

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Teaching Argumentation Skills Video Transcript

Dan Guerrero:

In real life, there is no yes or no answer. It's, like, always bad or worse. Did you get any of them?

Student:

I think I got three of them right, except one. I missed one.

Guerrero:

Which ones do you think you got right?

Student:

The claim, the warrant, and evidence.

Guerrero:

Here's what we're going to do. We're going to start with a quiz. This quiz is going to blow you away. It's all of three questions. These are the terms that you're going to have to have to make sure you know what we're going to do today. So quickly, let's get started.

Effectively, the quiz was three questions -- define categoricalism, define consequentialism, and establish the four fundamental aspects of Toulmin logic. These are terms the students have been working with for at least the last two weeks. And I needed to confirm in their minds that they know that they're going to use these terms in one way or another.

Diego:

What we're studying right now is called the Toulmin logic. And it's basically... it's a way of argument. It's claim, reason, evidence, and then warrant.

Miriam:

You do sometimes think, like, categorically without, you know, "Oh, whatever, whatever the consequence is," or consequenc... consing... consequentialist. And you're like, "Well, if I do this, then, you know, I'll get this outcome," knowing already what's going to happen after your action.

Guerrero:

Your homework was to identify one of the Toulmin logic arguments, and then write out a full argument for it. Welcome Alexis Bray to the stage. Give it up for him, man!

Alexis:

So my claim is that the legal drinking age should not be lowered, and for the most part it should stay at 21 years of age. And my reasons are drinking...

Guerrero:

The fundamental terms they needed to be able to internalize at this point was claim, reason, evidence, and warrant.

Alexis:

My warrant is that starting at a younger age will increase the chance of death. And I believe that only adults are responsible enough to drink alcohol.

Guerrero:

But I'm getting them into being able to weave this kind of academic, philosophical, sophisticated language in a low-risk environment. Because we know that that's what gets students into the participatory mode.

Alexis:

And conditions of rebuttal, many people believe that teenagers are responsible enough to drink alcohol. But if you look at the statistics, alcohol-related deaths among teenagers has increased greatly over the years. And that's it.

Guerrero:

Very nice. Does anyone have a response to his claim?

Student:

I don't understand why it has to necessarily be 21, if when you're 18 you're already allowed to be on your own and make... because you're old enough to make, like, educated decisions. And why is it up to 21?

Guerrero:

Did you want to respond to that?

Student:

I understand her point that everyone should have the right, like, they should make their own decisions or whatever. But your brain is still developing until, like, around 21, or 23, I think.

Guerrero:

Or for some of us, 45.

Student:

Or 45, you know.

Diego:

He tries to teach us, like, how to think on our feet.

Guerrero:

Outstanding. Yes?

Student:

But if your brain isn't fully developed by age 18, then why do they allow you to vote and make, like, big decisions when you're 18 and not 21?

Guerrero:

Like who should be president.

Student:

Exactly.

Guerrero:

Retort?

Student:

You can still make rational decisions. I'm just saying it's going to mess up your brain either way.

Diego:

I like that. Everyone has, like, a voice in his class.

Guerrero:

Students as learners make meaning in active participation and engagement with each other. And you have an idea that you have yourself, you're going to share it. In one way or another, it's going to change once you start exchanging ideas.

Now, right now we're going to do the activity I was telling you about. Everyone is going to get a slightly different scenario.

There were certain scenarios that were a little easier to deal with, some that were more difficult, because I knew that they could handle it.

Your job is to fill out this handout in preparation for you writing the argument tonight. So effectively this is your outline of the paragraph, using the Toulmin logic, okay?

The way they have it set up on that graphic organizer, they can go word-for-word, verbatim, and right on to a first draft. And the reason why that's important is because I want to give the sense to the students that it's the organization that's the hard part -- the writing is the easy part.

Who has topic A? Raise your hand. This table, here we go. This is a great one. Often we hear that it's important to tell the truth. Like when you don't do your homework. Is telling a misleading truth the same thing as lying? And I want you guys to kind of consider scenarios when it may or may not be. Okay, here's what's going to happen. I'm going to let you work on this for 15 minutes.

Student:

You're still lying.

Student:

No, lying is saying something that's not true. Like if she asked you did you drink, and then you say no, then that's lying. Because you're just leaving that part out.

Student:

But leaving that part out is, I think, lying.

Student:

No, lying would be like if she's like, "Did you guys drink?" and you were like, "No."

Student:

Saying something that's not true.

Student:

Then that would be lying. If you said, "Well, we were..." if she asked, "Were you drinking?" and you say you weren't, that's lying to them, because you just said you weren't, but you actually were. And if you don't say anything at all, then there's nothing to lie about, because you just didn't lie about it. You just didn't tell them everything.

Student:

But why is a person just going to ask you, just, like, "Did you drink?" or, "Did you go to..."

Student:

Or, like, if it's your friend asking you, then you might... if you, like, trust him enough then you'll say yeah, but if it's your parents, you know you're going to get in trouble, so then you say no.

Student:

If my parents ask me, "Did you drink," I'm going to be like, "Yeah."

Student:

Yeah, but they're not asking you if you drank or not. You're telling them what you did.

Student:

I still have to eventually end up telling them, because I will feel like I was guilty and didn't tell them the whole truth.

Student:

But there's no lie. You never lied.

Student:

It's still going to be a lie for me.

Guerrero:

Now, here's the next step. Who's using consequentialist warrant and who's using a categorical warrant?

Student:

I think it's consequential.

Guerrero:

For?

Student:

It's not a lie.

Guerrero:

And so what I try to do am I trying to insert the language. So, like, you know, what are you saying? Are you using a categorical point of view, or are you saying that's more consequentialist? And that's all I really had to do. Because since we had used the terms already, then they started applying it.

I want to tell you that that was awesome. It is not an easy thing to take these terms and apply it. Your homework is to take this outline and write up your argument.

At the end of the day, all the kids were able to do the outline, they were able to use that graphic organizer, come up to present. I mean, if you want to take, like, a writing process model approach, they brainstormed, and they outlined, and effectively, in a way, they kind of first drafted.

Here's what I would like you to do. Pull out a piece of scratch paper really quickly. And I want you to tell me one thing you learned today, and one thing you hope to learn as we continue with this unit on ethics and justice.

There is a low stakes writing that gets them used to writing. And when they get used to writing, they get used to reading, and they get used to thinking. And this is kind of like this symbiotic relationship between all the literacy skills-- the reading, writing, thinking, speaking, and listening skills that have to happen in the classroom every day. But if they don't feel confident, if they don't feel comfortable, if they don't feel the opportunity to take a risk, then the best textbooks and graphic organizers is not going to help. And I think that becomes the biggest challenge about teaching in some of our schools.

There are some amazing minds in this room, and fabulous writers. But at the end of the day, I want you to be able to decide for yourself whether actions are right or wrong. Because that is what the whole goal is. And in real life, there is no yes or no answer.

Student:

It's not always going to be high school. It's going to be, like, the real life, and, yeah, you've got to be ready for it.