

The First Discipline Is Class: Aiming at Inclusion in Argument across the Curriculum

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The teaching of argument spotlights a crucial intersection between writing across the curriculum and gatekeeping across the curriculum. While argument looks different in each discipline's unique activity system, every student aiming at full disciplinary membership must earn passing grades in some type of situation requiring them to assert a claim, articulate reasons, and marshal evidence. In this way, students' abilities to argue in academically acceptable ways directly determine their ability to earn their degrees—or not. Thus, our teaching of argument—the genre that weaves so visibly across the disciplines—requires close scrutiny for inclusivity, so that we avoid unconsciously privileging some students over others in acquiring the skills required to earn a degree. In particular, given our era's stark income inequality, we should examine our pedagogies for socioeconomic inclusivity: are we teaching argument in ways that maintain or challenge class inequities? What kinds of starting points are we assuming for the students who come to our classrooms—for example, a certain level of comfort and familiarity with performing the role of academic arguer—and do those assumptions privilege the forward movement of some students over others?

I maintain that the key to crafting a more inclusive pedagogy for argument across the curriculum is learning the conceptions of argument our students bring to our classrooms from their home knowledges, paired with the understanding that arguing in higher education is as much a classed and affective endeavor as it is an intellectual one. My aims in this article are to outline some disjunctions that working-class students can encounter in learning forms of academic argument and to describe classroom strategies for supporting students by positioning their experiences with argument as course content. Throughout, I talk about the identity of being an academic *arguer*, in order to emphasize that students' success at arguing across the curriculum requires more from them than learning disciplinary genre features: it also requires them to assume a particular character, distinguished by certain values for interacting with the world around them. In the course of exploring the intersections of socioeconomic class and argument pedagogy, I bring in my own experiences as a working-class student, focusing in particular on the affective clashes occasioned by negotiating two kinds of argumentative identity: home and academic. I bring in this personal evidence partly because “working-class” resists a single definition, and I don't claim to

speak for some larger set of others. Our talk about class differences must be nuanced, reflecting an understanding of class as local rather than universal, embodied rather than abstract, and influential rather than determinative. In this spirit, I suggest that the most usable definitions of working-class for the purposes of teaching will be self-referential and experiential. Instead of using the term to categorize students based on particular demographic parameters, we can learn more about concrete ways to support working-class students in our pedagogies by attending to the shared or recurring events and sensations—social, economic, physical, affective, and so on—that emerge from the personal narratives of our students who identify as working class.

Overall, my goal in sketching an encounter between working-class and academic ways of arguing is not to try to change what counts as academic argument, but rather to urge greater awareness of the socioeconomic places from which some of our students are coming to it. Research in working-class rhetorics, as well as personal reflections of the type I offer here, can teach us something about those places, but ultimately we will learn most from our students themselves when we position their prior experiences with argument as course content, letting students' narratives and reflections function as knowledge-making texts. The more we understand that a student's challenges in learning argument can stem from other types of difference besides intellectual or disciplinary ones, the more ethically and effectively we can teach it across the curriculum. Similarly, the thicker the understanding that we cultivate of how argument genres change across contexts, the more we can help students productively synthesize their home and school knowledges of argument.

Efforts to make the teaching of argument more inclusive respond to a network of exigencies in and beyond the university. As changes in the economy bring more working-class students to the college classroom, we have the opportunity to reconfigure foundational assumptions about the relations between genre knowledge and capital. On an institutional level, ensuring equal access to the skills of argument aligns with other initiatives to strengthen completion rates for first-generation students. At the level of research, broadening and revising our understanding of argument genres are ongoing tasks, requiring combined insights from multiple methodologies to examine argument's deep imbrication in epistemology, technology, and all manner of human relations. Finally, at the intersection of scholarship and pedagogy, efforts to democratize the teaching of argument constitute a vital response to calls from those who research class and argument, such as Irvin Peckham, Julie Lindquist, Nick Tingle, and William DeGenaro, for writing teachers to deepen our understanding of working-class students' existing genre knowledges. Overall, it still remains to bring sustained attention to the connections among class, discourse, and genre to scholarship in writing across the curriculum. In particular, we will benefit from exploring how issues of class manifest in our pedagogies, all the way from the theories that inform our

curricular outcomes to the language of our classroom materials. Of the scholars who examine class and discourse, Peckham provides the most detailed and concrete lens on the classed nature of writing instruction, and thus I engage regularly with his work in this article.

