Implementing Culturally Relevant Writing Instruction in the Context of an After-School Program for Resettled Refugee Youth

Vanderbilt University

Maria Zybina

Abstract

With the implementation of new Common Core State Standards that emphasize the significance of writing skills for both in-school and out-of-school settings, writing instruction in the ELA classroom has received more attention than ever. Argumentative writing is widely believed to play a crucial role in achieving "success in college and in life" (Hillocks, 2011, p. xvii), and therefore is of particular importance to researchers and educators. Yet, studies evaluating high school students' writing skills overwhelmingly report that many high school graduates are not prepared to face college writing demands (Read & Landon-Hays, 2013). This problem seems to be particularly acute for adolescent English Language Learners (ELLs) who often underachieve on high-stakes literacy assessments in English (Ramos, 2014). Scholars suggest that this is in part due to the lack of high-quality instruction (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009). These findings support the need for greater attention to the improvement of writing instruction for adolescent ELLs.

In my Capstone Project, I explore the affordances of culturally relevant writing instruction for high-school ELLs and suggest a writing unit plan aimed to develop students' argumentative writing skills in the context of an after-school program for resettled refugee youth. Toward that end, I first examine the notion of culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and how it is viewed in current research. Next, I focus on how theory of CRP can inform writing instruction for adolescent learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Finally, I suggest a writing unit plan aligned with the requirements of Common Core State Standards that leverages the principles of CRP. The conclusion of this paper focuses on the implications of my project for both practitioners and researchers.

Basis for Project

I used two works from the past year as well as additional research to complete this Capstone Project. First, I used and extended my work from my Writing Inquiry Project in EDUC 6450.01, Teaching and Learning Language Arts with Dr. Deborah Rowe. That paper aimed to explore research-based culturally responsive practices of supporting culturally and linguistically diverse high school writers.

Next, I built upon the work that I conducted as a graduate assistant for a collaborative project with the faculty member, Dr. Shannon Daniel. My literature review contributed to the paper on resettled refugee teens' perspectives on learning (Daniel & Zybina, under review) and is extended here for the purposes of this project.

In addition to drawing upon and extending the work I have done in the above-mentioned projects, I did more research by analyzing the dialogic approach to argumentative writing instruction that could be used to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse adolescent students. Within that framework, I also designed a writing unit that aims to enhance adolescent English Language Learners' argumentative writing skills in the context of an after-school program for resettled-refugee youth.

Introduction

Implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has called for more writing to be done in ELA classrooms. Starting in grade 3, the tenth writing standard for each grade level requires students to "write routinely over extended time frames […] and shorter time frames […] for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences" (CCSS (ELA/Literacy); National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Based on these CCSS, students must be able to produce the

following types of writing: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014).

Among the three genres, argumentative writing stands out as “the kind of writing that the Common Core State Standards puts first” (Hillocks, 2011, p. xvii). Expanding on this, Hillocks (2011) maintains, “Argument is at the heart of critical thinking and academic discourse; it is the kind of writing students need to know for success in college and in life […]” (p. xvii). And indeed, emphasis on argumentative writing is clearly manifested in extended writing tasks on high-stakes exit-level assessments of writing and in assessments of students’ readiness for college-level writing, such as the ACT and SAT.

Despite this apparent significance of writing in secondary education, many reports claim that high school writing is in need of improvement (Read & Landon-Hays, 2013). Thus, in 2003, Persky et al. rated 70% of students in grades 4-12 as low-achieving writers, and more recent data revealed that only 27% of 12th-grade students demonstrated writing skills at or above the Proficient level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Other studies argue that nearly one third of high school graduates are unprepared to meet the requirements of college-level writing (see Read & Landon-Hays, 2013).

The problems of high school writing instruction seem to be particularly acute for adolescent English Language Learners (ELLs) who often underachieve on high-stakes English literacy assessments (Ramos, 2014). Some researchers suggest that one of the factors accounting for this phenomenon might be the lack of high-quality instruction (Kiuhara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009) since the majority of ELLs find themselves in mainstream classrooms taught by teachers with little or no formal professional development in teaching such students (NCTE Position

Paper on the role of English teachers in educating ELLs, 2006). Hence, writing instruction for ELLs has become one of the most urgent issues in today's educational practice (Lin, 2015).

Studies exploring the writing needs of ELL writers (Lin, 2015) show that these students experience difficulties not only with linguistic aspects of writing (e.g., word choice, grammar, etc.), but they also have a range of sociocultural needs, including a need to learn more about American culture and the crafts of English writing, as well as emotional concerns, such as the need for an encouraging and supportive writing environment. This means that educators are expected to design writing activities that address ELLs' complex writing needs and enhance these students' writing processes and performances (Lin, 2015). In turn, to find out about students' specific needs, teachers should take time to learn more about their backgrounds, particularly in terms of students' literacy histories, which have a great influence on their writing performance (NCTE Position Paper on the role of English teachers in educating ELLs, 2006).

This capstone argues for the need of culturally responsive writing instruction for ELLs to help them become rightfully included in the nation-wide conversation about college and career readiness. Using the studies of Ladson-Billings (1992; 2011; 2014), Gay (2002; 2013), Villegas & Lucas (2002), Felton & Herko (2004), Kuhn & Krowell (2011) and others, this capstone and writing unit will explore how the tenets of CRP can be interwoven with the dialogic approach to teaching argumentative writing. Furthermore, I suggest specific strategies that educators can use to provide support for ELLs' argumentative writing skills by developing their ability to "frame the debate over a claim, presenting the evidence for the argument and acknowledging and addressing its limitations" (National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Rationale

It is important to note that although my Capstone Project is focused on resettled refugee high school students as learners, it does not intend to address the challenges such as isolation and racial biases that these students often encounter in schools (Ngo & Lee, 2007). For the most part, I aim to address the writing needs resettled refugee youth experience as ELLs, as determined by the research cited above (Ramos, 2014; Lin, 2015). Below, I outline the rationale that stands behind this particular interest.

Throughout the past year, I have been involved in a research project exploring resettled refugee teens' perspectives on their learning in secondary school (Daniel & Zybina, under review). The study was set in an after-school program for resettled refugee youth operated by an organization that serves the refugee community nation-wide.

Inspired by the teens' future academic aspirations, the main researcher subsequently implemented a writing workshop at the after-school program that focused on writing college application essays. The students seemed to find this college preparation initiative very helpful and expressed an interest in continuing the workshop meetings with a focus on activities that would further help them to prepare for college-level writing requirements. Given that the main researcher had already committed to several other projects and I was familiar with the context, I volunteered to design a writing unit aimed to enhance these teens' argumentative writing skills. I chose argumentative writing as the key focus of the workshop because of the emphasis on this genre within CCSS (Hillocks, 2011).

