



Argument Friday

SUMMARY

Argument is a proficiency that is critical to our students' future success as effective and informed citizens. In the following article, educators share how students in 11th grade inclusive classrooms worked on a weekly basis to not only adapt to standards around argument writing, but also understand the importance of crafting and presenting an argument as part of college and career readiness.

According to many colleges, the argument essay is the

most common type of writing assignment that incoming students encounter throughout their academic careers, and the majority of youth are not prepared for it. This instructional shift from persuasive, creative, and opinion-based writing is affecting high school classrooms across the country. Argument writing helps students to focus on evidence and teaches them to support their opinions with clear rationales. It allows them to present their ideas with clarity and grounds their ideas in reasoning and logic.

While many students know what it means to verbally “argue” with someone, they are less skilled with the practices associated with researching and

drafting a well thought out argument. They are also less skilled at using evidence and rhetorical devices to back up their claims. In his article, “Reading, Writing, and Thinking for All” (2007) education expert Mike Schmoker discusses a conversation he had with Harvard president Derek Bok, who appeared on National Public Radio endorsing a liberal arts education, because a liberal arts education is “what employers are really asking for.”

“They feel that graduates don’t write well enough, they don’t think clearly enough, they don’t have a good enough ethical sense, they don’t understand the relationship of business to the larger social and public policy problems of the United States — they aren’t globally aware (Rehm, 2006, p. 63).”

Jodi Burnash is a special education teacher at Nottingham High School in the Syracuse City School district. A member of the Syracuse Teachers Association, she currently works with grades 11 and 12. Burnash is a lead mentor for the graduate intern program at Syracuse University. She is an active member of her school leadership team and works with teachers on co-teaching practices, differentiating instructions, and developing meaningful curriculum and instruction.

Anne Daviau is an English teacher at Nottingham High School in the Syracuse City School district. A member of the Syracuse TA, she currently works with grades 11 and 12.

Jodi Burnash, Syracuse Teachers Association
Anne Daviau, Syracuse Teachers Association

Learning to craft an argument is a proficiency that is critical to our students' future success as effective and informed citizens.

Crafting an argument is important across multiple disciplines. Schools can use argument as a cross curricular initiative, asking students to make an informed opinion and support it with evidence. Although assignments may vary across curricula, the overall principles that guide argument writing are the same; students must research a current issue.

In our school, living environment classes are arguing about stem cell research, while our humanities class is tackling the gun control debate. Students choose a side to defend, identify strong supporting evidence for their claim, concede to a counterclaim, and refute the opposition, all while presenting this information in a logical and scholarly manner.

In the summer of 2015, we sat in professional development thinking about

the instructional shifts that would be required to develop successful students in this new era of standards, and we realized that something was missing from our practice. We needed something special to get students' attention. We needed a structure and a procedure that they would engage in enthusiastically. We needed a way to reach every student within our diverse population. We needed to involve every student, regardless of language or abilities. We needed what every great author and lyricist knows; we needed a hook! This was the day we created what has become a cornerstone of our practice within our classroom. This was the birth of "Argument Friday."

In our Argument Friday lesson structure, our students have the chance to consider their personal feelings about a topic, to acknowledge the nature of an argument and get passionate; and then are challenged to channel their emotions into an explicit, concrete, and thorough writing piece, backed by evidence.

Learning to craft an argument is a proficiency that is critical to our students' future success as effective and informed citizens.

continued on following page

School demographics

Nottingham High School, within the Syracuse City School District, is grounded in urban education and diversity.

School population: About 1,300 students

Student body makeup:

49% male, 51% female

78% of students are African-American

25–30% are identified as students with disabilities

25–30% are English language learners

Classrooms are inclusive; each section has an enrollment of about 30 students, with eight to 10 students identified as students with disabilities. Disabilities include mild to moderate learning disabilities, students with autism, and students with emotional disabilities, as well as other health impairments. Classes also average 10–12 English as a New Language (ENL) students from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.

What's the context?

