when they have that opportunity to talk with each other about it, when it comes time to write it on paper, all of a sudden, they already know what to write. They don't have to look at their teacher and say, what am I doing, what should I write, what should I say? Because they've already formed it in their brains and they really understand it.

J: And they've been thinking about it and caring about it

P: Several students bring a lot of information to the table. One student was writing about lightning. She was giving information like, "to stay safe you have to stay away from trees, buildings and tall areas because lightning always hits the tallest spot. Lightning is hotter than the sun, so if it strikes buildings or homes they could catch on fire." So that's her bringing in that cause/effect relationship, which I hadn't asked her to do in her writing, that kind of came naturally because she says this is what happens. "Did you know that lightning looks like a massive spark because lightning is made out of electricity and electricity looks like a big ball of light So you can also see that she's starting to understand those in-depth concepts that she'll learn as she goes further in school, but because now she just has this information, she has a good baseline.

So I think when it comes time for her to really understand what electricity is and how it works, I think she'll be successful at it because she's already had this background knowledge. 36: knowledge. That's why for us as teachers, we're constantly trying to make those comparisons to something they do at home, or something they've done before, because when they can make that connection, all of a sudden it's much easier for them to understand.

P: I had one student – when he is trying to process information, you can tell even when having a conversation with him, it's very difficult for him to articulate what he wants to say. You can tell that his processing time is much longer than an average second grader. But I was really proud of him for this writing sample, because most of the time, when I reflect back on when I gave him a writing sample in August, he wrote me maybe two sentences, and you wouldn't be able to understand what he wrote because he just wasn't interested in writing it, and he's learned, if I just put it on paper, the teacher will leave me alone because I did something. So I was really proud of him for this piece because he wrote about floods. He said, " This is all about floods. You need to make sure that you're not near a flood. Try to get up somewhere high. Don't get down because you will be drowned. If you have a pet inside, try and save him. You need to have sand bags in front of the door if it is a small flood." So there's that detail, he's already made the distinction that sand bags aren't going to work if the water is up to the roofline, but if you just have a little flood, you can use sandbags. "You need to have a life jacket." which was interesting, because in the whole research time, I don't think a life jacket came up with that group, but he's made that connection that if there really was a flood, if there was time, I would grab a life jacket. So it's interesting to see how all of this information has come out. You can tell he has a very in-depth understanding of what he's talking about.

I think he did a fantastic job with that, just being so confident in what he wanted to say. But again I think that goes back to, he'd had conversations with his friends about it and he really felt like he had some information to write. He didn't have to worry about what am I going to say, he just had to worry

about how am I going to put it on paper.

J: That's really interesting because it really respects that – sometimes we talk about being a good writer as though knowing what you want to say is automatic, which obviously, it isn't.

P: No

J: But once they have all this information, they can focus on, how am I going to get it down on paper.

P: Then they just have to focus on writing. Cause sometimes if they have two things they have to focus on while they're writing, it's overwhelming. That's when you see kids shut down, and not perform to the ability that you know they can perform.

J: They put something on the paper, but it's not really

P: It's not really what they think, or even what they really want to say, but they get so nervous and they think I just have to put something down there.

MODEL/GUIDE 2

J: And you chose several examples of – well first you chose the tsunami

P: That had lots of information but just really wasn't - I don't think any of them will remember anything from that video. Just because it wasn't entertaining. And I think that's really important, because if you can make learning fun, and you help students understand that when you convey information in a way that's entertaining, that's when people remember it and they listen to it.

J: They all picked up on wanting some humor from several of them, so it seemed like those models were extremely helpful for them.

P: I think you have to almost – if I had just gone to them and said, write your scripts, that would have been overwhelming. It makes it a lot easier if you give them an idea. I think about myself. If I'm trying to be creative, the first thing I do is go out and look and see what other people have done. So I try to give them that same opportunity. These are things other people have done. Now that you've seen it, what would you do? I think that was really beneficial with creating their scripts. We were able to do that in a day because they had everything they needed in order to create it.

J: And I think the conversations you had about each of those were really helpful. The questions you asked them about would this be helpful to you in the video, why did this make you interested, I think sometimes little kids have trouble taking something out of its context and applying it to their context, like tying your shoes they'd want to write a song just about tying your shoes. But since you'd had that conversation about how you could use this, it seems like they were able to excerpt it and take it to a whole different context.

