

ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING THROUGH A 21ST CENTURY FRAMEWORK:
AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This Action Research study examined the implementation of integrated writing as originally described by MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz (1993) in order to investigate (a) seventh-grade English-Language Arts students' argumentative writing productions and demonstration of cognitive complexity on a blog site, and (b) the teacher's ability to refine instructional planning strategies that impact student learning. This study aimed to impact teacher practice and student learning through writing interventions and reflective planning. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected to analyze the instructional strategies of integrated writing that influenced student argumentative writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. The researcher was referred to as the teacher-researcher throughout the dissertation because the researcher was the teacher in the seventh-grade classroom. This study was designed around argumentative writing theories that emphasized students' collaborative efforts in an online blogging forum. Two, four-week iterations of instruction guided by the intervention and data analysis produced data supportive of teachers utilizing integrated writing in their classrooms, primarily teachers using conferences to support students with individualized instruction during the drafting process of writing. The findings of this Action Research Study indicated that intervention instruction should focus on the ideational epistemology of writing and synthesis in cognitive complexity while giving students the opportunity to collaborate on argumentative blogs.

To: Arturo, Maria, Fred and Ellie

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“Kindred spirits are not so scarce as I used to think. It's splendid to find out there are so many of them in the world.”

— L.M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The pressure for school reform has been at the forefront of the conversation in education for the past forty years. No Child Left Behind (2002), the Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004), and A Nation at Risk (1983) have challenged policymakers to introduce initiatives that impact teacher practice while raising student achievement through standards-based-reform (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010). A call for higher standards, more frequent student assessment, and higher expectations for the teacher evaluation system have left districts looking to reorganize struggling schools, while searching for transformational leaders and teachers to assist in the process (Elmore, 2000).

The location for the present research study, an urban school district in Connecticut, along with 48 other states, has adopted the Common Core State Standards (2010) as a part of a national grant, known as Race to the Top. Across the nation states are working with two student standardized assessment systems to align state testing to the Common Core State Standards, one of which is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2010).

A large component of the shift in the national standards movement is a call for students to be "reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational" (Common Core State Standards Website, Key Shifts Section, para. 5). This shift affects students and teachers. One type of writing of interest to the present study is argumentative writing, first administered in 1993 on the Connecticut Mastery Test as persuasive writing. The CMT was replaced as Connecticut's standardized unit of assessing reading, writing, and math

with the Smarter Balanced Assessment when the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010) was adopted by Connecticut.

The Common Core State Standards (2010) website explains,

The Common Core emphasizes using evidence from texts to present careful analysis, well-defended claims, and clear information. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge and experience, the standards call for students to answer questions that depend on their having read the texts with care. The reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence in the text. Students should be able to answer a wide range of text dependent questions, whose answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text. Frequently, forms of writing in K-12 have drawn heavily from student experience and opinion, which alone will not prepare students for the demands of college, career, and life. Though the standards still expect narrative writing throughout the grades, they also expect a command of sequence and detail that are essential for effective argumentative and informative writing. The standards focus on evidence-based writing along with the ability to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current practice. (Common Core State Standards Website, Key Shifts Section 2, para. 6)

Preparing students to be career and college ready, inclusive of writing skills, is the reason for this shift. According to results on the Quality Counts 2014 report card that Education Week has been publishing since 1997, the Connecticut state report card reflects a grade of a D- for college readiness (Education Week, 2014). Adding to this data are the results of the 2011 writing

assessment for 8th graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A mere 24% of the nation's eighth and twelfth graders performed at the proficient level in writing (NAEP, 2011). The national data reflects the local data of the urban district being researched.

The urban district in Connecticut where the study took place has adopted many new initiatives to address the shifts in the Common Core State Standards (2010); however a significant decline in writing scores has been recorded. Results from the school's strategic school profile demonstrated improvements in reading; however, writing scores continued to decline, signaling the district to look for initiatives to improve student writing. Beginning with seventh-graders, 60.4% of students scored proficient in reading, while a mere 39.9% of students in the district scored proficient in writing (CT reports, 2012). The Smarter Balanced Assessment scores published in the Fall of 2015 reported, "26% percent of city students reached targets in the 'English/Language Arts' portion of the test taken last school year (Puffer, 2015, p. B1). This data reflects that the district where this study took place was significantly behind the state average.