One of the primary initiatives in our school is a humanities course in which teachers of English, social studies, special education, and English as a New Language work together to create lessons that are cross-curricular and grounded in skills needed to be successful after high school. I am fortunate enough to have been teamed with an amazing group of educators who have embraced adapting our practice to increase student-centered learning and engagement. In our space, we understand the importance of crafting and presenting an

argument as part of college and career readiness. Students engage in higher-order thinking where they compare and contrast perspectives, analyze and defend a position, and rank evidence from most to least significant to an informed claim, providing justification from texts. We know that writing, thinking, and speaking argumentatively promotes inquiry and deep discussion, and empowers students to become effective contributors to a civil society.

Within our new humanities class, we have made several instructional shifts in order to achieve our goals of college and career readiness, including increasing the amount and complexity of the nonfiction texts presented to our students and supporting them with close reading strategies to deepen their understanding and allowing them to pull evidence from these rich texts. We have created projects grounded in argument asking students to not only draft argument essays, but to hold academic debates grounded in reasoning vs. opinion.

Student groups became a construct of working with others with a shared viewpoint and similar claim versus working in homogeneous or heterogeneous groups based on skill level or academic need. Most critically, we had to shift our traditional content-based instructional methods to include deeper inquiry-based, student-centered lessons to increase the level of rigor. “The move toward rigor places students squarely at the center of the classroom, where they will grapple with challenging content individually and collaboratively, and where they will be expected to actively demonstrate their learning (Marzano, 2014, p. 10).”

Through this process our students considered multiple sides of questions and issues. We feel that this type of inquiry supports the types of habits

needed to find resolutions to complex problems that will face them in school, and in life.

Our team spent time doing an analysis of critical skill sets required to be successful to various NYS Standards.

Social Studies Framework

Gathering, Interpreting, and Using Evidence:

- (1) Define and frame questions about events and the world in which we live, form hypotheses as potential answers to these questions, use evidence to answer these questions, and consider and analyze counter-hypotheses;
- (4) Describe, analyze, and evaluate arguments of others; and
- (5) Make inferences and draw conclusions from evidence.

Civic Participation:

- (1) Demonstrate respect for the rights of others in discussions and classroom debates; respectfully disagree with other viewpoints and provide evidence for a counter-argument;
- (2) Participate in activities that focus on a classroom, school, community, state, or national issue or problem; and
- (5) Participate in persuading, debating, negotiating, and compromising in the resolution of conflicts and differences.

Writing Standards:

- (1) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. Explore and inquire into areas of interest to formulate an argument;
- (4) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; and
- (7) Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening:

- (1) Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively;
- (3) Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric; and
- (4) Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

continued on following page

... writing, thinking, and speaking argumentatively promotes inquiry and deep discussion, as well as empowers students to become effective contributors to a civil society.

Students discovered that our influences are based on our experiences, and that our environment often drives our claims.

The need for instruction around argument writing was urgent, and the necessity to make it relevant and applicable seemed critical. As a team, we reread questions from prior Regents exams and practice tests, then discussed topics we felt students would apply to their own lives, and followed up by surveying a subset of students to discover issues they felt impacted their daily lives. These included homework policies, social media, drinking age, voting regulations, immigration laws, high-stakes testing, charter schools, and gender equity, among others. These issues guided us when creating argument questions, and prompted us to research and find articles to both support and oppose possible claims around these topics.

What does it look like?

We realized that consistent practice would be essential, and it needed to begin at the onset of the school year. We knew it would be a challenge, and expected students to disengage, so we worked to create a predictable, structured activity that would become ongoing, and through a series of scaffolding exercises be supportive, yet challenging. It had to spiral up to the year-end expectations, moving beyond doing well on an exam, but also give students a set of skills that would support them as they worked independently as seniors and in college.

On Argument Friday, students were given a topic to consider, and during the first five minutes of class they chose a side and drafted in their writer's notebooks about their rationale for choosing that side of the argument. Specific lessons for writing a claim were created, using consistent directions from the standards, to teach them how to turn a question into a claim statement, while adding their own author's voice; creating a procedure where students identify the question word and move it to the appropriate place in the line (*Should extinct species be brought back into existence?* = *Extinct species should / should not be brought back into existence.*)

Each week, we aligned the topic to current trends, and the class took a vote to see how they felt about the topic as a whole, with students weighing in on their reasoning. This set them up to defend their position. Next, the class compared their results to nationwide results found on debate.org. This allowed them to justify why our population might agree or defy the national outcomes. Each week results would vary. There were times when the class majority matched the majority of the nation, and times when our data did not align with national trends. This often prompted a discussion about why we felt differently. Students discovered that our influences are based on our experiences, and that our environment often drives our claims.

