



Transactional Writing: Argument

LEVEL 1i 1ii 1iii 2 3 **4** 5

A Change for the Best

THE LEARNING CONTEXT

The students in this class were given many opportunities to write different forms of persuasive text and to participate in debates. The activities included writing letters to the editor (about Goldilocks and the Three Bears), and discussion and debate about topical issues they had chosen – for example, school uniforms and bullying.

The argument about providing for “the loners” was sparked by a visit from some American secondary students, who described a tragic shooting incident in their school. The class was interested and there was much discussion on what might prompt such behaviour. Many believed it was important to provide some form of lunchtime activity for lonely children. The students also drew on personal experience, remembering how they had felt when they had nothing to do. There was a shared belief that it was the responsibility of the school to provide for the loners.

Students were given a framework for drafting their first written argument on the topic. This consisted of:

- a thesis statement
- elaboration to support thesis
- conclusion to reinforce thesis.

The teacher then gave a lesson on how to establish the introduction or thesis of an argument, and another on the range of language features that might appeal to the reader’s emotions – for example, personalising the argument, credible data, and repetition.

The students then had to do some research on supporting evidence for their arguments. They were expected to write emotively, yet objectively.

Teacher-student conversations

The teacher conferenced with David after the initial draft:

Teacher: There are heaps of ways to hook our readers into your argument, but what have you tried to achieve in your thesis?

David: I want the readers to feel sorry for them, and make them think. Appeal by making them think differently.

Teacher: So is it necessary to focus on one school?

David: Nah – I’d better change it, eh? [He later removed the school’s name.]

Teacher: Okay – can you read me your introduction? Tell me or show me exactly where your “hook” is in your introduction.

David: “People who don’t even want to be at school.”

Teacher: Why?

David: Because it’s sad that kids feel so bad that they don’t want to go to school. I want people to feel bad and sad when they read that part!

Teacher: Any other language features that you want to use in your argument, to persuade?

David: I could get actual facts and be specific.

Teacher: Yes, because you already have one argument from your own ideas and thoughts, eh?

David went back to revise his first draft. He included some findings from his research, using factual information to strengthen his argument.

INTEGRATING READING AND WRITING

When teaching how to craft formal arguments about real situations, teachers should encourage their students to research their topic as part of the close reading programme, for example, by looking for similar situations or supporting information.

In this programme the teacher should also seek other examples of formal arguments about real situations for students to explore. They could discuss the language features in written texts, and decide how to use these in their own writing. At this level there should be appropriate models in newspapers and magazines, especially editorials and columns.



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WHERE TO NEXT?

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

Ideas

- making further use of data from research to strengthen argument convincingly.

Sentences

- using a greater range of structures for impact.

Language features

- using imperatives to command readers' attention.

This could be done through:

- a close reading programme that identifies and explores persuasive language features and information retrieval in published texts
- continued modelling of argument writing, to develop understanding of these features
- regular conferencing to develop his own writing.

CURRICULUM LINKS

English in the New Zealand Curriculum

Level 4: Writing Functions

Transactional Writing: Students should write instructions, explanations, and factual accounts, and express and explain a point of view, in a range of authentic contexts, organising and linking ideas logically and making language choices appropriate to the audience.

Levels 3 and 4: Reading and Writing Processes

Exploring Language: Students should identify, discuss, and use the conventions, structures, and language features of different texts, and discuss how they relate to the topic.

Thinking Critically

Students should 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: David directly addresses his audience on a sensitive issue – whether schools should provide for loners at lunchtime. He deals with it in a simple, honest and engaging way; it is almost as if he is talking to the reader. He is able to move from a personal to a general perspective, and take the reader with him. He also offers a credible solution.

Student's second draft

Deeper features

Ideas

States ideas clearly, with build-up to thesis statement.

Supports argument with relevant ideas and data.

Structure

Organises writing logically: thesis/supporting evidence/restated thesis.

Understands paragraphing.

Sentences

Uses a variety of structures.

Vocabulary

Uses appropriate vocabulary.

Language features

Attempts to appeal to reader's feelings.

Uses repetition.

Addresses audience directly.

Offers solutions.

You may not notice it but at school there are people who have no friends, people who are constantly getting bullied because they are different, people who don't even want to be at school. The worst time for these children is the lunch hour. With no one to talk to and no one to play with the hour seems to take forever to pass. If only they had somewhere to go where the bullies weren't. Somewhere they could meet people like themselves, have fun and make friends. This is why I believe there should be supervised games and rooms at lunch times for children to go to.

If there was organised games during lunchtimes the loners might meet people like themselves and make friends. They will also learn new skills like how to play different sports, cardgames and boardgames. They might even find a sport that they really like then join a club that plays on Saturdays or during the week. This will be an extra chance for them to make new friends and feel better about themselves.

Did you know New Zealand has the second worst suicide rate per capita out of the whole world. That is a disgrace to our country. I believe that if we start having organised games during lunchtimes it will be a start to descending down that ladder and getting rid of that awful fact.

Although some people will still not go, and will still get bullied at least they know it is there and have the choice whether or not to go.

Loneliness and boredom are some of the worst feelings possible. If we have organised games during lunchtimes it will be a start to getting rid of these awful feelings in our school.

Surface features

Grammar, spelling, punctuation

Uses these with few intrusive errors.



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Student's final draft

11.6.01

~~You may not notice it but (there are) people with no friends, people who are constantly getting bullied~~

You may not notice it but at school there are people who have no friends, people who are constantly getting bullied because they are different, people who don't even like coming to school want to be at school. The worst time for these children is the lunch hour. With no one to talk to and no one to play with

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the hour seems to take forever to pass. If only they had somewhere to go where the bullies ~~were~~^{were not} ~~(somewhere)~~ ~~(there)~~ they could meet people like themselves and have fun and make friends. (This is why I believe there should be (more) supervised games and rooms at lunch times for (the loners to go to.) (these sorts of) ~~children~~^{children} people to go to.)

If there ~~is~~^{was} organised games ~~at~~^{at during} lunch times the loners might meet people like themselves and make friends. They will also learn new skills like how.

(continued over)



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how to play different sports,
 how to play different cardgames,
 how to play different ~~board~~ ^{and} games.
~~then~~ they might find a fun sport
 that they like ^{then they} might join a
 club and make friends there
 and feel better about themselves.
~~then~~ they might even
 find a sport that
 they really like ^{then they} might
~~even~~ join a club that plays on
 Saturdays or during the week, and
~~that~~ ^{this} will be an extra chance ^{for them} to
^{new} make friends and feel ^{better} ~~good~~ about themselves.
 Although some people ^{still will still} might not go,
 and ^{will still} ~~still~~ get bullied (and teased),
^{they know} at least ^{they know} it is there and they

(continued over)



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Student's final draft

have the choice whether or not to go.

(Loneliness and boredom are some of the worst feelings possible.)

and ~~(I believe that)~~ If we have organised games and discussions ^{during lunchtimes} it will ^{be a start to} ~~help~~ getting rid of these ^{awful} ~~bad~~ feelings ~~from~~ ⁱⁿ our school. Well done 😊

Did you know New Zealand has the second ~~worst~~ ^{highest} youth suicide rate per capita out of the whole world ~~and~~ that is a ^{disgrace} ~~disgrace~~ to our country. I believe that if we start having organised games during lunchtimes it will be a start to ~~getting one a~~ ^{descending} start to descending down the ladder and getting rid of that awful fact.