

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

February 25, 2003

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Weinlos School's Instructional Focus: Narrative Writing

ORIGINATOR: L. Payne, Principal, Weinlos School

RESOURCE: Chris Black, Rayanne Iverson, Rita Johnson, Kerry Light, Tanis Marshall

STAFF: Regena Mitzel, Janet Smith

INFORMATION

Weinlos Elementary School, located in Millwoods, serves 325 students in K-6. It is a district site for the Mild Mental Disabilities and Behaviour Assistance programs. The school population reflects the unique nature of a multicultural community with a proportion of the students having English as their second language.

The implementation of the instructional focus at Weinlos School began in August 2001. At the onset, a review of school and provincial achievement data illustrated narrative writing was a relative weakness for students. The results of the data analysis coincided with writing being an area of staff interest. In consultation with the staff, students and community, it was determined that a research-based focus on narrative writing would be most beneficial for our student population.

*At Weinlos School, we will undertake a whole school coordinated effort to have our students show growth in their ability to create a narrative story. This will be accomplished through the implementation of a school wide focus on narrative writing in all classes. We will measure our students' growth through teacher and provincially designed marking rubrics.*

The staff agreed that although there were many different methods to deliver narrative writing instruction, they wanted to make common what would be taught and how it would be taught. In order to achieve focused and consistent teaching, professional development and collaboration became the most significant aspect of our work.

Staff recognized that we could not implement best instructional practices without first understanding the writing process and assessment of writing. Internally, staff chose to evaluate student work monthly, using the provincial scoring guides for division two, with modified expectations for grades four and five. Grade two and three teachers were able to use or adapt the provincial scoring guide for grade three to evaluate monthly writing prompts. The primary grades (K-1), however, determined that provincial scoring guides did not adequately assess beginning writers. The division one teaching staff focused their attention on creating a marking rubric for beginning writers

During all meetings, teachers brought student work and marked papers from various levels, using the scoring guides to standardize the process. They then shared and discussed their results. Teachers

found that they were able to use the guides to assign marks that were reliable and valid. On a school wide basis, once the internal system of assessing writing was determined, staff moved on to focus the work on selecting best practices for the instruction of narrative writing. Developed from our marking guide, a set of best practices was chosen for each of the five marking categories: content, organization, sentence structure, vocabulary and conventions.

A practical binder of best practices was developed based on this organization at the division two level and teachers are fully implementing it with students this year. The division one staff are currently in the process of creating a binder of best practices that will be used with students from grades K-3.

As a result of the dialogue and professional collaboration during the first year of the initiative, the staff gained a clear understanding of the writing process and of one another's valuable work in the classroom. During the current year, the results of this process are very evident in our daily work. There is currently in place:

- School wide writing of one story per month
- School wide system of marking
- School and community wide sharing of internal and external assessment results
- School wide use of scrapbooks
- Principal relief time provided to staff to allow intervisitations
- Use of SIS marks program to standardize record keeping
- Support staff writing conferencing with all students
- Monthly Instructional Leadership Team meetings and divisional meetings provided for planning and reflection
- Provision of meeting summaries from Instructional Leadership Team and divisional meetings to maintain a record of the work.

The Weinlos Instructional Leadership Team has had the opportunity to attend school visits elsewhere in the district and to share ideas and best practices with district teachers. These visits, along with dialogue within the school walls, have begun a process of thinking about what our next steps might be. Research shows that narrative writing provides general ideas that later on assist children to solve problems, reorganize knowledge and allow teachers to make the learning process meaningful in their lives. It has become evident that narrative writing has made an impact on the learning at Weinlos and extensions are being explored in other curricular areas. Our monthly writing samples have brought forward the need to have students examine and assess their own writing and the need to put the rubrics into children's language for this purpose. In addition, narrative writing is extended into the reading process so that students become aware of the story structure that surrounds them in literature.

The initiative of *Focus on Supporting Teaching and Learning* has had a profound effect on the academic achievement, the pedagogical aspects of teaching and the community members of Weinlos School. All staff have capitalized on the *Supporting Teaching and Learning* initiative in a manner that has been meaningful for their students, that enhances their instruction and develops leadership skills. This shared leadership model is now being realized and observed in the teaching and learning at Weinlos School.

LP/nw