P: My goal was to make them critical thinkers and so I want them to be constantly evaluating everything they see, and then taking that information and then translating that into their own work. So that was the purpose of that. I think that that modeling of different activities and resources is really important so they are able to make that transfer.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE 1

J: So then they worked on the scripts and that was interesting too to see their different processes. Different kids approached it in different ways. You want to talk about that?

P? Some students wanted to just write, right away, and then I had several groups who were, no, we need to act this out, let's get the kinks out before we're ready to put anything down on paper. And I was telling each group, there's no one right or wrong way to do this. Writers work in different ways. Sometimes they've got to talk it out with somebody and act it out, and sometimes they like to get it all on paper and then they go back and make revisions to it. So I thought that was really interesting. One thing I did note during this whole process was that I talked a lot about the collaboration piece, working together, and then actually making that decision to participate and help out your group, not hurt your

group but help them. I think that was definitely more challenging for some than others. I had one group where I had two students who were butting heads, having a hard time deciding whose idea they were going to go with. We did have a middle person in the group who was , just make a choice, but it did come down to a point where the two girls had to decide, OK, are we going to work together, or are we going to go separate ways and that will affect our entire video. I think they realized if they went separate ways and you do your thing and I do my thing, their video wasn't going to look good. So having that project forced them to say, OK, we've got to work together and come up with a plan, and I think showing the messiness of that process is important. It's not like kids get together and agree on everything and have these great ideas and talk things through, and I think this is all part of the learning process. What do you do when there is conflict? How do you resolve it? And how do you do it in a way that is appropriate?

P: The thunderstorm group, they were trying to figure out who would be the person – they wanted this person who would be out there and do this and I just looked at G and said, well you're in our school play, that's very similar to your part, and his friends didn't know that. They knew he was in the play but they didn't know what his part is. So as soon as I brought that up and as soon as he did it, they were yes, it's you. So they are able to make those decisions. But sometimes I think that if you know your students really well and know what their strengths are, you can lead them in that direction without saying, G needs to do it because he would be the best at it. They made that decision themselves. I just pointed them in that direction.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE 2

J: Now when you went, you were very skillful at conferring with them – sometimes they come up with things that are either don't quite have the information in them, or there's a kernel of a good idea there, but it doesn't quite come across yet. Can you think about any of the ways, how you approached those conferences to help them?

P: My flood group had that. They had this great idea about how they wanted to scare the person, and when I approached them, I kind of brought them back. They had the entertainment and they were missing the information. So when they showed me their idea, I brought them back to this (the sheet with questions) and said, OK, let's go to the checklist, and while we're going through this, I want you to evaluate if you have this. And I didn't really have to tell them, I just said, OK, the first thing is to state your severe weather. And they said we did that, and I said, great. Then we got to the second one, what does it look like, and they looked at each other and said, oo, we didn't do that, OK, we'll add that. And then we got to the next one and we went through the list. So I didn't have to tell them, you did this wrong, they kind of realized through their own self-reflection, we left out some pieces, we have to go back and fix that. So, then it makes them feel like, they're the ones adjusting this, not like I did this wrong, I can't go on, they realize they had just made a mistake themselves and I have to fix it. Because you can't fix something until you realize yourself that you are doing it wrong.

J: And you really believe it, right, it's not just the teacher telling you this,

P: They really have to believe this is not right and I need to fix this 26:07 and not just me standing there saying this isn't right.

J: So the fact that they had a certain amount of guidelines to start with that they could go back to, so you could still put the ball in their court for fixing it, they could figure it out. They didn't have to guess what you wanted.

LESSON REFLECTIONS

P: I think that giving them that creative outlet was really important for this process, because it made it their own. And it's interesting to see how every single group's video was different; none were exactly

the same.

J: And really also it seemed like you were able to utilize the different types of strengths that some of the kids had. Who would have known that some of the kids were as expressive as they were as actors, or could sing, or other kinds of talents that got brought out. It seemed to me that those supported their learning of the information.

J: Or people who may not have been the leaders in gathering the information, but then their strength comes in in presenting it. So by the end, they all feel – which they have – that they've all had an important part in it.

P: Because they've had a part in creating it.

J: So it seems – I know we're so often pressed for time in school, but the end result of that kind of sense of ownership and understanding –

P: It's so much more than if I just told them to fill out a test for me or write me a paper at the end of it. It was interesting. It was interesting to see what nice adjustments they made over the time they were working on it from that initial piece.