

TEACHING AND LEARNING ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOMS

Focused on the teaching and learning of argumentative writing in grades 9–12, this important contribution to literacy education research and classroom practice offers a new perspective, a set of principled practices, and case studies of excellent teaching. The case studies illustrate teaching and learning argumentative writing as the construction of knowledge and new understandings about experiences, ideas, and texts. Six themes key to teaching argumentative writing as a thoughtful, multi-leveled practice for deep learning and expression are presented.

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Dedication to Dr. George Hillocks, Jr.

As we were preparing the final version of the manuscript, Dr. George Hillocks, Jr., passed away. From the beginning of the research project in 2010 when we began our study of 31 classroom teachers and more recently during the writing of this book, we have remembered, considered, and read and reread George's ideas on teaching and learning argumentative writing. In particular, the chapter on teachers' "Epistemologies and Beliefs about the Teaching and Learning of 'Good' Argumentative Writing" as well as the chapter on "Curricular and Instructional Organization" were shaped by George's studies of writing instruction in secondary schools and college freshman classrooms.

Perhaps the most significant influence of George's work on our project was his commitment to the classroom as a place of significance and importance that deserves the respect and the attention of literacy researchers. We have not only admired George's career-long study of how teachers think about their practice and what can be learned from and with teachers, but, as researchers, we have also tried to learn from his example. We hope this book reflects his belief in teachers and the important role of school writing in the intellectual and emotional lives of the students they teach. For all of George's scholarship, we are deeply grateful.

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ARTIST'S STATEMENT ABOUT THE COVER

"we speak therefore"

This watercolor painting incorporates passages of this book's introduction. The words and phrases that resonated with me centered near the idea of arguing, but around having extended, complex, and contradictory conversations where people build on the ideas and speech of others. The visual image reminds me of feminist gatherings where the speakers' words are echoed by closer audience members back to more distant listeners in waves, voices spreading in expanding circles, reflected and refracted again and again. Our words, our selves, our fates are interconnected in powerful ways; we can use them as we may.

Melinda J. Rhoades



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INTRODUCTION

We have spent our professional lives thinking about, studying, researching, and working with young people and their teachers as they learn how to use written language to improve their lives, to generate new ideas and new knowledge, to explore literature, to construct social relationships with others who may be nearby or far away in time and space, and to have a voice in our society as it evolves and changes. For the past four years, we have been studying the teaching and learning of argumentative writing in high school English language arts classrooms. We view our interest in the teaching and learning of argumentative writing as part of our larger concern for how education in the English language arts (and particularly in composition) can be used to foster meaningful lives and social relationships, the acquisition of knowledge and insight, an ethic of caring and justice, the imagination and critical analysis, strong and diverse communities, and a democratic society in which every person is valued and can thrive.

Embracing the Integrity and Complexity of the Teaching and Learning of Argumentative Writing

We want to note at the very beginning that our emphasis here is on the teaching and learning of argumentative writing as an integrated, indivisible whole. For us, it is not enough to just study argumentative writing, argumentative texts, or argumentation as things in and of themselves. For us, there is an inviolable connection between teaching and learning and argumentative writing. To clarify: what counts as argumentative writing, indeed what counts as argumentation more generally, is not a given. It is not something that just exists. It is instead a set of social practices deeply embedded in our everyday lives and the social institutions in which we all participate. It is socially constructed through and exists only through teaching and learning. This teaching and learning may be formal as occurs in classrooms or it may be informal as occurs in families, communities, workplaces,

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and so forth. Nonetheless, what counts as argumentative writing is defined by and constituted by teaching and learning. Alternatively stated, any instance of argumentation (whether spoken or written) reflects and refracts previous events of the teaching and learning of argumentation and argumentative writing.

Unpacking the teaching and learning of argumentative writing is a complex process requiring consideration of language and composition processes, learning theories, philosophies of rationality, what counts as knowledge and knowing, social relationships, power relations, theories of instruction, situated logic, cultural differences, discourse processes, and more. And although teachers may not necessarily use the jargon of academia, these complexities are part of the context within which teachers in high school language arts classrooms think about, reflect upon, and engage students in constructing argumentative writing. This context is always evolving such that no moment of teaching and learning is ever frozen in time but must always be framed and reframed again and again.

