Exemplary Planning Commentary: English as an Additional Language

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1a. Central focus of the segment

The central focus of my lesson sequence is "debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence." The controversial topic in question is, "should parents monitor their child's activity on social media sites?" The language skills being targeted include expressing one's opinion, formulating an argument designed to persuade others, and arguing in a productive and collegiate manner. These language skills are taught and assessed through speaking, listening, and reading modalities.

This lesson sequence fits into a month-long unit that culminates in writing a persuasive five- paragraph essay. My sequence's culminating debate activity gives students the opportunity to construct an argument in the same manner as their unit culminating five-paragraph essay, while also engaging new language skills and competencies.

1b. Describe how the central focus and learning goals address English Language Proficiency Standards

My lesson sequence targets ELP standard 9.12.4: "an ELL can construct grade-appropriate oral and written claims and support them with reading and evidence." In addition, it also targets Common Core English/Language Arts standard 9.1.d: "[Student can] respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented."

The learning targets for my three-lesson sequence build on each other to ensure that students understand how to make accurate claims that are strong and persuasive. In addition, the group activities present in the unit will show students pragmatic strategies for agreeing and disagreeing in a respectful, collegiate manner.

The learning target for lesson one states, "I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing." The learning target for lesson two states, "I will categorize three claims in an argument as being 'strong' or 'weak.'" The learning target for lesson three states, "I will argue my stance on the social media debate with three strong claims and three debate sentences."

The three learning targets guide students of all comprehension levels through identifying claims in an argument (fact vs. opinion), recognizing what makes a strong or weak claim (importance of research and strong rhetoric, identifying bias), and integrate this information with their own personal experience with the debate question to construct a logical argument that is carried out in a collegiate manner. With these learning targets in place, students of all comprehension levels will be able to achieve the ELP and Common Core standards around which my sequence is constructed.

My lessons directly challenge and develop pragmatic and discourse competence through the framework of an academic debate on a topic that my students feel passionate about. Lesson 3, in which the students engage in debate with each other, allows students to practice pragmatic competence by providing sentence stems for presenting evidence, agreeing with an opinion, and disagreeing with an opinion. Students will recite these stems orally, practice with the instructor, and then use the language when they debate with each other. The structure of the debate graphic organizer allows for discourse competence to be developed, as the structure lends itself easily to that of a five paragraph persuasive essay, which is the culminating assessment for this unit.

In addition, metalinguistic competence is assessed and developed during lessons one and two, when students analyze an example written argument. In lesson one's claim-finding activity, students are shown how to search a piece of writing for important claims and evidence. This language-learning strategy will aid them with comprehension of longer pieces of academic writing in the future, which cannot be fully parsed in a single class period.

Finally, exit slips (see the assessments section) given each day give students the opportunity to identify new vocabulary learned during each class period. This strategy for developing grammatical competence allows students to capture the new words that they learn each day.

1c. Explaining how lessons build and link to language skills and content

The learning target for lesson one states, "I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing" the learning target for lesson two is, "I will categorize three claims in an argument as being 'strong' or 'weak'," and the final learning target for the sequence is, "I will argue my stance on the social media debate with three strong claims and three debate sentences." The learning targets build on one another to improve the pragmatic competence of all students, as well as explicitly targeting reading and speaking modalities. Metalinguistic competence strategies and the listening modality are also targeted through activities in lessons one and two.

Lesson one requires students to read a persuasive argument and identify pieces of information that support the author's stance on the debate question. The activities and learning target of this lesson, "I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing," explicitly targets reading modality, developed through a cooperative activity. In addition, strategies for skimming a piece of academic writing for important information are provided. This is a vital metalinguistic strategy for my student population, who all hope to be "mainstreamed" into a general education high school.

Lesson two builds upon this knowledge by asking students to differentiate between fact and opinion, and note the importance of research and preparation when trying to persuade others through written or oral communication. This lesson again explicitly targets reading modality, though speaking is also used when students work together to decide the difference between strong and weak claims used in the written example essay used in lesson one. With an explicit connection to lesson one through concept and materials, I will be able to assess students' development in relation to the content (their ability to identify claims and whether they are strong or weak in developing the argument) and their development in language proficiency (reading a piece of academic writing with a purpose, working cooperatively with peers, constructing an argument).