Audience, Identity, and Affect

The need to consider the implications of argument pedagogy across the curriculum becomes clearer when we consider the extent to which argument is a crucial learning tool for students. We assign arguments grounded in interpretation, critique, research, and hypothesis to help students advance new knowledge. We engage students in argument as a way of bridging realms, assigning a broad range of explicit and implicit argument forms—from multimodal narratives to proposals, empirical reports to digital advocacy projects—to help students connect academic and civic life, and the worlds of school and work. Across the disciplines, argument genres are ubiquitous yet widely variant, offering rich ground for teaching cross-curricular genre awareness and comparative genre analysis (Irene Clark and Andrea Hernandez; J. Paul Johnson and Ethan Krase; Christopher Wolfe; Joanna Wolfe, Barrie Olson, and Laura Wilder). Clearly, there is no universal genre of academic argument that students use for all these learning activities. However, audience-based justification is a common thread found in many argument genres across the university and is primarily what I refer to when I use the larger genre term *academic argument*. Audience-based justification signifies the expectations that an arguer will indicate some kind of central claim with which a critical audience could reasonably disagree, will objectively attend to the audience's counterarguments, and will develop lines of reasoning and supporting evidence chosen to satisfy the audience's demands for validity and sufficiency.

Undoubtedly, asking our students to define an audience in disciplinary terms helps equip them to argue in multiple contexts. At the same time, developing an inclusive argument pedagogy hinges on our efforts to make explicit with our students the tacit parts of our argument curriculum. This means guiding them to explore the nature of the more general academic audience on which disciplinary audiences are founded and positioning that academic audience as one among many audiences for argument—including those whom students have already encountered in their homes, workplaces, and communities. In turn, focusing on audiences and their demands helps us make explicit the social nature of argument genres, allowing students (and us) to register home and school ways of arguing, not as *a priori* forms holding greater and lesser intrinsic value in and of themselves, but simply as different practices for people with different, situation-driven needs. In addition, emphasizing the social nature of argument genres opens the way to address a facet of the argument curriculum often left unspoken—the fact that employing academic argument requires one to

perform a particular identity: outspoken, flexible, critical, and copious. As I discuss in more detail below, working-class students initially may find assuming this identity more fraught than do middle-class students. An inclusive argument pedagogy, then, will engage students in taking up these questions: When we argue in a particular context, who are we? With what kinds of personality, virtues, and power do we invest the figure of “arguer” in different contexts—home, workplace, school? Who can and can’t argue in these places?

In addition to helping students understand the social dynamics of genre, using questions like these to help students translate argument genres into terms of identity and performance directs our attention to the role of affect. Affect figures both in the experience of socioeconomic class and in the teaching and learning of argument. First, defining working class experientially reminds us that an individual’s affective experiences are an important part of what it means to be working class. For example, I define working class as “the lived experience of chronic economic instability.” I draw in part from Kristen Lucas’s assertion that a defining principle of working-class identity is “problematized providing and protecting,” the outcome of daily difficulties occasioned by “having insufficient or unstable means for providing for and protecting one’s self and family” (181, 183). In Lucas’s description and my own experience, what’s most significant is the *saturation* factor of economic instability in working-class life: being permeated with concern for meeting the fundamental needs of food, shelter, employment, healthcare, and transportation. Even when such needs are being met, one does not take the situation for granted: “Regardless of their current financial means, for the working class, providing and protecting is never far from consciousness” (182). These kinds of experiential definitions of working class highlight the close connection between economic conditions and affective experience. To live in economic instability is to *feel* unstable most or all of the time—precarious, un-anchored, lacking control, and hyper-alert to material stakes and consequences.

Second, using affect as one lens for viewing our students’ classroom experiences enables us to build more truly student-centered pedagogies. As Lindquist reminds us, “since students experience class as a real affective location, these experiential understandings must be engaged by our pedagogies” (“Class Affect” 206). For one thing, attending to students’ affective cues can help us scaffold assignments, units, and courses more effectively. In our attempts to chart learning paths that start where students are and lead them toward where we want them to be (i.e., achieving outcomes), the clues students give us about how they are navigating the journey emotionally—their participation patterns, body language, vocal tone, word choice, and more—can signal when we should slow down, speed up, back up, or reroute. Coming from another angle, we can take into consideration the potential affective dimensions of working-class lived experience, recognize that students don’t leave that experience