There are books and articles on argumentative writing that offer simplistic approaches. They reduce argumentative writing to a simple structure and they reduce teaching and learning to the behavioral task of producing that structure. Some educators will be satisfied with such approaches; after all, this is what the *Common Core State Standards* (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO] & National Governors Association [NGA], 2010) require and what often gets assessed. We take a different approach. In this book, we explore the complexities we have encountered over the past four years as we observed, recorded, and reflected on what happened in 31 high school English language arts classrooms. Some of the teachers whose classrooms we studied became partners with us in this exploration, and many continue to work with us to better understand the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. Together we tried to understand what it meant to teach and learn argumentative writing by embracing and making transparent its complexities and occasional contradictions.

Beyond Argumentative Writing as Text Structure

What characterizes most instructional and research approaches to the teaching and learning of argumentative writing is the extent to which *text* is privileged above *practice*. The “textual bias” (Horner, 1999)—that is, the treatment of writing as solely or primarily a linguistic object—is evident in the public outcry against standards of student writing but also in a number of responses to the writing crisis. For example, features of the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSSO & NGA, 2010) tend to focus on structural features, leading to a simplification of what it means to argue in socially engaging ways. Consider Standard 1 for argumentative writing for ninth grade, “Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content”:

- Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.
- 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.
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

(<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>)

This list of descriptors for argumentative writing raises two concerns. First, despite reference to “audience,” the list largely ignores the social context of writing and focuses on the structural features of the final product. A closer look indicates a not-too-subtle framing of features for a type of scoring rubric that has become a staple of writing instruction and evaluation in the United States, with each feature assigned points for grading purposes and a focus on “test prep.” Second, the descriptors for ninth grade change only slightly across high school grade levels, suggesting a rather mechanical and formulaic approach to argumentation rather than recommending, across grade levels, the development of an array of intellectual and language practices for addressing a range of audiences and social purposes. During our study of the 31 English language arts classrooms, we observed that teachers were often challenged by ways of providing their students with rich and compelling rhetorical contexts and practices for engaging in them effectively. More often than not, rather than taking up social processes implicit in argumentative writing there has been a tendency to reduce argument to a formula that oversimplified the task of thinking through an issue, taking a stance, and sharing it with others and eschewed the mutual, in-depth understanding of complex ideas and diverse perspectives.

Part of the problem with a focus on argumentative writing as text structure is that it eschews what Langer (2002) has referred to as “high literacy.” High literacy refers to a “deeper knowledge of the ways in which reading, writing, language, and content work together” (p. 3). There is empirical data that suggests that educators should be concerned about the lack of “high literacy” being taught and learned in schools. Applebee and Langer (2006) examined students’ writing performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) from 1998 to 2002 and reported:

Over 40% of the students at Grade 8 and a third at Grade 12 report writing essays requiring analysis or interpretation at most a few times a year. This is problematic since it is this type of more complex writing that is needed for advanced academic success in high school as well as college course work.

(Applebee and Langer, 2006, p. 8)

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Although the data from Applebee and Langer’s study is more than a decade old, it is consistent with more recent studies that have found that only a fraction of students (i.e., 3% of eighth graders, 6% of twelfth graders) can make informed, critical judgments about written text (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). Only 15% of 12th-grade students performing at the proficient level were able to write well-organized essays in which they took clear positions and consistently supported those positions, using transitions to lead the reader from one part of the essay to another (Perie et al., 2005). The lack of “high literacy” (cf. Langer, 2002) would appear to be related to recent findings in a study by Applebee and Langer (2013) in middle and high school classrooms across the United States. Their study indicated that with most writing instruction the teacher frames a great deal of the composing, with students left only to fill in missing information by copying directly from a teacher’s presentation or completing worksheets and chapter summaries. Perhaps more worrisome, more extended writing only required students to replicate highly formulaic essay structures to prepare for high-stakes testing or repeat information the teacher expects to read. In particular, Applebee and Langer (2013) state, “Writing as a way to study, learn and go beyond—as a way to construct new knowledge or generate new networks of understanding—is rare” (p. 27).

One major challenge in teaching argumentative writing as “a way to construct new knowledge or generate new networks of understanding” is that many students have difficulty mastering advanced reading comprehension and critical literacy skills in core disciplines associated with engaging in and critiquing effective arguments, especially in science, history, and literature (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010; Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Students also have difficulty recognizing and applying argumentative text structures (Chambliss & Murphy, 2002; Freedman & Pringle, 1984), generating evidence (Kuhn, 1991), and offering relevant reasons, counter-arguments, and rebuttals (McCann, 1989). Although many of these studies were conducted 10 or more years ago, the *Common Core State Standards* (CCSSO & NGA, 2010) notwithstanding, there is no reason to believe that the current situation is different, especially in light of Applebee and Langer’s (2013) study. Put simply, across grade levels and a wide range of academic course work, American children do not write frequently enough, and the reading and writing tasks they are given do not require them to think deeply enough.

