

Vignette 6.6 Designated ELD Instruction in Eighth Grade Using Persuasive Language to Debate

Background:

Mrs. García teaches designated ELD to sixteen eighth graders in her school who are at the late Emerging and early Expanding levels of English language proficiency (ELP). Mrs. García also meets with a select group of *long term English learners* (EL students who have been in U.S. schools for more than six years) during seventh period for a disciplinary literacy class. This class includes involvement by community mentors, positive role models who have committed to building strong relationships with these students through high school graduation with the explicit goal of supporting their mentees to make deliberate decisions that will allow them to attend college and/or pursue the career of their choice. All EL students have a *zero period* where they take an elective, thereby extending their school day, which ensures that ELs receive targeted language instruction but do not miss out on any content classes and electives, such as art and music.

Lesson Context:

Mrs. García collaborates with the eighth grade English teachers and content teachers at the school to ensure that the designated ELD instruction students receive is directly aligned with the expectations their teachers have for their students' language use. During their planning, the teachers agree that, due to the fact that they integrate ELD in their content instruction, their ELs at the late Emerging and early Expanding levels of ELP, who have been in U.S. schools for two to three years, will be able to fully participate in most of the tasks. However, they anticipate that there are some tasks that these students will need additional support with, due to their particular language learning needs.

The eighth graders are learning about students' First Amendment rights and will be engaging in a variety of literacy tasks to develop and convey their understandings of the topic (see Vignette #1 above). One of the tasks students will engage in is a debate about the big question:

Should students be allowed to express any message or point of view while at school?

When they plan together, the eighth grade team determines that their EL students at the late Emerging and early Expanding levels of ELP would benefit from additional support in engaging in the literacy tasks for the First Amendment unit. In preparation for the series of lessons she'll teach, Mrs. García has gathered several short articles about debatable topics. The students will read the articles, discuss them, learn about the language in the articles, learn about language that is useful for debating, and apply their knowledge of the content and language to engage in several debates. Mrs. García's ultimate goal is for her students to be able to engage in the debates and persuasive writing tasks in Mr. Franklin's English class, as well as other content areas. The learning target and focus standards in Mrs. García's lesson plans for this series of lessons are provided below:

Learning Target: Students will read about debates, practice engaging in debates, and discuss language powerful for debates.

CA ELD Standards (Expanding): *ELD.P1.8.3 – Negotiate with or persuade others in conversations (e.g., to provide counter-arguments) using learned phrases (I agree with X, but...) and open responses; ELD.PI.8.4 – Adjust language choices according to purpose (e.g., explaining, persuading, entertaining), task, and audience; ELD.P1.8.5 – Demonstrate active listening in oral presentation activities by asking and answering detailed questions with occasional prompting and moderate support; ELD.PI.8.11 – a) Justify opinions or persuade others by providing relevant textual evidence or relevant background knowledge with moderate support; b) Express attitude and opinions or temper statements with a variety of familiar modal expressions (e.g., possibly/likely, could/would); ELD.PI.8.12a – Use a growing set of academic words...; ELD.PII.8.1 – Apply understanding of the organizational features of different text types... (debate here is seen as a text type; application of other Part II standards, as well).*

Lesson Excerpts

Mrs. García begins by explaining that for the next couple of weeks, they're going to be reading about topics that are *debatable*, that is, people typically have strong opinions about the topic and good reasons to support these opinions. Often, they will write arguments to express their opinions and try to persuade others to do something or at least to think about the topic in different ways. They may also engage in a debate, which can be informal or formal. She tells them that they're going to learn how to engage in more formal debates, which they'll be doing a lot of in their content classes. She gives them a brief explanation of what *justify* means in English and provides cognates for the word (where they exist) in students' primary languages (e.g., *justificar* in Spanish) and translations in students' primary languages for those that don't have cognates for the word (e.g., *palawang-sala* in Filipino).

She tells them an example of when she's debated with others in everyday life, and then she asks them if they've ever debated an issue with anyone and how they did it. She gives them a few moments to think about this, jot down their ideas, and then share with a partner. She also provides them with sentence frames to support them to use the words *debate* and *justify* in their short conversation (I debated about _____ with _____. My opinion was _____, and I justified it by saying _____.)

Mrs. García: Okay, so you can see that in real life, you're engaging in debate, trying to persuade other people of your point of view, all the time. So you already know something about debate. Now we're going to discuss how we debate in an academic environment, like school, and we're going to learn how to debate like scholars.

Mrs. García poses the question that is the topic of lessons for the week, and she also writes it on the white board:

Should students be able to debate issues in school?

She clarifies the meaning of the question and then asks the students to think it for a moment and rate the degree to which they agree with the statement on a continuum (completely agree, agree, don't have an opinion, disagree, completely disagree) and to jot down a few ideas to explain why. Then, she asks them to discuss their responses at their table groups. She reminds them to refer to the Scholarly Discourse Ideas chart in the classroom as they engage in their conversations. All of the eighth grade classes have been using and adding to the chart since the beginning of the school year, and Mrs. García notices that her EL students frequently refer to it to find ways to engage in their collaborative conversations.

