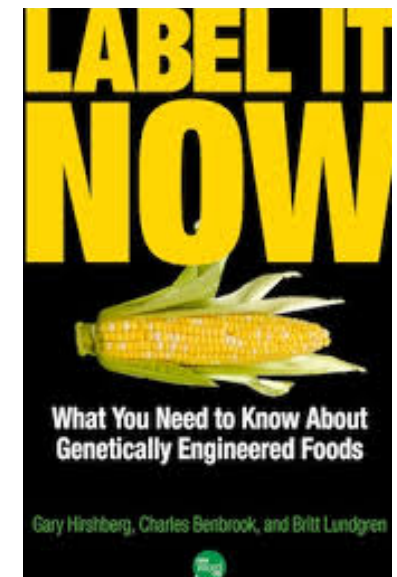




Building Academic Language for ELLs through
Discussion-based,
Dilemma-Centered Curricula



Claire E. White
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Quick background

2004: SERP: Strategic Education Research Partnership: non-profit organization that partners with districts around district-nominated issues/ research and development arm is at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

2006: Developed Word Generation – a cross-content middle school academic language program with Boston Public Schools and researchers around the U.S. - available as free, downloadable curriculum-

2010: SERP received a large grant from the USDOE-IES to modify Word Generation- for grades 4-8 grades tied to Common Core Standards with an emphasis on building discussion, academic language and perspective-taking in the early grades with a focus on science and social studies in the later grades

2014: Developed new materials for grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8- will be publicly available
TBA

CCSS Preface: Corporate Voices for Working Families, American Society for Training & Development, and Society for Human Resource Management.
(2006). *The Ill-Prepared U.S. Workforce*

- ❑ According to employers and college faculty, high school graduates do not have the skills they need to succeed.
- ❑ » 72 percent of employers rate new entrants with only a high school diploma as “deficient” in writing, 54 percent rate them as “deficient” in mathematics and 38 percent rate them as “deficient” in reading comprehension.
- ❑ » 70 percent of employer respondents rate new entrants with only a high school diploma as “deficient” in critical thinking/problem solving (skills that 58 percent of employers rate as “very important” to on-the-job success).
- ❑ » 39 percent of employers are unhappy with recent high school graduates’ ability to apply what they learn to solve real-world problems.
- ❑ » 38 percent of employers believe that the graduates are inadequately prepared for the quality of writing that is expected, and **34 percent are unhappy with graduates’ oral communication skills.**
- ❑ » About three-quarters of postsecondary writing, reading, mathematics and science professors say incoming students are “very poorly” or “poorly” prepared for college-level work in their content areas.

CCSS attends to building these skills and addressing these “deficiencies”

- (although this preface seems to place the blame squarely on schools and teachers instead of on more structural societal problems such as the number of children and families living in poverty)

Communication and Discussion Skills Strongly Reflected in the CCSS: How will teachers teach low-income and ELL students to:

- ❑ SL: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- ❑ Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- ❑ Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

What skills do teachers need to operationalize these new standards?

- ❑ We generally do not offer training in structuring academic classroom conversations that build the previously cited SL skills in CCSS in our teacher ed programs (although this is changing)

And teachers are being evaluated on their ability to operationalize these standards

Commitment: Intentional efforts to level the playing field for ELLs, language minority students, and low-income students

- ❑ by apprenticing ELLs into effective language and communication skills we know are rewarded and valued by school and society
- ❑ by modeling discussion/debates
- ❑ By modeling academic writing
- ❑ We need to develop and offer professional development and curricula **that apprentices teachers** into all of the above

Modeling matters

Social cognitive theory posits that portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences. In other words, people do not learn new behaviors solely by trying them and either succeeding or failing, but rather, our survival is dependent upon the replication of the actions of others.