Overview of the Research Project

Recognizing the difficulties that teachers have in teaching argumentative writing and recognizing that American children, in general, do not write enough nor write on tasks that require deep thinking, we began our research focused on trying to understand these difficulties in hopes of offering directions for increasing the amount and quality of student writing, especially writing linked to deep thinking and “high literacy.” However, we need to admit that we started the research project with some linear and simplistic understandings of the teaching

and learning of argumentative writing. We began by thinking that one could identify particular instructional practices that would lead to improved student writing of arguments. But the more we explored the teaching and learning of argumentative writing and the more we talked with teachers and students, the more we understood the complexities involved. As we worked on the research project, our thinking changed, and so did what we thought we were studying. Indeed, one way to characterize this book is that we are sharing with you the changes in our thinking and what led to those changes.

The research project in which we have engaged for the past four years involved 31 high school English language arts classrooms. We began by identifying high school English language arts teachers who had excellent reputations and who were teaching argumentative writing. At the time, which was prior to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, there were not a large number of English language arts teachers in central Ohio who had instructional units explicitly dedicated to the teaching and learning of argumentative writing.¹ Nonetheless, we were able to identify and observe instructional units in the classrooms of 31 experienced teachers who were recommended to us as outstanding teachers.

We gave the students pre-tests and post-tests on argumentative writing, video recorded daily during the instructional unit, collected and copied student written work, and interviewed the teachers and a sample of the students in each class. During the summer we met with many of the teachers, reviewed select video segments with them, and discussed the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. Many of the teachers participated in a “study group” we held several times a year in which the teachers shared with each other how they were approaching argumentative writing. Several presented at national professional conferences with us, describing what they did in their classrooms and the rationales for doing so. (Details of the research project are provided in Appendix A.)

In some ways our research design was naïve and not appropriate for capturing what was happening in the 31 classrooms. For example, some teachers planned their entire year around the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. They did not have a dedicated four- or six-week unit *per se*. This made comparison across teachers difficult. It was not just that they spent different amounts of time explicitly teaching argumentative writing; even those teachers who employed well-bounded instructional units on learning argumentative writing returned throughout the year to refocus students’ attention on the qualities of argumentative writing. It was impossible to systematically define what an instructional unit on argumentative writing was across classrooms. Further, while some teachers did focus on the structures and components of arguments, others did not. The teachers had different definitions of argumentative writing, and the range of teaching approaches was wide and varied. For some teachers, argumentative writing was a means of inquiry, of providing students with a way to figure out what they thought, to think critically, and to explore a topic. For others, argumentative writing was about persuasion or debate. In some cases,

it was the fulfillment of a preset teacher-sponsored formula. But in most classrooms, it was many different things that varied over time.

Another complication was the Advanced Placement Composition test. Many of the classes had as an explicit goal to prepare students to take the Advanced Placement Composition test (from the Educational Testing Service). For some teachers, there were expectations from school administrators, parents, peers, and students that the class would receive high scores on the Advanced Placement test. Other teachers did not have those pressures. Regardless, there were times in each classroom when the focus was on how to get a good score on a test, and times when the instructional conversation eschewed concerns about the test. Was the test a mediating factor in how instruction was conducted and what counted as argumentative writing was conceived, or was attention to the AP test a tangent? These complexities, and many others, required us to adjust how we were thinking about the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. As we learned, we changed our conceptions, our research methodologies, and our goals. Where our original goal was to identify instructional practices that were likely to lead to improved student writing of arguments, the goal of our research project evolved to the generation of theoretical constructs and “mid-level” theory about the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. And, we would argue, it is through the generation of mid-level theory that the teaching and learning of argumentative writing can provide students with access to “high literacy.”