For example, our students overwhelmingly voted yes (78%), as compared to the national vote (34%), when asked, *Should shopping malls be allowed to institute teen curfews?* We were surprised at this result, as in our cold and wintry city students use the mall as a social outlet, and our local shopping centers do not allow children younger than 18 to be unaccompanied after 4 p.m. While a few students spoke about infringing on their personal rights, and that it punishes all for the behavior of some, more students talked about personal safety concerns as our mall has been the site of violent attacks on younger kids and the elderly by groups of teens. Many of our students also work at the mall and discussed shoplifting and fighting in stores by other teens.

We start the year with simple topics to increase student buy-in for the process: *Should schools run year round? Should students get paid to go to school? Should students in public schools wear uniforms?* As the year progresses, we increase the level of complexity of the argument topics to align with complexities of reading and societal conversations: *What role will robots play in our future? Do apps help you or hurt you? Should people be allowed to hide their true identity online? Are professional sports too dangerous?*

Next, students are provided with informational texts around a given topic, beginning with two texts at the beginning of the year, rising up to four texts by second semester. Students read each text with the argument question as their lens, and annotated texts through close reading, looking for evidence to back up their own claim, as well as acknowledging a counterclaim.

Each week we assume we know how students feel about topics and each week they surprise us. For example, we asked students: *Do violent video games make kids more aggressive?* We anticipated students would respond with “No way!” as we have many gamers in our student population. Surprisingly and interestingly, many students felt strongly that today’s games are too violent and while students do interact with them, they would be happier if they were not so graphic. They were also very adamant that they do not like their younger siblings exposed to such violence.

In fact, after reading “Violent video games and mass violence: A complex link” by Ryan Jaslow of CBS News (2013), one pair of students drafted a letter to send to Warner Brothers, publisher of the “Mortal Combat” game series, asking them to adapt the game and “turn down the graphics... Even if the law says it should not be sold to minors, that doesn’t mean that minors

Each week we assume we know how students feel about topics and each week they surprise us.

continued on following page

It is imperative to teach students how to participate in civil discourse with others who have diverse opinions around a variety of subjects.

are not exposed to this violence as long as the games are in our homes... please think of our little brothers and sisters.”

Students read the articles and have these in-depth conversations grounded in evidence, and we watch as the opinions they had when they entered class are confirmed or swayed and they leave feeling empowered that they learned something and validated that they can support their ideas.

The most powerful moments occurred within the context of deep conversations around student-selected issues. We had specific reasons for selecting our topics each week — it fit into the themes of our curriculum, it supported rules and procedures of class / school / civic responsibility, it was connected to students’ personal lives, etc. What we had not anticipated, however, was the students’ overwhelming desire to choose their own argument topics. So, we decided to let them be the directors of their own learning from time to time.

We started an argument jar into which students could place topics of interest. On specific days throughout the week leading up to Argument Friday, we would use a strategy I named “scripted improv.” We would plan very specifically to look spontaneous in class. It is a strategy that we find works well to keep students engaged and to make

the content seem fresh and exciting. On those days we would “randomly” pick a topic from a jar, and let students debate their opinions, where the object was more aligned to promoting civic education.

We employed different devices to regulate voices so people were forced to listen to each other, rather than talk over one another. We found that using a ball that was tossed as a “talking stick” was a good way to regulate voices. Later in the year we added two podiums and developed a procedure where students were not allowed to share out unless they were “tapped” to approach. We believe it is imperative to teach students how to participate in civil discourse with others who have diverse opinions around a variety of subjects. In our age, and in this society, it has become critical to engage in this type of civility education.

What wasn’t working?

When we hit a stumbling block around teaching concession and refutation, we realized the reason students were not “getting it” was because it was out of their normal practice to acknowledge another perspective, yet rebut it with evidence. We struggled with how to teach this, as we knew it was an important skill — to be able to admit that someone else has a valid viewpoint, and to be able to prove that

same someone might be wrong about a given issue.

