

Teachers' and Students' Epistemologies for Argumentative Writing in High School English Language Arts Classrooms

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The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grant 305A100786 The Ohio State University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

We gratefully acknowledge support from the Center for Video Ethnography (CVEDA) and Discourse Analysis and the Department of Teaching and Learning at The Ohio State University (OSU). The content of this presentation does not necessarily reflect the policies of the USDOE Institute for Educational Sciences, the CVEDA, or the OSU Department of Teaching and Learning.

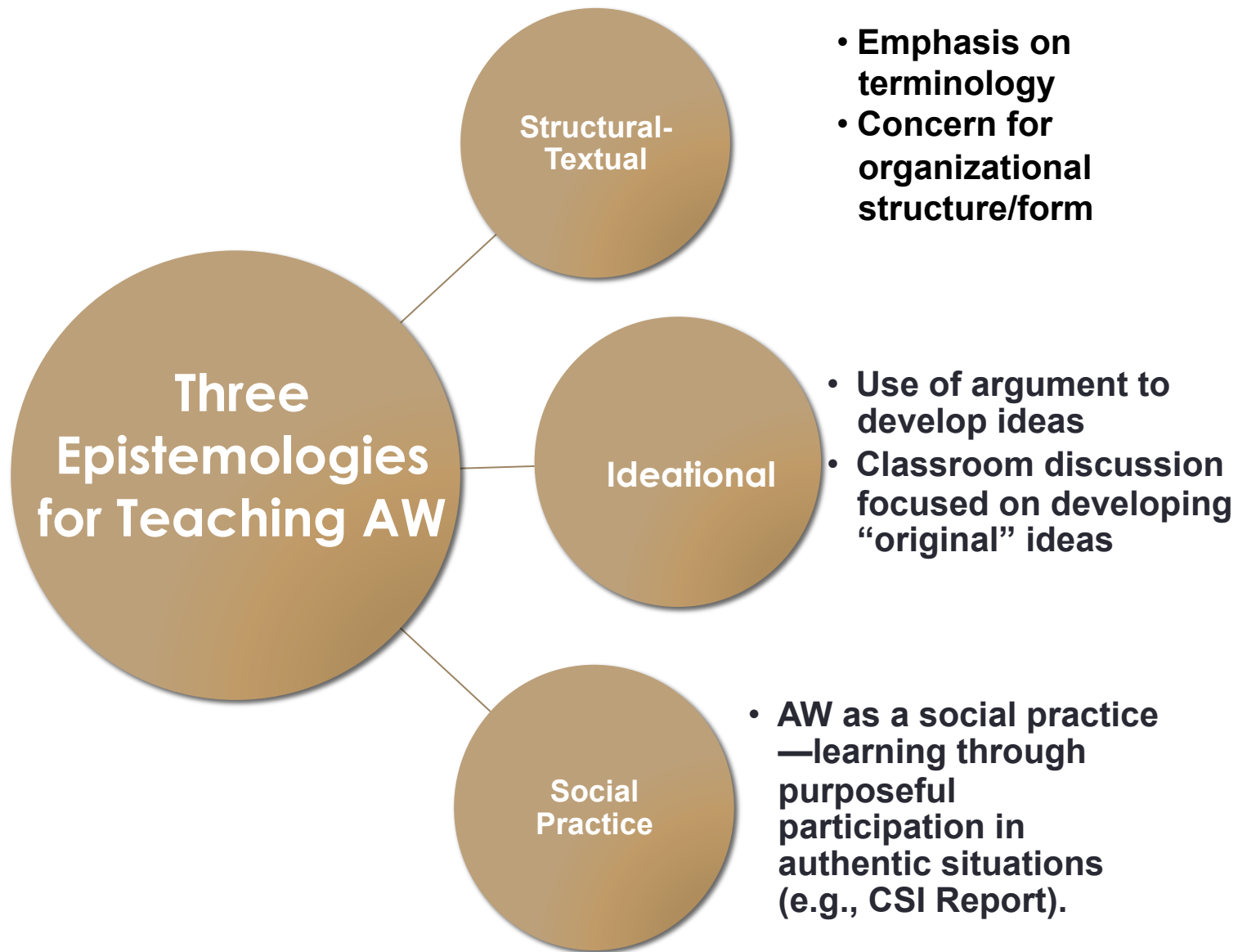
Argumentative Epistemologies

Related studies

- “epistemological stance” (Hillocks, 1999)
 - writing teachers’ epistemologies
- “literate epistemologies” (Johnston, Haley, Woodside-Iron, & Day, 2001)
 - relationships between students’ & teachers’ epistemologies
- Included in the implications in many studies (Langer & Applebee, 1987) are suggestions that teachers with different epistemologies will respond differently to students, organize instruction differently, and represent students’ learning differently.