Literature Review

In this section, I set out to review the current literature that frames effective instruction within the CRP framework. I outline key principles of the CRP instructional activities that are

represented in the literature. While not presently included as part of the CRP framework, I draw on the studies of Felton & Herko (2004) and Kuhn & Krowell (2011) to consider the value of a specific focus on the dialogic approach to support EL writers who are learning argumentative writing skills.

Framing Effective Instruction for ELL Students: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is a theoretical framework and practice wherein educators pay specific attention to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the contexts in which learning takes place (Ladson-Billings, 2011). Similar to this, some researchers use the term *culturally responsive teaching* to describe "the kind of teaching that is designed not merely to fit the school culture to the students' culture but also to use students' culture as the basis for helping students understand themselves and others, structure social interactions, and conceptualize knowledge" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p.314).

Culturally responsive pedagogy views the cultural and linguistic diversity of students as a strength and a favorable foundation upon which to build their learning (Gay, 2013). Gay (2002), for example, insists that teachers must take advantage of students' cultures and cultural experiences to facilitate and improve their academic and intellectual achievement. Building upon this idea, Ladson-Billings (2014) has recently suggested that educators should embrace a newer version of culturally relevant pedagogy that not only searches for cultural examples and analogues but also "pushes students to consider critical perspectives on practices that may have direct impact on their lives and communities" (p.81). She argues that when students are involved in discussing current social, political, and historical issues they learn to make thoughtful judgments and also understand how certain beliefs are formed (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Overall, the role teachers play in creating welcoming spaces that "affirm, maintain, and value students' languages, cultures, and experiences" (Nieto, 1994, p.419) has become a recurrent theme in most recent research on culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Thus, prominent theorists of CRP (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1992) suggest that to enact CRP in the classroom, a teacher must develop rapport with students, hold them to high expectations and construct learning activities and goals that align with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, interests, and long-term visions of success.

In addition, CRP demands that teachers invest in youths' futures by demanding students do and achieve their best (Gay, 2013), help students feel comfortable and confident in their personal cultures while they learn, and develop a sense of shared caring in the classroom community (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Teachers of multilingual students are also expected to support youth in overcoming linguistic demands while encouraging students to draw from all of their different languages as learning resources in the classroom (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). This can be achieved through the use of translanguaging pedagogies that invite youth to leverage their multiple languages in making sense of academic knowledge in school and open up possibilities of participation for students who might otherwise be excluded from the educational process. (Stewart & Hansen-Thomas, 2016).

With regard to literacy instruction, the importance of designing a learning environment that welcomes students' linguistic and cultural experiences in the classroom is also expressed in the notion of "third" spaces (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997). Specifically, Gutierrez et al. (1997) suggest that a third space is a space where "instruction is consciously local… situated, and strategic; and our current knowledge about language learning and language users informs the literacy curriculum" (p.372). The underlying idea of this space is that, in order

to make literacy instruction meaningful for the students, so that they eventually perceive their multiple languages as assets in learning, the teacher should design instruction that “utilizes the knowledge about linguistic resources and conventions of both the individual student and the repertoires of the larger community” (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997, p.372). Other key features of such instruction include “strategic use of more than one instructional script and varied discourse practices depending on the needs of the students and instructional goal” and curriculum that “connects classroom literacy practices to the practices of the students’ various communities.” In sum, in a third space youth are encouraged to draw from their wide repertoire of knowledge and practices (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Turner, 1997, pp. 372-373).

The idea of transformative, culturally relevant teaching also parallels NCTE’s Beliefs about Teaching Writing in that literacy practices are embedded in complicated social relationships and that as educators we should invite the ideas of our students to the center of our literacy curriculum (NCTE, 2006).

Review of Specific Instructional Activities within CRP Framework for High School ELLs

In this portion of my project, I examine writing instruction for high school ELLs within the CRP framework with the aim to outline foundational principles to be incorporated into my writing unit.

Recently, research has provided examples of instructional strategies and activities that can support EL writers. For example, Leer & Runck (2016) explored the benefits of using writing workshops pedagogy by observing ELLs engaged in writing workshop in three self-contained English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms and interviewing their teachers. Overall, the teachers agreed that to scaffold writing workshop for ELLs, more guidance, structure, and explicit instruction was needed than was traditionally expected in a workshop

context. Based on these findings, Leer & Runck (2016) provide some specific recommendations on how to scaffold writing workshops for ELLs. First, when ELLs are given too much choice in their writing, they may become overwhelmed. As a solution, teachers might choose the genre but allow students to select a topic within this genre. Second, teachers can introduce genre-specific templates to scaffold writing within a specific genre. Finally, teachers should provide opportunities for structured revision activities. For instance, they might design check-lists to guide the revision process.

As a way to leverage multilingual youth's funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) in the ELA classroom and empower them to tell their stories, Newman (2012) suggests a specific lesson sequence that centers on the use of mentor texts. In particular, this sequence involves three major steps. The first step is reading the stories and creating a "Writing Territory poster" to explore where the story comes from and what problems it raises. The second uses the "writing territories triangle" to guide students in discovering their individual connections to each text, or in other words, move from the big issues brought up in the mentor texts to their own stories. The final step asks students to complete quick-writes and share their stories with peers. Overall, the author emphasizes that the whole process of moving from the mentor texts to students' own stories is driven by the idea to locate and retrieve the story from students' funds of knowledge and help transform it into an essay that validates students' voices and experiences (Newman, 2012).

Following the line of research on effective strategies that aim to support adolescent EL writers while drawing on their linguistic and cultural strengths, Zenkov et al. (2012) provide an example of how culturally responsive writing instruction can be enacted with ELL middle grades students through the use of photo elicitation techniques. In the project described by the authors

(Zenkov, Ewaida, Bell, & Lynch, 2012), a group of low motivated ELL writers were asked to address some questions related to their perspectives on their success in school with images they were encouraged to take outside of school. Specifically, the images were expected to capture the realities of students' everyday lives that they perceived as impeding or facilitating their success in schools. The instruction process involved small-group and whole-class discussions of students' responses to the project questions which provided them with ideas for their future compositions. The teachers then worked one-on-one with each student to draft a written response using one of their images as inspiration.

Findings showed that while the students had often been unmotivated about writing tasks in their classes, "the teachers' willingness to let the outside world be a part of their curriculum" eventually helped to spark students' interest in writing. Specifically, "students discovered that they could question and analyze the academic and life challenges they were encountering, and more importantly, they displayed the ability to devise and articulate potential solutions to these difficulties orally and in writing" (Zenkov, Ewaida, Bell, & Lynch, 2012, p.11).