Students struggled with understanding that acknowledging the opposite side of an argument did not make them weak, it made them fair and reasonable. They had trouble realizing that they could still be “right,” still have more evidence, and still “win” the argument if they validated anything from the opposite side. They are not used to hearing arguments in a scholarly manner, and they certainly did not have a grasp of the rhetoric, or the transitions they could employ to create qualifiers and help them prove their claim.

Enter the game “Yeah, But” Ping Pong. Here students were placed in rows facing each other, separated by teams who took opposing sides of the issue. The students practiced conceding (yeah,) and refuting (but,) each other’s positions.

The game happened in three rounds. In round 1, students used their own rationale and outside information to rebut their opponents’ counterclaims. In round 2, students selected evidence from a short text while countering. This encouraged them to listen carefully to the refuting evidence and to locate the appropriate rebuttal. Round 3 also required evidence, but students used alternate counterclaim language taken from a brainstormed list of ways to

concede and refute, (*I see your point, nevertheless / I understand, however, etc.*). Each team received a point whenever they were able to volley the “ball” back to the other side.

As we moved through each round of the game, students began to hear the language used to acknowledge and rebut. They got more comfortable with using phrases that supported their agreement or disapproval. As opposed to using the volume of their voices to win an argument, they found the right transitions and qualifiers to shut down the opponents in a gentle but firm way. We were creating a class of citizens who could argue effectively and diplomatically without resorting to yelling, name calling, or anger.

Why does this work for all students?

To bring all these moving parts together, the culminating assignment was a written piece of work that addressed critical elements of argument writing, which began as a single paragraph, then advanced to three paragraphs, and then to five. Critical elements of the argument writing piece were gleaned from our standards analysis as well as our conversations with higher education partners. We are fortunate to have three institutions of higher learning in our area, and when inviting a group of professors in to discuss the readiness of our students, and what it

continued on following page

We were creating a class of citizens who could argue effectively and diplomatically without resorting to yelling, name calling, or anger.

Figure A

In our own words – Student rubric review: Grading the 5 Paragraph Argument Essay

Paragraph 1: Introduction

- ☐ Overview – general statement about controversy
- ☐ Claim – present your side of the argument
- ☐ Things I know about the topic

Paragraph 2: Body (Support)

- ☐ At least 1 Citation from 1 text
- ☐ Your analysis (this means)
- ☐ Transition / linking words

Paragraph 3: Body (Support)

- ☐ At least 1 Citation from a different text
- ☐ Your analysis (this means)
- ☐ Transition / linking words

Paragraph 4: Body (Counterclaim – concession and refutation)

- ☐ At least 1 Citation from a different text that EITHER shows the other side or your rebuttal
- ☐ Acknowledges the other side (concession)
- ☐ Shuts down the opposition (refutation)
- ☐ Your analysis (this means)
- ☐ Transition / linking words

Paragraph 5: Conclusion

- ☐ Re-state your claim or position
 - ☐ Transition words
 - ☐ Call to action OR strong statement
- _____ / 15

Feedback:

would take to make them more successful entering college, they shared some fundamentals.

These essentials include:

- Introduce precise and knowledgeable claims;
- Establish significance of a claim;
- Distinguish the claim from alternate / opposing claims;
- Organize arguments logically;
- Analyze texts to select evidence that supports and refutes claims;
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections;
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone; and
- Provide a conclusion that supports the argument presented.

As the process grew, expectations became even more individualized, as students at more advanced proficiencies were writing two- to three-page papers grounded in self-selected research, and students with persistent difficulties in writing continued to develop their five-paragraph essays, giving them time to work on both argument writing as a genre, and mechanics and conventions with which they struggled.