Our contribution

- **“argumentative epistemologies”** as a **constellation of beliefs** about argumentative writing, beliefs about learning such writing, ways of talking about argumentation, and the sorts of approaches to teaching and assessment that are likely to be associated with these beliefs
- argumentation represents a **distinctive way of knowing, understanding, and composing.**



Data Analysis

Data Sources	Kate	Jane	Clark
Teacher Interviews & Debriefings	3	3	5
Teacher Surveys	1	1	1
Classroom Observations	32	21	9
Student Writing Samples (final, summative)	37	20	26
Student Interviews	8	4	3
Student Surveys	34	14	20

Theoretical Frame: Appropriation

- Appropriation refers to the process through which a student adopts concepts, skills, practice, etc. available for use in particular social environments (e.g., classroom)
- Through this process student internalizes ways of thinking endemic to specific literacy practices (e.g., using 5 paragraph essay to write essays).
- The extent of appropriation depends on the congruence of a learner's values, prior experiences, and goals with those of more experienced or powerful members of a culture, such as an English language arts teacher.

Structural-Textual Epistemology

- The teacher emphasizes **argumentative terminology** (claim, evidence) and **structured paragraphing**
- The teacher locates argumentation (curricular sequencing and AW elements) as a **progression over time**
- The teacher evaluates **how argumentative elements are used and “unpacked”** within discussions and essays

Ideational Epistemology

- **Ideas** are foregrounded over elements of argumentation
- Argumentation is a means of developing **original ideas**
- Classroom discussions, writing instruction, teacher feedback on writing, and assessment are focused on the **ideas** being argued

Argumentative Writing as a Social Practice

- Argument writing is purpose-driven communication in a social context. Learning to write is fostered by real-life or analogous contexts, with real purposes for writing.
- Writing considered an event--the text, the instructional conversation, and the processes of composing it are inseparable from the whole complex social interaction which makes up the communicative event in which they are situated.
- Writing encompasses writing in all social and cultural contexts, rather than privileging the types of writing associated with education and other formal contexts.

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Kate: Typical Classroom Activities

- **Mini-lectures**
 - accompanied by handouts (teacher-mediated scaffolding) explaining assignment structures
- **Class review of sample essays**
 - teacher read aloud
 - argumentative elements circled/labeled
 - positive and negative examples
- **Partner/Small group work:**
 - peer review sheets (teacher-mediated scaffolding) accompanied each review session: students turned in with the final essay for points

Teacher's Task Presentation

Line	Message unit
1	What I want us to do now is to transition with the evidence that we've constructed just from this one story* and from <i>The Communist Manifesto</i> and from the paintings**
2	and I want you
3	how many of you have your ah the general claim statement , your basic claim statement done?
4	Okay
5	now
6	what I want you to do is you are going to take this information and we're gonna construct what is called an ABCD claim.
7	Okay?
8	So let's go back and we'll read along because I want you to have this done on Monday
9	okay
10	so you've got your general claim statement
11	everybody get your paper out so that you're following along

Student Interview

Question:

What kind of things did Ms. Cook do that helped you learn argumentative writing?

Bob (end of unit & end of year 1)

- “the **baby steps** to get to it definitely help”
 - Sample essays (good/bad)
 - Worksheets with directives (how to write each paragraph: “plain and simple, like how to do it, which is good for me”)
 - **Peer work** (“getting his opinion on like how my paper was and how I could change...”)

- “The **ABCD** it’s more like **concrete** like what to do. And also there’s a sheet like how to write any paragraph, how to write just like any paragraph with the commentary and stuff, that helped too.”

Student interview

Question:

What was Ms. Cook telling you about argumentative writing, how was she teaching it?

Sue (end of unit)

- “it’s a lot of little steps”
- “When writing the painting essay we used the **ABCD method of writing** with like I don’t remember what all the letters stand for but there was things like **concrete detail** and **commentary** on that detail and you have to have **evidence** from the text”
- “You have to **get more in depth** . . . prove your point and keep proving your point until the end.”

