

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: "LEVELING THE FIELD": THE NEED FOR EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION OF ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING FORM FOR 'STRUGGLING' SECONDARY STUDENTS

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In this essay, a method for explicit teaching of argumentative form is purported, based on the methods of classical rhetoric. Throughout, it argues that the secondary student labeled "struggling" is often one who is a cultural minority and who experiences a cultural mismatch between implicit standards in argumentative writing and that of his own culture. In order to provide culturally responsive instruction for such students, the essay suggests that teachers must make these standards for what constitutes a "well-organized" explicit and teach students methods to self-regulate their thinking during the composing process. In this way, students are granted an opportunity to succeed academically in terms of writing ability.

“LEVELING THE FIELD”: THE NEED FOR EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION OF
ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING FORM FOR ‘STRUGGLING’ SECONDARY
STUDENTS

By

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Preface

I sit here contemplating where to begin. By all accounts, this task of writing a thesis, of constructing an argument for a method of argumentative writing instruction, should not be this overwhelming. I have written such essays before and have studied this very topic. I have been working towards this goal academically and professionally. I am motivated by and interested in the content. I have been deemed a “successful” student in my formal education. Yet still, here I sit, in a room with research and ideas strewn about, feeling like the struggling high school students I teach. How do I come up with the ideas? How do I arrange all the pieces to make sense? How can I do this? And where do I start?

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Introduction– The Need for Argumentative Writing Instruction in Secondary Schools¹

As educators, we know from personal and professional experience that reading and writing are difficult tasks, ones that require our complete cognitive attention and an internal repertoire of skills and strategies from which to draw in order to effectively make meaning. Having each engaged with – and successfully met by virtue of the attainment of our professions – the demands of the academically literate world, we understand the struggle of putting pen to paper or typing word onto screen. But we know, too, that developing such literacy skills given the context of our rapidly-changing world is essential, especially for our students. We recognize the importance of teaching reading and writing skills to our pupils and of the access and opportunities that are granted to them through this instruction and learning; and we are aware of the consequences when such access and opportunities are denied. And though each of us approaches the classroom with the best of intentions, we encounter the difficulties of teaching writing to our diverse students, students who come from a variety of backgrounds and with varying sets of needs. What we often do not understand, perhaps are unable to identify with, is just how difficult the task of writing is for those students who have not met with academic success and for whom the world of academic discourse is overwhelming and unwelcoming. The question that remains for us to enact positive change, then, is the one that is most essential for our practice – how might we more effectively teach our students to write given who our students are and what we know about writing instruction?

¹ Some of the topics explored in this essay, though in different form and depth, originated in ideas generated for previous compositions for English 775 and English 708b, and is so cited in the Bibliography.

Current discussions regarding composition instruction seem to indicate a growing literacy crisis unlike any that has been seen before. The Alliance for Excellent Education and the College Board's National Commission on Writing, for example, have published reports citing a startling lack of literacy skills among current adolescents and warning of the long-term implications of such deficiencies (Graham and Perin 7-8, Bado-Aleman 1). And of the near twenty-eight thousand students who participated in the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exam at the twelfth grade level, deemed "The Nation's Report Card," scores on the writing section indicate an additional cause for concern. On the exam, students must write "...to inform, to persuade, and to tell stories – real or imagined – and to do so for a range of audiences, among them teachers, newspaper editors, potential employers, and peers"(Learning Point Associates 4). Thus, when assessed on the abilities to write for various purposes and across genres, only one percent of those twelfth grade students assessed on these skills scored at the "Advanced" level, and just 23% were considered "Proficient" writers (37).

Using the NAEP rubric to define the line between proficient and not, a proficient essay is explained as one in which students "...wrote well-organized essays in which they took clear positions and supported those positions in much of the response, occasionally missing transitions. These students sometimes varied their sentence structure and exhibited good words choices, and errors they made did not interfere with reader understanding" (45). Overall, then, an alarming fifty-seven percent of those students assessed were considered below this line of writing proficiency, scoring at the level termed "Basic," with an additional 19% deemed

“Below Basic” (37). Considering these numbers and what seems to be a continuing trend, startling 76% of students are considered below proficient in the area of writing according to this assessment.

Results are equally disconcerting in the specific category of persuasive writing – a category examined because of its frequent appearance on assessments such as the NAEP. On this exam, a 40% majority of the composite writing score is based on performance in this genre. The prompt on the 2007 exam, for example, required students to address the following task in essay form:

“The twentieth century has given us inventions that have changed our lives in many ways. Big inventions, like television, computers, or microwave ovens, have had such a great impact on our culture that they seem to overshadow small ones, like ballpoint pens, headphones, or calculators.

Write an essay in which you choose whether the “big” inventions or the “small” ones play a more important role in your daily life and provide reasons to support your position. You may use the examples of inventions given or come up with some of your own. Give as many examples as you feel necessary to support your position” (Learning Point Associates 44)

Considering the demands of this complex prompt – that students must form an argument that is only vaguely described in the rubric as one that is “well-organized,” “supported,” and “clear” – the results are perhaps not surprising. On this task, only five percent of students achieved at the “Advanced” level and a mere 21% were considered “Proficient” (Learning Point Associates 44). However, 34% of students were categorized as “Basic” writers, falling below the deciding line of proficiency, and an even greater 39% scored in the “Below Basic” category (44). Thus, in the area of persuasive or argumentative writing alone, over 73% of students assessed were categorized as below proficient.

Such tasks and result are seen too in other “high-stakes” contexts that bear implications for both the students who take the exams and the schools that are measured by the exam results. For example, similar writing tasks were generally required on state tests that determined whether or not Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has been made in reference to No Child Left Behind. On the 2008 Maryland HSA English Assessment, for example, one prompt asks students the following:

“Write a well-organized essay in which you agree or disagree with the idea that new technologies make our lives more complicated. Support your ideas with examples from your experiences or the experiences of others. Be sure that your essay is fully developed, that it is logically organized, and that your choice of words clearly expresses your ideas” (mdk12.org, Item 21 of 52).

What is thus implied is that the ability to write in persuasively, to form arguments about topics, is an essential strand of knowledge and skills to be developed in a secondary school education. In addition, though this exam is considered a “reading assessment” (as are many other “reading assessments” that require writing), students’ writing abilities are evaluated and composition continues to be used as a primary method of conveying reading comprehension and critical thinking.

And though the passing rates are better on such tests, an achievement gap has created a growing chasm that can no longer be ignored. On the 2008 Maryland HSA basic-skills, state-created assessment, for instance, most students were deemed “proficient,” but an achievement gap exists among populations. According to the results, within the state of Maryland and of the students who were assessed, Asian and white students passed at an 88% and 85% rate, respectively, while among African-American and Hispanic students, the passing rates were 61% and 68%, respectively. These results show a gap of roughly 20%. As for Special Education

students and those with Limited English Proficiency, the gap grows even wider as only about 30% passed of Special Education students passed, as did only 28% of students with Limited English Proficiency. Even in the more affluent counties within that state, such as Montgomery County, a near 20 percentage point gap exists among subgroups -- Asian students scored at a 92% pass rate and white students at 94%, while their African-American counterparts scored at a 72% pass rate and Hispanic students at 76% (MSDE). Since so many of the basic skills assessments by which our students and schools are measured require proficiency in this set of skills and this type of composition, such trends must be addressed by our educational systems, and instruction of argumentative writing must move to the forefront. And as some tests, such as the 2009 Maryland English HSA, move to becoming solely reliant upon selected response (multiple choice) questions, it is even more essential for teachers to address writing skills in the classroom to avoid the dangers of just “teaching to the test” -- test that, in the face of such low passing rates and high achievement gaps, may begin to phase out the writing portions that are most relevant to the skills students will need beyond the secondary school setting.