One of the implications for teaching prompted by this project, is that schools should rely more on types of texts with which diverse students are proficient, including visual and digital media, to foster students' motivation to engage in writing (Zenkov, Ewaida, Bell, & Lynch, 2012).

Another approach that can enhance the development of EL students' writing skills is described by Hirvela (1999). He discusses the benefits of the plural-authors model of producing a single text as opposed to the more common peer review/single-author model of collaboration that has its place in writing instruction, but does not allow for full-scale discussion of and practice in reading and writing (Hirvela, 1999). The activity described by Hirvela occurs in three

consecutive phases: students first collaborate as microcommunities of readers, i.e. small groups in which they discuss a short story they read jointly. Then, as microcommunities of writers, they discuss and negotiate the process of writing a group paper that responds and interprets the story they have read. Finally, the whole class transforms into a macrocommunity of readers and writers, in which students discuss and review what various groups have produced.

Overall, Hirvela (1999) argues that the plural-authors model of collaborative writing can benefit all students, regardless of their backgrounds, in developing their reading and writing skills through exchange of ideas and views on what an assigned text means and on how best to complete the writing portion of the assignment. However, he also underscores a special value of using this approach in the contexts of working with the ELL student population. Hirvela suggests that along with the opportunities to enhance these students' language skills, collaborative writing allows them "to establish collegial ties with other students who share the same concerns and backgrounds as they do" (p.12). Additionally, it offers "comfortable and secure learning situations to students who otherwise feel isolated and misunderstood" (p.12).

The literature review in this section of my project aimed to identify specific instructional activities within the CRP framework that address the needs of high school ELL writers. Findings of this review show that while research on the opportunities inherent in the writing instruction of ELLs is growing, studies that specifically focus on the development of high school EL students' writing skills (Hirvela, 1999; Newman, 2012; Zenkov et al., 2012) tend to pay more attention to expository and/or narrative writing, while argumentative writing remains a comparatively under-explored area. This gap in the literature supports the scholarly significance of my capstone project, particularly its focus on enhancing high school ELLs' argumentative writing skills.

I will conclude this section by synthesizing and extending the findings of my literature review into the Top 10 principles of culturally responsive writing instruction that I will incorporate into my writing unit.

1) *Provide authentic purposes and audiences for writing.* Overall, research views this as a powerful incentive for students to be engaged in the writing process. Rowe & Flushman (2013) support this as they encourage teachers to invite students to write for a variety of purposes.

2) *Provide opportunities for dialogue and discussions.* Including students' voice and casual language into the classroom discourse helps them to think more deeply about focal topics (Winn & Johnson, 2011). In particular, in the context of argumentative writing, discussions become an invaluable element of instruction as they encourage consideration and evaluation of multiple perspectives (McCann, 2010). Additionally, inviting students to participate in the discussion of important issues validates their ideas and experiences and helps them to realize how the latter can be transferred into writing (Winn & Johnson, 2011).

3) *Provide opportunities for topic choice.* Topics that students care about are more likely to produce in students commitment to the writing assignment (Crowhurst, 1990) and enhance their motivation to write (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Therefore, teachers should help students choose topics and issues in which they are genuinely interested and with which they may have personal experience.

4) *Engage students in pre-writing activities.* By helping students to move from thinking to writing, pre-writing activities lessen the cognitive demands that make writing so difficult for many students (Felton & Herko, 2004). With ELLs in particular, the key is to offer a range of planning strategies to choose from – visual, oral, graphic – so that every student can choose an

approach that works best for him in making the writing task accessible and manageable (Lassonde & Richards, 2013).

5) *Provide sufficient time and opportunities to practice.* Research shows that ELLs' mastery of literacy skills correlates with the time they are provided to develop these skills (as cited in Maxwell-Jolly, 2011). In addition to that, ensuring ELLs have sufficient time and extensive opportunities to write, "not only improves their writing but also promotes second language acquisition" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005, p. 209).

6) *Introduce genre-specific templates and provide opportunities for structured revision activities*. This is especially important to support ELL writers, as they need "more guidance, structure, and explicit instruction" than is traditionally expected in a workshop context (Leer & Runck, 2016).

7) *Use inquiry activities* such as looking for and analyzing data. This can lessen the cognitive demands of the writing task as it helps students develop ideas and content for writing (Graham & Perin, 2007). Additionally, it can also enhance students' interest in the issue they are researching as they find stories that resonate with their own experiences and concerns.

8) *Foster collaboration.* In the context of second language writing, engaging students in collaborative work has a dual goal. First, it has the potential to enhance personal relationships as students share their writing with each other, and second, ELL writers can benefit from additional assistance provided by their peers (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005).

9) *Use authentic/alternative assessment.* Using portfolios, checklists, and holistic scoring as opposed to tests as a standard form of assessment involves students in evaluation of their own writing. This way, they become active agents of their learning, because when "they know how and what they need to do to improve it [writing], they will improve" (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005, p.

248). Additionally, such assessments meet the requirements of culturally responsive instruction as they are designed with the students of a particular classroom in mind, and in response to the goals of the students (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013).

10) *Provide individualized feedback.* When teachers know their students' strengths and areas that need further improvement, they are able to provide feedback that targets these specific needs (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). One way to provide individualized feedback is during one-on-one writing conferences.

The Dialogic Approach to Teaching Argumentative Writing

Developing separately from CRP instructional activities, multiple studies have explored ways to strengthen students' argumentative writing skills (Felton & Herko, 2004; Kuhn & Krowell, 2011; Reznitskaya et al., 2001). Overwhelmingly, these authors maintain that reasoning starts in "the everyday social practice of argumentation" (Kuhn & Krowell, 2011) and hence is inherently dialogical.

Furthermore, Felton & Herko (2004) argue that when engaged in dialogue, adolescents effortlessly produce the very elements of elaborated argument that often seem to be missing from their written essays, such as acknowledging and dealing with alternative perspectives on the issue. To offer one possible explanation of this phenomenon, Anderson et al. (2001) suggest that "the ability and disposition to take more than one perspective arises from participating in discussions with others who hold different perspectives." (p. 2). To summarize, it is widely believed that since "adolescents produce their strongest arguments in dialogic contexts" (Felton & Herko, 2004), the dialogic approach to teaching argumentative writing has the potential to help students transfer their argumentative skills from oral speech to writing (Felton & Herko, 2004; Kuhn & Krowell, 2011).

Implementing this approach in the context of an after-school program might produce especially effective outcomes for high school ELLs because of the potential of the out-of-school setting to promote productive discussions among the participants. Research shows that for adolescent ELLs in particular, embarrassment over making mistakes can hinder language production (as cited in Maxwell-Jolly, 2011) in the school classroom. However, "the smaller groups often formed in out-of-school settings lessen the pressure on students over their "performance" in English" (Maxwell-Jolly, 2011). Thus, the participants of the focal after-school program might feel more comfortable and secure engaging in verbal arguments with each other.