Student Interview

Questions:

As you think about AW, what do you think is the most important piece to remember?

What is argumentative writing?

Kane (end of unit & end of year 1)

- “Always bring up your **opinion** as many times as you can but you always have to have **the facts to support it . . .** but make sure they all really **support your claim.**”
- “Having a **claim and supporting** it, I guess. It doesn’t even have to be super organized, it doesn’t have to be some amazing thing but as long as it has a **claim and you know you got your argument out,** that’s what it is.”

Teacher Interview

Question:

As you think of this structure since they did arguments on the paintings and now with the lenses you use, do you expect or anticipate to see a shift?"

Ms. Cook (during subsequent unit)

- “I expect to see that they don't have to work as hard thinking, like how do I do this. They have a **framework**, in fact, well like I said this morning, I said, ‘I need your **claims statements**,’ and they're like, ‘Uh, I forgot’ but they didn't say, ‘I don't know how to do it.’ It was oh, I just didn't do it.”

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Writing Assignment

- Write an analytical argument about one of the short stories we read in class. Your argument should include at least one literary element we discussed.

Francis: Typical Classroom Activities

- Classroom discussion about literature
- Critiquing successful and non-successful essay models
- Writing an essay proposal for peer and teacher feedback
- Teacher and peer feedback on essays, with opportunity for teacher conferencing

Teacher Interview

“I think it’s important that they have that burden of coming up with original arguments and supporting them and explaining them.”



Class Discussion of Ideas

Students raise the issues

Students talk at length about opinion, using evidence from the story to support argument

Multiple students share ideas

Students are trying out interpretations; what they said in class is often different from what they wrote

A Student's View of Discussion

Kim: “Mrs. H will just ask a very broad question, and now we’re coming up with **our own ideas** and what we think things mean, and it’s a lot more of **us thinking of things** instead of being fed what certain things are... I do my best to read through things and make sure I understand them the best and try to **come up with some ideas** and then also **build off of what other people are saying**”

A Student's Writing Process

Jake: “I was getting lost in my **ideas** about it, so I had to become more focused on the task at hand...you have to **take one idea at a time** and analyze it, go to the next and analyze it, and then you can tie them together at the end

Teacher Evaluation

- Kim: “One of the things that she always says is it ultimately **convincing**, and you just have to make sure that it is going back to the **thesis**, is it still working towards that, is it still focused on that.”
- Jake: “She’ll be looking to see if **all my ideas** tie into the thesis, the **overall idea** of the whole thing.”

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Clark: Typical Classroom Activities

- “Trying to build complexity and ambiguity in students and their writing”—teaching students to warrant their arguments.
- Crime scene investigation (Hillocks (2011): Argument of Fact—see complexity in still shot of the murder scene.
- Small group and teacher-led discussions to analyze the crime scene.
- In-class collaborative writing—for example, CSI report for a Police Chief.

Classroom Discourse: Warranting

T: I want to talk about what we just did (with warranting). We wrote a whole bunch of rules to interpret evidence in this murder scene. Okay. Where do rules come from?

S: From our experiences. How we live...like everyday things.

T: Like what?

S: Speeding, for example. You get a ticket or you crash—we need rules.

T: So experiences give us rules—like the child who learns not to touch a hot stove.

S: They're your beliefs and morals.

T: And that is not always obvious to us. Where do these come from?

S: Parents, society, movies...

T: Yes. Church, religion... like authorities. They give us rules. These rules are applicable to any argument you are going to make—we carry these rules with us. Warranting just makes this more obvious to us.

Classroom Discourse: Warranting

T: Let's think this through for a second. We make claims to try to convince people of an opinion. And we support those claims with evidence... observable evidence. It would make sense then that the warrants are grounded in beliefs. These are things we believe are true.

T: This is what argument is: you are starting with something you believe is true, you combine it with something you observe to form an opinion. But then you have to hope that the beliefs that are warrants will hold up for other people. This is the big challenge—even when evidence is observable will the audience believe our warrants?

From Student Interviews

- **Kathy:** “I liked the way we became CSI investigators to figure out who committed the murder. We were investigators just for a while when we had to write reports.”
- **Robert:** “(The teacher) always makes English seem like it is part of other things we do. Writing is about things that are interesting and important to us.”
- **Susan:** “One thing that helps is going through the class work, like in groups and stuff. We get ideas from others.”



Thank you!

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