at the classroom door, and be on the lookout for times to support them. This might be as simple as asking, “How are you?” and then listening and encouraging, but it honors the fact that, along with doing coursework, working-class students are also doing the emotional labor required to synthesize home and school identities. This is hard work: sorting through dissonant value sets; surmounting regular waves of feeling deeply out of place; dealing with fears that adding an academic identity requires losing or betraying one’s home identity; managing the anxiety of seeing each grade as a high-stakes win or loss in achieving the degree required for future economic security. We should remember that what we see as a student’s intellectual deficits, recalcitrance, or lack of application might at times actually be his or her absorption in this fatiguing work of building an integrated, confident identity. For working-class students, learning academic discourse is often more than simply an intellectual effort or a utilitarian game; it is also the emotionally charged reconfiguration of one’s self. If we want to do more than take working-class students’ tuition dollars—if we want to support them and strengthen their completion rates—we must allow the affective experiences occasioned by this reconfiguration to inform our teaching.

The Academic Arguer

When it comes to our teaching of argument, our consideration of working-class students’ affective experiences can help us make explicit the identity required to be an academic arguer. By making it clear that such an identity is situated and learned, we emphasize to our students that it is not inherent; if they struggle to become an academic arguer, it is not because they have some fundamental lack that “real” college students must have been born with. As teachers, laying bare the character required for academic argument keeps us aware that we must go beyond teaching the virtues of academic argument—for example, critique, comprehensiveness, qualification, skepticism, and so on—as innately superior in and of themselves to dissecting *why* they are productive and valuable for the work of a particular discourse community. Moreover, making explicit what we expect from academic arguers, and why, can lead to our better understanding of the classed dimensions of academic discourse. Peckham cautions against “uncritically” promulgating the principles of critical thinking that characterize academic argument, that is, “adopting them as if they were class neutral rather than loaded with attributes that make them more accessible to middle-class than working-class students” (67). Such awareness isn’t cause for discarding the virtues of critical thinking, but should rather remind us to build curricula and pedagogies that account for the various socioeconomic places from which students are coming to our classrooms. As we challenge students to do the often uncomfortable work of layering the identity of an academic arguer on to their existing identities, we will

need to provide more time and more support in the liminal places where troublesome new knowledge butts up against familiar knowledge.

In the following sections, I outline characteristics of a model academic arguer—typical answers to the question of who we are when arguing in the university—and respond to them with personal reflections from my experiences as a working-class, first-generation college student. When I first encountered the scholarship I draw on below, I was a graduate student, teaching argumentative writing to students from upper-middle-class backgrounds. Struck by the contrasts between that and my prior experience teaching the same material at two colleges serving mostly working-class students, I found the research of Peckham, Lindquist, Tingle, and others profoundly helpful in making sense of the differences. But while I was initially thinking only of teaching argument, I often found myself thinking as much of my own experiences learning academic argument as that of my students. Removed from my undergraduate experience by two decades and a corporate career, I was surprised by the strength with which these researchers' insights resonated with me—a demonstration of the depth and perdurance with which socioeconomic class can influence students' learning.

An Academic Arguer Gives Voice

Materials addressed directly to students, such as course descriptions, textbooks, and assignments, frequently equate argument with voice. To make a civic argument, we tell students, is to make your voice heard; to make a deliberative or disciplinary argument is to add your voice to a conversation. This particular synecdoche gives good rhetorical value. Not only does it allow us to praise the kind of argument we teach using an attractive and concrete symbol, it also conveys a tacit exhortation to civic responsibility or disciplinary maturity: “Don't fail to make your voice heard.” On top of that, we add yet another equation: argument equals voice equals agency. But the underlying message that giving voice is always edifying or necessary may not match some working-class students' deeply formative experiences. Implicit within the pedagogical use of “voice” to signal “argument” are some distinctly classed assumptions about how the world works.

One assumption is that the equal right to speak one's voice, and thereby change things, is inherent, or natural. So, even if students haven't been able to exercise it before in meaningful ways, once they walk in our classroom door, they need only access or release their true nature, and there it is—voice, just waiting to get out. But in the “natural world” of working-class students, voice comes not from one's internal essence, but from, as Peckham describes, position (32). Where I came from, the people who had the right to voice were what I thought of as “titled”: principal, mayor, boss, priest, teacher, or parent. This made sense to me because these were the same

people who could effect tangible changes in my world, such as my grades, the clothes I could wear, my dad's wages, and the town curfew. Walking from this world into my first college classroom didn't automatically endow me with a title and thus a voice, and being told it was my right and responsibility to make a claim in my first paper did not ring genuine. This was not my natural world. Moreover, the idea of changing my natural world through words and voice didn't seem tenable either. Peckham notes that "middle-class kids learn that reality is malleable, that people in their condition can in fact effect change by speaking to the world, which in turn speaks back," while working-class students may have seen less verbal negotiation and more wordless compliance with roles and rules as they are (75, 77). Thus, making my voice heard required me to do far more than draft and revise an argument. I had at the same time to conceive and accept a natural world that contradicted mine, an example of the psychological-emotional workload—the second job, so to speak—that came along with my other homework.