Description of the Unit

While the full unit appears in the Appendix A, this section of my paper aims to provide an overview of the unit in terms of the learners, instructional strategies, and assessment.

The full unit includes an outline of eight lesson plans for eight 50-minute workshop sessions meeting twice a week. It is important to note that the unit is not bound by a strict scope and sequence typical for in-school settings, which means that the timeline can be adjusted to students' needs, and hence, the number of workshop sessions may eventually be more than eight. In the introduction to each lesson plan, I list the incorporated principles for culturally responsive writing instruction (see the Top 10 principles in the previous section) and outline specific goals it pursues. The goals align to 11-12th grade Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The curriculum also contains suggestions for assessment, which is for the most part informal and is realized in the form of peer response, one-on-one conferences, and check-lists for self-assessment.

Following the ideas underlying the dialogic approach to teaching argumentative writing (see literature review), my writing unit aims to foster dual-perspective reasoning and integration of opposing claims into students' argumentative essays (Kuhn & Krowell, 2011). With this long-term goal in mind, the unit: 1) familiarizes students with argument schema; 2) promotes students' understanding and appreciation of alternative perspectives by engaging them in extensive reading and research on the issue; 3) scaffolds the transfer of argument schema from dialogue in the form of verbal debate into writing (Felton & Herko, 2004).

Learners and Learning Context

In terms of the learners, this unit is designed for high school ELL students participating in the after-school program for resettled refugee youth, with whom I have spent some time in the past year as a graduate assistant in a larger research project. In particular, the unit is targeted at several high school youth that participated in the writing workshop the previous year. All of them were planning to apply to community colleges in TN or nearby states (Daniel & Zybina, under review). The students encompass a range of cultural backgrounds – the countries where they were born and raised include Burma, Thailand, and Rwanda. This unit intends the lead teacher to be the university professor that has conducted the ethnographic study exploring the youth's perspectives on learning and has consistently volunteered in the after-school program ever since. Thus, being familiar with the focal students' backgrounds, interests, needs, and academic aspirations this teacher encompasses most of the characteristics that define the culturally responsive teacher (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). However, to use this unit in a different context, a teacher in charge might consider conducting student interest surveys and classroom observations to identify what is motivating and relevant to students.

In this capstone project, I have chosen to focus on the academic needs of adolescent ELLs in particular, because high school is the crucial point in the life of any student, regardless of their background, at which they are faced with the necessity of making decisions about their future. However, with respect to linguistically diverse student populations, a large number of studies maintain that "the likelihood that EL students will receive any post-secondary education … is lower than for other students" (as cited in Maxwell-Jolly, 2011). One of the reasons behind this lower level of achievement is the previously mentioned lack of teachers' overall knowledge of how to better serve ELLs' needs (NCTE Position Paper on the role of English teachers in educating ELLs, 2006). Additionally, there is also a very limited amount of time that EL students are given within a classroom "to learn a new language and learn content through this new language" (Maxwell-Jolly, 2011). Thus, with regard to the goals of my project, it is very likely that the learners would benefit from extra time devoted to activities that can support their argumentative writing skills (Maxwell-Jolly, 2011), and the after-school program has the potential to provide them with that valuable resource. Overall, situating the writing workshop in the context of an after-school program might benefit the ELLs through the use of its "extra" time in the following ways:

- Students can spend as much time as they need in each stage of the writing process, especially in the drafting and revising stages that many ELLs mostly benefit from (Cloud, Lakin, Leininger, & Maxwell, 2010).
- Teachers can have more extensive opportunities to accommodate instruction to the students' needs as necessary.

- Teachers can have more extensive opportunities to make connections to students' lives and create safe and responsive environments which result in higher levels of EL students' engagement and motivation (Maxwell-Jolly, 2011).

Instructional strategies

The unit uses a process-approach to teaching writing, which exposes students to five interrelated stages: prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). This framework is believed to be especially valuable for ELLs because it breaks the writing process into smaller manageable parts and allows them to concentrate on one task at a time, thus lessening the cognitive demands of the task (Peregoy & Boyle, 2005). Additionally, this approach encourages students to actively leverage their experiences in the writing act as they choose a topic and brainstorm ideas during the prewriting phase.

In this unit, the students are allowed the freedom to choose a topic that resonates with their interests and/or lived experiences and are encouraged to generate ideas through brainstorming, questioning, and teacher-facilitated oral discussions. Since it is difficult to account for the direction these discussions will take, I have chosen to leave it up to the teacher, who is assumed to have enough skill and experience to effectively facilitate the discussion while drawing on students' linguistic and cultural background knowledge. The teacher is also invited to tailor the content of the workshop sessions according to students' emerging understandings of the key concepts and ideas and provide opportunities for additional practice as needed.

Assessment

Since this unit is situated in the context of an after-school program and in most general terms aims to increase students' level of comfort with a specific skill, it does not intend to recreate the academic rigor of the classroom settings. For this reason, the primary form of

assessment is informal assessment realized in the form of reflections, peer- and one-on-one writing conferences, and student self-assessment.

Writing assessment specialists maintain that the best scoring guides and grading criteria are those that are created with a particular context in mind, and in response to the goals of particular students (as cited in Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013). For teachers, this often means designing their own rubrics or making adjustments within a given rubric (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013). Thus, since the unit focuses on the elements and the structure of the argument, the rubrics I have designed are aligned with the writing assignment and reflect its goals (Appendix B, Fig. 4 & 5). Specifically, the rubrics in Peer revision sheet (Fig. 4) aim to evaluate communication of ideas and presence of the elements of the argument. In the Self-assessment check-list (Fig. 5) I outline only tentative suggestions for the rubrics, since it is expected that students will be involved in the discussion of the rubrics as a way to promote "deeper analytical understandings of the genre" (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2013). For the teacher, this discussion coupled with students' reflections on the process they used to construct argumentative essays serves as a source of information about students' development and growth.

Ortmeier-Hooper (2013) warns teachers of ELL writers against correcting every issue and problem that is present in a student paper since for many students, this may feel overwhelming and counterproductive for the simple reason that they aren't sure where to begin. Thus, other writing traits such as sentence fluency, grammar, and word choice (Culham, 2003) can be assessed separately by the teacher based on the needs expressed by individual students', and the feedback can be presented in the form of the teacher's comments (Winn & Johnson, 2011, p. 82).

Final Thoughts

With the implementation of new Common Core State Standards that emphasize the importance of writing skills both in school and in out-of-school settings, writing instruction in the ELA classroom has received more attention than ever. Writing instruction for ELLs in particular, has become one of the most important issues in today's educational practice (Lin, 2015).

