

Teaching method was a 'butterfly moment' at Halton Hills Christian School

By **Laura Konyndyk**
Special to The IFP

"We often settle for low-quality work when, with perseverance and careful critique, we are capable of excellence."

This is the conclusion that Ron Berger arrived at after visiting Anser Charter School in Boise, Idaho, where he encountered a series of butterfly illustrations by a first grade student named Austin. If you've seen Berger's

"Austin's Butterfly" video, you know how much Austin's butterfly improved with each draft: the first one is a sparse and uninspired marker drawing, but the sixth and final draft is a thing of beauty—detailed, colourful, and carefully rendered.

The video has inspired teachers all over the world to think more about the role that constructive criticism plays in helping students create quality work—including Amanda Vandervinne, Se-

nior and Junior Kindergarten teacher at Halton Hills Christian School (HHCS).

Like many people familiar with Austin's story, Vandervinne was struck by the fact that Austin's final illustration is not just the mark of a gifted artist, but the result of many thoughtful critique sessions with his classmates. After watching the video at a district PD day, Vandervinne decided to be intentional about making room for con-

structive peer-to-peer feedback in her own SK/JK classroom.

Her version of an "Austin's Butterfly" lesson went like this: She watched the Austin's Butterfly video with her class, and then asked each child to draw a picture of a penguin. After that, the class had the chance to critique their teacher's penguin drawing, based on what they'd learned from the video.

What could Mrs. Vandervinne do

to make her penguin look more like a penguin? What might she do better? What should she change? The questions prepared students for the next phase of their assignment: critiquing each others' work.

"It was really neat for the students to hear from each other how to improve their work," said Vandervinne. "It came from someone on the same level as them, not from above."

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