Lesson three asks students to organize their thoughts, plan out their argument, and then verbally debate with each other. The activities and learning target for this lesson explicitly develops language proficiency in the speaking modality. The graphic organizer provided (see materials section) requires students to listen to the other team, note their claims, and decide on a winner. Students are also required to identify which debate sentence stems they used during their debate on the back of the paper. In addition to the informal assessment I engage in when I circulate around the room and give "check grades" to students who are actively participating, this graphic organizer is the culminating assessment of how student's ability to construct an argument to persuade and argue verbally has evolved over the course of the sequence. Finally, the pre- and post-assessment gives students an opportunity to take a stance on the prompt under debate throughout the sequence, providing another written record of how a students' arguing ability may have improved.

1d. Opportunities to express learning targets (Washington State only).

Each day, class begins with my presentation and clarification of the learning target (e.g. I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing). After new vocabulary and concepts in the learning target have been clarified, students are instructed to turn to one another and explain, in their own words, what they will learn today. Students are also encouraged to guess what the activities for the day might be, or why the skills they are learning in class are important. During this time, I circulate through the room to ensure everyone is participating.

This process only takes the first five minutes of the period, and is vital not only for setting a proper tone for the period, but also for cultivating positive teacher-student relationships. In his book Classroom Management that Works, Robert J. Marzano states that student-teacher relationships are at their best when learning goals are communicated at the beginning of class, and are revisited throughout the period with clear feedback (2003). It is with the latter goal in mind that I designed a daily exit slip that allows students to express the understanding of the learning targets, with clear feedback on how their understanding is progressing.

In my daily exit slip (please see an example of this in the assessments section), students will write down what they learned in their own words. The exit slip for the last day of the sequence, day three, gives students an opportunity to express why learning debate is important for their education. Since this sequence takes place in the middle of a unit on persuasive writing, it is my aim that students express the importance of fully expressing an opinion, or identify the importance of respectfully disagreeing with other students in an academic context.

2a. Summary of students' prior knowledge

Students are already able to read and comprehend an academic essay at a 3rd-5th grade level. Prior to this sequence, they have learned how to identify the basic parts of a five paragraph essay (introduction, body paragraphs, conclusion, hook, call-to-action. While students may not have any academic debate skill, a large number of outgoing personalities in the class ensure that a speaking activity will be met with enthusiasm. Students in my class are able to talk to each other without any anxiety, regardless of linguistic or cultural barriers. This gets rid of the largest hurdle to overcome for a successful speaking activity: student anxiety. With regard to formal speaking activities, students have learned how to carry on a basic conversation and express their ideas, but they may not be able to do this in an academic manner as required by a debate.

Students will be learning to express, defend, and argue their opinion on a controversial topic in an academic and collegiate manner, as stated by the central focus, "Debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence." Students will learn how to identify claims in a persuasive piece of writing, differentiate between "strong" and "weak" claims, and the structure of an academic debate. These are displayed by the learning targets for each lesson: "I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing," "I will categorize three claims in an argument as being 'strong' or 'weak', and "I will argue my stance on the social media debate with three strong claims and three debate sentences." To do this, students will be reading pieces of academic writing on the subject, connecting this with their personal experience with the debate topic, and using new vocabulary and sentence stems to express their opinion.

2b. Summary of student assets

The class shown in my sequence is made up of students from half a dozen countries. Most of these students come from families of a low socioeconomic status (98% of students are on free and reduced lunch). The circumstances under which some of my students came to the US (Civil War, asylum, etc.) may cause them great duress, so special attention must be paid to language or subject matter that may be a "trigger" for these students. Language and content presented in the class should be approachable by students of many English proficiency levels, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences.

Three of the students in the classroom are SIFE students. As students who have passed the "newcomer" program and graduated to the high school program, basic linguistic competence is guaranteed. However, some of the SIFE students may be more comfortable with academic skills such as note-taking, essay-writing, or debating, than others. To support these students, I have prepared annotated models and "mini-lessons" related to the academic skills required by my lesson sequence (e.g. how to fill in a graphic organizer, or how to take notes on a piece of writing).

One of my students has an IEP related to dyslexia. This student's IEP requires that all assessments can be conducted or submitted orally. I have school-provided dictation software to convert his oral answers into text, and will insert this student's responses directly into digital copies of assessments if necessary. However, it is also important for this student's IEP goals that they are given the opportunity to answer in writing, so these alternative assessments will only be used as a backup if the student needs it.

