

Research-based Strategies for Teaching Argument Writing: Cognitive, Sociocognitive/Sociocultural, and Design-Based Lenses

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Abstract (75 words)

This symposium focuses on contrapuntal lenses for teaching argument writing: cognitive, sociocognitive/sociocultural, and design-based lenses. The first paper draws on a validated teacher professional development program for writing arguments of literary analysis. The second paper focuses on a sociocognitive approach to empower students to participate in civic engagement. The third paper takes a design-based approach to develop argument writing assessments. Presenters will provide a wide-angle view for supporting secondary students' argument writing.

This symposium focuses on contrapuntal lenses for teaching argument writing: cognitive, sociocognitive/sociocultural, and design-based lenses. The first paper draws on a validated teacher professional development program that focuses on making visible the moves that research indicates expert readers and writers use for constructing arguments of literary analysis. The second paper focuses on a sociocognitive approach to empower students to participate in civic engagement and construct arguments of opinion. The third paper takes a design-based, iterative approach based on teachers' and students' experiences to the development of an assessment to test students' argument writing in history, over time. Presenters will provide research data on each of these approaches and discuss how they overlap, providing "a wide-angle" view of how argument writing can be supported through multiple approaches across different contexts and disciplines.

Paper #1: Research-based strategies for teaching arguments of literary analysis in ELA

The first lens to teaching argument writing leads us into secondary ELA classrooms. Through a cognitive strategies approach to literary analysis, we know that writing, particularly one that focuses on forwarding a thesis, involves different processes and knowledge of skills involving reading and interpreting texts; organizing, composing, and revising of written prose; and constructing knowledge and meaning-making of the source-text, for both writer and reader (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Shanahan, 2016; Tierney & Pearson, 1983). How skillfully a writer is able to defend their claim is highly dependent on their declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge of writing moves. Arguments of literary analysis, a ubiquitous academic assignment, involve the ability to understand an author's purpose, identifying the central message they wish to convey, and being able to find textual evidence to support a claim around this message. Additionally, attention to author's craft, or use of language and figurative language, and character development, setting, and plot is essential in constructing arguments around literary texts.

The Pathway to Academic Success is a teacher professional development intervention aimed at enhancing teachers' existing repertoires to teach writing, particularly academic writing,

for multiple purposes. Teachers are provided with 46 hours of professional development to support their students by unpacking and making visible the processes and skills expert readers and writers use when composing, in this case, arguments of literary analysis. How teachers and students learn, perceive, and apply these strategies varies across different contexts. The project has been validated through the What Works Clearinghouse with multiple studies categorized as *without reservations*. It has been found to be effective in multiple school districts with different iterations (Borko, 2004), with benefits for English learners and Latin@ students in particular.

Based on the results of multiple randomized controlled trials, teacher surveys, and student writing assessments, presenters will demonstrate effective, research-based strategies for teaching arguments of literary analysis that demystifies the reading and writing process for students. We will highlight cognitive strategies that support students prior to reading, during reading, and after reading, as they compose their arguments. We will also present perspectives from teachers and students across multiple school districts to share their stories and experiences using these strategies to acknowledge their contributions to our work.

Implications for research and instruction include ways to use teacher and student feedback to help iteratively design professional development materials and experiences; how to make research-based claims on effective strategies in the classroom; and how reform ownership is possible when stakeholders feel involved and invested.

Paper #2: Research-based strategies for teaching arguments of opinion for civic engagement

The second lens also invites us back into secondary ELA classrooms. Through a sociocognitive/sociocultural lens, we think about the acquisition and use of information as occurring within an interaction-knowledge network. In an era where public discourse has become increasingly polarized and “echo chambers” of narrow views populated people’s social media feeds, teaching students to ground their arguments in evidence is more important than ever. Therefore, the National Writing Project (NWP)’s approach to argument writing starts with having students understand multiple perspectives that go beyond pros and cons and are based on multiple pieces of evidence, which ultimately enables students to take responsible civic action. At its core, College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) supports students in navigating an increasingly dense informational world so they can become informed citizens who are prepared to participate in and ultimately strengthen a healthy and vibrant democracy.

Participating in a conversation, as opposed to a debate, is central to our understanding of argument. Before students develop a solid claim for an argument, they need to get a good sense of what the range of credible voices are saying and what a variety of positions are around the topic. Students have to first distinguish between credible and unreliable sources, and then identify a range of legitimate opinions on a single issue. This initial move counters the argument culture by seeking understanding before taking a stand. Once students understand a range of perspectives around a topic and develop an initial claim, they begin to select evidence with which to build a case. We help students to build skills associated with using sources based on Joseph Harris’ *Rewriting: how to do things with texts*, presenting the use of evidence in academic writing as a set of possible actions, or moves. Rather than plopping quotations into their arguments, students learn to do things with textual evidence, making them able to “respond to the work of others in a way that is both generous and assertive.”

In this talk, we will demonstrate how C3WP, an EIR-funded program, engages students in civic action through argument writing and will share research results that show broad improvement in students' argument writing. Participants will examine student work and gain appreciation of the argument moves students make.

Paper #3: Research-based strategies for teaching argument writing in history

The third lens to teaching argument writing takes us into secondary history classrooms. Through a design-based perspective (Barab, 2006), we understand that students' experiences can be leveraged to improve source-based argument prompts for distance learning contexts. Effective source-based argument writing in history requires that writers synthesize multiple perspectives and put forth logical arguments using evidence and reasoning. Moreover, teaching secondary students to write source-based arguments is also a complex endeavor that is particularly challenging in remote teaching and learning spaces.

In this talk, we will first discuss the results of a design study that iteratively developed source-based argument writing prompts for distance teaching and learning in grades 6-12 history/social studies classrooms in one large, urban public school district located in southern California. We will share what we learned about students' multimodal literacy behaviors during distance teaching and learning contexts to 1) develop text-sets that support students' use of evidence from multiple sources and center the stories of groups fighting for justice, 2) scaffold students' reading and synthesizing of complex texts, and 3) implement research-based strategies for teaching argument writing in grades 6-12 history/social studies classes. We will conclude with implications for the design of source-based argument writing learning opportunities in history/social studies classrooms that invite reading the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 2005).

The symposium will conclude with a moderated 10-minute question and answer session.

References

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