We chose topics that were accessible enough that all students, regardless of ability or first language, could express an opinion. To increase motivation to participate in both oral and written activities around argument concepts, we thought about topics that were relevant and current, as well interesting to teens. We spent time selecting topics and locating text sets to support those topics, based on current trends in

societal issues that could be connected to key objectives within the curriculum units. For example, during our first marking period, we establish our rules and procedures and create a classroom culture. Therefore, some topics supported our end goals of promoting ownership of the learning environment: *Should schools get rid of grades and ranks? Should high schools start later? Are smart-phones actually good for you?*

We also thought about how to ease students into the elements of writing an argument. We began the year with one well-developed paragraph that would include the fundamentals of argument writing as taken from the NYS Regents scoring rubric, which we dissected and re-wrote into a student-friendly protocol, getting student input after a rubric review (see Figure A). Students used the protocol to grade themselves, and then grade model papers while practicing giving non-numerical feedback as a way to assess their understanding of the task, and transfer their knowledge to their own writing.

A series of organizers were developed to support students with each step of higher expectations. Scaffolding began for everyone. As students grew proficient with

Figure B

Topic / Question: _____
 Claim Statement: _____
 What do I already know about this topic before reading? _____

(ACCORDING TO...)

Text #	Line #	Evidence (Quote) that supports my claim	Analysis (In my own words)
		"	This means...
		"	
		"	This means...
		"	

(ACCORDING TO...)

General Analysis (In my own words)	Text #	Line #	Evidence (Quote) that <u>opposes</u> my claim
Some people say...			"
			"

Refutation: "However, this is not true because..."
 (Say why you are right, based on what you know or read) _____

Call to action: _____

continued on following page

Our goal was to create a space where crafting arguments became a part of a learning process where our students looked for answers without depending on us.

the single paragraph, scaffolding became an intervention for some, but not all (see Figure B). The structure of the organizer changed as the expectation changed. However, each time all students were provided with support, and it was gradually pulled away as they grew more independent and skilled with the task. By the end of the school year, both the assignment and the supports were tiered based on individual need, while preserving the essential outcomes of the task.

The structure of the varying facets of Argument Friday allows for more participation than traditional writing lesson structures, as it takes into account speaking, listening, reading, *and* writing through the variety of activities. It naturally embeds wait time as students have a chance to think and write about their own opinions before being asked to defend them (orally or in writing) with supporting evidence gained from engagement with complex texts. Even the text selection lends itself to differentiation, as tiered texts based on Lexile levels can be made available to students with reading challenges, while preserving the objectives of the activities. ENL teachers help locate texts in alternate first languages. We look for some texts with clearly defined features that lend themselves to locating key ideas and evidence.

For students who struggle with the written task, verbally defending their

ideas allows them to go through brainstorming and planning steps for the argument essay without the road blocks that typically occur when asked to plan for writing on demand. Varying the lengths of the final writing piece is a way to maintain the critical elements of the argument structure while meeting the students at their ability and gradually increasing the rigor on an individual basis.

Many students in our classes are identified with learning disabilities in reading, writing, and language, and they are able to work on their individualized education plan (IEP) goals within the context of the classroom, which is more inclusive in nature than progress monitoring based on secondary tasks unrelated to the class work of their peers.

What does the research say?

When teachers think about teaching argument writing, we turn to the work of George Hillocks Jr. In *Teaching Argument Writing* (2011), Michael W. Smith shares in the foreword, “George’s genius as a teacher is his ability to create contexts that push his students to do more serious and significant work than they thought possible — and to take pleasure in the doing” (p.ix).”

When we created Argument Friday we hoped it addressed the teaching portion of argument essays, but never

realized it would develop into part of our classroom culture, which did in fact push our students to engage and achieve in ways none of us knew possible.

Hillocks discusses the power of “environmental instruction, that is, a kind of instruction in which the students, teacher, and curricular materials are equally important as instructional resources,” rather than the more traditional model of teacher-centered instruction where students are “bored and apathetic observers of their teachers’ activity.” In a student-centered environment, the student as individual is the driving force of instruction, rather than the content where “the transmission of a body of knowledge is the primary focus (Clasen & Bowman, 1974, p. 9).”

Argument Friday offers student-centered instruction, where students are builders, not watchers. It is a gateway into project-based learning, where students are the constructors of their own knowledge base through research and collaboration, increasing their skills in literacy, written and oral communication, critical thinking, work ethic, and social responsibility. With this structure we were able to “immerse learners in rich experiences, using various tools, resources, and activities with which to augment or extend thinking (Hannafin, Hill, & Land, 1997, p. 97).” Our goal was to create a space where crafting arguments became a part of a learning

process where our students looked for answers without depending on us.

