

! This example commentary is for training purposes only. Copying or replicating responses from this example for use on a portfolio violates TPA policies. Portfolios may be screened for originality using software for detecting plagiarism. Candidates submitting a portfolio for scoring must confirm they are the sole author of the commentaries and other writing. Failure to adhere to scoring policies may void scores and cause a report to the institution or state agency associated with the submission.

1. Lessons shown in video

Clip one shows direct instruction from the first ten minutes of Lesson one. Clip two shows instruction and interaction with students in the beginning of lesson three.

2. Promoting a positive environment

From 1:36 to 4:00 in clip one, and from 0:08 to 0:58 in clip two, I clearly state the overall goals for the sequence, and for the day of instruction. This involves identifying key vocabulary that students will need to know, testing students' prior knowledge of the content and language objectives, and having the students state the learning target to each other in their own words. In his book *Classroom Management that Works*, Dr. Robert Marzano claims that stating clear objectives at the beginning of each class period, and referencing them throughout class, was a key factor in promoting positive student relationships (2003).

Furthermore, when reviewing the learning target with students, I always elicit a definition for each unknown word from my students. I wait for at least one response, correct or not, from the students before giving them the definition. Correct responses (like the one at 0:08 in clip one) are rewarded with positive feedback, and the exact wording provided by the student is used on future assessments and materials whenever possible. This way, students not only see that I value their input during class, but also can feel like they are helping construct their understanding of new vocabulary and language function, rather than receiving it all from the teacher. When students feel they are contributing to the material being covered in class, rather than just receiving it, students can feel that their teacher respects them. The demand to guess the meaning of a new word using contextual clues is also a challenging language demand for this level of students. It is my hope that, through encouraging this kind of contextual guessing with new words, that my students will also become more comfortable taking risks in the classroom.

Throughout clip one (1:25, 6:47 and 7:05) I use humor in an attempt to make the classroom atmosphere more warm, inviting, and casual. Students have told me that they very much appreciate this, as the majority of them have come from countries where teachers always directed the class through rote memorization with a straight face. That said, due to the large number of different cultures in my classroom, humor must be used with discretion. In this sequence, humor was used to cultivate a more collegiate and friendly atmosphere for debate, rather than one of animosity.

There are several times in both clips (4:43 and the entire last minute of clip one, 6:50, 7:07, 7:28, and 7:44 in clip two) where I engage students one-on-one, while other students are engaged in small group work. Besides allowing me to conduct an informal assessment on how each student in the room understands the day's learning tasks, I employ this strategy to ensure that students know that I care about their progress. While I still encourage active hand-raising and questioning during class, I believe that it helps each student to know that they will be seen and addressed individually sometime during the class period. My student with an IEP needs this individual attention, not only to ensure they are staying on task, but to dictate a verbal response to a written activity, if necessary. SIFE students also benefit from this one-on-one attention, as the gaps in their knowledge can sometimes be very embarrassing for them, or a reminder of the duress they went through to come to school in the United States.

3. Engaging in communication

1:36 to 4:00 in clip one and the first minute of clip two show me clarifying the meaning of key vocabulary words in the learning target, then asking students to describe its meaning to each other in their own words. Students are not seated

next to a peer who speaks the same native language, to encourage interaction in English. This interaction takes place at the beginning of each class period in my lesson sequence.

Please note that students will be providing self-reflections on the learning target daily on their exit ticket slip. As such, I will go into much more detail about student voice as it relates to the learning target and why it is important in task three.

Developing language proficiency

Throughout both clips (0:06, 1:53, 2:11, 2:40, 2:50, 5:55, 7:23, 7:33 and 7:53 in clip one, 3:10 in clip two) I elicit student responses orally. I do not call on specific students, or direct the class to say the answer in unison, but instead have cultivated a classroom environment where any student is comfortable answering any prompt orally. Most of these elicited responses were related to unknown words in activity prompts or learning targets (e.g. “claim”). The use of prior knowledge or context within a sentence to guess the meaning of a new vocabulary word is an invaluable metalinguistic competency skill that students practice regularly in my classroom.

The last five minutes of clip two shows students planning the argument they will use in the debate, a cooperative speaking activity that serves as the culminating assessment for my sequence. Before students engage in the activity, I use direct instruction to explain the purpose of the graphic organizer (2:00 in clip two), and identify the language functions students will need to engage in to have a successful debate (active speaking and listening). I also elicit student responses to review what was covered in lesson two (3:10 in clip two). Both of these instruction strategies scaffold towards the sequence’s culminating speaking activity.