This capstone project aimed to explore how the principles of CRP can be leveraged in the design of writing instruction aimed to support the needs of high school ELLs, in particular – the development of argumentative writing skills. I recognize that the project is limited in that it lacks some specific contextual features. Specifically, it only provides a general structure for the workshop sessions and leaves it up to the teacher to make the majority of content-specific decisions. In doing so, it relies on the assumption that the teacher knows well the students' needs and interests and has enough experience and skill to tailor the content drawing on the students' cultural and linguistic background knowledge.

However, the project was able to identify and delineate the essential research-based culturally responsive practices that can be used to support the writing instruction of high school ELLs. In my literature review, I have found that relatively few studies explore specific needs and difficulties of adolescent EL writers. In turn, studies that do focus on the development of high school EL students' writing skills (Hirvela, 1999; Newman, 2012) tend to pay more attention to expository and/or narrative writing, while argumentative writing remains a comparatively under-explored area. Yet, teachers need to learn how to enhance EL students' argumentative writing skills to help them better prepare for writing in college (NCTE, 2006). Therefore, I suggest that this area might deserve closer attention in the future.

References

Anderson, R. C., Nguyen-Jahiel, K., McNurlen, B., Archodidou, A., Kim, S. Y., Reznitskaya, A., ... & Gilbert, L. (2001). The snowball phenomenon: Spread of ways of talking and ways of thinking across groups of children. Cognition and instruction, 19(1), 1-46.

Cannes Lions Archive [Video files]. Retrieved from: http://www.canneslionsarchive.com/winners/

Chang, Y., & Sperling, M. (2014). Discourse and identity among ESL learners: A case study of a community college ESL classroom. Research in the Teaching of English, 49(1), 31-51.

Cloud, N., Lakin, J., Leininger, E., & Maxwell, L. (2010). *Teaching adolescent English language learners.*

Crowhurst, M. (1990). Teaching and learning the writing of persuasive/argumentative discourse. Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation, 348-359.

Culham, R. (2003). Introduction; Chapter 1. *6 + 1 Traits of Writing: The complete guide. Grades 3 and up* (pp. 7-32). New York: Scholastic.

Daniel, S., & Zybina, M. (under review). Resettled refugee teens' Perspectives on Learning: "They should teach us seventh grade stuff, but not like in elementary school". Journal of Language, Identity, and Education.

Felton, M. K., & Herko, S. (2004). From dialogue to two-sided argument: Scaffolding adolescents' persuasive writing. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 47(8), 672-683.

Gay, G. (2002). Preparing for culturally responsive teaching. Journal of teacher education, 53(2), 106-116.

Gay, G. (2013). Teaching to and through cultural diversity. Curriculum Inquiry, 43(1), 48-70.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). *Writing Next-Effective strategies to improve writing of adolescents in middle and high schools.*

Gutiérrez, K., GUTIÉRREZ, K. D., BAQUEDANO-LÓPEZ, P. A. T. R. I. C. I. A., & TURNER, M. G. (1997). Putting language back into language arts: When the radical middle meets the third space. Language Arts, 74(5), 368-378.

Harklau, L., Losey, K. M., & Siegal, M. (Eds.). (1999). *Generation 1.5 meets college composition: Issues in the teaching of writing to US-educated learners of ESL.* Routledge.

Hillocks Jr, G. (2011). Preface. In L. Luedeke & S. Chapman (Eds.), *Teaching argument writing: Supporting claims with relevant evidence and clear reasoning, grades 6-12* (pp. xv-xxvi). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Hirvela, A. (1999). Collaborative writing instruction and communities of readers and writers. TESOL journal, 8(2), 7-12.

Kiuhara, S. A., Graham, S., & Hawken, L. S. (2009). Teaching writing to high school students: A national survey. Journal of Educational Psychology, 101(1), 136.

Kuhn, D., & Crowell, A. (2011). Dialogic argumentation as a vehicle for developing young adolescents' thinking. Psychological Science, 22(4), 545-552.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1992). Reading between the lines and beyond the pages: A culturally relevant approach to literacy teaching. Theory into practice, 31(4), 312-320.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2011). Is meeting the diverse needs of all students possible? Kappa Delta Pi Record, 47(sup1), 13-15.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2014). Culturally relevant pedagogy 2.0: aka the remix. Harvard Educational Review, 84(1), 74-84.

Lassonde, C., & Richards, J. C. (2013). *Best practices in teaching planning for writing.* In S, pp. 193-214). New York: Guilford Press.

Leer, E. B., & Runck, B. C. (2016). Using Writing Workshop with English Language Learners. English Journal, 105(3), 107.

Lin, S. M. (2015). A study of ELL students' writing difficulties: a call for culturally, linguistically, and psychologically responsive teaching. College Student Journal, 49(2), 237-250.

McCann, T. M. (2010). Gateways to writing logical arguments. English Journal, 33-39.

Maxwell-Jolly, J. (2011). English Learners and Out-of-School Time Programs: The Potential of OST Programs to Foster EL Success. Afterschool Matters, 14, 1-12.

Moll, L., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. Theory into Practice, 31(2), 132-141.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices& Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). Common core state standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.core standards.org/ela-literacy/ccra/w/.

NCTE. Beliefs about the Teaching of Writing. Urbana: Author, 2006.

NCTE. Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLs). Urbana: Author, 2006.

Newman, B. M. (2012). Mentor texts and funds of knowledge: Situating writing within our students' worlds. Voices from the Middle, 20(1), 25-30.

Ngo, B., & Lee, S. (2007). Complicating the image of model minority success: A review of

Southeast Asian American education. Review of Educational Research, 77(4), 415-453.

Nieto, S. (1994). Lessons from students on creating a chance to dream. Harvard Educational Review, 64(4), 392-426.

Ortmeier-Hooper, C. (2013). *The ELL writer: Moving beyond basics in the secondary classroom.* Teachers College Press.

Peregoy, S. F., & Boyle, O. F. (2005). *Reading, Writing, and Learning in ESL: A Resource Book for K-12 Teachers.* Pearson Education.

Ramos, K. (2014). Teaching Adolescent ELs to Write Academic ‐ Style Persuasive Essays. Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 57(8), 655-665.

Read, S., & Landon-Hays, M. M. (2013). The knowing/doing gap: Challenges of effective writing instruction in high school. Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education, 2(2), 3.

Reznitskaya, A., Anderson, R. C., McNurlen, B., Nguyen-Jahiel, K., Archodidou, A., & Kim, S. Y. (2001). Influence of oral discussion on written argument. Discourse Processes, 32(2-3), 155-175.