Mid-Level Theory

One goal of our research on the teaching and learning of argumentative writing is to generate mid-level theory that can inform both educators and researchers. A distinction can be made between mid-level theory and high theory (also called grand theory). High theory proposes a series of constructs, principles, and models that explain vast sets of circumstances, and it has a broad scope—a grand narrative of how things work. By its very nature, high theory must overlook the particularities of cases and reify them into common structures. Examples of high theory employed in education include grand narratives of social reproduction (e.g., Apple, 1975, 1979; Bernstein, 1990, 1991; Bourdieu, 1991), universal learning theories (e.g., Carroll, 1993; Skinner, 1953, 1957; Vygotsky, 1978, 1987), theories of individual development (e.g., Piaget, 1952, 1983), and language (e.g., Chomsky, 1977, 1980). In our view, high theory can provide important insights and perspectives, but one needs to be careful of uses of high-level theory that totalize human experience; that is, that attempt to explain the complexity and diversity of human experience within a single frame or narrative.

By contrast, mid-level theory hovers just over the particularity of events, seeking to explain human social life as situated, contextualized, and indeterminate. As such, mid-level theory eschews the universal and instead theorizes a bounded series of social events as complexly and multi-leveled structured meanings. Rather than being inductive, an emphasis is placed on abductive reasoning and inferencing. Geertz (1983) uses the term “thick description” to characterize

those ethnographic efforts that seek to generate mid-level theory. As Geertz (1983) writes, “Many social scientists have turned away from a laws and instances ideal of explanation toward a cases and interpretations one, looking less for the sort of thing that connects planets and pendulums and more for the sort that connects chrysanthemums and swords” (p. 19). He continues, “The instruments of reasoning are changing and society is less and less represented as an elaborate machine or quasi-organism and more a serious game, a sidewalk drama, or a behavioral text” (p. 23).

The theorizing in which we are interested in our study of the teaching and learning of argumentative writing derives from asking, “What is the game that is being played here?” where “game”² refers to the social and language practices as they are enacted in the social events involved in the teaching and learning of argumentative writing and “here” refers to the specific and particular space inhabited by the people as they engage in the activity of teaching and learning argumentative writing.

From Argument as Essay Form to Social Practices

The dominant model in researching the teaching and learning of argumentative writing centers on the question, “How can students be taught to effectively engage in argumentative writing?” (Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011). Four years ago, we began with the same question. Both our experiences and the research literature suggested that teaching students to engage in argumentative writing was difficult. And while students might be taught to understand claim and evidence, learning what a warrant was or to employ sophisticated uses of warranting (never mind anticipating dissent and fashioning appropriate counterarguments) was beyond most secondary school students.

Many of the previous studies seemed to assume that argumentative writing requires the production of a particular structure and set of components (e.g., claim, warrant, evidence, backing) or an algorithm. For some teachers (although none of those in our study), argumentative writing was defined as the traditional five-paragraph essay (a thesis paragraph followed by three paragraphs of supportive information, with a final concluding paragraph). As such, argumentative writing is conceptualized as a particular type of writing with a preset form, and what students need to learn are the components, structures, and qualities of that form. These can be simplistic, as in the five-paragraph essay, or more sophisticated. Regardless, such a conception of argumentative writing emphasizes a surface-level production. At best, it may provide some students with an introduction to argumentation, argumentative writing, and useful terminology. But when such a formulation is all and is the end product that students learn about argumentative writing, it is likely to be a vacuous procedure performed for a grade and little more.

Another set of studies asking the question, “How can students be taught to effectively engage in argumentative writing?” conceptualizes argumentative writing as a set of thinking processes. Reznitskaya and Anderson (2002)

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provide one such approach and refer to “argument schema” as a key component in students’ learning to write arguments. A series of studies conducted by them (Anderson, Chinn, Chang, Waggoner & Yi, 1997; Reznitskaya, Anderson, & Kuo, 2007; Reznitskaya, Anderson, McNurlen, Nguyen-Jahiel, Archodidou, & Kim, 2001) shows that students can acquire argument schema and employ them in classroom tasks. Other small-scale, intervention studies in genre-specific elements of argumentative literary discourse (e.g., Lewis & Ferretti, 2009) have demonstrated the value of direct instruction in the strategies and structures that are more “naturally” employed by expert writers.

However, as useful as such studies might be, as we observed classrooms and talked with teachers and students it seemed to us that more is going on than just the acquisition of a set of textual structures or argument schema. Teaching and learning argumentative writing involves social relationships among the teacher and students, ways of reading that were distinct, shared ways of thinking, a set of shared values and goals, ways of writing and structuring texts to which students were accountable, social relationships and responsibilities between the writer and the reader, constructions of time and space that contextualized doing argumentative writing, shared definitions of knowledge, and a shared language (shared by the teacher and students in the classroom and, in part, shared with others beyond the classroom). Dichotomizing the teaching and learning of argumentative writing into the “what” and the “how” was missing a lot of important social and intellectual dynamics and complexities that also seemed to be part of teaching and learning argumentative writing. Argumentative writing seemed less like a type or form of writing and more a part and parcel of a set of varied social practices.