The central focus for my sequence states that students will be able to, "debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence." After noticing how often my students are trying to communicate with each other on social media during class, I chose a topic that would get students excited to argue with each other, "should parents monitor their child's activity on social media?" Many students tell me that they use social media to communicate with friends and family in their home countries as well. This topic, combined with my students' general outgoing nature and enthusiasm towards speaking activities, provides a solid connection between my students' prior personal and cultural experiences, and the new content and language skills taught by my sequence.

3a. Selecting learning activities based on prior knowledge and other assets

Given my students' familiarity with the five-paragraph essay model, I decided to present the *for* and *against* arguments for the debate topic (should parents monitor their children's activity on social media?) as two five paragraph essays. This gave students a central document to refer back to during argument planning, and a few chances at skimming the essays for strong claims and crucial information provided an opportunity for students to develop metalinguistic competency as well. The information gleaned from these five paragraph essays were then used to create new language output (debate sentence stems and vocabulary) in new modalities (speaking and active listening). Using language constructs familiar to students as a stepping- stone towards new knowledge is a practice widely supported by Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky's theory of educational scaffolding, which states that students need to build upon material they have already mastered to learn new concepts.

My decision to emphasize group activities that were collaborative and competitive in nature stemmed from both a practical and theoretical need for more communication in the classroom. This lesson sequence was conducted during a "break week" between two standardized tests that were administered at the school. As such, most classroom activities were individual writing assignments or test-taking workshops that were not conducive to collaborative, cooperative work. In his research on instructional scaffolding, Lev Vygotsky states, "what [a] child is able to do in collaboration today, he will be able to do independently tomorrow" (1987). Small group work also is generally a lower-anxiety activity than individual written assessments or verbal performance in front of the class, something central to my educational philosophy. Dr. Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis states that meaningful language acquisition cannot take place if students feel nervous or anxious. Dr. Krashen's findings also mirror my own language learning experiences. Thus, when designing classroom activities, I make sure to design ways for students to practice new language functions with each other in a low-pressure setting, while still leaving opportunities for me to assess them formally and informally. Smaller-scale, cooperative speaking activities are also more easily adaptable for my SIFE students and learners with an IEP.

3b. Selecting learning activities for the whole-class and individuals

My instructional strategies consist mainly of brief direct instruction followed by activities that encourage group work, cooperative communication in English (seating is such that students are not sitting next to students who speak their native language), and low-stress opportunities to apply new concepts and use new grammar and vocabulary. Support is offered through frequent circulation throughout the room, prompting students to practice new grammar, vocabulary and concepts, and daily exit slips that give students the opportunity to assess how they are progressing relative to the learning targets.

My classroom includes one student with an IEP related to dyslexia, and several SIFE students. The SIFE students are all very high functioning and have made a successful transition from the newcomer to the high school program. However, concerns over PTSD due to the circumstances of their immigration to the United States, as well as possible gaps in more basic class knowledge (e.g. how to use a graphic organizer) may still exist. As such, I designed my sequence to use as much direct verbal language as possible. All activities involving written material also incorporate some kind of visual or kinesthetic component to increase accessibility to other students. For example, the "claim sorting activity" in lesson two asks students to shuffle pieces of paper into groups, and the "claim highlighting activity" on the same day asks them to highlight strong and weak claims in different colors. I have also developed annotated materials and mini-lessons to explain how students can use a graphic organizer, or take notes directly on a piece of writing.

These strategies are also beneficial for my IEP student, who needs to engage in oral activity whenever possible, and tends to struggle with written activities that do not engage at least one other type of learning style or intelligence. The student in question will be expected to turn in a graphic organizer and complete daily Exit slips and written assessments, but must be given the opportunity to answer orally, per the requirements of their IEP. I can use dictation software provided by the school to record this student's verbal responses and turn them into text directly in a digital copy of the chosen assessment. That said, building towards more confidence in written activities is another requirement of this student's IEP. As such, the dictation software and verbal responses will only be used if the student seems to be having great difficulty with an assignment, or if they specifically request to use it.

3c. Resources for getting help on learning targets (Washington state only)

The Exit slip completed each day includes a field that asks students to identify two resources that may help them if they need more assistance with the topic covered in class. This gives students an opportunity to identify books, school resources, and individuals that may help them towards achieving the learning targets for each lesson. Coupled with the other questions on the Exit slip, the data collected will accurately track my students' progress towards the learning targets in and out of class.

I will be monitoring the data from my SIFE students especially closely. Since they have come from a country that may have lacked a formal education system, or have other significant life experiences that prevented them from going to school, they may not be able to identify helpful resources in a school besides just asking the instructor for help. This is why I have put an example in the question on the Exit slip ("example: A person or book"), to show students the kind of resources they could list. Additionally, I have created an annotated Exit slip that I can show the SIFE students if they are having trouble with their responses.