Stewart, M., & Hansen-Thomas, H. (2016). Sanctioning a space for translanguaging in the secondary English classroom: A case of transnational youth. Research in the Teaching of English, 50(4), 450-472.

The Culham Writing Company Blog. Student modes guides: Persuasive/Opinion/Argument [pdf file]. Retrieved from: http://www.culhamwriting.com/LIBRARY/RESOURCES/scoringguides.html.

Toulmin, S. (1958). *The uses of argument.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2011 Writing Assessment.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers rethinking the curriculum. Journal of teacher education, 53(1), 20-32.

Wickline, K. Picture This: Combining Infographics and Argumentative Writing [Lesson plan]. Retrieved from: http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/picture-this-combining-infographics-31135.html.

Winn, M. T., & Johnson, L. P. (2011). *Writing instruction in the culturally relevant classroom*. National Council of Teachers of English.

Zenkov, K., Ewaida, M., Bell, A., & Lynch, M. (2012). Seeing how to ask first: Photo elicitation motivates English language learners to write: Photos prompt middle grades English language learners to reflect upon and write about their lives. Middle School Journal, 44(2), 6-13.

Appendix A

Agenda

Week	Meeting sessions	
1	**Day 1** ▪ Commercial (The Cannes Lions Archive): illustrate the idea of a one-sided vs. two-sided argument ▪ Introduce Toulmin model of argument ▪ Discuss the model and complete graphic organizer (Appendix B, Fig. 1) using a sample topic	**Day 2** ▪ Brainstorm topics ▪ Interview classmates ▪ Choose a topic
2	**Day 3** ▪ Read about the topic. Alternatively, conduct a short research online ▪ Discuss the controversy of the topic and different perspectives ▪ Complete Position development table (Appendix B, Fig. 2)	**Day 4** ▪ Take a position on the topic ▪ Individually complete the graphic organizer (Appendix B, Fig. 1) ▪ Draft an argument
3	**Day 5** ▪ Verbal debate (small groups) ▪ Debrief experience with the same-side partner using the Reflection Sheet (Appendix B, Fig. 3) ▪ Swap roles and repeat	**Day 6** ▪ The Revision Sheet (Appendix B, Fig. 4): discuss the purpose ▪ Read partner's essay ▪ Peer revision (pairs) ▪ Whole class discussion and debriefing
4	**Day 7** ▪ Write the final draft ▪ One-on-one conferencing	**Day 8** ▪ Develop check-list for self-assessment (Appendix B, Fig. 5) ▪ Assessment and reflections

For this unit, Days 1 and 2 are "launching" days. Day 1 introduces the structure of the argument and builds argumentation schema, while day 2 is devoted to exploring the topics of

interest to the students and establishing their authentic audience – their classmates. During the closing sessions, they will be reading each other's essays.

Day 1: **Introducing the structure of the argument.** *Objective:* building students' argumentation schema by introducing structure of the argument, its purpose, and vocabulary for describing the elements of the argument. Incorporates *Principle 1: Authentic audiences and purpose; Principle 2: Opportunities for dialogue and discussion; Principle 3: Genre-specific templates (see literature review for the list of principles).*

1. Play for the students a persuasive commercial (the teacher might use commercials from the Cannes Lions Archive). Discuss the following questions: What is the purpose of the commercial? What arguments are given to convince us to buy the item? What words, phrases, or images make the item seem attractive and desirable? Do the creators of the commercial mention any reasons for not buying the product? (ex., the item might be too expensive). Explain that this commercial can be roughly compared to a one-sided argument which fails to address different perspectives on an issue. However, an elaborated argument should take into account both sides of an issue (adapted from Wickline, Lesson plan).

2. Introduce the essential elements of argument through a simplified version of the Toulmin model of argument (Toulmin, 1985) - position, claim, warrant, and data. To make the terms more memorable and more accessible to students, use the acronym PREP (Felton & Herko, 2004): a *position* on an issue, one or more *reasons (claims)* to support that position, *explanation (warrant)* for those reasons, and *proof* (data) to support both the reasons and the explanation.

3. Explain that you'll illustrate this argumentative terminology by using a sample issue - for example, "It is better to be a teenager than an adult". Introduce the PREP graphic organizer (Appendix B, Fig. 1) and complete it collaboratively in the course of the discussion that follows:

- As a group, discuss possible positions on that issue

- Ask students to find one or more reasons to support each position
- Discuss explanations for those reasons and what evidence they could present to support the explanations.

4. Explain that students will be writing an argumentative essay which will require them to consider multiple (and often, counter-arguing) perspectives on an issue. Emphasize that students will be asked to take one side of the issue; however, they will also present and consider the other side's claims as required in argumentative writing. Make it clear that students will share their writing with each other when they will be reading each other's essays for peer revision.

Day 2: Identifying a topic of interest. Incorporates *Principle 2: Dialogue and discussion; Principle 3: Topic choice; Principle 8: Foster collaboration.*

1. Brainstorm issues/topics that are important to students. Start by asking students to consider the following questions (have these questions recorded on the board or the chart paper): What are you interested in? What questions do you want to answer for yourself? What problems do you wish to solve? What concerns do you have about school/everyday life issues/your future? (Ortmeier – Hooper, 2013) What do you feel would be fun to debate about?

- Encourage students to consider their classmates as their audience - What are some topics that you feel others would benefit from understanding and seeing both sides of?
- Encourage students to consider socially relevant issues that they have had personal experiences with
- Suggest ideas for the topics that might look interesting to them based on the interests they expressed previously: love, relationships, independence, responsibilities, fairness and equality, social networking, and technology.

2. Give students 10-15 minutes to think about these questions and jot down their ideas.

3. Have students mingle and interview each other about their ideas.

4. Get back as a group. Put students' ideas on the board and discuss them to find a viable topic that they feel passionate about. Choose one topic. Explain that during the next session, they'll be engaged in a short research about the topic, so they might wish to start preparing at home.

Day 3: Prewriting activities: Reading about and/or researching the topic. *Objective:* exploring the topic to improve content knowledge and familiarize with different perspectives on the issue. Incorporates *Principle 2: Dialogue and discussion; Principle 4: Pre-writing activities; Principle 7: Inquiry activities.*

1. Based on the topic identified in the previous workshop session, prepare materials for the students to read about the topic. During this session, the students read overviews of the topic. Alternatively, if the classroom allows for the use of computers with access to the Internet, students might engage in online research about the topic. Prior to that, it's helpful to discuss how to identify credible sources of information. As the students are reading, circulate and provide assistance as needed.

2. Introduce the Position development table (Appendix B, Fig. 2). Explain that this activity will help students to develop a position on the topic. Have students fill out the first two columns individually.