A social practice perspective on argumentative writing refers to argument as defined, understood, and experienced as a set of social constructions and ways of acting, using language, thinking, valuing, and feeling. A classroom, like other social contexts, has its own shared social beliefs, norms, expectations, and ways of acting and interacting, within which particular social practices are adopted and adapted. As a set of social practices, what counts as argumentative writing and how teachers and students do argumentative writing varies within and across the social contexts of classrooms.

It is important to note that approaching the teaching and learning of argumentative writing as the teaching and learning of a set of social practices is not to deny the role of cognitive and linguistic processes involved in argumentative writing. Nor does a social practice perspective ignore attention to texts and how they are structured and how they are used. Rather, it is to ask, when people say that they are engaged in argumentative writing, what is it that they are doing? How are they doing it? Who is involved? When? Where? How are their actions within an event related to other previous and future events and the social institution in which the event is embedded? What are the social, cognitive, linguistic, individual, and collective consequences of what they are doing both in that immediate situation and over time and across situations and fields? In Chapter 1 we discuss the conception of argumentative writing as social practice at length.

Organization of the Book

We have organized the book to present a narrative about the teaching and learning of argumentative writing in English language arts classrooms as a set of diverse and complex social practices. We begin by discussing what we mean by social practices (Chapter 1) since this conception of the teaching and learning of argumentative writing frames and guides our interpretation of what we have found over the past four years. We then discuss teacher epistemologies for the teaching and learning of argumentative writing and their beliefs about what good argumentative writing is (Chapter 2). This is followed by a discussion of classroom instructional activities as they occur in lessons and over time, what we call “instructional chains” (Chapter 3). We then focus attention on instructional conversations (Chapter 4), since it is through those conversations that teachers and students engage in and construct learning. This is followed by a discussion of the contextualized assessment of argumentative writing (Chapter 5). We then focus on a topic that we believe is critical to any discussion of the teaching and learning of argumentation and argumentative writing, the underlying definitions of rationality as both a context for the teaching and learning of argumentative writing and as an educational outcome (Chapter 6). We close the book with a chapter discussing what we believe our inquiries and discussions may mean and the implications for defining and understanding the teaching and learning of argumentative writing (Chapter 7).

The organization of the book is intended to convey a narrative that begins with teachers and then follows the teachers as they orchestrate instruction and interact with students in the production of a set of argumentative writing social practices and in the construction of a related rationality. Implicit in this narrative is a view of the teacher as a thoughtful, reflective, knowing protagonist who engages others over time in constructing the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. However, teachers are not the only protagonists in this narrative. Students are also potential protagonists (and better characterized as co-protagonists since they may act in tandem with teachers). In crafting this narrative we have tried to foreground the complexities involved, including the diversity in definitions of argumentative writing and the diverse ways that teachers conceptualized and orchestrated learning and instructional conversations. We have also tried to foreground our finding that the teaching and learning of argumentative writing needs to be viewed as occurring over long periods of time. Argumentative writing social practices with their underlying definitions, epistemologies, and rationalities are continuously evolving and influencing what the protagonists do and how they interpret what they do. In brief, the narrative is not linear, even if it appears that way on the surface.

Figure I.1 provides a visual schematic of the organization of the book.

As we conceptualize the teaching and learning of argumentative writing, teachers, students, and the school all bring something into the classroom that influences what happens there. Although we focus on what the teacher brings and in particular on teacher argumentative epistemologies and beliefs, we are

