

## **Case Study**

### **Exhibit 1**

#### ***Class Description***

Mr. Michaels's 11<sup>th</sup> grade English class is located in Acorn Community High School in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. The population of the school is 99% minority students of which 95% are African American, 4% are Latino and 1% are Caucasian. Eighty-seven percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. There are 56% male and 44% female students. Mr. Michael's class of 25 students is comprised of 23 African American students and two Latino students. There are 25 male students. One of the Latino students is native born. The other has been in the country for six months and receives ESL services. All students are economically challenged and receive free lunch. Five of the students are reading on level and twenty are two-three years below reading level according to standardized ELA test scores. The five on-level readers write with basic competency. The remaining twenty students struggle with writing. The class is comprised of Mr. Michaels is concerned because he is about to embark on a required unit of study focusing on argument. This is a four -week unit in which students will be engaged in researching whether college athletes should be paid. Although the rest of the grade was given the topic of whether it was acceptable to violate the individual's rights in the interest of national security, Mr. Michaels was concerned that this would not engage his students who were primarily disengaged and struggling readers and writers. He went to his supervisor and asked for permission to choose a topic that he felt would better engage and motivate his students. Since his class was all male and since the majority of his students were interested in sports, he felt that his alternative choice for a topic would better engage his students.

#### ***Evidence***

During the first two weeks of the unit, students were engaged in reading articles and doing research on the assigned topic. Mr. Michaels made sure to include texts on both sides of the issue. During class, he engaged his students in discussion around the texts and had students take notes. After they had completed their research, Mr. Michaels presented a rubric for the argument essay and went over the criteria by which their work would be evaluated. He reminded students that they had to chose either to argue in favor of student athletes being paid or against them being paid. He had the students brainstorm their topic and talk about it in their table groups. At that point, he had them write their first drafts of their arguments. As Mr. Michaels had feared, the results, with few exceptions, were poor. In particular, Kareem's paper had many serious issues. There was no clear thesis statement. Although Kareem wrote with strong voice, his paper was written in street slang and sometimes reverted to text language and profanity. While he provided reasons for his position, he cited no textual evidence to support them. His work contained many sentence fragments and run-on sentences. There was no paragraphing whatsoever. There were serious grammatical errors including lack of agreement between subject and verb, use of double negatives, and inconsistency of tense, and there were

numerous spelling errors. Other than at the beginning of sentences, proper nouns were not capitalized. Sentences often ended in commas. There was little sense of organization. Mr. Michaels wanted to support Kareem in his writing but was concerned about what steps he should take, given the overwhelming amount of issues evident in Kareem's writing. Mr. Michaels was also concerned about John. When John handed in his paper, there was only one paragraph written on it, a thesis statement copied word for word from the example Mr. Michaels had modeled for the class, and 3 bulleted reasons for his position. When Mr. Michaels conferred with John, he asked him why he didn't want to complete the assignment. John replied, "What's the point. I'm gonna fail anyway. This topic is stupid."

### ***Lesson Plan***

<b>Topic: Argument Writing</b>	
<b>Standard:</b> 11th grade CCS-W1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e	
<b>Lesson Objective:</b> Students will write a first draft of their arguments based on multiple readings.	
<b>Grouping:</b> Students will work independently after engaging in several discussions and peer brainstorming in groups of four.	
<b>Materials:</b> writers' notebooks, loose leaf paper, students' notes gathered from multiple readings of sources on both sides of the issue	
<b>Lesson Component</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	Remind students that they should be working on their first drafts of their arguments. Review the components of an argument and the criteria cited in the rubric that had been introduced at the beginning of the unit. Remind students to cite evidence from the notes that they had been gathering after engaging in reading and research from multiple sources. Remind students to review the various parts of their arguments that they had been working on in their writers' notebooks and in their writing folders and incorporate them into their arguments.
<b>Independent Writing</b>	Students will work independently while Mr. Michaels will hold conference with several students.
<b>Share Out</b>	After working on their drafts, students will complete an exit slip asking them what they felt they did well and in what areas they were having difficulty. Students briefly shared their successes and concerns at the end of the work period.

### **Use the exhibits to answer the following questions:**

1. The majority of the students probably wrote poor arguments because:
  - A) they struggled with comprehending the reading sources used to support their arguments.
  - B) they lacked experience with code-switching.

- C) they needed additional scaffolding on how to write an effective argument
- D) all of the above

The correct answer is D. Students need greater scaffolding in breaking up the task of writing an argument in smaller chunks. There is often a strong connection between a student's reading and writing competency. Students who struggle with reading often struggle with writing as well, and vice versa. Students also need to be taught how to code switch, moving from street or community, informal language to academic language and formal English. Struggling learners often become overwhelmed by the many demands of academic writing and cannot address all those areas at once.

