



Transactional Writing: Argument

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Pocket Money

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The teacher read the folk tale of the three little pigs to the class. She asked them how they thought the wolf might have felt – “Why would a wolf want to catch and eat pigs?” – and encouraged them to consider the pigs’ feelings. In this way the students had the opportunity to look at both sides of the story.

The teacher talked about the language we need to use to persuade a reader. Then the class discussed what language the wolf would need to use to persuade the pigs that he was just behaving naturally, for a wolf! They came up with some persuasive “feeling” phrases which the teacher listed – for example: I’m hungry – I need something to eat, it’s natural for me to eat pigs.

The teacher and students then discussed what it was like to receive pocket money, and what they did to earn it. At this point the students thought of a particular occasion where they received pocket money, and revisited their explorations of the characters’ feelings. The teacher reminded them of how they had considered these from different perspectives.

She asked them to take a position on whether they should receive pocket money. They discussed their reasons with a buddy, did role plays, and brainstormed key words and reasons about the issue: I deserve it, I work hard.

The next step was to establish who their audience would be – parents, teachers, friends, siblings. Each student chose the audience they believed would be relevant for their argument.

The teacher modelled writing her point of view and identifying the audience: “Mum, I think I should get pocket money.” She stopped at that point and gave each of the students a paper folded into three sections. They copied the teacher’s statement into the first section, as they had all chosen this point of view. They were to write their reasons into the other two sections later in the lesson.

The teacher then asked them to “think about talking to your audience. Think about the words you will need to use to persuade them.”

They also had to explain why they thought they should be given pocket money, and what they had done to warrant it. This was to be part of their argument, along with a recommendation.

The teacher modelled writing her argument, explaining as she wrote. The students were then asked to work out what their own reasons should be. They were not permitted to copy the teacher’s text.

Once they had written their reasons into the other sections of the folded paper, the teacher asked them to suggest some words to link the position, the reason, and the recommendation. She listed their suggestions and modelled using them. The students then selected their own joining words and used them in their writing.

Once the drafts were complete the teacher reviewed her own writing and asked: “What do we need to do to check our work?” She modelled checking for punctuation (capital letters, full stops), and any spelling they might be unsure of: “Are there any more sounds you can hear?” She reminded them to use their table dictionaries to check spelling.

Teacher-student conversations

During the writing the teacher conferenced Sarah. She focused on word and sentence formation by asking such questions as: “What sound can you hear first?”, “What comes next?” No information or direct instruction was given.

After the draft was finished:

Teacher: Why should Dad pay you for mowing the lawns?
 Sarah: I do a job. He does a job. He gets paid.
 Teacher: Do you think Dad would agree with your argument?
 Sarah: Yes, 'cause I should get paid for doing hard work.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

The writing of arguments must be accompanied by a reading programme that incorporates the features of shared reading, guided reading, and a sustained silent reading programme of exposition texts. Students can explore persuasive-writing skills and strategies in published texts and models of writing. Persuasive writing may be found in the *School Journal*, library books, and picture books.

Through the reading programme the skills and strategies of persuasive writing could be explored, processed, discussed, and evaluated, and links established to their own writing. Students could:

- look at reasons authors give to support their arguments, and examine how points are supported with elaboration
- examine vocabulary choices made by authors when attempting to persuade an audience
- look at sentence structure and beginnings examine the persuasive language features.



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WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Sarah towards the next learning step, the teacher might help her to focus on:

Ideas

- elaborating further by giving another reason.

Vocabulary

- extending her use of high-frequency words.

Structure

- varying sentence types and beginnings.

Language features

- using such persuasive language features as rhetorical questions and emotive language.

This could principally be done through:

- continued modelling of argument writing to develop an understanding of how writing strategies may be used
- regular individual conferencing
an instructional reading programme where students are guided to identify and discuss authors' writing strategies and persuasive language features.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 1: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions and recount events in authentic contexts.

Levels 1 and 2: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language, students should explore choices made by writers, and identify and use the common conventions of writing and organisation of text that affect understanding.

Thinking Critically: In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should identify and express meanings in written texts, drawing on personal background, knowledge, and experience.

English in the New Zealand Curriculum, pages 35-36

REFERENCE

Ministry of Education. (1994). *English in the New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.



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Pocket Money

WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: The writer, Sarah, clearly states a point of view, and backs it up with reasons. The vocabulary indicates strong feelings and a personal stake in the issue.

Student's first draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Demonstrates some reasoning.

Vocabulary

Uses some content words and high-frequency words.

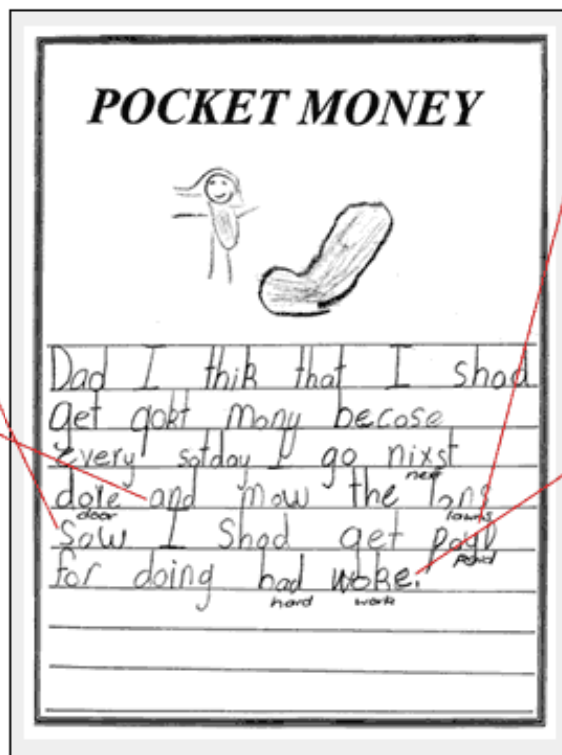
Structure

Beginning to sequence ideas.

Sentences

Uses simple sentences, with some variation in beginnings.

Attempts compound sentences.



Surface features

Grammar

Pays careful attention to word order.

Punctuation

Understands and uses capital letters, full stops and question marks with support.

Spelling

Spells most high-frequency words correctly.

Records dominant sounds in order.

[Dad I think that I should get pocket money because every Saturday I go next door and mow the lawns so I should get paid for doing hard work.]




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Pocket Money

Student's first draft

POCKET MONEY



Dad I thik that I shod
get qekt mony becose
Every soday I go nixst
dote and maw the ^{near} lons
^{door} saw I shod get ^{loans} payd
for doing ^{hard} bad ^{work} wbre.