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Clinical 2: Teaching Writing Skills

I recently worked with a high school sophomore from the Agua Fria High School District in Avondale, Arizona to improve his writing skills. The student requested that his alias for confidentiality purposes be, “Bulbous AI,” which is a request I will adhere to in consideration of the time he put in to helping me complete this assignment. For the three separate assignments considered below, his honors sophomore English course required that he analyze the positive and negative effects of industrialization, analyze a character from the class’ required novel, and analyze the reasons behind the cultural decline that occurred in South Africa. I gathered information about the teacher’s expectations and the Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards that related to these three assignments, determined what areas of Bulbous AI’s writing could use further development in relationship to these standards, and consequently taught him a related skill.

For these three writing assignments, the two main goals were to evaluate writing skills and to measure students’ mastery of content. The first essay measured students’ understanding of the historical concepts surrounding the issue of industrialization, which functioned as a precursor to the novel they read as a class, upon which the second and third essays were predicated. The second essay revolved around character analysis, and the third essay had the students analyze the thematic content of the novel, which dealt with the political and cultural landscape of South Africa. The teacher expected that her students would develop solid

arguments to support their interpretations of the content, structure those arguments coherently using the expository essay formula that she taught them, and follow the typical six-trait rubric. The Arizona College and Career Readiness Standards that relate to these assignments most strongly correlate with those found in sections 9-10.W.1 and 9-10.W.2. The first essay was due on 08 December 2016, the second essay was due on 23 January 2017, and the final essay was due on 15 February 2017.

Bulbous AI's writing showed improvement over the course of three months, but there were some common themes between the errors in each essay. The major categories included syntactical errors, minor grammatical errors, and weak or absent conclusion sentences. The presence of syntactical errors and minor grammatical errors relate most strongly to AZCCRS 9-10.W.5, and are typical of sophomore level writing, which simply indicates that Bulbous AI is on target for his age and still has room to grow in the future. Using weak or absent conclusion sentences relates most strongly to AZCCRS 9-10.W.1, and simply reflects that his teachers had only barely covered the concept in middle school, and no teachers in high school had explicitly covered the material. As Gore explains, students, especially those with ELN, benefit strongly when teachers explicitly "teach text structure" (Gore, 166). Even in this one area of struggle, he was not performing under grade level, but the concept is one that the Arizona Department of Education requires sophomores to eventually master. Although many of these errors are expected even in quality sophomore level writing, I still decided to teach Bulbous AI a new skill to help him develop his writing because Wormeli recommends that, "At every turn, principals and teachers are not out to be equal. Instead, they are pushing to be fair and developmentally appropriate. This is sometimes hard to accept, but it enables schools to push students farther,

thereby achieving more than they would if schools practiced only one-size-fits-all pedagogy” (Wormeli, 3). The recurrence of these errors is demonstrated in the chart below.

	Syntax	Grammar	Conclusions
Essay 1	3	5	All paragraphs (4)
Essay 2	2	4	All paragraphs (3)
Essay 3	2	3	All paragraphs (4)

After carefully considering Bulbous AI’s admittedly stellar writing, I determined that his conclusion sentences would benefit the most from further development. I asked him, “How would you feel if I taught you about conclusion sentences?” His immediate response was an exasperated, “Yes, please! I don’t know what those are supposed to be. They seem pointless. Like, if you want to know what my argument is, just read the freaking paragraph. I just said it! Why do I need to say it again?” His response gave me valuable insight into his prior exposure to the content, which seemed minimal at best. I remember from our class lectures that several groups have emphasized the importance of helping students understand the relevance of content to their lives, so, as will be further explained later, I included intentional instruction to help illustrate the purpose, function, and impact of conclusion sentences. When I really evaluated Bulbous AI’s writing performance, I discovered that he thinks through his arguments in a way that very easily lends itself to academic writing. His overall claims, or theses, were well supported by a few major arguments, which were then supplemented by convincing textual evidence. His command of language was quite adept for his age, and upon request, he informed me that he had received extremely high grades on all his assignments. Even given this degree of success, I committed to refine his writing skills because he openly demonstrated a desire to

continue learning, and as we discussed in class and as I have reflected in my discussion posts, accommodations are not just for one kind of student. Accommodations and adaptations are meant to push every student to his or her fullest potential, which can also include continuing to push a student who has surpassed the expectations.

So, after some preparation, I began our lesson by displaying the state standards that relate to conclusion sentences, specifically, “Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims. d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented” (AZCCRS, 9-10.W.1). I included these in written form at the start of the PowerPoint, and verbally explained that they basically indicated that what I was about to teach was deemed valuable by the Arizona Department of Education, whose standards mirror those of the Common Core system.