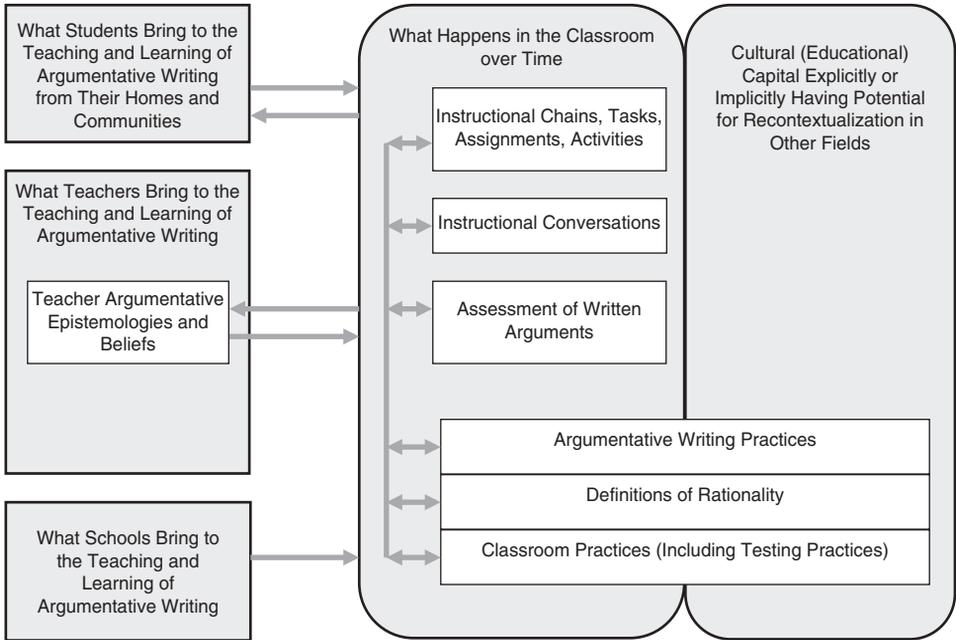


FIGURE I.1 Schematic Organization of the Book

aware that what students bring is also critical. They bring various and diverse kinds and forms of cultural capital, social capital, linguistic capital, and in some cases economic capital as well. They bring experiences in former classrooms and in educational settings outside of schools. The school also contributes to (some would say “imposes on”) the teacher and what happens in the classroom. This includes mandated curricula, assessments, schedules, student organization, resources, a general climate, accountability systems, management systems, and so forth. In this book we have not specifically addressed what students and the school bring to the teaching and learning of argumentative writing, although it is noted throughout the book.

We have focused on three aspects of what happens in the classroom: instructional chains, activities, assignments, and tasks; instructional conversations; and the assessment of student written products. However, we also note that what teachers and students construct through their instructional activities, conversations, and assessments are a series of social practices for argumentative writing (what we also call argumentative writing practices) as well as a shared set of definitions of rationality that contextualize those argumentative writing practices. These argumentative writing practices are intimate, with the broad range of classroom practices promulgated as part of the established and evolving classroom culture and community. It is not so much that argumentative writing practices, classroom practices, and ideologies of rationality are the products of

instructional chains, instructional conversations, and assessments, but rather that they are part of and embedded in each other. Thus, the scheme displayed in Figure I.1 is not a linear model. It is better conceptualized as an interactive model in which the components continuously evolve over time. From the perspective of defining argumentative writing as social practices, what happens in the classroom does not yield products or caches of skills located in student minds, but rather sets of social and cultural practices and ideologies that are available for recontextualization in other settings, contexts, and fields. To help the reader locate the contribution of each chapter to the bigger picture, on the page preceding each chapter we have reproduced Figure I-1, highlighting the area to be addressed in that chapter. As you read the book, we hope that you will keep the whole in mind, and the intimate relationship of the parts to each other, to the whole, and the whole to the parts.

Final Introductory Comments

The findings we share from our research do not provide a singular, coherent view of the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. The teaching and learning of argumentative writing is not monolithic but is filled with complexities, contradictions, and intersections with a broad range of other teaching and learning practices and processes. These complexities, contradictions, and interactions cannot be wished away by narrowly conceived approaches to teaching, assessments, standards, or research methodologies.

Vygotsky (1978) drew attention to the significance of language environments in learning, arguing that children “grow into the intellectual environment around them.” In becoming literate, students acquire a set of cultural practices, values, and beliefs within which they construct an identity. The significance of this view is summed up by Gee (1996), who observes that “what is at issue in the use of language is different ways of knowing, different ways of making sense of the world of human experience, that is, different social epistemologies” (p. 59). That is, in the process of appropriating argumentative practices, students acquire a great deal more than simply learning how to read and write arguments.

It is our view that embracing the complexities, contradictions, interactions, and diversity of the teaching and learning of argumentative writing provides students and their teachers with opportunities for deep learning, exploration, and the acquisition of literacy practices that foreground the construction of new insights and the appreciation of diverse perspectives. From this perspective, the teaching and learning of argumentative writing is not so much about making an argument as it is about adopting a way of being in a world filled with tensions, multiple and contradictory truths, and diverse ways of life and living.