But this is not the general model followed by schools

Evidence concerning the role of discussion

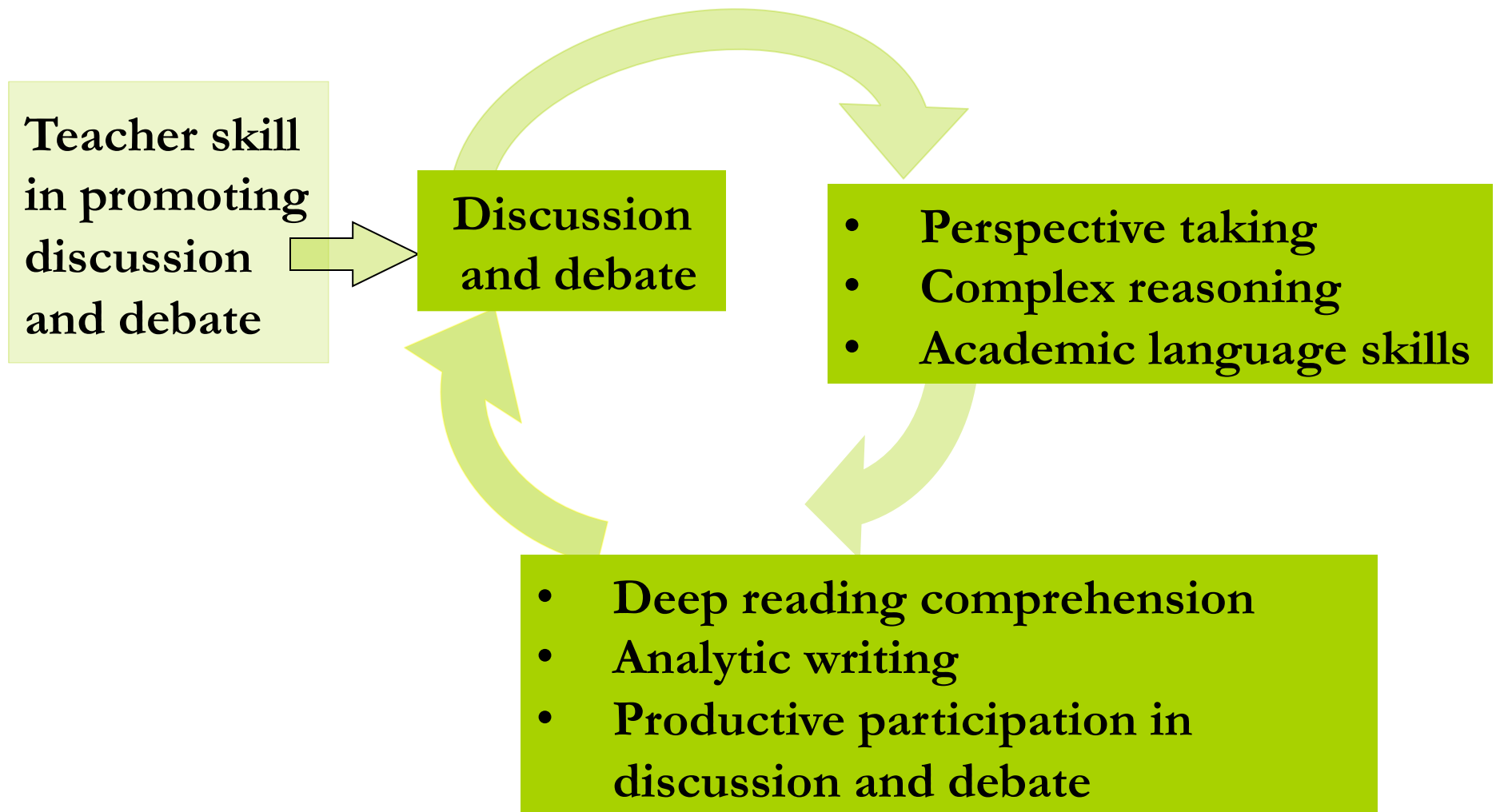
Classroom discussion is rare and brief

(Applebee, Langer, Nystrand & Gamoran, 2003)

	Low track classes	Middle track classes	High track classes	Mixed classes
Minutes of discussion/lesson	0.70	1.44	3.30	1.42

And it always has been (Gamoran & Nystrand, 1991)

Word Generation: Theory of Action



A discussion-based approach with dilemma and controversy as foundation for engagement and building academic language

□ Word Generation

Common Core Standards and WG

CC shifts in expectations for learning

- ❑ 50/50 genre balance
- ❑ Text complexity
- ❑ Building content knowledge
- ❑ Perspective and argument
- ❑ Text-Based questions
- ❑ Academic vocabulary

Word Generation

- ❑ Engaging, informational, narrative, expository text
- ❑ At grade level text across content areas
- ❑ Weekly discussion and writing to enhance argument and perspective skills
- ❑ Intense weekly study of academic vocabulary

Word Generation-T: Features

- ❑ 3 series (3 years of materials).
- ❑ 24 week-long units each focused on a set of 5 target words selected from the Academic Word List (AWL)
- ❑ Cross content activities: 20 minutes a day/5 days a week)
- ❑ Texts written at 6th grade level
- ❑ **Passages written to engage adolescents in high-level discussions on nationally-relevant topics as well as on topics that are of great interest to this age group**
 - Politics and Privacy: Do we need to know everything about a political candidate's life?
 - Should amnesty be given to undocumented immigrants?
 - Should we label food that comes from genetically modified organisms?
 - Should you be able to rent a pet?
 - Should there be curfews for teenagers?
 - Junk food: Should it be sold in schools?

Word Generation: Weekly Schedule

Monday
Launch
passage
introduces
words

Tuesday-Thursday
Math-Science-Social Studies

Friday
Writing with
focus words

Join the national conversation!

SHOULD SECRET WIRETAPPING BE LEGAL?