2. Which would be the **least** effective course of action Mr. Michaels could take?

- A) Provide Kareem with samples of standard-bearing arguments that he can use as a model for his work.
- B) Correct Kareem's first draft and return it to him to rewrite. Go over your corrections with him during a student conference with him.
- C) Provide Kareem with a graphic organizer or essay frame to guide him.
- D) Focus first on helping Kareem with the content of his essay and ask facilitating questions during conferencing asking him to find articles read with his notes that would support his argument.

Choice A is an effective strategy. Students need models of what good writing looks like to guide their own writing. It would be helpful to label the parts of effective examples of good arguments so that Kareem would have a better idea of what needs to be included in his own argument. While rubrics are effective, they are not enough. Students need to be able to look at benchmark work and see how that work meets the criteria outlined in the rubric.

Choice C is also an effective strategy. Many struggling readers and writers benefit from graphic organizers to help organize their thinking since many students are visual learners. Graphic organizers such as the 4-square organizer or the Cornell Outline prove highly helpful to struggling writers.

Choice D is an effective strategy as well. During conferences with students, first have students discuss what they are trying to accomplish. Assist struggling students in selecting texts and other evidence that support their claims. While proper usage and mechanics are important, it is more important to facilitate Kareem in formulating his thesis and providing arguments with evidence to support those claims before addressing mechanics. Following the writing process, drafting and

revision should always precede editing. If you overwhelm struggling writers with mechanics and usage, they will shut down and give up.

While Choice B might appear to be the most expedient form of action, the only one whose writing will improve from that course of action is the teacher. Correcting a student's work will not teach a student how to correct his own. In addition, if you have ever been returned a paper with a sea of red marks on it, you know how demoralizing and overwhelming that can be. Students become highly discouraged when all they see are insurmountable obstacles, and most students will not even begin to pay attention to each correction. Effective teachers must learn to perform triage when it comes to addressing writing issues. Initially, helping struggling students to get their ideas down on paper must come before any attempts to correct mechanics and usage. Through mini-lessons, teacher modeling, and student conferences, teachers must break down the skills that students will need and only address one or two issues at a time rather than all of them at once. Once students have mastered one skill, then move on to address another issue. We must also teach and model the art of code switching and explicitly teach students the characteristics of formal, semi-formal, and informal language. Always remember to build upon students' strengths. Kareem was able to articulate his position and give reasons to support it. That is a good starting point. By helping him create a thesis and introductory paragraph, you can then help him build body paragraphs and find and cite supporting textual evidence, and then write a conclusion. Then we can help him to organize his paragraphs by using transitional words. Only after we have addressed content, can we begin to address mechanics and usage by focusing on one issue at a time. With struggling writers, we must take baby steps and allow students to experience small successes along the way in order to encourage their growth and build their confidence. Therefore, Choice B is the least effective strategy for addressing the needs of struggling writers.

3. Which writing issue should Mr. Michaels address first with the writers who did poorly on their first drafts?

- A) Teach students the characteristics of formal academic English
- B) Teach students how to use evidence to support their claims.
- C) Teach students to use transitional words to organize their arguments.
- D) Teach students proofreading strategies.

The correct answer is B. While all of the above must be taught, it is of the utmost importance for students to gather and use evidence to support their claims. Most of the students were able to form a position but had issues with how to use evidence to support those positions. Organization and style need to be addressed during revision and grammar and usage should be taught during the editing phase of the writing process in the context of the students' writing. We must first help students express their position and find evidence to support their positions.

4. What would be the best way for Mr. Michaels to address John's refusal to complete the assignment?

A) Remind John that the writing project is 25% of his grade and he will fail if he doesn't at least attempt to write the argument.

B) Pair John with another writer for additional support and encouragement.

C) During a student conference, ask John to talk about the bulleted reasons he had provided and ask him to show Mr. Michaels any evidence he had found to support those assertions. Model how this evidence could be used to expand his writing piece. Provide encouragement and praise for finding three reasons to support the thesis.

D) Offer to help John individually after school.

The correct answer is C. Threats rarely work with struggling learners. While it would be an excellent idea to eventually pair John with a peer, John may feel too embarrassed to want this type of assistance, and this may be difficult if the other students in the class are also struggling. While offering after-school assistance is wonderful, many students have obligations after school. While John may ultimately require this type of support, it is best to begin by asking John to orally discuss his thoughts before putting them on paper. Struggling readers and writers need positive encouragement and feedback that is timely and manageable. It is best to help John begin to collect the evidence he has gathered and provide greater scaffolding in the form of modeling how to use this evidence to expand his ideas.

5. After analyzing the information provided, write a response of approximately 150-200 words in which you identify one issue that Kareem is facing in trying to write an argument that meets standard. Choose one instructional strategy you would use to address that issue you identified and explain how that strategy you identified would be effective in improving student learning.