Given new technologies and a seeming disconnect between school settings and student interests, the temptation might be to reconsider the entire paradigm for writing instruction and to do away with the traditional definitions of “effective” argumentative writing and the accompanying traditional instruction on these styles of composition in favor of more “inclusive” styles and practices, such as story-writing or analysis of new media. The push might be to rely more heavily upon technology and to incorporate more creative assignments, since, arguably, these types of tasks seem

to better motivate and/or engage students in classroom activities. But while there is a necessary place in the instructional setting for narrative and informational writing and analysis, as well as for the more creative lessons such as ones centered on music lyrics as poetry or short-story writing, etc., the fact remains that students will rarely be assessed on these types of skills in the post-secondary academic or work worlds, not to mention the high-stakes standards-based testing that has accompanied the No Child Left Behind push (such as with the NAEP exam, for which argumentative writing constitutes the largest percentage of the overall writing score in comparison to the other two types assessed, narrative and informative).

The truth of the matter is that our society emphasizes argumentative and persuasive writing that is linear and implicitly relies upon traditional rhetorical definitions of “effective” composition with regards to argument and persuasion. Our task as practitioners, then, is to make explicit the implicit and to uncover the magic of the muse that “inspires” effective writing. Thus, what is called for is a re-conceptualizing of argumentative writing as interest-based opportunities for student learning and of explicit argumentative writing and strategy instruction as a means of providing equitable academic access for all students. This essay, then, will advocate for a method of teaching argumentative writing to adolescent writers in a way that builds on those principles of traditional rhetorical models, namely in terms of arrangement and organization as fundamental to what we term “effective composition,” and that connects these principles to the students we teach – students who are often reluctant to engage in academic tasks because they have met with failure. Though not purporting a “one-size-fits-all” model, it does examine the

general importance of motivating students to participate in instruction, advocates for explicit instruction of the traditional five- or six-part model that emphasizes the purpose or function of each component, and connects all of these pieces to the concept of writing as a recursive cognitive process that is demanding and difficult for all writers. In motivating students to engage in academic, argumentative writing tasks, in making the underlying standards of writing explicit, and in providing students with strategies to regulate their thinking processes as they work to complete these tasks and to meet those standards, the traditional argumentative essay and the accompanying instruction, can become more equitable and, perhaps, even more “culturally responsive.”

A Familiar History – Every Individual is a “Struggling Writer,” and So It Has Always Been

Some practitioners have suggested that the alarming trends indicating a lack of literacy skills are due to the changes in student demographics. As more immigrant and English language learning students enter the American school systems, and as these systems face a continuing achievement gap between minority students and their white and Asian counterparts (as aforementioned) in addition to the concerns regarding students with disabilities and special needs, some secretly and sometimes unknowingly believe that the students are to blame because the students are seen as lacking – lacking motivation, lacking language skills, lacking cognitive ability. For teachers, however, holding such thoughts is discriminatory and dangerous, for ultimately it is teachers who are left behind the closed door of the classroom with both with the responsibility of building the capacity of each student in a heterogeneous classroom context and with the power of deciding which students will, or will not, receive educational opportunities.

Though it may seem to some that the demographics and dynamics of the modern American classroom may be changing, what must be understood is 1) that such situations are not unique to our history and can thus be addressed by looking back while moving forward and 2) that it is every student who is a “struggling” – but not an “unskilled” – writer. As Graham and Perin highlight in *Writing Next*, because “...writing appears to be a ‘marker’ attribute of high-skill, high-wage, professional work” and is thus a ‘gatekeeper’ of sorts in maintaining the lines between social, economic, and professional classes, addressing these needs is a question of equity – to

whom will we, as an educational system, grant the gift of writing, and along with it, socioeconomic mobility? (19). As the authors note, “unless our society pays attention to developing all of the education skills (including writing) of all segments of the population, it runs the risk of consigning many students who are poor, members of minority groups, or learning English to relatively low-skill, low-wage, hourly employment” (19). As teachers, then, we must teach the students we have, not the ones we have imagined or idealized.

While some encounter such issues with resignation or alarm, overwhelmed by what must be accomplished in each academic year (and it is overwhelming and alarming), we must instead remind ourselves that the situation is not as unique as we might initially think. In fact, as Greek and Roman civilizations developed – the same societies who created the very “definitions” of rhetoric and writing that we hold to today – they, too, encountered such seeming obstacles regarding education and instruction in the face of a changing population of students. As James Murphy recounts in “The Key Role of Habit in Roman Writing Instruction,” the very notion that “students [could] be habituated into [writing] skill and virtue...[to]...produce appropriate and effective language in any situation” arose from what was viewed as a need to create a common curriculum in reaction to the growing, more inclusive empire (35-36). And similar to the belief that many teachers hold regarding education as a means for gaining mobility, the common curricula established, such as those created by Isocrates, intended to bring greater democratization to “...prepare students by developing writing as a source of civic power” (32). In this sense, the concept and purpose of an educational system for teaching writing was an attempt by these

civilizations to address the academic and social needs of the of their students, while maintaining a sense of the traditional “standards” of writing.

And though, as Carol Dana Lanham reveals in “Writing Instruction from Late Antiquity to the Twelfth Century,” such systematic rhetorical education was initially granted only to “a small, homogenous population of Latin-speaking males” in the Roman world, the populations of students eventually changed. Similar to our concerns for students who are English language learners, the Roman empire was forced to reconsider how to instruct those pupils for whom the primary literacy language of Latin was foreign (79).

This concern was visible yet again in later history throughout other countries as well. Britain, for example, reexamined their academic systems and instruction as the middle class demanded greater access to formal education. As Linda Ferreira-Buckley and Winifred Bryan Horner explain in their essay “Writing Instruction in Great Britain: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” composition instruction “...evolved in response to social, political, religious and economic developments” (173-174) in an attempt to meet the new needs of those populations that had been granted access to these educational systems. Thus, as we battle in our current American context with what we consider a unique and developing “issue,” there is something to be learned from reconsidering these concerns in terms of an expected historical cycle.

Essentially, then, the “changes” in student populations and needs that we consider problematic new circumstances are perhaps the one stable tenet upon which we should build our systems for composition instruction – our students will always

“change,” as does our society, and so, too, will students’ instructional needs differ from year to year and from student to student. In our own early American history, Elizabethada A. Wright and S. Michael Halloran have noted in their article “From Rhetoric to Composition: The Teaching of Writing in America to 1900” that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “...the growth of the middle-class spirit placed a new burden on the colleges both in sheer numbers of students and in new responsibilities” (230). As greater academic access is granted to students across socio-economic statuses and races, similarly heard today is the lament of the college professor and the high school teacher that “these students” are increasingly unskilled at writing and unprepared for the academic world. But to teach the students we have the content that is necessary for academic success is our charge and calling.

As all classrooms – both in our early history and today – encounter a diverse student body with a range of academic needs, what continues to be easily overlooked is the opportunity that exists to connect these “struggling” student populations to the foundations of effective composition instruction rooted in rhetoric. While in the example of American schooling in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, “...classical rhetoric might have been adapted to the needs of the changing American culture and served as an art of political competency for the widening enfranchised public...instead, it was virtually abandoned by colleges in favor of a socially and politically unaware rhetoric of composition” (Wright and Halloran 240).

Encountering a similar place in our current history of composition instruction, we must now reconsider the most effective ways in which to instruct our students,

balancing both their needs and the traditions that underscore our definitions of effective composition.

Having noted other times and other societies in which such concerns regarding composition instruction have occurred, and as such concerns continue to exist today, it is time for the educational community to recognize that shifts in student populations are a ‘natural and necessary’ part of our larger history, forcing us to re-examine and re-evaluate what we deem essential in our writing curricula and pushing us to reconsider those elements which should crucially change to meet new needs (Bado-Aleman 3). In re-conceptualizing what the terms “effective composition” and “effective composition instruction” mean, we are moved to recognize the role of culture in our classroom contexts and in the type of writing we deem “academic discourse.” As Catherine Hobbs and James Berlin purport in their article “English Writing Instruction,” composition and “...writing instruction has remained at the heart of curricular decisions as to the kind of society we should advocate and the kinds of individuals we should encourage to make up that society. [Because] decisions about writing pedagogy put into material practice our beliefs as to the purpose education should serve in our society” (248). And that purpose should be to educate every student, recognizing his individual needs and skills, and eliminating the myth of the “traditional” student of yore and the “struggling” student of today.