Word Generation - Unit 3.05

Focus Words

wiretapping | notwithstanding | eliminate | suspicious | source

WEEKLY PASSAGE



Alina Woods was talking to her cousin in Mexico over the phone. She remembered hearing about **wiretapping** on the news. She had heard that the government was listening to international telephone conversations. Government officials were doing this so they could know if terrorists were planning attacks. Alina wondered if someone was listening to her conversation.

After the September 11th attacks, President Bush told the National Security Agency (NSA) to pay attention to conversations between Americans and foreigners who the government thought were **suspicious**. The NSA could tap phone calls, email accounts, and text messages as **sources** of information. He told the NSA officials to do this in secret, **notwithstanding** the fact that they were supposed to ask a court for permission. But President Bush said this secret wiretapping was necessary to keep the country safe. He called his new rules the Protect America Act.

Some people defend the Protect America Act because they think it will protect Americans from terrorists. They think that if a person seems suspicious, it is important to listen to that person's conversations and read his or her e-mail messages. People who support the President's new rules point out that the Protect America act **eliminates** any possible delays in getting information about possible terrorists because the government does not have to wait

for a judge's permission. They believe it ensure America's safety.

Other people are against the Protect America Act, notwithstanding the need for safety and security. They think wiretapping violates a person's right to privacy. The main problem for opponents is that the Protect America Act allows the President the power to spy without warning or court permission. These people think the price we are paying for security is too high and that we are giving up some of the personal freedom provided by the Constitution.

What do you think? Should secret wiretapping to help the government catch terrorists be legal? Or do you think, notwithstanding the risks of a possible attack, nobody should be able to spy on our conversations without telling us? Where do you stand? Remember someone may be listening!

TEACHER: Discussion Questions

- ▶ According to the passage, what is wiretapping?
- ▶ Why did President Bush support secret wiretapping?
- ▶ Why do some people think secret wiretapping is a good idea?
- ▶ Why do some people oppose secret wiretapping?
- ▶ Do you think wiretapping is a good way to catch terrorists?

Math

- a) Students can work in pairs
- b) Whole class discussion
- c) Open-response (show/explain how you got your answer)

MCAS-type mathematics problems using some of the target words



Unit 2.07

Should the government fund stem cell research?

Problem of the Week

President George W. Bush restricted government funding on stem cell research. On August 9, 2001, he said that scientists could not **obtain** federal money for research on embryonic stem cell lines created after that date. This **paralyzed** certain areas of research. Scientists put some scientific **investigations** on hold.

President Bush believed he had a moral duty to stop new **embryos** from being destroyed. Each embryo, he pointed out, is a potential human being. His **theory** was that using embryos for research cheapens human life.

President Obama has a different moral theory. He says human beings have a moral duty to help people who are suffering. Therefore, they should use science to fight disease. In 2009, President Obama lifted President Bush's restrictions.

Option 1: Each embryo needed to start a stem cell line is made up of about 100 cells. Its mass is about one ten-millionth of a gram. Which of the following shows one ten-millionth?

- A) .0001
- B) .00001
- C) .000001
- D) .0000001

Option 2: Each embryo needed to start a stem cell line is made up of about 100 cells. Each person is made up of about 100 trillion cells. Write both numbers in scientific notation. How many orders of magnitude separate the two numbers?

Discussion Question: In 2009, the FDA approved the first clinical trial using **embryonic** stem cells. A company called Geron Corp planned to inject embryonic stem cells into 8-10 people whose legs were **paralyzed** by a spinal cord injury. The Geron scientists had a **theory** that these cells could help repair damaged nerves. **Obtaining** subjects for the trial would take time, because the scientists wanted to inject the cells within a few days of the injury. They said the trial was primarily an **investigation** into whether injecting stem cells would be safe. But they also hoped to see whether the stem cells would help patients recover some movement in their legs.

Pretend that you are against stem cell research. What would you say to these researchers to convince them to give up this project?

Science

Thinking experiments to promote discussion and scientific reasoning

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Unit 2.07

Should the government fund stem cell research? Science Activity

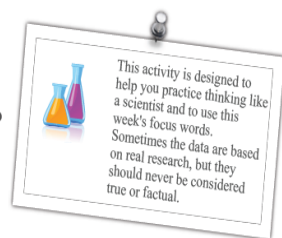
Professor Seemy's class is talking about stem cell research.

"I saw a woman on TV who was **paralyzed** in a car accident," says Gabriel. "She said stem cell research could help her walk again."

"I saw a guy on TV who opposes stem cell research," says Toni. "He said that scientists kill babies to **obtain** stem cells."

"That's wrong," says Gabriel. "Scientists get stem cells from **embryos** that grow in a lab. Embryos aren't babies. They're tiny clumps of cells."