My student with an IEP will be given a chance to complete his Exit slip (and identify resources to support his learning) orally. I have a digital copy of each day's Exit slip created especially for this purpose, and will be ready to use the dictation software to record his verbal responses at the end of each class period. I anticipate this will be needed for the Exit slip, as this student is usually much more comfortable with direct instruction than with expressing feelings or opinions in English.

4a. Identifying the language function

During this debate lesson sequence, students will be arguing their opinion on a controversial topic as stated in the central focus, "Debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence." The learning target for lesson three also directly targets this language function, "I will argue my stance on the social media debate with three strong claims and three debate sentences." While the activities in this sequence allow for several different language functions to be used, the arguing of an opinion within the structure of an academic debate is the main focus.

4b. Learning activities enabling practice with the language function

The culmination of the lesson sequence comes in lesson three, in which students, "argue [their] stance on the social media debate with three strong claims and three debate sentences." The quantitative requirements in the learning target, and the graphic organizer that is filled out during the activity (see materials section) provides some much-needed structure to the arguments happening in-class. Students are likely not used to a formal academic debate, and will need the "flow" that my direct instruction and organizer provide so that they may achieve the learning target.

Students will also have access to a list of debate sentence stems, which they will circle as they are used in the argument. These sentence stems guide the conversation towards new language demands, namely ensuring that the debate is argumentative and not merely recitation of information. Sentence stems are grouped by function in an argument (e.g. "expressing an opinion," "agreeing," "disagreeing") so that students can easily use them to argue their stance on the topic based on the context of the conversation.

4c. Additional language demands

There are several words that students will need to fully understand in order to successfully complete the central focus, "Debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence." Key vocabulary words include: debate, claim, evidence, reason, stance (in an argument), position (in an argument), and monitor. Sentence stems such as, "We argue _____ because _____" and, "I disagree with your stance on _____" are provided to assist in the flow of communication during the debate, and to ensure that the debate remains argumentative.

The debate lesson sequence places the most emphasis on developing pragmatic competence through written and oral activities. While students are comfortable talking with one another, students do not know how to have a structured argument about a single topic, and may have trouble speaking to persuade others. To this end, I scaffold persuasive language by providing examples of persuasive language related to the prompt in a format the students are familiar with (the five-paragraph essay). On the day of the debate, I will give direct instruction on the "flow" of an academic debate, and instruct them how to use the graphic organizer to plan their argument, so that students of all speaking levels can present their argument and challenge their pragmatic competence. The graphic organizer also guides active listening during the activity, where students must listen to the claims of their partner and note them in their graphic organizers. After this, students can compare the claims presented to see who won the argument.

This activity is assessed by having students turn in their completed graphic organizers with sentence stems circled, as well as a participation check grade I give when I walk around the room during the activity.

4d. Supporting language use

During lessons one and two, students are given two model persuasive essays on the debate prompt (Should parents monitor their child's activity on social media sites?): one "for" essay and one "against" essay. These essays follow a five-paragraph format that the students have already studied prior to my lesson sequence. This provides a great example of how an argument is constructed, so that they might see what kind of information and sentence stems they need to use when they argue their stance in lesson three.

In lesson three's debate activity, the primary language supports available to the students are my direct instruction of the debate flow and sentence stems, and the graphic organizer students are required to complete. My direct instruction includes a written example of how a debate should "flow" compared to a regular conversation, or an unstructured argument. Students are told that each team has a turn presenting one claim, back and forth, before the real argument can begin. Students are also told the ground rules for a speaking activity in class: students cannot be interrupted while they are talking, all speaking must be done in English, and rebuttals should attack someone's ideas, rather than the person themselves. This instruction will help students conduct a successful debate.

The graphic organizer (see materials section) assists students in planning their argument for debate, with clear organization of different claims, and sentence stems used to express opinions or dis/agree respectfully with the other team. This graphic organizer also activates students' prior knowledge about the five paragraph essay to help them write a persuasive argument with three strong claims.