Deciphering what differentiates the student who is particularly successful with writing in the academic secondary (and post secondary) school setting from the one who “struggles” is thus a difficult, but necessary task. What is even more important to recognize, however, is that every individual is one who struggles with writing, for

even the most gifted of authors battle writer's blocks and overcome internal and cognitive battles to produce written texts. Making this more complex for our adolescent, secondary students is that the demands placed on them for demonstrating their abilities increase each year. As the Learning Point Associates for the North Central Regional Educational Library notes in its report "Using Student Engagement to Improve Adolescent Literacy," every student encounters academic struggle as he moves through the educational system. As explained, "Even for students who achieve early reading and writing success, the literacy demands of middle and high school can pose substantial challenges" since these students "must be able to comprehend more complex texts; determine the meaning of obscure, unfamiliar, and technical vocabulary; use higher-order thinking skills to analyze a wide variety of literacy and expository texts and media; and develop skills for expressing their ideas by writing" various texts (Learning Point Associates 4). But for those students who have demonstrated needs in literacy skills, "these challenges are even more daunting" (Learning Point Associates 4); such is even more so true when those students lose the motivation to engage in academic literacy tasks because of past failures or due to the identified literacy skill needs.

Before we can consider writing instruction as processes solely focused on completing necessary curricular and writing tasks, then, we must first consider the students whom we instruct and the writing strengths, needs, and experiences they bring with them to the classroom. We must first consider how to motivate students to write arguments, and later, how to best help them learn to write according to the

traditional rhetorical standards by which their arguments will be assessed. To do so, it is necessary to consider definitions of the “struggling student writer.”

Struggling Students, Motivation, Skills, and Writing – Being Responsive to and Aware of the Cultural Issues at Play

As teachers, we know that content knowledge forms only part of a greater responsibility. Though many in the field might consider themselves subject-matter teachers, such as “writing teachers” or “English teachers,” etc., it is more important that we begin to expand our educational paradigm such that educators begin to realize more fully that they are instead teachers of students, and not just of those “content areas.” Attempting merely to teach content information without regard to the students is a difficult and often futile effort if the instruction does not match the needs of the whole student; and these needs very often include a student’s motivation, or lack thereof, to complete a given writing task.

Motivation is essential for effective writing instruction because writing is a complex task that requires commitment and effort. This difficulty is especially true for those students whom we offhandedly and often too quickly label “struggling.” Though it has been previously established that all writers struggle with the task of creating original written texts, it also can not be overlooked that there is a population of students for whom such demands pose an even greater challenge. To clarify for the purposes of this discussion, then, the “struggling student” will be defined in two ways: 1) as a student who seemingly lacks motivation to write within the context of the academic classroom and/or 2) as a student who lacks proficiency in the skills necessary for creating cohesive texts that meet the standards of traditional arguments in the American school setting. Though this definition may be broad, encompassing students from those with special needs in the Special Education setting to those who are English language learners and finally to those who seem ‘unmotivated’ to engage

in writing in the academic setting, it is this general because so many of our students do, indeed, struggle with argumentative writing as seen in the alarming test trends noted earlier in this essay.

Noting such trends and the many diagnostic tools available to assess an individual student's literacy skill levels, many might choose to begin by examining ways in which to build these skills. What is overlooked, however, is the need for a student to first be willing to engage in building these skills because he values the "reward" that will be reaped from his diligent efforts and the difficult work. For, as NCREL suggests, "educators who teach reading and writing skills without addressing student engagement [motivation] are unlikely to yield substantial improvements. As anyone who has spent time with middle and high school students can attest, attempting to build the skills of disengaged adolescents is a futile enterprise...whether expressed as defiant noncompliance or passive 'checking out,' the student who refuses to learn will succeed in that effort," and ultimately fail in the academic setting (Learning Point Associates 6). Thus, sparking in students the motivation to write is the first key factor to building student ability to write effectively.

But just what does it mean to be motivated versus unmotivated? Broadly defined, we might think of motivation as a general and an intrinsic desire to do, complete, or achieve something. When considering student motivation, particularly with regard to being motivated to write, what we turn to is an overall "attitude" that is bared towards the work that must be done. In "Motivating Reluctant Students to Write: Suggestions and Caveats," Pietro Boscolo and Carmen Gelati purport that this

attitude "...includes two main components: the student's sense of competence in writing, and his or her view of the role and relevance of writing as a subject" (61). A motivated student, then, is "one who values writing as a means of expression, communication, and elaboration, and is willing to write to the degree to which a writing task enables him or her to express ideas and feelings" such that the motivated student feels an internal sense of competence because he or she "is realistically self-confident about his or her ability to use writing successfully"(Boscolo and Gelati 62). Thus, when the motivated student writes – and meets with success in the academic setting via a high grade or positive teacher feedback – his or her confidence is reassured and the student feels "satisfied and engaged" (Boscolo and Gelati 62). In sum, writing is a positive and rewarding experience on many counts for the motivated student.

What happens to this sense of confidence and the feelings of satisfaction and engagement, however, when success is not met and the writing experiences are negative? For the unmotivated student, writing has a connotation that is far different from the motivated learner's. As any teacher could anecdotally relate, writing is seen by these students as "repetitive and boring activities" (Boscolo and Gelati 62) and considered relevant only insofar as the tasks relate to the students' overall grades – and in some cases, gaining course credit through passing grades does not seem reason enough for the unmotivated, struggling student to engage in the writing tasks. In addition, the unmotivated student lacks a positive identity of himself or herself as a "good writer," having perhaps attempted to write in past educational experiences but meeting only with poor marks on assignments and negative comments from the

teacher. For these students, motivation falls lower and lower as they move through the educational system, because “both enjoyment and the sense of competence tend to decrease in middle and even further in upper grades due to teacher evaluation, which is often more concerned with underlining students’ mistakes in written texts than appreciating their efforts” (61). Such negative feedback reinforces in the students a lack of positive academic identity and further pushes them away from wanting to engage in academic writing experiences. If the student can not see the value in completing the laborious and cognitively demanding task of writing, and if he does not see himself as able to succeed in undertaking such a venture, then he will not be motivated to do so. These realizations on the part of the students make many “lose the incentive to adhere to school norms” or, by extension, academic standards (Noguera 343) – if I can’t do any of this anyway, they think, why try at all?

And whether teachers are willing to admit it initially or not, when the struggling student is considered what comes to mind is the cultural minority student who, to some of the majority white teachers in secondary schools (Juarez et al 21), seems defiant, unskilled, and/or unmotivated. But as these students ...”soon begin to recognize that education is not working for them and will not provide them with access to socially desirable rewards” (Noguera 343), it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to find the links that will connect the student to a vision of himself as attaining success and achieving an aim that has the value of social mobility – this can be accomplished through argumentative writing. It must be understood and made explicit, however, that writing in general and argumentative writing more specifically are not culturally neutral, and further, that these underlying cultural values for

assessment of “effective writing” may clash with that of the students’, ultimately “de-motivating” these same students from wanting to engage in tasks that have standards the students do not understand and thus can not achieve.