In another class, I was invited rather than assigned to give voice (which makes me wonder, on a side note, how genuine it is to "invite" students to do something we will grade), but I found the situation equally baffling. Beneath this undoubtedly well-intentioned approach is another unspoken, classed assumption: that projecting one's voice is naturally desirable, something we can count on students to want to do. No doubt many of them do, if they grew up being invited to chime in on their world as so many middle-class children are, or if they didn't but are ready to reshape their understanding of voice and agency. In my case, however, far from being ready to jettison my home background, I depended on it for ballast, and in that background, raising an argumentative voice was not desirable but painful and risky. No mere word games or paths to inquiry, arguments in my experience were violent ruptures in the familial or social fabric, and the potential consequences were considerable. To *want* to argue was seen as a personality flaw. You can imagine that I struggled in classrooms where teachers tried to foster debate in group discussions.

Today, I tell my students they can develop argument skills even if they don't "naturally" like argument at this stage of their lives: that they may well cultivate the pleasure of giving voice over time but needn't feel unnatural if they find argument assignments or those small-group debates distasteful. Similarly, in my civic discourse class, I teach the many positive functions of holding the *ideal* of an equal right to voice. The point is that the classed assumptions underneath the argument-voice synecdoche can be used poorly or well. They are harmful when we unconsciously or covertly exercise their classed power in what Peckham describes as a "weeding-out mechanism acting against working-class students" (66). In contrast, making the assumptions explicit and exploring them with our students can constitute a rich strand of an inclusive argument pedagogy. For one thing, examining the values and exhortations that academic

argument carries along with it engages students in the kind of genre analysis skills we hope they carry with them across the curriculum. Doing such analysis also opens up dedicated class time for students' more personal processing of potential clashes between home and school approaches to argument. In this way, some of the psychological and affective work students do when learning to function in an unfamiliar, high-stakes world can count as work for the course, not separate from it.

An Academic Arguer Is Fluid

Multiple theories of argument, including deliberative, rhetorical, and narrative approaches, state that a necessary condition of so-called genuine argument is the arguer's willingness to acknowledge multiplicity, change her mind, and adapt her approach. Exhortations to be open-minded are found in many argument textbooks, along with strategies for adapting an argument to a specific audience. Indeed, adaptability is the essence both of audience-based justification, the strand that connects multiple genres of academic argument, and of writing across the curriculum in general. Many students, no matter their socioeconomic class, struggle, especially in their first year, to imagine the diverse viewpoints of others and often initially resist the notion that they are capable of seeing an issue from multiple angles of vision or shifting among those angles as they encounter different rhetorical situations. Peckham points out, however, that these capacities to imagine and manifest diverse viewpoints may pose a particular challenge for working-class students, who often haven't had the exposure to different places and people afforded to middle- and upper-class students through travel and study or service abroad. This breadth of experience "*naturalizes* for higher social class members the condition of being able to see from many different points of view, a central feature of academic argument"; in contrast, "[f]or the working-class person raised in circumscribed environments, identity is fixed" (Peckham 73, emphasis added). Most students can recognize that they talk differently to their parents than they do to their friends, but working-class students may be less practiced than their middle-class peers in extending this notion of identity, communication, and meaning itself as fluid, changeable across contexts and audiences.

Based on my experience, I would add that not only is the capacity to conceive diverse perspectives and move fluidly among them less familiar to a working-class student, such fluidity may also be less desirable. In perpetually unstable economic conditions, a stable, fixed identity can be regarded as a character virtue and an economic advantage. In my hometown, people who changed their lives—jobs, addresses, opinions, and even hobbies—out of preference (as opposed to necessity) were often viewed with suspicion, seen as selfish, flighty, or weak. If you changed your position on whether Highway 71 should be rerouted outside of town or switched political parties, it meant you'd knuckled under to someone else's influence. If, out of inclination,

you'd changed jobs or addresses a couple times in five years, you lacked good judgment or persistence. So, when I got to college, the emphasis on fluidity as a necessary trait for a successful academic arguer was worrisome. Intellectually, I could conceive the benefits of examining context and adapting to audiences, but personally, exercising flexibility and multiplicity felt fraught. Yet, if I couldn't learn to argue, I couldn't be a real college student, not to mention citizen or professional. This constant weighing of competing identity stakes—which are higher, those at home, or school?—was another task in that second job of learning brand-new character virtues along with course content.