The Common Core State Standards (2010) has provided the recommended standards for grades K-12 with an emphasis on the skills needed to make students ready for post-secondary education or the work force. Four skills were identified as vital to the success of students being career and college ready. They are critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006). These essential skills, noted by the Common Core State Standards (2010) are known as the 4C's. Figure 1.1 displays a visual of skills that are recommended for students to learn. Argumentative writing is an important shift in the Common Core State Standards (2010) with an emphasis placed on giving students 21st century opportunities for learning.

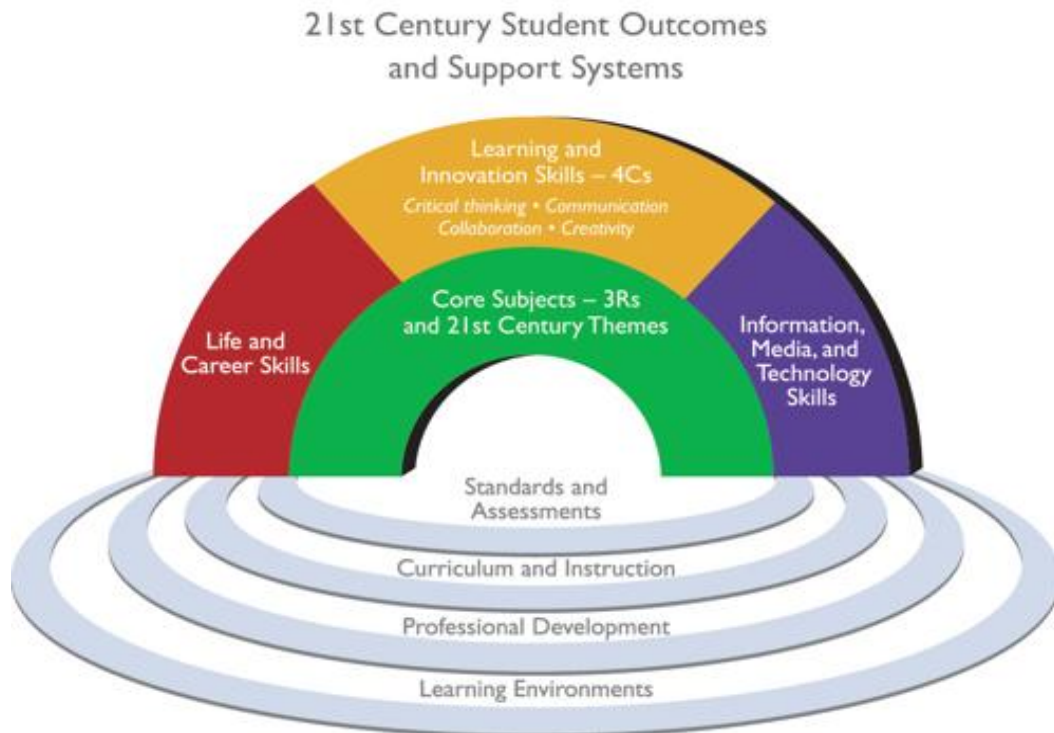


Figure 1.1. Framework for 21st Century Learning (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009, para. 1).