In examining the particular needs of the many populations included under the title “struggling,” then, we must be specific in highlighting those cultures that are not of the mainstream white majority. It can not be overstated, however, that such populations are not synonymous with disability and are not the only ones who, indeed, struggle with writing. But it also can not be overlooked that there is clear documentation that it is these populations – i.e., Latino, African-American, ELLs, Special Education, and those of a ‘lower’ socio-economic status – that have been represented in the achievement gap as noted in the scores aforementioned. In addition, there is a clear representation of African-American and Latino students among English Language Learners, particularly in areas like the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region, and an overrepresentation of these students in special education programs. As Gwendolyn Cartledge and Lefki Kourea state in their essay on “Culturally Responsive Classrooms for Culturally Diverse Students With and At Risk for Disabilities,” the “national data for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (i.e., African, Hispanic, and Native American) reveal high rates of dropping out of school, disproportionate special education placement, greater failure in meeting the state and national standards across basic subjects, and the poorest outcomes of all students in our schools (National Research Council)” (351). These gaps must indeed be recognized and addressed.

Such data, though, are not entirely reliable and may do more to reinforce negative stereotypes of minority students as inherently “struggling” students. For example, as noted in her essay, “Culturally Responsive Teaching in Special Education for Ethnically Diverse Students: Setting the Stage,” Geneva Gay argues that “...many students of color are disproportionately assigned to special education because educators lack knowledge about or appreciation for their cultural values and socialization, and how these affect learning behaviors” (613). Similarly, teachers lack an understanding of how all of these cultural differences impacts writing and argument, leading some teachers to dismiss many minority students’ writing as “poor” and falling “below standard.” If we are to make changes that motivate our students to want to succeed in the writing classroom, we must be honest about the differences that exist between the teacher’s experiences and the students’. For better or worse, we must acknowledge that “teacher preparation programs designed to prepare teachers for diversity and social justice best equip teachers to teach in idealized White, middle-class communities where children come from heterosexual, two-parent, primarily English-speaking families” (Juarez et al 20); but these are not the contexts in which most teachers teach, nor should they be.

Thus, to fully examine the academic and writing needs of these students, we must balance the need to address these populations with the responsibility not to further harmful stereotypes so that we might ultimately understand that the struggling student struggles because of the cultural mismatch between standards and expectation, and that a culturally responsive approach includes making these

standards explicit and raising expectations for student achievement by teaching students strategies to meet these goals.

Since these particular populations of students carry with them long-term negative attitudes towards the act of writing and towards themselves as writers because of negative educational experiences with writing, however, it is a difficult hurdle for both teacher and student to overcome. Nevertheless, one effective approach may be as simple as recognizing the underlying cultural clashes that occur in the writing classroom between the teacher's "standards" and the students' needs and experiences. To fully understand how to increase student motivation to write in the academic setting, which is vital to the learning process, teachers must realize the cultural values that are assumed and upheld through teaching writing in the classroom, and they must consider how to carefully balance both sets of demands in such a way that will value each stance and motivate students to succeed by illustrating both the possibility of attaining this aim and the value of doing so. For, as leading writer in the field of Culturally Responsive Teaching, Geneva Gay states, "if teachers know how the attributes of ethnic learning styles are manifested in study habits and intellectual task performance, they will be able to teach ethnically diverse students how to study more effectively, and perform better on teacher-made and standardized tests" (620). To do so is our responsibility.

So, what are the various cultural patterns that emerge in the examination of writing across cultures? For this discussion, I turn to Robert Kaplan's pivotal essay, "Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-Cultural Education," which states that "...it is necessary to recognize the fact that a paragraph [and all units and forms of writing, it

might be added] is an artificial thought unit employed in the written language to suggest a cohesion which commonly may not exist in oral language” (21) and which is, most certainly, not “universal” in its ability to argue or persuade all readers across cultures. This is mainly because different cultures have different values that underlie the styles that are deemed most effective.

For American academic standards of writing, “The thought patterns which speakers and readers of English appear to expect as an integral part of their communication is a sequence that is dominantly linear in its development” (Kaplan 14), and deviations from such linear organization and development at the sentence, paragraph, or whole composition levels, are deemed “ineffective.” The Anglo-European traditions to which we adhere and which have developed from the Platonic-Aristotelian that will be later examined in more depth, thus differ from the oral, storytelling traditions from which some of our students’ sense of “effective writing” stem (Kaplan 12).

But as Geneva Gay notes, this understanding of contrasting “rhetorics,” if you will, is essential to both our understanding and that of our students, because “...understanding the attributes of the storytelling motif that some students of color routinely use in communicating ideas and interacting with others, and how they try to do the same things in their written work in schools, will help teachers to better determine the students’ thinking strengths and weakness” (Gay 620). Perhaps if this were better understood, students would not be so unmotivated and discouraged by the comments they receive on writing that they think achieves the aim that was assigned. As Kaplan explains, it is quite often that “Instructors have written, on foreign-student

papers [and it could be added, cultural minority student papers], such comments as: ‘The material is all here, but it seems somehow out of focus,’ or ‘Lacks organization,’ or ‘Lacks cohesion.’”(Kaplan 13). These comments, however, are unclear to the student because he is writing from his perspective of the “effective.” What complicates the situation is that the teachers’ comments, too, “...are essentially accurate. The foreign-student paper is out of focus because the foreign student is employing a rhetoric and a sequence of thought which violate the expectations of the native [academic American English] reader” (Kaplan 13). In these situations, then, though both student and teacher are “correct” in differing senses, it is always the student who loses in the situation because it is the teacher who assesses the essay and who does so according to her own measures – measures that may not have been thoroughly explained to the student who holds a different understanding. This type of exchange is what we might call an example of the “white privilege” that permeates in the writing classroom as in all others and causes groups of students to lose the motivation to achieve academically. As Juarez et al explain, white privilege is “the historical privilege of characteristics associated with being White, a primary English speaker, male, heterosexual, Christian Protestant, and middle class” (21). In associating our writing standards with Anglo-European models, privilege is thus granted to those who can adhere to those standards.

For the teacher to be able to negotiate among these differing notions of effective writing in a way that allows students the opportunity to achieve without negating or devaluing other methods, she must be aware of what Kaplan terms the ‘thought patterns’ that underscore cultures. While it would be extremely difficult to

arrive at a thorough understanding of every culture's language and thought patterns, it is possible to become familiar with a few general principles of the cultures from which our "struggling" students come. Because the achievement gap highlights the lack of academic success among Latino and African-American students against their White and Asian counterparts, it is important to note the thought patterns of the Romance languages, such as French and Spanish. Though not all of these students may be English language learners or speak French or Spanish, it is not a great leap to assume that these patterns underlie the long-standing oral traditions of these students in their personal lives, and thus affect their understanding of effective academic writing. As Kaplan explains, writing in these language traditions are "...marked by what may be called an approach by indirection... [in which] the development of the paragraph may be said to be 'turning and turning in a widening gyre'...around the subject and show[ing] it from a variety of tangential views, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are" (Kaplan 17). Such differences underscore the cultural clashes that can occur between the teacher's standards and the student's values.

It is thus clear from Kaplan's discussion and subsequent analyses that there exists a "Much greater freedom to digress or to introduce extraneous material [that] is available in French, or in Spanish, than in English" (Kaplan 18), which is a marked difference from the linear development that is expected in the academic American setting. Particularly in terms of argumentative writing, students whose traditions rely upon the thought patterns of the Romance languages, might consider the inclusion of personal experiences and seemingly digressive anecdotes as a vital component to

furthering their arguments while the teacher expects a clearly linear development reliant upon more “substantive” support. And though some might note that the Greek and Roman roots from which we derive our current definitions of effective writing are connected to Latin, as are the Romance languages that offer differing cultural patterns, it is important to note, too, that the language and culture of conquerors is different from that of the conquered. Perhaps this historical detail underscores the differences among patterns -- though one might think the patterns of the Romance languages in French and Spanish should be more akin to those of Latin, the languages are not exact, and the French and Spanish of African countries and Latin American countries, respectively, are different from these “same” languages in European nations, leading to these variances. The possibility here, however, is to find ways in which to combine these pieces.