5a. Assessing student learning

My formal pre and post-assessment is a short quiz that includes two multiple-choice, and two short answer questions (see assessments section). The assessment tests knowledge of basic vocabulary for the sequence, "claim" and "debate." It also asks students to state, in their own words, the difference between a strong and weak claim, which is the focus of lesson two and provides the foundation for building a convincing argument in lesson three. Finally, the assessment asks students to respond to the debate prompt, "Should parents monitor their child's activity on social media sites?" This gives me an opportunity to see how my students' capacity to create a convincing argument has evolved over the course of the sequence. Administering the same short assessment before and after the sequence paints a clear picture of how students' knowledge progressed over the course of the sequence, and eliciting answers in their own words will allow me to see more specifically how their communication skills have evolved.

The Exit slips completed by students each day are informal assessments that give me valuable data for planning future lessons in the sequence. In the Exit slip students explain what they learned that day in their own words, list new vocabulary that they learned in the lesson, rate their comprehension on a scale of 5 (and explain why), identify resources they can use if they need more help with the lesson's content, and answer a question related to the day's learning target. These Exit slips are not entered into the grade book. It is vital that students know that writing "I don't know" is a perfectly valid answer and, in fact, provides much more useful data for my instructional planning than an incorrect answer. While they are not graded, the daily Exit slip assessment will be analyzed each day to prepare for future lessons in the sequence.

The debate graphic organizer and participation check grade are designed to explicitly measure each students' progress toward meeting the central focus of the sequence, "Debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence." The debate graphic organizer asks students to plan their argument in a small table, identifying three strong claims they will use to attempt to persuade the other team. During the debate, students have to actively listen to the other team's argument, taking notes on what claims the other team is using in their attempt at a persuasive argument. Finally, a prompt at the bottom of the organizer asks students to identify who "won" their debate, and why. It is my aim with this assessment that students will not only be able to construct an academic argument with strong use of evidence, but also be able to recognize a strong argument that they read or listen to. The structure of the organizer (see in materials section) also provides metalinguistic strategies that students might use when planning their written persuasive essays, or when they scan an informational article for useful facts. While the culminating assessment is an oral activity, I constructed this organizer as a way to impart the core concepts of an academic debate, even if a student is anxious or otherwise unable to participate in the activity.

5b. Adapting lessons

By offering several verbal activities that also target different intelligences (e.g. the visual/kinesthetic claim sorting activity in lesson two), and giving students the opportunity to conduct assessments verbally rather than in writing, I have supports across my sequence that will ensure all students can meet the learning targets for each lesson.

Only one of the students in my class has an IEP, related to dyslexia. This students' IEP states that he must be given the opportunity to take any assessment orally, due to difficulties with writing. In accordance with this students' IEP, I will have digital copies of each assessment with school-provided dictation software ready on each day, should they decide to take an assessment orally. The IEP, however, states that the student must be given a chance to do all writing activities to become more comfortable with writing. As such, the digital copies and dictation software will only be used if it seems the student has great difficulty on an assignment, or the student specifically requests it.

My SIFE students are all at a suitable English comprehension level for the activities in my sequence, but their interrupted education may mean that they need help with other academic skills. To this end, I have created annotated graphic organizers and Exit slips, so the SIFE students may see an example of how to fill out an organizer, or understand what kind of answers I seek on the Exit slip.

5c. Student reflection (Washington state only)

At the outset of each lesson, after clarifying academic vocabulary present in the learning targets (for example, "I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing"), students are asked to turn to their table groups and discuss, in their own words, what they will learn today. During this time, I circulate around the room to ensure that conversation is in English and on-task. This also presents a good opportunity for students to ask questions about the learning target in a more casual setting, where they may have been too shy to ask in front of the whole class.

Students also describe their understanding of the learning target on daily exit slips. On this informal assessment, students describe what they learned that day in their own words, rate their understanding of the learning target on a scale of 1-5 (with graphics of smiling and frowning faces helping to illustrate what the numbers mean), and identify two other places, people, or resources they can turn to if they need help. My student's responses to these questions will not

only give me valuable data as I move forward in planning my unit, but will also give me a good idea of how students feel about the content being taught.

5d. Strategies to promote student self-assessment (Washington state only)

Students will use their Exit slips to monitor how their learning is progressing through the sequence. On the Exit slip, students can quantify how well they achieved the day's learning target on a scale of 1-5 (with visual aids to help). They are also able to write what they learned that day in their own words, and express why this knowledge is important. Finally, students are asked to identify two resources they can use if they need more assistance in meeting the day's learning target, and answer one question about the content that comes directly from the pre and post assessment.

In addition to the Exit slips, students will also be shown their pre-and post-assessment scores after the completion of the sequence, to see how their understanding of the content and language competencies changed over the course of three lessons.