During the planning activity, students are working together to use the pragmatic and metalinguistic strategies from lessons one and two to construct a persuasive argument around the debate prompt. Clip two shows students using target vocabulary and sentence stems, working together to plan their final argument. This activity integrates the content aspect of the debate sequence with new language functions (speaking with the intent to persuade, participating in an academic debate) to achieve the goals set out in the learning target, “I will argue my stance on the social media debate with three strong claims and three debate sentences,” and the central focus, “Debate a controversial topic with appropriate use of strong claims and evidence.”

Link to prior knowledge and assets

From 2:00 to 3:00 in clip two, I activate students’ prior learning of the five-paragraph essay format to assist them in planning their arguments. Students studied the structure of the five paragraph essay previously, and will be writing a persuasive essay as the culminating assessment of the whole unit, after my sequence is finished. Activating this prior knowledge gives students valuable context for how to construct a persuasive argument, while also providing a speaking activity as a scaffold for their final written assessment.

Given that my lesson sequence focuses on debating a controversial topic, I knew that the topic I chose would need to be easily relatable and controversial in the students’ eyes. Thus, after noticing the amount of time students try to spend time on social media during class, I decided on the topic, “Should parents monitor their child’s activity on social media?” When introducing the prompt in clip one (7:53 in clip one) I ask students for examples of social media sites. After giving the initial example “Facebook” at (7:54 in clip one), I immediately received a flurry of responses from the students (8:00 to 8:30 in clip one).

Allowing students to provide open responses in this way ensured that they could understand the debate topic in their own personal and cultural contexts. Given the strong student response to the prompt after it was first explained (a student shouts “No!” at 8:58 in clip one), I knew that students were making connections to their own experience to enliven their learning about debate and persuasive arguments. Student enthusiasm is key to a successful speaking activity, and the response I got to this prompt on day one all but ensured enthusiastic participation on day three.

4. Deepen student learning

Student responses elicited throughout clip one (0:06, 1:53, 2:11, 2:40, 2:50, 5:55, 7:23, 7:33 and 7:53) were used to clarify new vocabulary words closely tied to the learning targets (e.g. I can identify a claim in a piece of persuasive writing) and central focus. Prompting students for a definition by encouraging educated guesses, or changing the part of speech of the target vocabulary to a more familiar word (e.g. “categorize” to “category”) promotes valuable metalinguistic thinking for my students, especially as they aim to join their American peers in the “mainstream” high school system. In addition, students who correctly guessed the definition of a new vocabulary word sometimes had their definitions used verbatim on future assessments, which reinforces the idea that their contributions to class can be valuable additions to the curriculum.

The end goal of all language learners should be to understand new words through a variety of contexts, rather than possessing a dictionary definition of all English words all the time. My eliciting of responses in clip one promotes this kind of language learning and thinking.

Language proficiency and modality

The debate graphic organizer, explained and distributed from 3:00 to 4:00 in clip two, supports students’ active participation in the speaking activity, while also engaging in development of their pragmatic competency. My direct instruction and one-on-one support during the argument planning activity helps students develop important pragmatic skills (speaking to persuade) while giving them an opportunity to practice saying these arguments aloud rather than just writing them down. The direct instruction also suggests active listening, and the sentence stems suggest what students can say if they agree or disagree with another students’ opinion.

Furthermore, my prompting for student definitions for new vocabulary throughout clip one (0:06, 1:53, 2:11, 2:40, 2:50, 5:55, 7:23, 7:33 and 7:53) allows students to practice the valuable metalinguistic strategy of guessing the meaning of a new word in context.

Culture and linguistic background

The debate prompt, presented from 7:44 to 8:30 in clip one, was designed to connect students’ sociocultural experiences to the academic skills being taught to ensure more active participation and enthusiasm towards the material. Students at my school often use social media to talk to friends and family in their home country, something unique to the background of the student population I work with. Once the prompt was thoroughly explained at 8:40 in clip one, students’ enthusiastic reactions prove that a strong connection was made between personal experiences and the content being taught.

The debate graphic organizer, presented from 3:00 to 4:00 in clip two, connects students’ prior learning of the five-paragraph essay structure to the spoken arguments they will engage in as the culminating assessment of my sequence. The use of the five-paragraph essay format in my organizer provides valuable scaffolding from what students have previously studied (written explanatory essays) to what students are about to do (spoken persuasive arguments) and will directly connect to what they are about to study (written persuasive arguments).