Note that the differing patterns of thought, and in turn writing, are exemplified in some ways, and not by accident, in this essay, which begins with a personal anecdote that supports my research from my own experiences as a Latina student and teacher. In addition, the greater argument for explicit instruction of academic American argumentative form, for me, must take into account the “whole child” in terms of his motivation to succeed, his cultural values that clash against those of the mainstream classroom, and his need to have strategies to meet the academic writing standards. To some in the academic world, such a method of development might seem full of “digressions”; but for those who understand my cultural patterns of thought and how they influence my writing, the lines of reasoning are clearer. To succeed

academically, however, I must negotiate this preference and style with the linear lines by which I will be assessed.

For teachers to be able to help students achieve according to one set of standards when many sets exist, then, and “For self-understanding, teachers need to recognize their own ethnocentrism and bias and realize that their worldview is not universal nor are their cultural norms absolute” (Cartledge and Kourea 353). In short, we must be explicit about the ‘cultural norms’ that are pre-supposed and valued in the current American academic setting when it comes to argumentative writing so that students might be taught ways in which to acquire these skill that build on what they do know (based on their cultural patterns and values). In understanding that these skills are culture-specific but attainable and able to be learned, and that attaining and learning these skills can lead to academic and social success, “struggling” students might gain an increased motivation to engage in such learning.

And while some might argue instead that it is the writing traditions which we hold that need to be reevaluated so as to incorporate more of the non-traditional patterns, the more immediate concern – and responsibility – for the practicing secondary school writing teacher is how to provide her students with the ability to meet the writing standards that have been ingrained in our country for centuries and which are currently the measure of progress and ability in college and the professional work setting. Given that, as discussed earlier, the ability to write is seen as a necessary skill for the post-secondary academic and work worlds, and that both those contexts rely upon certain traditional forms, teaching both these particular sets of standards and how to attain them are essential because the English classroom has a

responsibility "...to provide the student with a form within which he may operate, a form acceptable in this time and in this place" (Kaplan 24).

For the struggling student, and especially for the minority student, such acceptable forms may seem foreign and unattainable, but to ignore these real standards and/or to be vague about how to achieve them will serve only to reinforce those negative self-images and further widen the achievement gap. But to provide explicit instruction of the standards will at least allow these students a door into the mysterious world of writing and allow them the opportunity to join the community of "good writers," as currently defined.

Thus, rather than engaging with colleagues in an endless argument about the perils of "lowering standards" for "low-performing students," we can instead spend our efforts better helping students to achieve and empowering them with an ability to work within the current standards such that they might one day have the social, academic, and economic power to change those principles. Doing so demonstrates the care and concern for students and their futures that Geneva Gay notes is essential to the most effective of teachers (Gay 620). And in this way, approaching writing instruction that recognizes different cultural patterns and is explicit about the preferred set of standards maintained can be seen as culturally responsive in that as teachers "demand high academic performance" from every student, they "facilitate" such performance by both making the standards clear for students and showing students how to attain those standards (620). In addition, when students are taught how to argue according to the forms of the academic and professional settings and are given an opportunity and the power to bring about change in those worlds, then

“...students are taught that being educated involves more than academics and it carries with it the responsibility to use knowledge to bring about social change” (Gay 623). It is this opportunity for change that makes explicit writing instruction necessary.

A Brief Examination of the Standards of “Good Writing: -- Traditional Rhetorical Structure and the Importance of Arrangement

To further consider the more effective methods of composition instruction, it is essential to consider how “effective composition” is defined and to what standards our students’ writing is held such that we might make these demands more explicit for all. For as we know from personal experience, the struggling writer often thinks himself doomed before he ever even begins a writing task; in many instances, this lack of confidence and motivation is because of his lack of a positive academic identity as a successful writer who is capable of producing an “effective” written argument. In the eyes of these students, they simply do not have what it takes to create the types of arguments that teachers want.

Such a lack of a positive academic identity as a writer is further (and often unknowingly on behalf of the teacher) reinforced when a student produces a written argument that adheres to his cultural pattern of thought, but which differs from the concept of “effective composition” held by the teacher in her rubric. As Kaplan explains, our current understandings of the English language and the inter-related cultural thought patterns that emerge from that language “...have evolved out of the Anglo-European cultural pattern” (12). In this pattern, held up as the continuing current standard for effective writing in American academia, “The expected sequence of thought in English is essentially a Platonic-Aristotelian sequence, descended from the philosophers of ancient Greece and shaped subsequently by Roman, Medieval European, and later Western thinkers” (Kaplan 12). If this is the system by which we

measure our students' writing, then is it not essential for us to explicitly teach students 1) what the patterns are and 2) how to achieve them?

Though, as teachers, we sometimes begin instruction by saying to students that they already have the abilities to write in these styles because they have the abilities of thought and speech – if one can argue in speech, one can argue through writing, the thinking goes – it must be understood that oral speech and written language are two distinct linguistic processes. As Janet Emig explains in her landmark article “Writing as a Mode of Learning,” writing is a unique “languaging” process and therefore provides great difficulty for any individual who accepts the cognitive challenge of constructing a written response. This is especially true for the struggling writer. As she explains,

“Traditionally the four languaging processes of listening, talking, reading, and writing are paired in either of two ways. The more informative seems to be the division many linguists make between first-order and second order processes, with talking and listening characterized as first-order processes; reading and writing, as second order. First order processes are acquired without formal or systematic instruction; the second-order processes of reading and writing tend to be learned initially only with the aid of formal and systematic instruction” (Emig 8).

If writing is not a “natural” skill or process, and if the standards by which we measure “effective writing” are not culturally neutral, then it might follow that neither the contexts for writing nor the forms that govern what constitutes effective writing can be considered “natural.” Rather, the definitions of these concepts are externally created

and established to govern what is considered “effective.” In an effort to address the needs of all our students, then, the next step in considering a means for explicit instruction of argumentative writing is to establish what constitutes “effective writing” in our current context as rooted in the aforementioned traditions.

While some practitioners who work to motivate students to write – and to teach student to write well – might initially turn to narration or story-telling, the importance of teaching argumentative and persuasive writing can not be ignored. It could be true that the narrative genre might be of more interest to students and might help to ease them into the academic world, but the truth of the current educational testing climate is that students are assessed mostly by their ability to write argumentatively and persuasively in line with given standards. Further, argumentative writing contributes more to what colleges will require – papers that support a clear thesis on a given, discipline-related topic, not necessarily the “story” or narration of personal experience as it relates to that subject.

Still other practitioners might choose to consider the importance of grammar as it relates to effective composition, for writing must be clear and able to be understood grammatically by the reader if it is to be effective. But while this is true, grammar is what many teachers already seem most comfortable explaining and correcting in the classroom because grammar can be more easily explained in terms of “right” or “wrong” according to the language rules that exist and can be looked up and recited. Of much more difficulty, and perhaps even more importance, however, is how to explain to students the more abstract concepts of form in argument. For these

reasons, the scope of writing standards analysis in this paper is limited to organization of argumentative writing as rooted in classical rhetoric.

Much of what is considered to be good writing relies upon arrangement, or organization, of the underlying ideas and the relating support. Though arrangement is but one of the five canons of traditional rhetoric – the other four being invention, style, memory, and delivery – it must be kept in mind that rhetoric was originally an oral discourse, and that as it moved to written composition, memory and perhaps even delivery became less of a focus, at least for the purposes of the classroom (*Rhetoric and Poetics*). However, it should also be noted that the canons of invention and style are closely interrelated with arrangement – in order to have a well-organized composition, the argument must have a wealth of solid ideas (invention) and an appropriate presentation and arrangement of those concepts in language (style). Thus, when examining standards of effective organization, invention and style are also naturally addressed as they pertain to strategies for planning and revising (as will be discussed in the later sections).

Thus, to make explicit the writing standards of effective argument for all students, it is necessary to examine what those standards purport regarding organization. Though in the introduction to this issue, general tests for high school completion were examined (such as the HSA), for further analysis, it would be key to note the standards of those assessments created by such entities as The College Board, since tests such as the SAT and Advanced Placement examinations are considered benchmark tests to secondary schools and universities, indicating a student's knowledge and skills in a subject area. Students who score well on these

exams, which each require writing as part of the overall assessment, are students considered college-bound and who can earn advanced college credit before actually entering the university. These tests therefore mark the expectations for academic writing that are, arguably, the “standards” accepted by colleges and universities.