Throughout the lesson, giving multiple means of presentation was an intentional strategy used to unlock learning for all students, especially those with ELN, according to the recommendations made by Gore (Gore, 30). Additionally, throughout the lesson, I used a “plethora of examples” and provided the student with electronic “guided notes,” included below (Gore, 26, 33). I began the lesson with examples of conclusion sentences used in real life, along with video evidence. I drew from lawyers’ closing arguments, published opinion editorials, and presidential debates, then emphasized the role of conclusions in solidifying the main points in their target audience’s minds, and stressed the major impact of these arguments on national events. He responded well

to this strategy. Next, I taught him everything I knew about conclusion sentences, pausing often to check for understanding, and encouraging him to use his guided notes during the process. All slides are included below. He did not really utilize the guided notes, and preferred to stay directly focused on the PowerPoint. I sent him the PowerPoint online using Google, so we were both able to view and interact with it directly. Then, I modeled other students' essays taken from an online AP database, and we evaluated what was good about their conclusion sentences as they related to the content I had just presented. Bulbous AI seemed to respond well to examples, which helped to solidify the concepts I had just introduced to him. Finally, I guided him in some practice with conclusion sentences, and then let him practice on his own. For sake of ease and applicability, we used his own former assignments, and wrote one new conclusion sentence, and edited another one. After all this instruction, he demonstrated a clear understanding of the purpose of a conclusion sentence, and was able to quickly and effectively create his own in ways that satisfactorily demonstrated the content of the lesson. Both his conclusion sentences summarized the main points of the paragraph, included clear transitions, and tied the paragraph into his overall argument. Afterwards, I asked Bulbous AI how he felt about conclusion sentences, and he thanked me profusely for having taken the time to teach him about them, which instantly made all my efforts well worth it, and he expressed satisfaction with the strategies I had used. He said that he felt confident in his ability to continue to produce quality conclusion sentences, which aligned with what I saw of his increased skill level. Overall, the lesson went astoundingly well, and I was glad to have done it.

Works Cited

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Career Ready Standards English Language Arts and Literacy. Phoenix: Arizona

Department of Education, 2013. Print.

Wormeli, R. "Differentiation at the Secondary Level." *Adolescent Literacy in Perspective*

(2007): 1-28. Web. May 2014. <www.ohiorc.org/adit/>.

Conclusion Sentences

Date: 03/26/2017

What's the point?

- <My notes here>
 - <My notes here>
- <My notes here>
 - <My notes here>

What makes a good conclusion sentence?

1 Anchor to thesis

- <My notes here>

2 Summarize MAIN POINT of Paragraph

- <My notes here>

3 Tips and Tricks

- <My notes here>

Notes from Examples

- Example One
 - <My notes here>
 - <My notes here>
- Example Two
 - <My notes here>
 - <My notes here>

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented. (9-10.W.1)

Conclusion Sentences

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to demonstrate the two major elements of quality conclusion sentences by writing 1 new conclusion sentence and editing 1 of your own sentences from previous assignments.

What's the point? Does anyone actually use them in real life?

Examples of Real Life Conclusion Sentences

<https://youtu.be/I611FPdZG2k?t=5h14m>

This is a link to one conclusion given in the OJ Simpson murder trial.

(start at 5:14:00)

<https://youtu.be/ES3MbkfTUTI?t=30s>

The two final presidential candidates gave concluding statements of their main points before the American electorate voted. (start at 0:30)

Examples of Real Life Conclusion Sentences

Final statement of “The critical questions on Russia,” an opinion editorial given by Anne Applebaum to the Washington Post:

Congress cannot simply ask the question “was this all legal,” because it probably was. Congress, or an independent investigator, needs to find a way to ask, “was this moral,” because it surely wasn’t, and “does it constitute undue influence,” which it surely does.

What makes a good conclusion sentence?



Summarize Paragraph

“What is the main point I’m trying to make with this paragraph?”

Ignore the evidence statements; summarize the points you make in the analysis statements.

Should be more nuanced than topic sentence



Anchor to Thesis

“How does the main point of this paragraph support my overall argument (thesis)?”

Not a restatement of the thesis

Keeps overall argument grounded in thesis

Reiterates how this paragraph proves your point



Tips and Tricks

“Does this feel like a conclusion sentence? Does it make sense in relationship to the paragraph I just wrote?”

Transition Words

Look to topic sentence and thesis for inspiration

Don't bring in new ideas

Student Model 1

Thesis:

Monolingual English speakers are at a disadvantage in today's world because business practices benefit those who speak multiple languages, they miss out on the culture the rest of the world has to offer, and they don't benefit from the educational benefits that learning a language offers.

Conclusion Sentences:

- 1) Being multilingual opens up opportunity in the business world for Americans abroad and at home.
- 2) Being multilingual opens the door to cultural gain otherwise impossible, especially for native English speakers.
- 3) This educational and mental benefit comes from the learning and utilizing of a second or third language, proving another benefit of multilingualism for Americans.

https://source-media.cengage.com/digitalServices/pdf/so_speakers1_01_0_english_language_01.pdf

Analysis of Student Model 1

The Good

Summarize?