Peckham also describes working-class resistance to multiple, shifting identities as a function of class solidarity. For working-class students, “changing who you are to respond to the social context is what middle-class people do” (65). Changing to be a different person in different situations wasn't labeled middle-class in my hometown, but it was condemned as being phony. “He just tells everybody what they want to hear” or “You can't trust that one—you never know what she's going to come with” were typical criticisms for people whom I would now describe as rhetorically flexible. To reiterate an earlier point, the classed nature of the intellectual values and character virtues underlying academic argument is not cause for their dismissal. I aim large portions of my argument and civic discourse curricula at helping students cultivate precisely the capacities for multiplicity and flexibility that I found so vexing. However, I devote some of that time to putting those capacities themselves in context, rather than starting off assuming they are self-evident or universally well-regarded. For example, I ask students to discuss fixity and fluidity as virtues and to speculate about their implications, both negative and positive, for argument. Positing them as virtues emphasizes that these are not merely descriptive features of intellectual processes, but also prescriptive judgments we make of others' characters. This conversation often brings to the surface students' personal ambiguities about exploring alternative views, changing their minds, and making contextualized judgments. Rather than concluding such students lack imagination, tolerance, or empathy, we should consider that they may come from a home culture that values consistency and indeed stubbornness as marks of good character. Teaching the capacities of fluidity and multiplicity is vital, but we must understand the cultural sources of working-class students' potential unease with them and provide sufficient time for taking up the identity of academic arguer that their middle-class counterparts may already find familiar and beneficial.

An Academic Arguer Is Critical

Assigning arguments is a primary way to demonstrate that we're teaching critical thinking. The words “critique,” “critical inquiry,” and “critical distance” are commonly used in argument pedagogies to distinguish between reasoned, mature argument

and invective as marked by ad hominem attacks. Launching critical arguments, especially of authority, is frequently presented as an essential capacity for the enlightened scholar, the democratic citizen, the liberatory reformer, or the paradigm-changing entrepreneur. Peckham describes another iteration of exercising a critical attitude as the element of *dialogism* in academic argument: engaging authorities, negotiating, and assuming the necessary agency to change conditions. Middle-class parents, “who are constantly negotiating with others in the workplace and who bring this way of seeing the world home with them,” train their children that “talking back” is a sign of intelligence and competence (73, 79). Such students are less apt to be dismayed by the common injunction in argument pedagogies to “take charge” of sources, interrogating and weighing in on what experts have written. In contrast, working-class children are often trained to “defer to authority, reproducing [a] parent’s rhetorical situation in the workplace” (80). In particular, working-class children learn early the material risks of open criticism. My mom didn’t “interrogate” the landlord because he could raise the rent or evict us; my dad didn’t “demand accountability” from his boss for unpaid overtime and machinery in poor repair because he could lose his job. Where I came from, “to carp about the bad job, especially to the boss, is to put oneself in a position of vulnerability” (Tingle 227). Having experienced chronic economic instability, working-class students may regard argument and its discursive moves of critiquing and challenging others as particularly risky, finding it difficult to quickly set aside their experiences of argument as involving real stakes—wages, shelter, food. At the same time, they envision the real stakes of not learning to argue like an academic: good arguments are rewarded with good grades, so failing to master critical attitudes and vocal criticism ultimately means failing to achieve a college degree.

The requirement for an academic arguer to “be critical” also rests on the assumption that critique is part of an individual’s inherent right to, and capacity for, the agency to change conditions. But treating this assumption as a given may cause us to start our pedagogy in the middle of things, for example, launching a unit on argument as advocacy or assigning a proposal without first exploring (and challenging) our students’ existing ideas of who can and can’t change things. At the same time that I learned a value for fixity—for not voluntarily changing things about my identity or approach—I also learned the necessity to accept changes imposed on me by people who had more power than I did, being told “don’t complain” and “don’t contradict.” As Tingle notes about his working-class home, feeling and expressing frustration was “simply a waste of energy. . . . The job is bad? So what? That’s the business of the boss and not the worker” (227). When I encountered the academic idea of what agency looks like—outspoken critique, an individual’s assertion of voice—it did not look like me. This didn’t indicate that I was fatalistic or accommodationist, but simply that I needed extra time to integrate this picture of agency—derived from “the assertive,