One particular test, the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition exam, for example, is a test whose course objectives and test requirements indicate a student’s skills in composition. Students who do well on this exam can potentially earn credit that is equivalent to an introductory composition course at the university level, such as for “English 101” or “Freshmen Composition” courses. During this exam, students are required to complete three written essays in response to given prompts, as well as answer forty or more selected response questions based on reading passages. One of the essay prompts provides students with several given resources (such as excerpts from newspaper columns, academic journal articles, and visual texts like advertisements or cartoons/comics) and requires that students “develop a position” on a stated issue and support that position with “evidence” that includes the resources provided (College Board 10). For assessment purposes, rubrics are used (though, interestingly, these rubrics are not provided to students). These rubrics indicate that the most effective essays are those that “effectively develop a position” and create arguments that are “convincing,” “...especially sophisticated...” in their ability to use language and evidence in a persuasive manner, and are thus “...skillful in the synthesis of sources, or impressive in their control of language” (College Board).

It is this consideration of “synthesis,” and the writer’s ability to form cohesive, organized, and supported arguments, that returns attention to the central importance of arrangement in what is deemed effective argumentative writing. For a student to succeed against the standards of the holistic rubric, he must have an “organized” essay that purposefully develops a position using evidence, paying careful attention to the relationships between and among invented ideas and developing them in a clear and linear sequence for the reader. Though several variations for connecting the evidence and ideas may exist, the student must immediately (under the time constraints of the assessment situation) determine what Vicki Spandel describes in her instructional text *Creating Writers through 6-Trait Writing Assessment and Instruction*, the “internal structure of a piece that gives support and direction to the ideas that are proposed” (2).

Even the rubric for the Maryland State English HSA states that the best essay (with a score of four) is a response that is “...a well-developed essay that fulfills the writing purpose” (MSDE, mdk12.org); for most students, this type of language is too vague to decipher because as the rubric calls for “an effective organizational structure,” it does not explicitly provide a definition or model of what this term means (MSDE, mdk12.org).

But as has been noted, the expectation for this “internal structure” actually exists externally and relies upon cultural preferences for a linear development of argument.

The organization that is thus considered most “effective” for the purposes of academia, then, is the arrangement set forth by the classical rhetoricians Aristotle, Quintilian, and Cicero, which can also be seen in the introductory college texts that

form the instructional bases for many university composition courses. Though there are many intricacies to the development of the arguments, along with detailed exercises and opportunities for various other combinations of arrangement, each philosopher suggests similar parts to the structural arrangement of an effective argument. Aristotle, for example, advocates an arrangement model that includes four basic components: an introduction that sets forth the topic (the proem) followed by a narration that necessarily contextualizes the argument (narration of subject), a clear examination of the claims that support the argument (confirmation), and a conclusion that summarizes and extends the argument (epilogue) (Aristotle 200; Lindemann 43). Similarly, Quintilian's model posits an exordium, narration, and conclusion, but his consideration further divides the confirmation into two parts – proof and refutation – highlighting the importance of balancing one's own arguments in relation to the arguments against one's primary position (Lindemann 135). Comparatively, the author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, sometimes named as Cicero, provides an additional subdivision of parts to suggest six primary sections for an argument. In this organizational form, the introduction or exordium is similarly followed by the background information or narration of the context, but then a partition is provided, giving the division of the argument (Lindemann 43). But in this model, too, what follows are the confirmation, refutation, and conclusion (43).

Across these models, then, are similar foundational elements that form current standards for “good writing.” Corbett and Connors recognize such similarities in their text *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* – a text widely used by colleges and universities in writing courses that aim to build students' skills regarding written

argument. In this text, the authors note that though there are minor differences among models, "...most rhetoricians recognized five parts for the usual argumentative discourse: exordium, narration, confirmation or probation, refutation, and peroration" (259). Perhaps hoping to simplify the model, their suggestion of four parts – an introduction, a statement of fact, a confirmation, and a conclusion (259) – is a clear return to Aristotle's proposal.

Further, the parts are still derivative of classical rhetoric because in the first section the exigence and thesis are established (260, 264); in the second portion there is still an exposition of the necessary circumstances surrounding the issue, or background (271); in the third portion is the incorporation of the rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, logos, as well as a refutation of the counterargument to effectively persuade the audience (276, 278-280); and in the fourth part is a conclusion that summarizes the arguments and supports briefly for final persuasive effect (284, 288). Thus, what can be derived by the teacher is an explicit understanding of those components that work together to create our notions of "well-organized" arguments.

Still, many have highlighted the dangers of what might be termed such "formulaic" writing. As Crowley and Hawhee note, "ancient rhetors paid much more attention to rhetorical situation than to formal rules" in that factors such as the needs of the audience and their responsiveness to the arguments were considered to create arguments that fit the given oral context (257). But conceptualizing notions of audience is an abstract consideration for our students (and is too big a topic to begin exploring in this essay), since most of their "audiences" really consist of one person – the teacher – and this "audience" has a clear, if unstated, notion of organization by

which she will be assessing the student's writing. Even in instances of state assessments, college entrance essays, SAT or AP exams, the readers and assessors of these essays are teachers whose notions of effectively organized writing have been influenced by the traditions aforementioned. Even so, John Clifford cautions teachers that teaching argument form by the traditional components as suggested in works like *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* that creates the "...illusion that we can transcend ideology with three well-developed paragraphs of evidence, that we can somehow change the minds of others in a rhetorical vacuum" (44). But what must be acknowledged is that the common assessment or classroom assignment situation is an inauthentic rhetorical situation that places the student, particularly the cultural minority or struggling student, at a disadvantage because he is unaware of the needs of an audience of teachers with whom he may have no connections or understandings.

To suggest, then, that these four or five basic components be made explicit for students such that students might write more effective and more organized essays is to argue for an equitable practice that will provide all students with access to the basic form we consider to be effective in our given context. This is not to suggest, however, that struggling students be further disenfranchised through the denying of opportunities for critical thinking that occurs when creating and writing arguments. As Kimberly Wesley warns in "The Ill Effects of the Five Paragraph Theme," focusing on what could be interpreted as formulaic writing might "...actually dissuade students from practicing the rhetorical analysis necessary for them to become critical thinkers" and actually further the achievement gap (58). Thus, Wesley suggest that "...instead of teaching students to memorize a format and then

manipulate every teacher-given topic to fit that format, we should ask students to reflect on what format best enables them to voice their concerns and meet the needs of their audience. In doing so, we encourage students to become communicators” (60).

But while this notion of having students find what might be termed an “organic” form to their arguments seems at first glance most reasonable and perhaps more equitable, we meet again with the given realities of the classroom contexts. The writing that is occurring has been assigned by the teacher, perhaps making it less authentic or meaningful because the rhetorical situation has been somewhat manipulated. Further, this writing is ultimately assessed by the teacher according to standards for format that have already been predetermined on a much larger scale than the classroom, for every county, state, national, and college test essay requiring argumentative writing as a marker of ability assesses such text by rubrics indicating only a general need for the essay to be “well-organized” – a term that clearly has specific standards based on the aforementioned five parts of argument. Teachers, then, must balance the building of critical thinking about rhetorical situations in their students with the expectations that have been established and which must be met by the student if he is to succeed academically. In addition, there must be the acknowledgement that for many of our students, particularly those who have been termed struggling because of a seeming lack of motivation and/or skill, providing a five-part framework gives them a foundation on which to build later learning; without these foundations, such students become further discouraged in approaching a task that seems unachievable and confusing if standards are not made explicit.