Anchor?

Make sense?

The Bad

Summarize?

Anchor?

Make sense?

Official AP Score: 8

Student Model 2

Thesis:

Monolingual English speakers are a disadvantage because they fail to appreciate traditions, limit global activity and hurt their overall intelligence.

Conclusion Sentences:

- 1) Language and culture go hand-in-hand: one cannot be experienced without the other.
- 2) Wars and international conflict can be avoided by knowing another language and not miscommunicating.
- 3) The brain becomes smarter, faster, and wittier to make an individual's overall intelligence skyrocket.

https://secure-media.collegeboard.org/digitalServices/pdf/ap/apcentral/ap18/english_language_01.pdf

Analysis of Student Model 2

The Good

Summarize?

Anchor?

Make sense?

The Bad

Summarize?

Anchor?

Make sense?

Official AP Score: 4

Practice on Mine

Thesis:

Although Stephen believes that the cities have torn down the tribal society, the white Europeans are to blame for the breaking of the tribe because they have forced their ways on the tribal society, as well as the forcing of the Africans to move Johannesburg in order to feel meaningful.

Practice on Mine

The tribe has been broken due to the Europeans oppressing their own culture on tribal life and by forcing the Africans to move to Johannesburg so that they can have a purpose. This can be seen when John Kumalo expresses to his brother Stephen, "But at least I am free of the Chief... an old and ignorant man, who is nothing but a white man's dog. He is a trick, a trick to hold together something that the white man desires to hold together" (67). This shows how the Chiefs are just puppets for the Europeans, so that they can keep a leash on the Africans. Because of this, the Europeans are able to exploit the Africans' weakness of non industrialization to ensure their own wealth, at the expense of the Africans. Additionally, the Europeans have changed society from the tribal life of peace and quiet, of being apart of the land, to having a necessity for the cities, the money, and the poverty as they push all the Africans towards the mines. This is seen when John Kumalo explains to Stephen that, "It is important to find gold, they say, for all South Africa is built on the mines...But it is not built on the mines...it is built on our backs, on our sweat, on our labour...they are all built by us" (68). Because of the forced labor of the Africans, the Europeans are able to just stand by and get wealthy without working due to their enslavement of the Africans. Even though this enslavement is not literal because the Africans are still paid and they can still live in a tribal society, the pull of Johannesburg and the need to be more successful has corrupted the Africans' morals to the point where it is an addiction.

Sample Concluding Sentence: Consequently, the white Europeans are to blame for the breakup of the African tribe because...(summary)

Practice on Mine

Thesis:

Throughout the book, Alvarez displays that Minerva is both a hero and an ordinary person. She has the heroic traits of defiance, resistance, and devotion. Alvarez also points out her flawed human characteristics of courage, determination, and the drive to be free.

Practice on Mine

To start with, Alvarez demonstrated Minerva's heroic traits of defiance, resistance, and devotion. Minerva's defiance can be seen when she was dancing with Trujillo, who was acting inappropriately towards her, where Alvarez writes, "I can see my hand in an endless slow motion rise - a mind all its own - and come down on the astonished, made-up face" (Alvarez 100). This shows how even though Trujillo is the most powerful man in the country, Minerva was defiant enough to stand up for herself and not be manipulated by Trujillo. Because of this heroic characteristic, Minerva was able to lead the rebellion and not be intimidated by Trujillo. In addition, Minerva is very resistant. This is shown when Minerva and her sister Mate were in prison and they were offered a pardon. Minerva declines the pardon because "we Mirabals had to set a good example. Accepting a pardon meant we thought we had something to be pardoned for" (Alvarez 236). In Minerva's eyes, accepting the pardon was giving into Trujillo's power, so Minerva resisted the temptation of freedom and stayed in prison. Setting this example proved how resistant Minerva was, helping others resist the regime as well. Finally, Alvarez demonstrated how devoted Minerva was to the rebellion when she describes how Minerva had to give up raising her child in order to stay involved in the rebellion. Her sister, Patria, who raised Minou for Minerva observes, "It did hurt her to make this sacrifice she was convinced she needed to make" (Alvarez 155). Even though it was extremely painful for Minerva to give up her family, she was so strongly devoted to the regime that she was willing to make this sacrifice. Being this devoted allowed the regime to flourish and help others join the rebellion. Overall, Alvarez gave insight into the heroic side of Minerva by displaying her characteristics that helped the rebellion.

Sample Concluding Sentence: Because Alvarez glorified the sacrifices Minerva was willing to make for her cause, Alvarez gave insight into the heroic side of Minerva's defiance, resistance, and devotion.