"People have strong opinions about stem cell research," says Professor Seemy. "But they may not understand stem cell science. I have a **theory**. I bet most people don't even know what stem cells are. Let's **investigate!**"



Question:

How many people can define "stem cell"?

Hypothesis:

Most people will not know these basic facts about stem cells:

- A stem cell is a cell that can become a more specialized cell.
- Stem cells become skin, blood, nerve, and muscle cells.
- All cells in a person's body come from (or stem from) stem cells.

Materials:

- 100 adults

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Procedure:

- Show each adult the 3 statements about stem cells.
- Ask whether the statements are true or false.
- Calculate the percentage of right and wrong answers for each question.

Data:

Statement	Right	Wrong
A	60%	40%
B	25%	75%
C	18%	82%

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?

Debate/ Discussion

Developing *positions on the issue*
set out in the passage, to help
the class frame the debate

Unit 2.07

Should the government fund stem cell research?

Debating the Issue

1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Scientists should focus on finding cures using adult stems cells instead of stems cells from embryos. There are valid ethical concerns about using embryonic stem cells.

B Destroying an embryo to get the stem cells is like murder. This should be a crime.

C The government should pay for embryonic stem cell research. This could be our only hope for treatment of many injuries and diseases that cause suffering and death.

D Scientists should be allowed to do research on embryonic stem cells, but the government should not pay for it because many taxpayers oppose it.

E _____

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:



GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

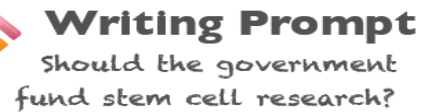
In my experience . . .

that's similar to what I think too...

What makes you think that?

When I re-read the text, it reminded me...

Give evidence to support your position.



Focus Words

Exemplary	
☐	Stated my own position clearly
☐	Included 1-2 arguments
☐	Included 1 counterargument
☐	Used 2-6 focus words

Check off what you accomplished:

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1-2 focus words

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

WG-Enhanced- Grades 4-8

***Develop** new curriculum for grades 4 and 5 w/discussion, debate as primary driver, cross-content exposure to AWL words through engaging and age-appropriate dilemmas

***Modify** existing Word Generation middle school program for 6th, 7th, 8th grade grades through enhanced science and social studies units

- Structured discussion is the driver
- Tied to content and **Common-Core standards**
- Incorporates perspective-taking, complex reasoning, academic language



WORD GENERATION

fourth grade edition

Hello —

привет

I love you —

я люблю
тебя

Thank you —
спасибо

Bye —
свидания

Unit 5

Should everyone learn a second language?

SCHEDULE

Day 1

Newscast/Reader's Theater

Day 2

Characters' Perspectives

Day 3

Word Study

Day 4

Word Study

Day 5

Math

Day 6

Interview

Day 7

Science

Day 8

Pre-Debate

Day 9

Debate

Day 10

Writing

→ **beneficial**

→ **cultural**

→ **bilingual**

→ **complicated**

→ **proficient**

THE PHARAOHS OF ANCIENT EGYPT: OPPRESSORS OR GREAT LEADERS?

FOCUS WORDS

order

proposal

value

oppressive

revolution

stability

What You'll Be Learning in This Unit

In this week's social studies lesson you will learn about ancient Egypt and its pharaohs. The pharaohs were more than powerful rulers. They were believed to be gods with supernatural powers. People thought that the pharaohs watched over Egypt even after they were dead.

The pharaohs owned all the land and controlled the people who lived there.

What You'll Be Debating in This Unit

Some say the pharaohs were **oppressive**—their treatment and control of ancient Egyptians was unjust because the pharaohs often treated them cruelly, and no one else had a say in how things were run. But others say that the way pharaohs treated and controlled the people was justified because they built a powerful civilization that lasted for centuries. In the debate, you'll have the opportunity to take a side and defend your position.



General results for WG-T

- Program has been shown to positively impact second language learners as well as native English speakers on outcome measures
- On average, 2 of the 5 words are used in each weekly essay; writing gains in final 10 weeks of implementation (data show consolidation after summer months)
- Discussion-based approach and opportunities for speaking seem to be the basis for these gains
- All students, if they knew 70% of WG words scored in the proficient category in ELA on our standardized test
- Currently working on the analysis of data gathered from 4 years of WG-E

Conclusion

- ❑ Let's give English language learners and low-income students something to talk about- engaging them in the ethical issues of our day not only builds academic language but civic engagement which in turn helps them develop academic, social, and political identities
- ❑ Let's give teachers the tools they need to operationalize effective classroom discussions so that they can apprentice and engage ELLs in daily discussion-based activities across content areas
- ❑ Dilemma-centered curricula, discussion-based classroom activities as well as systematic vocabulary instruction are together, a powerful combination for engagement, for academic language development, and reading achievement of our most vulnerable students



Thank you.. (white.claire@gmail.com)