The Common Core State Standards (2010) gives teachers the applicable standards in order to plan for effective instruction. Planning for active learning is a part of the evaluation system that the urban district is utilizing. That evaluation system was put into place with a focus on administrators evaluating teacher proficiency in four domains. The rubric for effective teaching that the Connecticut Department of Education uses to evaluate teachers is divided into four domains:

Domain 1: Classroom environment, student engagement, and commitment to learning

Domain 2: Planning for active learning

Domain 3: Instruction for active learning

Domain 4: Professional responsibilities and teacher leadership

(CCT Rubric, 2014, p. 7)

As teachers plan instruction to address Domain 1, Domain 2, and Domain 3 in the teacher evaluation rubric, teachers are encouraged to utilize Web 2.0 resources to provide students with "multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression" (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010, p. 35). Providing students with multisensory materials helps students to retain what they are learning, considering that students retain 90% of what they see and do (Rief, 1993). Web 2.0 is a term used for multimedia internet applications, such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, and social media in order to infuse popular culture into the classroom (Voltz et al., 2010). The Connecticut Department of Education has developed an education technology plan (2011). That plan stresses that students are given the opportunity to express themselves in 21st century ways. The Connecticut State Department of Education website states,

Literacy in the 21st century requires more than the ability to read, write, and compute.

The Connecticut state department of education believes that every student must develop strong technological skills and continually use them in order to function adequately in our 21st century world. Connecticut schools must ensure that technology resources are integrated across the curriculum in pre K-12 and become part of the fabric of instruction. Students must be able to use the many forms of technology to access, understand, manage, interpret, evaluate and create information. They must also be able to analyze information for content, relevancy, and accuracy and be able to present that information

in a variety of formats, including those with technology platforms. (Educational Technology Plan, 2011, p. 4)

Planning rigorous curricula is essential to meeting the needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010), argumentation, 21st Century Skills and preparing students to be career and college ready. Wagner (2008) as found in Ainsworth (2010) defines rigor as incorporating seven 21st Century Skills. They are "critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and leadership, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written communication, accessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination" (p. 7).

Teachers utilize the domains of the Depth of Knowledge (Webb, 2005) to design rigorous curriculum for students to increase their cognitive complexity thinking skills. There are four domains in cognitive complexity. They are recall and reproduction, skills and concepts, strategic thinking, and extended thinking.

Problem

Low writing scores, the pressures to adjust teacher instructional methods to meet the needs of the writing expectations of the Common Core State Standards (2010), implementing 21st century instruction, designing rigorous curriculum to increase student cognitive complexity, and planning for and instructing active learning are the issues that the teacher-researcher addressed in her middle school writing classroom through this Action Research project. The purpose of the study was to reflect on and refine teacher instructional practice when implementing a writing intervention. The methodology of Action Research was employed because the teacher was the researcher during the study that spanned from the Fall of 2015 to the Spring of 2016.

Purpose

The purpose of this Action Research study was to investigate the teacher-researcher's instructional skills and strategies when shifting towards the Common Core State Standards (2010) designed to impact student argumentative writing instruction. The findings from this Action Research project may help inform other English language arts teachers about strategies designed to improve teacher practice and writing interventions for seventh-grade students. The purpose of the Action Research study was twofold: first, to determine if implementing technology-based curricula across content areas using instructional strategies improves students' argumentative writing, and second, for the teacher-researcher to improve her own teaching and research praxis.

The overarching research hypotheses driving the development and testing of the intervention in this Action Research Study are:

- 1.) Writing interventions and instructing students to produce writing in multimedia expression will improve student argumentative writing and cognitive complexity.
- 2.) The teacher-researcher will develop critical teaching and research skills by reflecting on student learning.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Utilizing the Common Core State Standards (2010), integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993), the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) and the theoretical framework of sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) created the context for this study. These theories provided the underlying foundation for this study and the gateway into argumentative writing instruction through 21st century skills, with a focus on the writing intervention, integrated writing.

Two key shifts in the Common Core State Standards (2010) are (1) student writing productions, grounded in evidence from the text, and (2) speaking and listening skills. The anchor standard involving argumentative writing is to "Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence" (CCSS.ELA-CCRA.W.1). The Common Core State Standards also place emphasis on the students' ability to speak and listen in a magnitude of ways. The anchor standard reads to "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" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL1). This review of the literature has been separated into sections: (1) the study's theoretical foundation, (2) argumentative writing and the Common Core, (3) empirical studies about argumentative writing, (4) argumentation and disciplinary literacy, (5) instructional strategies that foster 21st century learning, (6) research about teaching writing across content areas, (7) integrated writing intervention, and (8) blogging. The researcher

attempted to use best practices to instruct middle school students in the writing and collaborating processes.