All of this, however, is not to say that what should only be taught is the dull and formulaic “five-paragraph essay” that has become an oversimplification of the important components of an effective argumentative essay. But neither can it be denied that such a framework relies on traditional rhetorical principles that the teacher upholds consciously or not, and that it provides comfort and direction to the struggling student who might otherwise resign himself to failure. As Thomas Nunnally argues in his article “Breaking the Five-Paragraph-Theme Barrier,” there is something to be said for this form, which “...requires (1) an introductory paragraph moving from a generality to an explicit thesis statement and announcement of three points in support of that thesis, (2) three middle paragraphs, each of which begins with a topic sentence restating one of the major ideas supporting the thesis and then develops the topic sentence (with a minimum of three sentences in most models), and (3) a concluding paragraph restating the thesis and points” (67). What is most important about such a format, though sometimes formulaic, is that “This highly structured format for essay writing provides for effective inculcation of concepts such as unity, coherence, and development” – concepts that are often difficult for struggling students to make concrete (67). Providing this framework, then, can be seen as a type of initial scaffolding that at least allows the student writer an opportunity to see how the argumentative writing task can be accomplished in smaller, more achievable parts.

It must, of course, still be acknowledged that many have mistakenly oversimpli-fied the importance of function into the “five-paragraph” essay; this reduction, too, is dangerous. But highlighting the importance of teaching the function

of each of these five parts to an argumentative essay is not the same as advocating for the five-paragraph model. As Mountford and Reynolds caution in “Rhetoric and Graduate Studies: Teaching in a Postmodern Age,” we can not become myopic in scope, allowing for only what seems most practical, because “...when rhetoric is limited to the ideas that are most portable or flexible for syllabi and curriculums – i.e., Aristotle’s topoi, Burke’s pentad, or Toulmin’s logic – graduate teaching assistants [and teachers, in general] may miss the implications of larger rhetorical concerns: historical context and concrete situations, the writer’s subjectivity, and the need to negotiate across differences and among contradictions” (199). Similarly, in “The Course in Classical Rhetoric: Definition, Development, Direction,” Theresa Enos warns that neither can we only seek to purport the theories of just a few of the rhetoricians, because “...when we reduce classical rhetoric to the study of only two or three ancient rhetoricians, we may be paving the way for yet more professional books and textbooks that treat or literally call the classical rhetoric they have reduced ‘that old time religion’” and perhaps further dissuade students from writing in styles with which they are unfamiliar and which are created by individuals with whom they can not identify (47).

At the same time, however, it must also be recognized that these forms, these rhetoricians, and these methods do form our standards for good reason. Perhaps this reliance upon the traditional forms stems from the notion that Frank D’Angelo suggests in his article, “The Four Master Tropes: Analogues of Development,” which is that “classical rhetoric presents a model of communication that has already been tested to see what works and what doesn’t work, a model in which some categories,

features, and relationships have been established” (100-101). Considering, then, the establishment of these various parts of formal, written, argumentative discourse, it is important that teachers spend their efforts efficiently and productively to achieve results that will help students succeed academically.

Rather than spending instructional efforts finding ways to negate what are the foundational principles of argument in the American academic arena or reconsidering the validity of these forms, it is more essential that teachers recognize that these forms *are* the foundations of what we consider to be effective arguments. Teachers must note the importance of teaching these principles to our students, for, once the students master these forms, they can later break away from what some might consider the formulaic, and create new models of organization that are also effective – but even deviations from these forms are, in essence, still based on these organizational models because they are a conscious reaction to the traditional formats for arrangement. And as Corbett and Connors have noted, consideration of the basic and expected components of an argumentative essay is not organizing “topically,” such as with an outline; instead, the writer must figure out the function of each part of the greater form to determine the most effective arrangement (Corbett and Connors 259). In having students consider the form, the parts of the form, what information those parts should contain, and how those parts and that information might best be organized forces students to engage in the critical thinking about rhetoric and argument that some critics argue is lost in such a method – and it does so while providing students with parameters and guidelines that help guide them in the process.

Thus, the teacher plays an important role in helping students make connections between the standards for organization of an argumentative essay and the function that each of the five defined components serves within the argument being made, and she must help the student come to a point at which the student is able to be metacognitive throughout the writing and thinking processes. The goal for instruction of organization in writing is for the student to grasp the principle of *kairos* so that, as Crowley and Hawhee explain, he or she has a thorough understanding of "...knowing when and where to marshal particular proofs [in a given context]. *Kairos* suggests the possibility of achieving an advantage with optimal placement of arguments, propitious timing, or a combination of the two"(258) so that an understanding of *kairos* means that students are better able to consider the "essential" elements of argument given particular contexts and audiences (Harker 91-93). It is mastery of this principle that ultimately allows students to move to a point of mastery – but it is also this type of thinking about and reflection on writing that students must be explicitly taught in order to help them develop an internal, self-directed sense of how to engage in self-questioning as they compose written arguments.

Connecting the Dots – Self-Regulation Strategies

While it is clear that motivation is one component to be addressed regarding the struggling student writer, it is also necessary to address a second need for this kind of student – a seeming lack of skills. While students at the secondary level have indeed had experiences with writing for years, such experiences have not always led to internalized learning or academic success. As Jill C. Chalk and her colleagues cite in an essay on “The Effects of Self-Regulated Strategy Development on the Writing Process for High School Students with Learning Disabilities,” it is necessary for instructors to realize that “...these students lack a basic knowledge about how to approach writing and the writing process as a whole” (75) and that such a lack of knowledge leaves the student writer defeated, and consequently, unmotivated to perform. As has been noted earlier, “a student’s self-efficacy beliefs are closely connected to competence level in a domain, on the one hand, and self-regulation skills, on the other” (Boscolo and Gelati 69); thus, it is the role of the teacher to develop in the student both aspects of competence and self-regulation throughout the composing process so that these students can “manage the difficulties of writing” (Boscolo and Gelati 69).

And, without a doubt, writing is a cognitively demanding activity.

Unfortunately, we know, too, that “less skilled writers are unable to deal successfully with so many complex operations, due to low linguistic competence and scarcely effective cognitive strategies” (Boscolo and Gelati 61), particularly when we consider the cultural and linguistic diversity of our students as examined earlier in this essay. Because many of our struggling students grapple with these processes while

composing, then, it is necessary not only to be explicit about the standards of organization deemed effective for the purposes of the classroom, but it is also essential to teach students how to create writing that fits such forms.

To teach these pieces to students, educators must consider those cognitive processes involved in creating written text. As we now know from Flower and Hayes' widely accepted cognitive model of the writing process, three main components involved in composition are planning, translating, and reviewing (278). Such pieces are considered in relation to the task environment, which engages both the rhetorical problem that is presented and the writer's long-term memory of form, content, and context, etc (278). Throughout the model, what is perhaps most relevant in terms of enacting change in a student's ability to self-regulate throughout this recursive process is the role of the monitor function, which acts "...as a writing strategist which determines when the writer moves from one process to the next" (283). For it is in this monitoring function that we might find the way in which to help students become better writers, since even Flower and Hayes, citing the research of Bereiter and Scardamalia note that "...much of a child's difficulty and lack of fluency lies in their lack of an 'executive routine' which would promote switching between processes or encourage the sustained generation of ideas" (283). The task for the teacher, then, is to teach ways that achieve or at least prompt this "executive routine."

The processes of planning, translating, and reviewing, can be considered with regard to the canons of invention, arrangement, and style – and all of these writing tasks are intricately connected to the ways in which students think about writing and while composing. As Corbett and Connors clarify,

...we use the material we have gathered in the process of invention...
[because] the processes of invention and disposition are not really as independent of one another as we [modern rhetoricians and cognitive psychologists] may have suggested by giving them separate treatments [in texts].
In reading the activity of evaluation can take place almost simultaneously with the activity of comprehension. Likewise, in composing, we are often engaged with the problems of selecting and arranging our material even while we are engaged in discovering our material” (276)

What students thus lack are ways in which to self-evaluate as they create, select, and arrange material in relation to the task and the standards set forth. As Ruth Knudson cites in her study on “The Development of Written Argumentation: An Analysis and Comparison of Argumentative Writing at Four grade Levels,” what students’ argumentative essays often lack is enough proof to support claims that are made as well as a thorough address of the counterargument and refutation components that are essential to the essay’s effectiveness as dictated by our traditional models of organization (177). In addition, she notes that “the elements where these student writers are weakest are ones for which prompts are more readily available in conversation” (177). What must therefore be taught to students are ways in which they might prompt themselves as they invent, arrange, and style essays and as they plan, translate and review their own writing.