Another commonplace aspect in contemporary discussions of teaching writing is that the only way for a student to learn to write is to write. Like Hillocks, we found that students can also learn to write by “talking together while working through problems that provide rehearsals for the kind of thinking they will have to do when they are composing” an argument. We see the effects of these conversations as students get extended practice in doing particular kinds of thinking, and thus take ownership of their skills.

The Columbia University Writing Project discusses argument writing in its Research Base: “In Appendix A, theorist and critic Neil Postman is cited to demonstrate the importance of argument’s role in 21st century learning. He calls argument the ‘*soul of education*’ because when composing an argument, students need to read and think critically, evaluate multiple perspectives, in order to measure the strength of their own claim, and draw conclusions (p.24).” Argument Friday is where we tried to marry the entire facet of the ‘*soul of education*’ into a teachable, practical structure that produced results.

Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide (2011) shared, “a successful reader or writer will be a person who can argue

continued on following page

Purposeful collaborative planning, co-teaching, and reflecting have allowed us to think critically about the structures we use in the classroom, and to develop unique strategies to engage students.

Purposeful collaborative planning, co-teaching, and reflecting have allowed us to think critically about the structures we use in the classroom, and to develop unique strategies to engage students with college-and-career-ready skills that they find interesting and relevant to their lives, where our curriculum objectives are also being met.

effectively using rhetorical styles and structures to make his or her own ideational contributions to significant conversations within and across domains, and who can read thoughtfully and write with authority in ways that others will find interesting and convincing.” In mini-lessons embedded into Argument Friday our students learned about rhetorical devices used to win someone over to their side. We discussed Aristotle’s three appeals in depth:

“Ethos” (*an appeal to authority where the speaker has a strong reputation, and demonstrates that s/he is credible, trustworthy, and qualified*),

“Logos” (*an appeal that uses facts, data, and statistics to support the topic, where the speaker offers a clear, logical, and rational idea*), and

“Pathos” (*an appeal to emotions that evokes feelings, values, desires, hopes, fears and prejudices using figurative language, anecdotes, and imagery*).

We also practiced rhetorical questions, to ask a question of an audience to engage them without having a response from the audience, posed to create a dramatic effect. Next, in teams, students practiced creating appeals around given topics to see which team had the most convincing argument. These games taught the class how to better argue successfully and convincingly.

What makes this collaborative?

Our work is a collaboration of content area teachers and related service providers within our school community. Most strikingly, we have found that purposeful collaborative planning, co-teaching, and reflecting have allowed us to think critically about the structures we use in the classroom, and to develop unique strategies to engage students with college-and-career-ready skills that they find interesting and relevant to their lives, where our curriculum objectives are also being met. Once we created this structure and began to employ it, we reflected and adapted the concept. We then shared it with teachers across departments and had some conversations around how to take the premise of our Argument Friday and vertically align it from ninth grade to grade 11, in hopes of increasing the rigor and complexity going forward.

We have a few partners at Syracuse University, a local college that supports the work we do around co-teaching, collaboration, and inclusion. Our partners in the School of Education have visited and participated in various aspects of the Argument Friday lessons, speaking to our students about the importance of these strategies from the perspective of a college professor. They have also joined us for “Yeah, But” Ping Pong, and voted on some of our topics, just to engage in good conversations with

students around current issues, and to encourage accountable academic talk in our classroom.

Moving forward, this year we are integrating our parents and community members into Argument Friday by publically posting our list of debate topics and inviting them to have conversations with students outside of school about their positions, as well as inviting them into the classroom to take part in student-led talks around current topics of interest.

What were the results?

As teachers, we were so pleased to see the effect of Argument Friday in multiple aspects of our class. Within a few weeks we began to hear questions, “Are we arguing tomorrow?” and “What are we arguing about this week?” or “Can we pick an argument topic?”

Engagement was heightened and excitement about learning grew. In our experience, students who struggle in school tend to take extended weekends, and traditionally, our Fridays had lower attendance than the rest of the week. However, by the end of the first marking period we realized that our attendance was actually higher on Fridays. Students enjoyed talking about their opinions. They liked to argue. They were good at it, and they knew it.