Theoretical Foundation

By utilizing sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) the researcher formulated the research questions and study design. Vygotsky's (1962) theory on the way that people learn has influenced pedagogy in many ways; it has its roots in classroom strategies that teachers utilize to enhance student learning. Instructional strategies such as reciprocal teaching, scaffolding, small group instruction, group problem solving, and tutoring, have promoted engagement and student learning (Blake & Pope, 2008). Vygotsky placed a great emphasis on the social environment of where learning takes place. Discussion with a purpose is allowed to take place through interactions with others. Many teaching strategies have unfolded through this theoretical lens, such as student collaborative efforts, peer sharing, discussion-based learning, and students' private speech (Winsler, Abar, Feder, Schunn, & Rubio, 2007; Ostad, & Sorensen, 2007). Vygotsky argued that language is the basis for developing reading and writing skills. When teachers utilize social learning theory in their classrooms, the opportunity for debate, collaborative learning, conferencing and dialogue take place. The foundation of 21st century learning skills utilizes collaboration as a main component for preparing students to be career and college ready in order to meet the needs of the ever-changing, evolving, 21st century (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006).

Giving students the opportunity to engage in collaboration supports Vygotsky's (1978) principles of how students learn. Vygotsky believed that learning begins the first day of the child's life, when the child constructs his or her own knowledge. Development cannot be

separated from its social constructs. Student learning leads to development. Language plays a central role in a student's mental development. Vygotsky believed the "zone of proximal development" to be the goal for student learning stating, "Human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). This places great emphasis on the environment in which the student learning is taking place. Vygotsky defined the zone as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). By helping a student utilize support from a "more Knowledgeable other," who can be a person with a higher ability level or a better understanding of the content, a peer, parent, or teacher, the learner's "zone of proximal development" is met. Vygotsky understood that by pairing students of differing learning abilities, students would have an opportunity to learn from each other. The zone would be looked at as the students' goal for learning and essentially would be a moving target that would move as the students mastered the concept, as shown in Figure 2.1. This also gives teachers the opportunity to scaffold the instructional strategies to better serve the students in mastering the concept.