To provide equitable writing instruction, then, teachers must be explicit about the processes involved in composition and teach ways to improve the related thinking and questioning processes. Because students often do not understand the recursive

nature of composition and because they are unable to prompt their own thinking as they compose, teachers need to provide strategies to remediate students' thinking, as well as their writing (Bizzell 387). Such instruction can be as simple as providing questions for students to consider as they compose each part of the essay, or by developing clear rubrics that outline the criteria required of exemplary essays. For further support, Chalk et al give the example of mnemonics as a self-regulation strategy, which can serve to help students access their knowledge for organization. Their suggested device is an acronym, D.A.R.E., which stands for 1) developing topic sentences for the paragraph(s) 2) adding details to support the claims being developed, 3) rejecting those position suggested in counterarguments and 4) ending with a conclusion (80).

In addition, Joanne M. Podis and Leonard A. Podis present a taxonomy of plans for effective arrangement in "Identifying and Teaching Rhetorical Plans for Arrangement." These patterns, which help the writer consider how to best arrange those parts of the essay which would create the confirmation and refutation within the whole essay, include 1) presenting material that is obvious before that which is remarkable, 2) presenting an explanation of the issue before a refutation of those points with which there is author disagreement, 3) providing an explanation of the issue before complication of the perspective or points, 4) examining the related concerns or issue from those that can be solved to those that seem least or unsolvable, 5) considering those points with which the writer agrees before those with which he disagrees, 6) reviewing the pieces that are "literal" before those that become more complicated because they are "symbolic," 7) noting those points which are

more likely before those that might be “speculative,” and lastly 8) presenting the examples that align with given “rules” concerning the argument prior to moving to the “exceptions” to those rules (430-438). Such suggested patterns are essential for the struggling writer as these guides provide students with clear scaffolding for ways in which to best arrange material within the larger five components of introduction, narration, confirmation/proof, refutation, and conclusion. Further, these patterns seems to indeed follow the logical progression of the five components to argument as they are listed, thus helping students to uncover the expectations that reader might have as to how an argument should be presented for what Podis and Podis consider “readability” (439). Additionally, the suggested patterns can be further clarified by connecting them to a rhetorical grammar, of sorts – the “known-new contract” that Martha Kolln establishes in her text *Rhetorical Grammar*, which explains that for the sake of coherence and clarity in writing, one must present known information before considering that which is new to the reader, and the writer must make connections between the new and the known to enhance reader comprehension (30).

This is not to say, however, that students must follow these guidelines as the “rules” in every situation, or that variances of these forms are not effective; but at least there is an acknowledgement of these expectations such that the struggling writer is made aware of the standards which would otherwise be implicit, and therefore confusing, to the student. In addition, as Flower and Hayes note, “...by placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer, who is able to explore ideas, to develop, act on, test, and regenerate his or her own goals, we are putting an important part of creativity where it belongs – in the hands of the working, thinking writer”

(296). And it is this type of power that will raise a student's motivation to engage in writing because his skills for achieving effective writing are being developed.

Modern composition instruction, therefore, can take much from the canons of tradition rhetoric. During the process of invention, strategies must be explained to help students consider ways in which to develop ideas. As the ideas are developed, models for how to most effectively organize those ideas for impact must be examined to further the canon of arrangement. And teaching students how to question themselves throughout these processes to put it all together helps them to consider coherence and thus style in writing. In teaching invention, arrangement, and style, in this way, the processes vital to composition can be demystified, and the muse that so many students think exists for only the selected few can finally be revealed to be a set of standards and strategies. Showing students this "magic of the muse" will further build motivation in that they will begin to realize that, with proper guidance throughout the composing process and an understanding of the standards, they, too, can create effective arguments.

Conclusions – Argumentative Writing Instruction of Form as an Opportunity for Engaging “Struggling” Students and Building Motivation

While this essay suggests the need for explicit teaching of form, by no means can we say there is a single model by which every student will be able to best learn the how to write well according to the academic standards we hold for writing in our current educational system. With clear, explicit instruction of the basic components, however, at least each student is given an opportunity to learn, and each teacher has a baseline from which to determine next steps for individual students. We must communicate through not only our words, but also through our equitable instructional practices that effective effort does lead to mastery of content and achievement in academics, for “if a student believes that an action can produce the desired outcome, he or she has the incentive to persevere in the face of difficulties” (Boscolo and Gelati 69).

No longer is it acceptable to dismiss the struggling student as “unmotivated” or “unskilled.” Rather, we must move to make our inclusive classrooms more culturally responsive and our practices more equitable by making clear the dominant cultural influences of the majority that contribute to our “objective” standards for writing. We must acknowledge the traditional standards we hold for arrangement as they contribute to our definitions of “effective essays.”

Explicit instruction of traditional arrangement components and self-regulation strategies during composing forces educators to become more culturally responsive because of the acknowledgement of cultural influences on the writing classroom. When teachers are this explicit, they provide “...complete, clear, and measurable

learning objectives,” work to intervene “...early to address readiness [and motivation and skill] limitations,” and, in essence, build “...communal learning environments” thereby making their classrooms more inclusive and conveying the message to students that the teacher cares and the student can achieve (Cartledge and Kourea 355). Further, if the key elements of student engagement are “student confidence and high self-efficacy, teacher involvement, relevant and interesting curricular materials, and choices of literacy activities” (Learning Point Associates 7), then the argumentative essay, taught explicitly addresses such components – as teachers work with students on essays that force students to engage with interesting and relevant issues, students’ confidence and motivation are raised and a positive cycle of effort and success is established.

There is, of course, much more that needs to be done in the way of building culturally responsive and equitable teaching into the composition classroom. As Gloria Ladson-Billings explains in *The Dreamkeepers*, “...culturally relevant teaching fosters the kinds of social interactions in the classroom that support the individual in the group context. Students feel a part of a collective effort designed to encourage academic and cultural excellence” (76). Thus, we must move to make our writing classrooms more inclusive and provide opportunities for cooperative learning in our context such that students come to see the importance of their voices as they construct arguments. By learning to accomplish such writing, students gain the ability to change their academic and social worlds. But as teachers, we must realize and address the notion that “...the best quality education for ethnically diverse students is as much culturally responsive as it is developmentally appropriate, which means

using their cultural orientations, background experiences, and ethnic identities as conduits to facilitate their teaching and learning” (Gay 614). Our aim for the future is to further negotiate the differences in the writing classroom in ways that will positively help all of our students achieve.

As we negotiate cultures in the classroom, however, we must note also that “...to deny the influence of the [traditional] system...would be naïve and irresponsible” (Rogers 48) because ultimately, students are judged in terms of whether or not they have met the demands of these systems. We must therefore consider “...how to promote responsive education for individual learners within standardized programs,” curricula, and assessments (Rogers 48) in such a way as to promote learning that is inclusive and culturally responsive, but which also addresses the requirements of the given context. One step towards eliminating the achievement gaps is 1) to provide students with a clear understanding of those standards by which their work will be judged 2) to approach writing instruction as explicit teaching of the function of the form for argument and arrangement, and 3) to instruct students of strategies for self-regulation and reflection throughout the composing and thinking processes. Doing so provides students with cultural capital that will allow them academic success and academic mobility. And once they can meet the standards, they can later work to reform those standards as they are given access to those positions – teachers, lawmakers, leaders – that make such decisions, and that require “good writing” skills.

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