5. Analysis of teaching

While I strongly believe in my strategy of eliciting student responses to build vocabulary knowledge and metalinguistic competency, there were several times throughout both clips in which I could have done less talking and let the students contribute more. At 0:42 in clip one, I offer an example of a debate topic “Spring is the best season.” I got several passionate student responses, but was too quick to rush through an explanation of the learning target to properly engage them. Explaining the learning target is a critical task for each class period, but I had more than enough time to let students have an impromptu debate on seasons at this time. This would have allowed students to get an idea of what a debate is supposed to feel like, while allowing me to conduct an informal assessment on where student’s speaking and pragmatic skills were relative to the central focus before beginning the sequence. While the preassessment provided valuable data for this, observing students speaking in a debate context prior to teaching the sequence would have given

me a better idea of how my students, individually and as a whole, could develop their language skills through the content of my lesson sequence.

In addition, there were several opportunities for me in both clips to have students elaborate on the meaning of vocabulary both new and previously covered (2:37 in clip one, 0:25 in clip two).

This would be more effective than giving definitions to them directly, or simply asking “do you remember this word?” and waiting for a yes or no answer. A better question would be, “we learned the word claim yesterday, can anyone tell me what that means?” In the clip one timestamp cited above, I gloss over a vocabulary word in the learning target because it will be covered more in-depth later, when devoting a few minutes towards explaining it would have been a valuable opportunity for students to prepare for the second day of the sequence.

Finally, I want to adopt a system in which I can still keep the casual atmosphere in the classroom, but prompt more students in the classroom for answers, so that the same outgoing student doesn’t answer every single prompt in the class period. At some point, I think randomly calling on students would solve this problem, but I hope that I can create an atmosphere in which all students feel they can contribute to the class.

Finally, there were a few missed classroom management opportunities, in which I could have helped students more during group work or direct instruction to make sure they were on-task. At 5:00 in clip two, some students are talking over my explanation of the debate flow and rules, knowledge that is crucial for students to develop the proper pragmatic skills during the debate activity. The noise level of the students who are talking is perhaps magnified by the placement of the camera and microphone during taping, but I still could have done better to control these students during one of the more important periods of direct instruction. At 6:25 in clip two, a disagreement develops among a group of students who are planning their argument. Usually I try to let squabbles among students resolve themselves, as this is another authentic opportunity for students to practice valuable communication and competency skills in English. However, upon review of the video clip, it is clear that an intervention from me would have gotten these students back on task sooner, and use their communication skills more productively.

Overall, my biggest missed opportunities for the selected video clips – and the overall sequence were the handful of times I could have asked students to contribute more to class. I believe the purpose for which I elicited student responses was adequate (constructing definitions for new vocabulary) but aside from these scripted times I asked for student input, I could have been more flexible in allowing students to voice their opinions about what is being covered in the class. There were also a few classroom management problems that largely arose from my patrolling of the room during direct instruction and group activities. I firmly believe in giving students this one-on-one attention, but I should be swifter in dealing with interruptions that affect how my students understand and participate in classroom content and activities.

Changes for improvement

The benefits of having students contribute more to the classroom verbally are numerous. In his theory of educational scaffolding, Jerome Bruner states that speaking activities and practice are the pathway to higher-order psychological thinking. For children and adults, speech can enable more flexible, independent, and abstract thinking (Bruner 1978). Giving students more opportunities to think aloud, make an educated guess, or simply respond to teacher inquiry during class allows more opportunities for these psychological pathways to be opened.

Giving students more opportunities to negotiate learning outcomes with me during instruction is incredibly important (Rogers and Freire). My largest takeaway from watching these clips and analyzing my instruction is that I should not pass up any opportunity for students to contribute to what is being learned in the classroom.

Furthermore, there are numerous studies that suggest that proper language acquisition can only take place when the student uses it for communicative purposes (Krashen, 1995, Doughty and Williams, 1998, Ellis, 2002). While the activities in my lesson sequence do allow for language learning through communicative practice, I think this data also speaks to the necessity for ELL teachers to allow for as many chances for students to respond or communicate authentically as possible. Increasing such opportunities can only lead to less reluctance to speak English (which helps

with language acquisition, per Dr. Stephen Krashen's affective filter hypothesis), and lead to new discoveries in content and language learning.

With regards to classroom management, it is clear to me that I did not explain the expectations for student conduct during the debate clearly enough. Vague expectations for behavior makes classroom management much more difficult later, as identified by Marzano in his book *Classroom Management that Works* (2003).