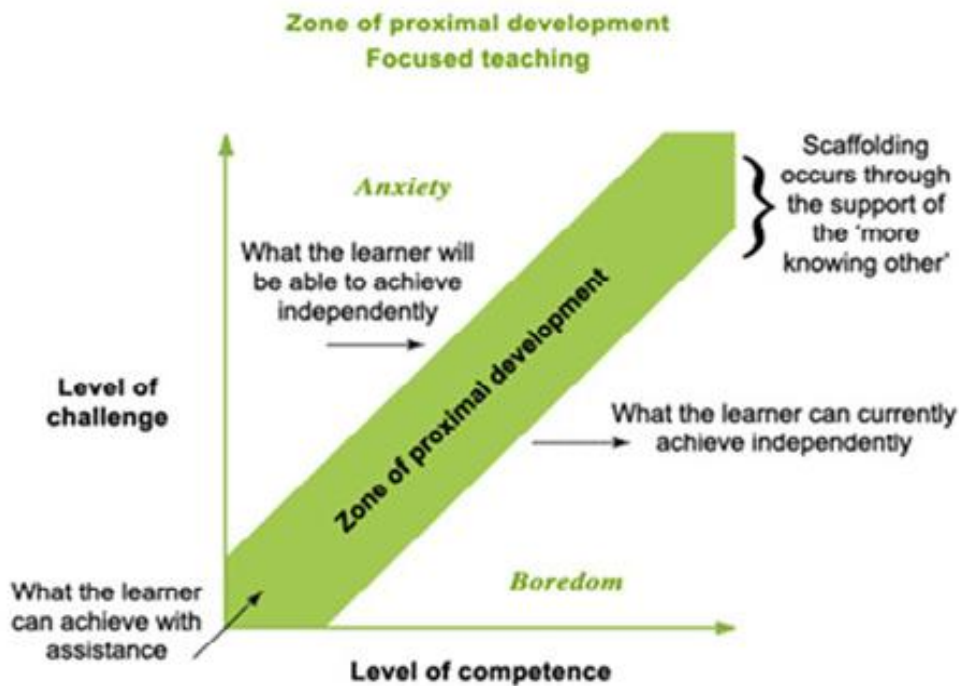


Figure 2.1: The Zone of Proximal Development, Hill & Crevola (2014).

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977) also supports students learning from one another through modeling. Bandura understands observational learning as a major component of social learning theory, with the environment playing a crucial role. Bandura believes that humans process information actively and reflect on behavior and the consequences attached to it. Observational learning cannot occur unless cognitive processes are at work; therefore, Bandura concludes that four concepts help us determine if social learning is successful, attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. Self-efficacy plays an important role in order to build student cognitive processes. Self-efficacy is built through reflection. Giving the students the opportunity to reflect on their learning builds competency in learning. A teacher reflecting on student learning also builds teachers' instructional capacity. Bandura's (1986, 1993) focus on

self-efficacy shows that self-reflection is the capstone to improving self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1993) defines self-efficacy as a person's belief in his or her own competence. He understands that people will only do what they think they can do and will not try what they think they will not do successfully. According to Bandura (1986), people with a strong sense of self-efficacy see tasks they cannot do as challenges, not threats, with four factors influencing efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and somatic and emotional state. Studies have linked high self-efficacy to high achievement in education leaders, teachers and students. In the present research study's method design of Action Research (Wilborn, 2013; Looney, 2003; Piercy, 2013; Smith, 2009), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) and sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978) complemented argumentation theories when using instructional strategies that improve argumentation. The intervention of integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993), chosen for this study, incorporates collaboration, writing and reflection.

The early theories about argumentation complement this investigation on middle school argumentative writing instruction. These early theories are still used modern instructional strategies in the way that argument is taught. The history of argumentation has its roots in the conflict between philosophy and rhetoric (Fletcher, 2015). The struggle between philosophy and rhetoric can be looked at as the difference between persuasion and argumentation, understanding that "the central tension between philosophers' bold claims to offer irrefutable demonstration of truths for ideal audiences versus rhetoricians' more modest claims to persuade given audiences that a particular conclusion warrants their assent" (Ramage, Callaway, Clary-Lemon, & Waggoner, 2009, p. 50). Persuasion is the capability of presenting opinions based on beliefs and trying to persuade the audience to ascertain those views, while argument, or the demonstration of

truths grounded in evidence is defined as, "A speaker or writer, engaged in argumentation, uses certain words and sentences to state, question, or deny something, to respond to statements, questions or denials, and so on" (van Emmeren, Grootendorst, & Henkemans, 1996, p. 2).

Understanding the definitions of persuasion and argumentation is important because philosophers, beginning in the 19th century, used rhetoric to discuss the politics and issues in the forum of debate.

Hillocks (2011) discusses persuasion and argumentation when he references philosophers whose early teachings are used in classrooms. Aristotle's (1928d) *Topics* presented guidelines for debating, setting the stage for argumentation to be dialectic, which translates into strategies for teaching argumentation in the 21st century classroom. Aristotle questioned logic and how we know something to be true, therefore, discussing syllogism, the way that one arrives at a truth through statements and premises made. When syllogism was not appropriate in many of the debates that Aristotle saw in the senate, Aristotle (1924) wrote *Rhetoric*. It dealt with formulating probability regarding arguments of three kinds: forensic; epideictic; and deliberative or fact, judgment, and policy (Hillocks, 2011).