<p><i>To ask for clarification:</i></p> <p>Can you say more about ____?</p> <p>What do you mean by ____?</p> <p>Can you show me evidence in the text that ____?</p>	<p><i>To affirm or agree:</i></p> <p>That's an excellent point because ____.</p> <p>What you said about ____ resonated with me because ____.</p>
<p><i>To build or add on:</i></p> <p>I'd like to add on to what you said.</p> <p>Also, ____.</p> <p>Another thing I noticed was that ____.</p>	<p><i>To disagree respectfully:</i></p> <p>I agree with you, but ____.</p> <p>You make a good point, but have you considered ____.</p> <p>I can see your point. However, ____.</p>

After she debriefs the small group conversations with the whole group, she previews the text students will read. The short article contains some content that may be unfamiliar to students (e.g., civil

rights movement, boycott), so she explains the ideas. The text also contains many general academic words, and she previews the meaning of some of them. (She will teach eight of the words/terms more intensively over the next two weeks: justify, protest, avoid, bias, perspective, controversy, defined by, issue. She also asks the other eighth grade teachers to use the words as much as they can so that students experience them in different contexts.)

The process she uses to facilitate students' reading of the short text is as follows.

- Teacher reads the text aloud as students follow along in their texts
- Students discuss the big ideas in the text in pairs and then debrief with teacher
- Students partner read the text
 - each partner reads a section
 - the other partner uses a *careful reading tips* bookmark to clarify understandings of the section
 - the two briefly discuss their ideas, write questions and notes in the margins, and highlight or circle terms that are unclear
 - swap roles and read the next chunk until the whole text has been read
 - discuss questions at the end of the text and go back to clarify terms and understandings
- Teacher debriefs with the whole group

The text and the Careful Reading Tips Bookmark follow.

Should School Be a Place for Debate?

(wordgeneration.org)

In room 207, Mr. Smith is teaching his students about the civil rights movement. He asks the students questions such as, "Who were the freedom riders?" or "What year was the Montgomery bus boycott?" It is easy for students to find the answers in their textbooks. Mr. Smith tells the students whether they are right or wrong. On Friday, they will have a quiz about these facts.

Do	Say
Think about what the section means	I'm not completely clear about what this part is about, but I think it might mean...
	I think this section might mean __ because __.
Summarize what the section says	What I understand about this section so far is _____.
	The main ideas/events in this section are _____.

In room 209, Ms. Miles is also teaching about the civil rights movement. She asks her students, "Is peaceful protest the best way to make things change for the better?" The students have a **debate**. Some think Martin Luther King was right to tell **protesters** to **avoid** violence. Others believe that sometimes violence is necessary when people will not listen to reason. They ask Ms. Miles for the right answer, but she says there is no right answer.

Some people believe that kids in school should only learn about facts. These people think students should get information from their textbooks or teacher and memorize it. That way, some argue, everybody will learn the same things and they can all do well on tests.

Other people think **debates** can be hard because there are no right answers. Sometimes everybody learns different things from a **debate**. This makes it hard for

teachers to give a test to find out what students have learned. **Debates** also take a lot of time. Teachers who have debates may not be able to cover as many topics in class. Then, students may not learn all of the facts in the textbook.

However, **debates** may help students understand why the facts they learn in school are important. We live in a democracy, where everyone needs to know how to form and **justify** opinions in order to make decisions. Students will not always have a teacher or a textbook to give the right answers, so young people need to learn to think for themselves. Each person has a unique **perspective defined by** his or her knowledge, experience, and attitudes. Even teachers and textbook authors have their own **perspectives**.

Through a classroom **debate**, students hear their classmates' opinions. Students **justify** their opinions with evidence from texts and based on their own experiences. Sometimes, hearing from classmates who disagree with them makes students learn about their own **biases** and understand a problem in a new way. Hearing classmates' **perspectives** during a debate can help students understand the complexity of many important **issues**. Whether it is better to have teachers teach from the text or to have students engage in **debates** is a continuing **controversy** in education.

What do you think? Should students learn only facts in school? Or should **debates** be an important part of their education?

After their partner reading, Mrs. García debriefs the reading with the students to clarify understandings and terms. To close the lesson, she asks them to write a paragraph in response to the questions at the end of the reading, and she asks them to read the text again for homework, using an English dictionary or bilingual dictionary to look up words they still don't understand.

The next day, Mrs. García asks the students to briefly share and discuss what they wrote in their table groups and then collects the students' writing. She'll analyze it using a framework she's developed based on the CA ELD Standards to determine language areas she needs to focus more intensively on (e.g., combining ideas in sentences, expanding and enriching ideas using adjectives or prepositional phrases).

Mrs. García: Now that you've had a chance to read and think about debates and whether or not debates should happen in school, we're going to actually debate that issue. In high schools in our district, there's a debate league where teams of students from each school debate controversial issues. In order to be on the debate team, you have to learn how to be a skillful debater. A skillful debater is someone who can justify more than one perspective. For example, a debater might start by arguing that students should study hip hop lyrics because it's really like poetry. Then, she can change positions and argue that students should not study the lyrics because they make people violent. The skillful debater has to put personal opinions and biases aside and debate the issues using good reasons and evidence to justify the position. The teams that win based are the ones that can justify each perspective. That's what you're going to be doing: learning how to be a skillful debater.