3. As a group, debrief what the students have learned from their readings/research activities: discuss students' understanding of the controversy of the topic and the different perspectives they have encountered. Record students' thoughts and ideas on the board or the chart paper and save the record for the next session. Have students fill out the last column in Position development table.

Day 4: Prewriting (graphic organizer) and drafting. *Objective:* students organize their ideas by completing the graphic organizer and engage in writing. Incorporates *Principle 3: Genre-specific templates; Principle 4: Pre-writing activities; Principle 10: Individualized feedback*

1. Debrief students' ideas from the previous session – put up the records of their thoughts about the topic and ask them to use the tables they have completed.

2. Have the students take a position on the topic based on the ideas in their Position development tables.

3. Students complete a blank version of the graphic organizer (Appendix B, Fig. 1)

4. Students draft an essay arguing their position. During stages 3 and 4, the teacher circulates around the classroom and provides assistance as needed.

Day 5: Verbal debate and reflection. *Objective:* engaging students in verbal debate to help them consider opposing perspectives, develop counterarguments and rebuttals, and create qualifications to their arguments (Felton & Herko, 2004). The long-term goal is to help them transfer this two-sided argument in their essays. Incorporates *Principle 2: Dialogue and discussion; Principle 5: Sufficient time to practice; Principle 8: Foster collaboration; Principle 10: Individualized feedback.*

1. Explain that students will engage in debate about the topic. It is likely that many students will favor one position as opposed to the other. In this case, to create equal numbers on each side, suggest drawing lots. Explain that even though some of them will have to argue for the position they don't really hold, it is helpful for "practicing the skill of generating opposing-side arguments", a skill that they are expected to internalize in the writing process (Felton & Herko, 2004).

2. Have students get organized in groups of 4, where 2 individuals represent each side of the issue. Students use their written arguments. While one student argues with another from the

opposition, the task of the second student from each side is to listen closely and make notes in the Reflection Sheet (Appendix B, Fig. 3).

3. After 10-15 minutes of debates, the students representing each side pair up and debrief the debate over the Reflection Sheet. Special attention should be paid to reviewing the arguments of the opposing side and what counterarguments were or could have been given. Students add ideas to the reflection sheet.

4. Have the students swap roles. Now, the students who previously acted as observers, actively engage in debates and test the ideas they have produced collaboratively with their partners. After 10-15 minutes of debates, they get together in their pairs again to debrief and add final ideas. The teacher acts as a facilitator by helping to sustain debates, answering questions, and prompting ideas.

5. As a group, discuss how the students felt about this activity. Elicit their ideas about how the process of verbal debate is similar to/different from writing an argument.

Day 6: Peer-response revision of the written argument. *Objective:* evaluating and revising the structure of the students' first drafts. Incorporates *Principle 2: Dialogue and discussion; Principle 6: Structured revision; Principle 8: Foster collaboration; Principle 9: Authentic assessment.*

1. Hand out the Revision Sheet (Appendix B, Fig. 4). As a group, discuss the purpose of this activity and go over the procedure. Explain that students will be working in pairs, but first, they'll read their partner's essay individually. While reading, they'll be using the Revision Sheet and making notes for the author. Then, they will get back together with their partners and share ideas for each other's essay. Before students set out to read, go over the questions on the sheet. To make sure students understand the task, check-in with several students.

2. Have students discuss in pairs the ideas they have put down in their Revision sheets. Circulate around the classroom and provide individual support and feedback to each pair.

3. As a group, debrief this activity: encourage students to ask questions, discuss in what ways this peer-revision has been helpful, and which of their concerns haven't been resolved.

Day 7: Writing a two-sided argument. *Objective:* refining the first draft by incorporating opposing perspectives and other ideas from the revision session. Incorporates *Principle 5: Sufficient time to practice; Principle 9: Authentic assessment; Principle 10: Individualized feedback.*

1. Have students work on their drafts. They can use their graphic organizers, Revision sheets, and any materials from the previous sessions. Provide the opportunity for one-on-one conferencing, during which students can ask questions, get clarification on their areas of concern, and receive extra help. Also, whenever appropriate, draw on students' new understandings of the structure of the argument to help answer questions that arise in the process.

Day 8: Assessment and reflections. *Objective:* deepening students' understanding of the structure of the argument through the co-creation of rubrics for self-assessment. Incorporates *Principle 9: Authentic assessment; Principle 10: Individualized feedback.*

1. Invite students to participate in the design of the rubrics for self-assessment. Make it clear that their suggestions should be based on their emerging understandings of the structure of the argument. As a starting point, use suggestions outlined in Appendix B, Fig. 5.

2. Ask students to reflect on the process they used to construct their argumentative essays. Draw their attention to how participation in the verbal debate was helpful for the writing act. Have them synthesize and summarize what they have learned about the structure of the argument, once again underscore the importance of addressing the opposing viewpoints when considering an issue.

3. Ask students if they would also like their papers to be assessed in terms of grammar, sentence, fluency, and word choice. Collect the papers from individual students and provide feedback in the form of comments and suggestions.

Appendix B

Fig. 1 PREP graphic organizer (Adapted from Felton & Herko, 2004)