goal-oriented rhetorical norms of the dominant culture” (Dale Cyphert, qtd. in DeGenaro 146)—into my picture of myself. Peckham cautions against taking up the “heady directive to teach [our] students to read and write against the grain without considering how this advice privileges middle-class children, who are trained to presume precisely this stance” (79). Once again, the implication is that we should examine where our argument pedagogies start: do we build units, activities, and assignments on a schedule that assumes students will hit the ground running, so to speak, ready to go with the (middle-classed) willingness to critique and the confidence in personal agency that successful academic argument requires? Because students have to argue successfully across the curriculum in order to earn a degree (including, in many cases, producing a thesis-driven capstone as a contribution to their discipline), we should aim for ways of teaching argument that provide a level starting place.

The Academic Arguer Provides Evidence

The essence of academic argument is evidence, the feature that we say distinguishes it most strongly from opinion and quarreling. Like other features, it is often presented in argument pedagogies with a tinge of virtue: the *responsible* arguer provides evidence; the *respectful* arguer acknowledges her audience’s equality by attempting to move them with reasons and evidence, rather than force. We also emphasize the connection between evidence and ethos. An arguer demonstrates goodwill and credibility by using the particular types of evidence his audience regards as valid, gathering it from sources they respect and handling it ethically by providing context and documentation. I agree with all of this; I think giving good evidence does function as a mark of an arguer’s responsibility, respect, and credibility. But I aim to make it clear to my students that this view of evidence is not a universal given; rather, it arises from a particular view of human relations, tracing such lineaments as Athenian democracy, Liberal political philosophy, and Enlightenment epistemology. I combine this with asking students to tell me what else they know about what makes an argument strong and credible, and where they learned that. Peckham notes throughout his book that working-class attitudes tend to grant authority on the basis of someone’s position, and that was certainly my experience. In my background, what made an argument powerful was not evidence, but some facet of the arguer’s identity, such as his or her position, age, wealth, or experience. In fact, giving reasons and evidence was what you did when you were on the defensive or supplicating; the most powerful judgments were those made by people who didn’t need to explain why they held them.

Moreover, the authority of the “I” in “because I said so” was singular. For working-class students, the principle of triangulation (showing multiple voices in agreement around a piece of evidence) might not resonate with their understanding of what makes for a strong argument. Triangulation is, essentially, calling in backup: an

unremarkable activity in a middle-class ethic of collaborative group work and collective action, but potentially an expression of weakness in a working-class ethic in which strength is a feature of individuals. Similarly, the principle of sufficiency (providing an extensive body of evidence) may also elicit some initial hesitation from working-class students. Middle-class children often get listened to without interruption, but in my hometown, loquacity was more apt to signal not intelligence but vanity or self-importance. It was common for me to think that someone who went on and on in displaying his knowledge was “full of himself.” Yet, extensively displaying one’s knowledge is the heart of an academic argument, which gets most of its mass from evidence. However, if we understand that the principle of sufficiency is not self-evident, we might see a student’s scanty roster of evidence as indicating something besides carelessness or ineptitude, and thus requiring more from our pedagogy. Taking time to explain how the principles and attitudes regarding evidence in academic argument came to be, while also asking students to articulate their experiences of argument, emphasizes that ways of arguing are contextual. My hope is that this emphasis on context encourages students to understand that in taking up the identity of an academic arguer, they don’t need to subtract other identities, but rather are capable of moving among them.

The purpose of highlighting these potential contrasts between working-class identity and the identity we demand of an academic arguer is to help us better understand what students might be experiencing when we teach argument across the curriculum. Students from middle-class backgrounds are more likely to have grown up with the advantage of seeing their parents enact the attitudes we call for. Working-class students, without that head start, are faced with two curricula: the explicit, intellectual one of learning the skills of academic argument and the implicit, affective one of taking up the virtues and character of being an academic arguer. On the inside, the often painful task of reconciling dissonant identities requires tremendous energy and engagement, but it can result on the outside—the side we see—in behaviors that look like disengagement: absences, silence, missing or partial coursework, superficial performances when assigned to make a critique or take a stand. An inclusive argument pedagogy distributes course time so that some of students’ internal engagement in identity work becomes part of the work of the course.