She splits the class into two groups, and she guides the class to facilitate guidelines for debates, based on their reading (she fills in what the students do not yet know about debates). Next, she randomly assigns each group a position:

- Debates do not belong in schools. They take too much time, and students need to learn so much material.
- Debates should be used in schools. Reading from textbooks and listening to lectures is boring for students so they do not learn the material. Debates would get students interested so they would learn more.

The process she uses to engage students in the debates is the following:

Debate Process

(adapted from wordgeneration.org)

1. Half of the class discusses their positions while the other half observes and takes notes (fishbowl approach), using two guiding questions to critique the debate:
 - Are the debaters providing reasoning and evidence? Are important words from the reading used?
2. The two groups of students switch roles so that the observers (now debaters) get a chance to discuss the issue. The observing group then critiques the debate.
3. Debrief with the whole group on their use of reasoning and evidence, argumentation, and precise words, as well as their use of scholarly discourse.

Once the students become used to debating, Mrs. García will add two additional steps after step 2 (step 3 above becomes step 5):

3. The two groups switch roles again. This time, they try to apply counter arguments to the positions of the other students. The observing group then critiques the debate.
4. The two groups once again switch roles. This time, they try to apply counter arguments to the positions of the other students. The observing group then critiques the debate.

Part of the conversation that takes place during the debate is provided below:

- Dante: I have two things to say. First, I think debates should be used in school because they're more fun for the students.
- Phuong: That's an excellent point because it's a lot more fun to talk about things than to just read and write all the time. When you talk about things, you learn more, too.
- Celia: I have something to add. In the article, it says that when you debate, you get to hear what other people in your class think, so you get to learn from what they know. You get to hear their perspectives that you might not know.
- Dante: Another thing I noticed is that you don't just hear what they say. They have to justify what they think. So for example, in a debate, you really have to pay attention to what people are saying so you can agree or disagree. And you have to be able to say what you really think because you have to justify yourself. I mean, you have to justify your opinion.
- Roxana: Also, in some other classes, we just have to sit and listen and be quiet all the time. That's really boring, and sometimes I fall asleep. I think that's a good reason to have debates.

Once the students have practiced debating the issue using steps 1-3, they go back to the guidelines for debating and add to it and revise it so they can use it as a resource for the next debate they'll have.

Next Steps

Mrs. García observed her students as they were debating and noticed that they were very engaged in the conversation—whether they were debating or observing—and that they were applying both their knowledge of the content and English. However, while the issue of debating in schools was a good foundation for discussing debate, she felt that the issue was not that controversial. She plans to provide more frequent opportunities for her students to debate about more controversial topics (e.g., Should English be the official language of the United States? How should schools prevent bullying?).

At the end of the week, Mrs. García asks her students to write a response to the question, “Should students should be able to debate issues in school?” Using the framework for analyzing writing she developed based on the CA ELD Standards she compares this response to the one students wrote at the beginning of the week. In her analysis, finds that not only do most of the students have more to say about the topic, they are applying their knowledge of the language used in the text and debates to their writing. For example, all of the students use the words *justify*, *debate*, and *perspective*. In addition, in the second writing piece, most students write sentences that are more grammatically complex (e.g., complex sentence, use of prepositional phrases, long noun phrases) than their first writing sample.

Mrs. García meets with the eighth grade teaching team to share the students’ writing and her observations from their debates, and the team uses this information to shape and refine upcoming lessons and projects.

Sources:

Lesson adapted from materials on the Word Generation (<http://wordgen.serpmedia.org/>) Web site:

Should Schools Be a Place for Debate?

Should Doctors Be Allowed to Assist Seriously Ill Patients to Commit Suicide?

(http://wg.serpmedia.org/video_debate.html)

Should Secret Wire-Tapping Be Legal?

Careful Reading Tips Bookmark adapted from QTEL, WestEd.

Resources:

For many more ideas on how to engage middle school students in reading, writing, and discussing debatable issues, including lesson and unit plans and videos of the lessons in action, see the Word Generation project (<http://wg.serpmedia.org/>).

Conclusion

The information and ideas in this grade-level section are provided to guide teachers in their instructional planning. Recognizing California’s richly diverse student population is critical for instructional and program planning and delivery. Teachers are responsible for educating a variety of learners, including **advanced learners, students with disabilities, ELs at different English language proficiency levels, Standard English learners**, and other **culturally and linguistically diverse learners**, as well as **students experiencing difficulties** with one or another of the themes presented in this chapter (meaning making, effective expression, language development, content knowledge, and foundational skills).

It is beyond the scope of a curriculum framework to provide guidance on meeting the learning needs of every student because each student comes to teachers with unique needs, histories, and circumstances. Teachers need to know their students well through appropriate assessment practices and other methods in order to design effective instruction for them and adapt and refine instruction as appropriate for