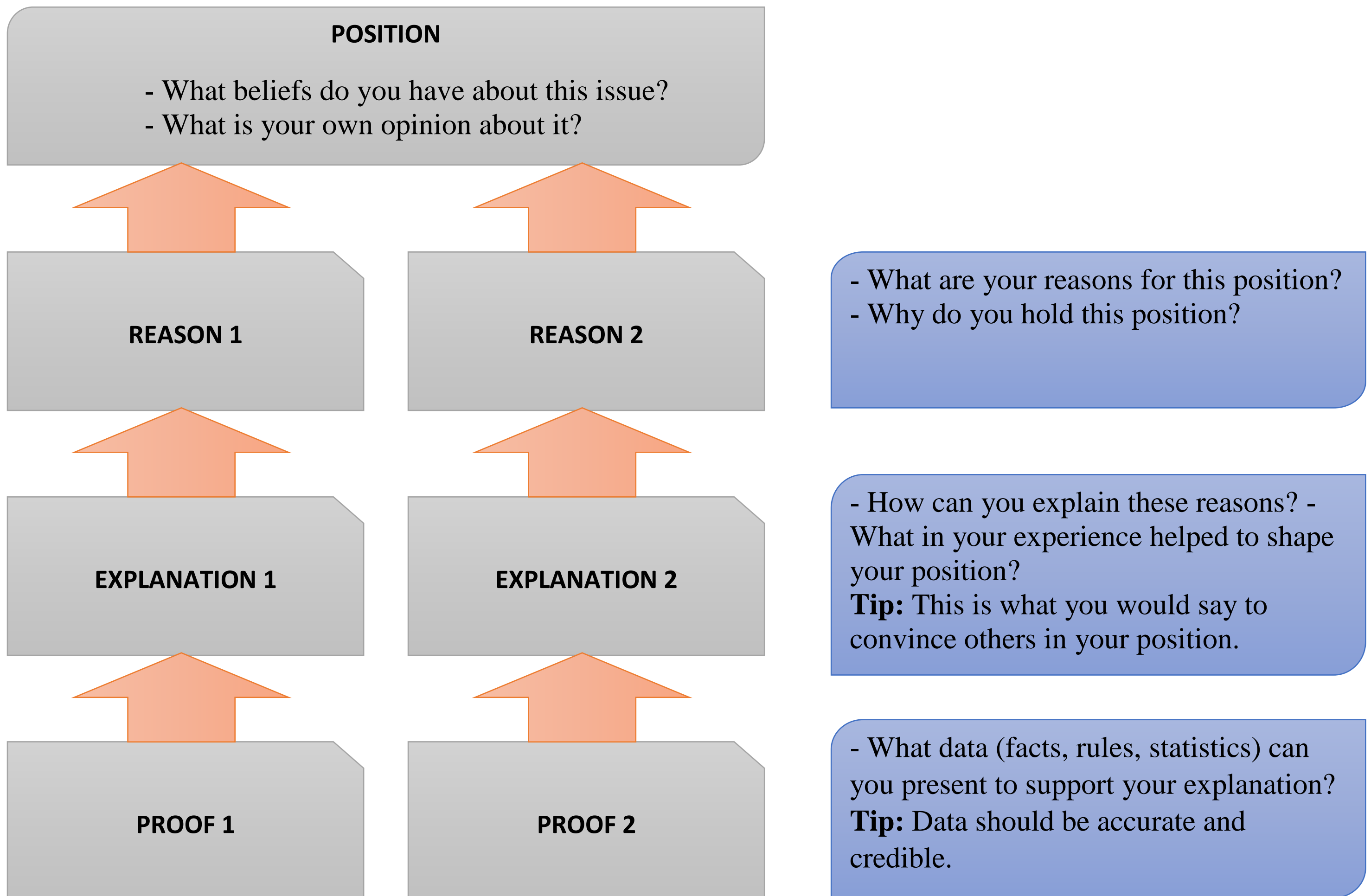

Fig. 2 Position development table (Adapted from Winn & Johnson, 2011)

Developing Ideas around [Topic/Issue]	**Your own ideas** (Personal experience)	**Ideas generated from research** (Articles, texts, online research)	**Ideas generated from discussion** (What others contributed to your understanding of the topic)
What positions/views are out there about [Topic/Issue]?			
How does [Topic/Issue] affect you/people around you/communities/the world?			

Fig. 3 Reflection Sheet (Adapted from Felton & Herko, 2004)

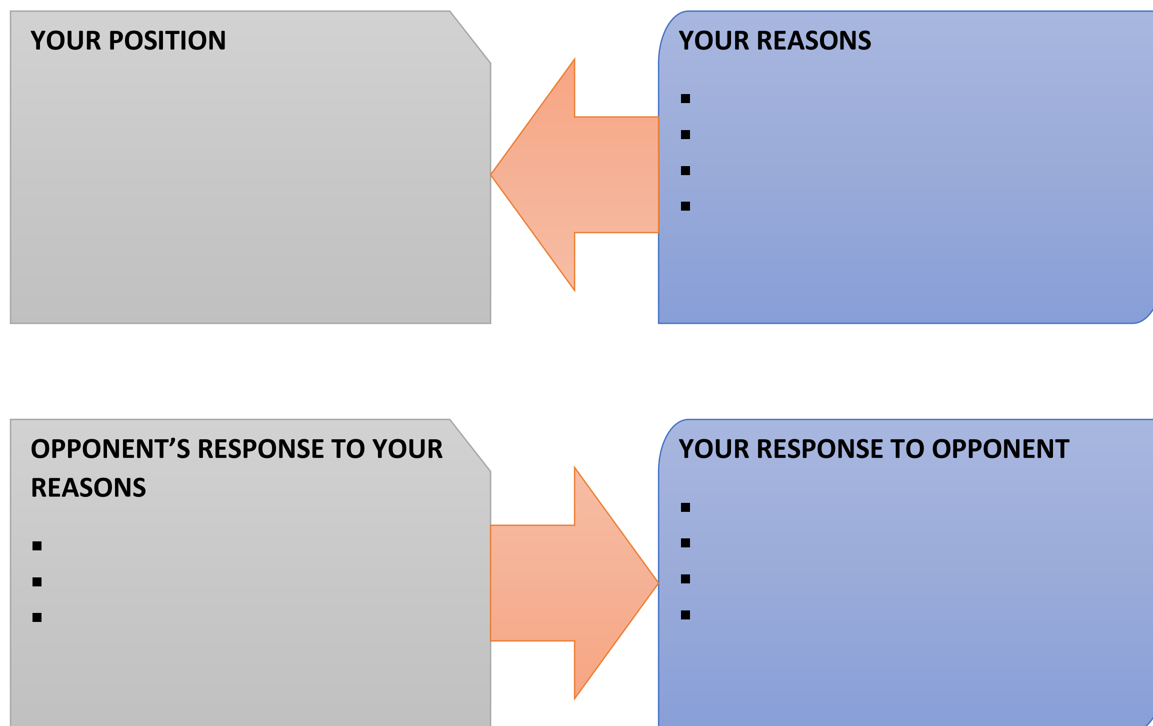

Fig. 4 Peer-revision Sheet

1) Use color-coding to identify and highlight Position, Reasons, Explanation, and Proof.

Use the following colors:

- Position - red
- Reason - blue
- Explanation - green
- Proof – yellow

2) What ideas (of the reasons, explanations, or proof) that are particularly strong in supporting the author's position?

3) What ideas (of the reasons, explanations, or proof) that might need further development to support the author's position?

4) Does the writer include reasons from the other, opposing, side?

5) Is there anything you would add or remove from this essay?

6) Is there anything you would suggest to make this argument stronger?

Fig. 5 Ideas for self-assessment check-list (Adapted from Cloud, Lakin, Leininger, & Maxwell,, 2010;The Culham Writing Company, 2016; and to be developed with students)

1. Introductory paragraph
   - Controversial topic is introduced.
   - Your position on the topic is clearly stated.
   - Your supporting reasons are stated.
2. Body paragraphs
   - Topic sentence introduces a supporting reason.
   - Reason is supported by a relevant explanation and proof.
   - Opposing position is acknowledged and challenged.
   - Repeat these steps depending on how many supporting reasons you have.
3. Concluding paragraph
   - Restate the topic, your position, and supporting reasons.
   - Closing statement.