



Transactional Writing: Argument

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Too Much TV

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The students read a variety of argument texts as part of their reading programme. They discussed letters to the editor about pertinent local issues, and identified the persuasive language features. The teacher wrote a letter about an issue of concern to her, and the class examined how she had used the features of persuasive language.

After *The Three Little Pigs* was read as a shared book, the students took the wolf's point of view, looking at why he should not be "jailed" for what he did. The teacher modelled the writing process, and the students were expected to produce two or three reasons to support their position.

The next step was to read *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* as a shared book. The teacher modelled writing an introduction, stating her position on the correctness of Goldilocks's behaviour in the house of the three bears. She then put three points to support her position, with reasons to back them up. The students wrote their own arguments about Goldilocks's actions, using the same process. In groups, they shared the arguments they had written.

The class read the *School Journal* article "Should Animals Be Kept In Zoos?" (1.4.98) as a shared book, and the teacher modelled writing an argument about keeping animals in zoos. She wrote an introduction, some points with elaboration, and a recommendation. She and the students then examined her argument, identifying the persuasive language features and suggesting ways to make the argument more convincing. The teacher drew their attention to elaborating on the points. The students then wrote their own arguments on the topic.

They went on to discuss ways of making an argument persuasive. These strategies were recorded for them to refer to. Their arguments were to include: an introduction, elaboration, humour, repetition, rhetorical questions, and a recommendation.

The teacher again modelled writing an argument on a topic significant to her. The students chose their own issue and used a planning sheet to set out their position, three points with elaboration, and recommendation. They wrote their draft argument over three days. During this time there was a discussion about beginnings and paragraphing. They recrafted immediately after the draft was complete.

In individual conferences the students read their arguments to the teacher. Her input at this point was to focus on what they might want to improve. They also conferenced with a partner before publishing.

There had been a lot of class discussion about violence in general, and Siasoi was well acquainted with the teacher's own views on aggressive behaviour at school. There had also been discussion about the links between children's television programmes and the displays of aggressive behaviour in the children who watch them.

Teacher-student conversations

Siasoi worked independently, with limited discussion and no direct intervention by the teacher. The good structure of the writing was discussed and the strong arguments praised. He was asked to check spelling more carefully.

Teacher: How have you persuaded readers that there are other things to do instead of watching TV?

Siasoi: I wrote that we can ride bikes and things like that.

Teacher: You've stated your point of view strongly at the beginning. Do you think your recommendation at the end links to this?

Siasoi: Yep, because I ask TV stations to take off their cartoons that have fighting in them.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

Writing arguments could be accompanied by a reading programme that incorporates the features of exposition texts, particularly in guided and shared reading. Students could explore persuasive writing skills and strategies in published texts and models of writing.

Persuasive writing texts could take the form of published expository essays expressing a point of view, newspaper articles, letters to the editor, poetry, songs, and so on. Persuasive writing may be found in the *School Journal*, newspapers, magazines, library books, and sophisticated picture books.

Through the reading programme the skills and strategies of persuasive writing could be explored, and links established to the students' own writing.

WHERE TO NEXT?

To move Siasoi towards the next learning step, the teacher might help him to focus on:

Ideas

- developing and refining the introduction of the position and the conclusion/recommendation.

Language features

- including more persuasive language features in the argument, e.g., data for objectivity, rhetorical question to make the reader think, repetition.

Structure

- developing clear links between position and supporting points.

This could principally be done through:

- a guided reading programme to identify and explore the strategies of persuasive writing in published texts
- modelling of argument writing, with student input, to develop an understanding of how the features of persuasive language may be employed
- regular individual conferencing.



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CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 3: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express personal viewpoints in a range of authentic contexts, sequencing ideas logically.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should, using appropriate terminology, describe, discuss, analyse and apply the distinctive features of a range of texts and explain how they suit the topic and purpose.

Thinking Critically: In achieving the objectives of understanding and using written language students should be able to discuss and convey meanings in written texts, exploring relevant experiences and other points of view.

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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WHAT THE WORK SHOWS: Siasoi presents some convincing, well-argued reasons to support his point of view. They flow sequentially and the language and style are appropriate. He speaks directly to his audience, especially towards the end.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Ideas

Develops ideas with significant detail and elaboration.

Structure

Sequences ideas logically.

Begins to organise some ideas into paragraphs.

Sentences

Uses a variety of structures.

Vocabulary

Attempts to use words and phrases to make arguments more powerful.

Language features

Uses some features of persuasive language, e.g., rhetorical questions, pronouns denoting inclusion, imperatives.

Dear Editor

I think we should not have too much t.v. because more and more children are getting aggressive every day it is the t.v. that causes it. Programmas like Dragonball Z, Pokémon and other things that have fire balls, shooting and bomings are terrible for young children minds.

Some children think it is real but it isn't. Children think war and fighting is fun and don't realize that it kills poeple in real life and hurts families.

Secandly there are better things for children to do than watch t.v. children can draw, ride bikes, play games, talk with each other and have heaps of fun without t.v. .

finally I believe children get more into fighting and arguing if they watch too much t.v. we want peaceful children and adults, don't we I ask t.v. statiais to take off the aggressive cartoons at least and ask parents to check their kids t.v. viewing.

Surface features

Grammar

Uses most grammatical conventions correctly, with only a few errors.

Punctuation

Punctuates with increasing independence: capital letters, full stops, question marks, speech marks, apostrophes.

Spelling

Spells most high-frequency words correctly.

Demonstrates good understanding of most basic sounds and patterns in written English.



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Too Much TV

Student's second draft

Dear Editor
 I think that we should not have too much tv. because more and more children are getting ^{aggressive} ~~argergurste~~ every day its the tv that ^{causes} ~~causes~~ it. Programmas like Dragon ball Z, pokémon and other things that have fire balls, shooting and bomings, are terrible for young children minds.

Some children think it is ^{real} but it isn't. children think war and fighting is fun and don't realize that it kills people in ^{real} life and ^{hurts} ~~huarts~~ families.

Secandly there are better things for children to do than watch tv. children can draw, ride bikes, play games, talk with each other and have heaps of fun without tv.

finally I ^{believe} ~~belive~~ children get more into fighting and arguing if they watch too much tv. we want peaceful children and adults, don't we. I ask tv statians to take off the ^{aggressive} ~~argergurste~~ cartoons at least and ask parents to check their kids tv viewing.