Crafting an Inclusive Argument Pedagogy

As addressed earlier, one way to make the way we teach argument more inclusive of working-class students is to examine our starting points. Reviewing our textbooks, syllabi, course schedules, presentations, and other teaching materials can reveal the level of knowledge and familiarity with academic argument that we’re assuming students will bring with them; such a review may also suggest places where spelling out and contextualizing certain expectations can help bring students along more quickly.

At the same time, we can review materials for the language of disinfection that lingers in argument pedagogy—the injunctions to students to forget what they know about argument, or to reclassify what they thought was argument as mere quarreling, in order to become a “genuine,” that is, academic, arguer. It’s vital to acknowledge that we expect students to argue in academic ways but equally vital to work from an ethos of addition, supporting students in laminating new identities onto their existing ones, instead of abandoning one for the other. Because students rely on our course materials to navigate the class and often treat them as authoritative, we can benefit from scrutinizing them closely to ensure they send accurate and supportive messages about what’s involved in synthesizing multiple knowledges about argument.

Along with reviewing our materials for the messages they send, we can make our argument pedagogy more inclusive by incorporating students’ experiences of argument as part of the course content. This can help us avoid essentializing “a” working-class identity and keep the focus instead on our particular students’ identities, histories, and practices. For example, one relatively simple way to highlight students’ experiences is by assigning composer’s memos to accompany argument projects. In these memos, students not only explain some of their rhetorical moves, but also reflect on their emotions or describe what kind of identity they took on when making an argument. Depending on the project, questions I have asked students to address in these memos include, *How did it feel to critique the writers you responded to in this argument? This assignment asked you to profile and write to a resistant audience; how did it feel to do that? How would you describe the voice you developed for this project—who were you trying to be in making this argument? What role did you feel you were taking on in this argument, and what kind of relationship did that set up with the audience, do you think?*

While composer’s memos guide students to reflect on one experience of making an argument, two major assignments—an argument journal and a comparative analysis—engage students in enriching course content by deeply examining several of their experiences of argument. The argument journal aims at supporting students in integrating their home and school knowledges. Over the first three weeks of class, students in my argument classes write substantial but informal responses to prompts asking them to reflect on their existing knowledge and experiences of argument. (In an appendix, I’ve included the prompts I’ve used recently, but prompts and word count should flow out of the content and outcomes of a particular course.) On one level, the journal gives students a chance to warm up their writing muscles by composing long, informal, detailed, but low-stakes texts, while also helping them start a reflective habit of mind that they’ll cultivate the rest of the semester. The journal can also provide material for students to use later in the term in other assignments, such as an argument narrative or a comparative analysis.

On another level, the argument journal aims to bring students' understanding of argument into the classroom, not as wrong knowledge needing disinfection, but as course content. About two-thirds of classroom activity in those opening weeks consists of students sharing self-selected parts of their journal entries and discussing them in small and large groups. Such discussions help students get to know one another, but they also produce tangible course material. Each discussion activity calls on students to add to a collective, running list on the course website of their insights, questions, and recurring issues about argument, such as ideas about what it is and isn't or should and shouldn't be and the variety of forms and functions they've known argument to take on. The list shows to students in concrete form the knowledge about argument, as both a concept and a practice, that they've created collectively from the individual experiences they bring to the classroom. In addition, the list functions as an authoritative knowledge base, equivalent to the textbook and other course materials, to which students return throughout the semester when assignments direct them to revisit the list and engage the material there. Finally, writing the journal engages students in thoughtfully examining their existing knowledge about argument, while the accompanying discussions reveal the wide variety of forms and functions that argument can take. Both are foundational activities for learning to write in multiple disciplines.

Like the argument journal, a comparative analysis assignment aims at incorporating students' experiences of argument into course content. Coming after the journal but still part of an early unit surveying multiple approaches to argument, the comparative analysis paper directs students to examine multiple arguments they've experienced, setting them side-by-side to identify similarities and differences. In the first step, students identify three arguments in which they've participated as either arguer, audience, or, in a dialogic argument, interlocutor. For written or transcribed arguments, students locate the text (which could be anything from an essay in an academic reader or a paper they've written, to the text of a speech, an op-ed, or an online exchange) and write a description of the contexts in which the text was composed and encountered. Students can also select verbal arguments they've experienced, as long as they can write a description of the situation that includes plenty of detail about what was said by whom.