From a data perspective, as a school our 11th-graders attempted the Regents exam in January as a chance to get them some exposure to a test that was brand new to both staff and students. We were thrilled to see that, after only a half year of instruction, students that took part in Argument Friday produced over a 70% pass rate, where 43% of test points were earned through argument writing. Students’ research skills were strengthened, their overall writing mechanics improved, and they changed the way they manipulated language to help them prove a point.

In considering the work of Costa and Kallick (2000), we feel that Argument Friday captures the essence of the *Habits of Mind*:

- Persisting,
- Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision,
- Managing impulsivity,
- Gathering data through all senses,
- Listening with understanding and empathy,
- Creating, imagining, innovating,
- Thinking about thinking (metacognition),
- Responding with wonderment and awe,
- Taking responsible risks,
- Striving for accuracy,
- Thinking flexibly,
- Finding humor,

continued on following page

Students’ research skills were strengthened, their overall writing mechanics improved, and they changed the way they manipulated language to help them prove a point.

- Questioning and posing problems,
- Thinking interdependently,
- Applying past knowledge to new situations, and
- Remaining open to continuous learning.

Embedded into our structure is a combination of real-life, problem-solving skills required to promote strategic thinking and application.

From a social perspective, we felt empowered when we realized that, by the end of the year we had improved attendance, increased standardized tests scores, and we had developed a class of young adults who were talking about the issues of the world around them in informed and strategic ways. We were beginning to crack the difficult learning outcomes of civil discourse in the classroom, giving students the tools to turn unsupported opinions into coherent, evidence-based arguments and effectively challenge their opposition with rhetoric rather than reactions, such as name-calling, insults, or threats.

We were nurturing young adults who were learning to respect, tolerate, and welcome a different opinion, and saw it as an opportunity to disagree in a healthy way, where they felt validation when they could back up their claims. In these spaces there did not have to be a

“winner.” In this classroom students felt that they won if they could support their argument well, and could encourage someone else to acknowledge their side. This skill will serve them well in any forum in their lives.

Students came into school with ideas about topics they wanted to research and to discuss. They became the driving force in crafting the Argument Friday lessons. They began to bring in texts they found outside of school, unprompted, as they grew more interested in current events and decisions made by governments, businesses, and communities around the world.

Argument Friday has become the building block our humanities class strives to build upon to reach our ultimate goal: to develop thoughtful, creative, and logical readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. It is a structure that cultivates students who can actively engage in academic conversations with peers and adults in an effort to prepare them to be college and career ready, as well as effective contributors to our society.

REFERENCES

- Clasen, R. E., & Bowman, W. E. (September 1974). Toward a student-centered learning focus inventory for junior high and middle school teachers. *Journal of Educational Research*, 68, 1, 9.
- Costa, A. R., & Kallick, B. (Eds.). (2000). *Activating and engaging habits of mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2003). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hannafin, M. J., Hill, J. R., & Land, S. M. (Winter 1997). Student-centered learning and interactive multimedia: status, issues, and implications. *Contemporary Education*, 68, 2, 94-97.
- Hillocks, G. (2011). *Teaching argument writing: Grades 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Hillocks, G. (2010). Teaching argument for critical thinking and writing: An introduction. *English Journal*, 99(6), 24-32.
- Marzano, R. & Toth, M. (2014). Teaching for rigor: a call for a critical instructional shift. *Marzano Center Monograph*, West Palm Beach, FL: Learning Sciences International, 10.
- Murawski, W. & Dieker, L. (2004). Tips and strategies for co-teaching at the secondary level. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 35(5), 52-58.
- Newell, G. E., Beach, R, Smith, J. & VanDerHeide, J. (2011). Teaching and learning argumentative reading and writing: A review of research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 46(3), 273-304.
- Research Base Underlying the Teachers College Reading and Writing Workshop's Approach to Literacy Instruction. (2014). Retrieved October 31, 2016, from <http://readingandwritingproject.org/about/research-base>
- Schmoker, M. (2007). Reading, writing, and thinking for all. *Educational Leadership*, 64(7), 63-66.