Notes

1. Since the implementation of the Common Core Standards, many teachers and school districts have become interested in the teaching and learning of argumentative writing. We have mixed reactions to this increased interest. Increased attention

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to argumentation and to argumentative writing provides teachers and students with opportunities to better understand argumentative writing and how it might be taken up and used; but it also seems to be the case that too frequently the interest is oriented to procedures likely to improve test scores rather than a substantive and deep understanding.

2. Our use of “game” here is intended to reflect the influence of Wittgenstein’s (1953) discussions of language and especially his discussion of “language game” on the conduct of the research project and our interpretation of the data.

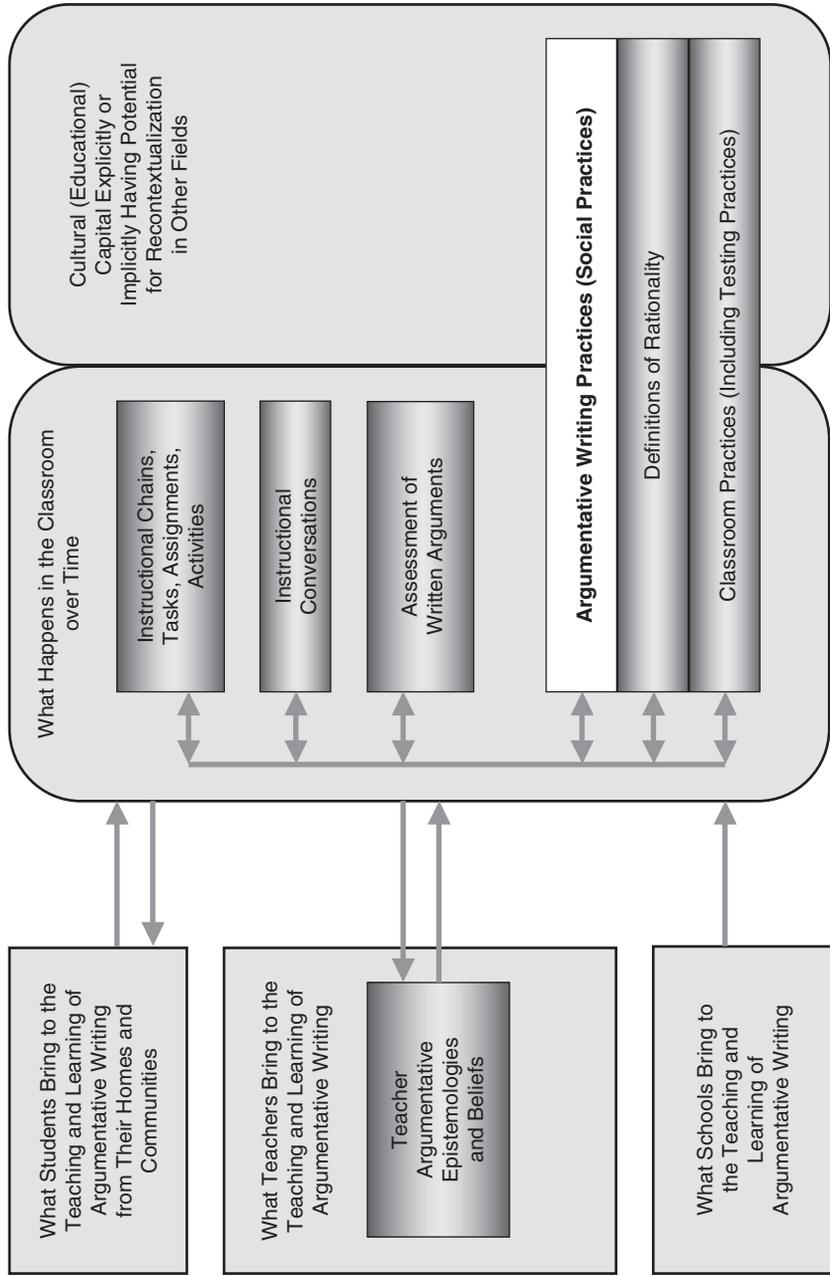


FIGURE 1.1 Schematic Organization of the Book—Chapter 1

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5 How Instructional Contexts Shape the Structure and Content of Students' Argumentative Writing

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