Next, each student selects one general criterion to anchor his or her analysis, working from a list the class generates collaboratively. Typical criteria usually include site (where does the argument occur?), purpose (is the argument aimed at the audience's thoughts, actions, other?), format (a mix of medium and organization), primary audience, and the identity of the arguer. Students then flesh out this framework—three arguments compared and contrasted along one major variable—with analysis along three or four additional, more complex criteria. With some supplementation by me,

the class again generates a list of these, drawing on readings and personal experience to come up with questions we can ask about an argument and its context and ways to label the questions as variables. Examples of these more complex criteria for comparison and contrast include style (What kind of language is used?); backing (does the arguer provide evidence? What kinds?); function (What larger purpose—e.g., social, material, institutional, etc.—does the argument serve to accomplish?); quantity (How many words are considered necessary to make the argument? In a dialogic argument, does one person talk more or less?); power and authority (Who gets to argue in this situation, and who doesn't?); roles and relationships (Who are the different persons in this argument, and how do they stand relative to each other?); and consequences (What are the risks and rewards of arguing in this situation?). In the draft they turn in, students present the insights resulting from this analysis that they found most compelling, using language from the texts and contextual details to illustrate their points.

The comparative analysis assignment reinforces the argument journal in that both aim to validate students' experiences of argument as knowledge to incorporate rather than discard as they learn the expectations and identities involved in academic argument. Whether or not students choose to analyze arguments from their home culture, the comparative analysis assignment can help students see that they're capable of participating in several different kinds of argument, multiplying identities rather than rejecting them. At the same time, the assignment introduces students to variety in argument, exercises them in distinguishing among arguments based on a complex set of factors, and alerts them to the inseparability of arguments and their contexts—all capacities that can help them learn to analyze and write multiple kinds of arguments as required by different disciplines.

Positioning the argument journal and comparative analysis paper as producing course content helps me emphasize that learning academic argument is part of a life-long process of learning many different kinds of argument, and thus a process of adding to, rather than replacing, one's identity. The ultimate purpose of both assignments is to give students some dedicated space and time for creating an integrated identity in which home and school selves cooperate. The integration process is often painful or just plain hard, and more so when students must do it exclusively on the fly, reacting without pause to a gauntlet of academic stimuli that demand particular performances. By creating opportunities for students to treat their experiences of argument as class content, I hope to convey to them that such identity work is not a tacit requirement they need to "get right" wholly on their own time, but instead an acknowledged part of learning one kind of argument—academic—for which they can expect time and support in class.

Appendix: Argument Journal Prompts

Entry 1

1. “Argument” covers a wide range of activities. What different parts of your life do you see argument operating in? Name a few, and give me a few general descriptions of how you see argument operating in each.
2. What metaphor would you use to describe argument, and why?
3. What specific things do you want to learn about argument in this course?

Entry 2

How does the prospect of entering an argument make you feel? Why do you think it makes you feel that way? Do your feelings differ depending on what kind of argument you make, for example, depending on the place, language, topics, purposes, and people who are involved?

Entry 3

Think back to when you began high school, and review the period from then until now. Has your view of argument in general—what an argument is like, what’s involved in arguing—changed in this period of time? If so, how? If you can think of any experiences that helped change your perspective of what it means to argue, describe them.

Entry 4 (pick one)

- A. Has there been a time in your life when you were a resistant audience (as described in your textbook) to a particular argument about a controversial issue—but then changed to become a strongly supportive audience to that same argument? If so, tell me what the issue is, how your position on it changed, and, most important, what led you to the change.
- B. We’ve discussed the importance of adapting arguments to specific audiences. Can you recall one or two times when you made arguments (in any realm of your life, and of any type) that you consciously adapted to a specific audience? Describe the situation: what you argued about, to whom, and how you adapted your argument to that audience.

Entry 5

Where you come from, what do people think about argument? How do you make arguments there? What factors do you think shape these attitudes and practices of argument? Examples can be helpful here.

Entry 6

Almost all theorists of academic and civic argument sketch various conditions—

usually, states of mind or attitudes that interlocutors must hold—that must be present for the resulting communication to be considered “true argument.” Common conditions include the requirements that people admit that different valid viewpoints can exist; that people fully reveal their purposes for arguing a particular claim (i.e., transparency about agendas); that people willingly engage in self-reflection to discern their own values and assumptions; that people treat other interlocutors with respect and attention; and that people engage in argument only if they are genuinely open to the possibility of changing their minds. What do you think of these conditions?

Entry 7

- A. From the last three weeks of class discussions and readings, what are a few points about argument that you’ve found particularly helpful, or challenging, or objectionable? Tell me about each one and why it struck you.
- B. Do you have any opinions, feelings, concerns, or ideas about argument that you want to share with me—things that weren’t covered in previous journal entries or that you didn’t get a chance to share in class?

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