Freire (1962) plays a vital role in the influence of argumentation, emphasizing rhetoric and debate. The purpose of the classroom discourse in the teaching of argumentative writing is to debate, linking classroom discourse and argumentative writing together. Freire's theory of "dialogical argument" had much significance when he wrote about the oppressor, the oppressed, and the liberated person. Freire asserted that when disagreement and agreement of opinion is discussed, true democracy is at hand. Freire saw the traditional classroom as taking on the role of the oppressor; however, when teachers and students engage in discourse, liberation from the oppressed occurs.

While early argumentative theories have roots in Aristotle and Freire's work, modern day instruction utilizes Toulmin's (1958) model for arguments of probability (Hillocks, 2011, Fletcher, 2015). Toulmin's model for argumentative writing instruction is specific regarding the qualities that the argument must possess. Toulmin places critical emphasis on the rhetorical side of the argument, valuing the discussion between the speaker and listener. Chase (2011) understands, "These elements represent the basis of argumentative discourse and an organizational framework for argumentative essay writing" (Chase, 2011, p. 5). This has been translated to instruction in middle and high schools as having students discuss or write a claim based on evidence, a warrant that explains the evidence supporting the claim, backing to support the warrants, followed by counterarguments (Hillocks, 2011). These components all help to add validity to the argument. While many middle and high school students are familiar with utilizing claims and citing evidence, understanding the components of citing a warrant is not as easy (Fletcher, 2015). Using Toulmin's definition, Fletcher explains, "A warrant is an underlying principle or assumption that authorizes the connection between the data and the claim" (Fletcher, 2015, p. 164). Fletcher advises going back to Aristotle's word premise or using the word assumption instead of Toulmin's word warrant in order to relay to students that what we usually assume is what we think to be true. Fletcher recommends that the teachers' goals for the students are that they question these assumptions, formulating argument and debate.

Linking argument and debate has offered educators the opportunity to link theory to pedagogy. Van Emmeren & Grootendorst (1996) understand that debate is drawn from an understanding of argumentation and it has contributed to it. Toulmin's (1958) model gives teachers the opportunity to link the two. By allowing students the opportunity to engage in

discourse and writing with a structured framework, students are encouraged to learn from each other, while citing relevant evidence from the text that they are working with (Hillocks, 2011).

While argumentative writing and debate have been linked together, debate continues on how teachers teach argumentative writing (Newell, VanDerHeide, & Olsen, 2014). Through Newell et al.'s (2014) research on thirty-one English language arts teachers' instruction, the researchers named three argumentative epistemologies that have significance in the way that teachers approach teaching writing. Table 2.1 represents the epistemologies. While structural and ideational have to do with the procedural facilitation of argumentative writing, social practice links the writing to the classroom language and collaboration. Newell et al.'s (2014) argumentative epistemologies link theory to pedagogy, while supplementing Hillocks's (2011) model for instruction, furthermore, bringing to light the debate surrounding different epistemologies of argumentation.

Table 2.1:
Identifying Features of Three Argumentative Epistemologies (Newell et al., 2014, p. 97).

Argumentative Epistemology	Primary Instructional Focus	Priorities for Learning to Argue	Basis for Assessment
STRUCTURAL	Developing coherent essay structure as an argument.	Learning terms for parts of argument and procedures for composing argumentative essay structure.	Location of argument elements to develop formal essay structure.
IDEATIONAL	Developing original ideas that are explored and justified through argument.	Using the process of argument to engage deeply in content (such as literature) and develop original ideas.	Relationships among and development of ideas within an argumentative framework.
SOCIAL PRACTICE	Developing a projected or imagined social context with a “real” audience that anticipates an argument.	Considering the rhetorical context and warrants for arguing with an audience about significant social issues.	Responsiveness to the social context, including audience, as well as appropriate evidence, warrants, and counter-arguments.

Newell et al.'s (2014) chart, based on the research of thirty-one English language arts teachers, breaks down the way that argumentative writing is taught in classrooms. As teachers adjust to the shifts presented in the Common Core State Standards (2010), many classrooms focus on the structural components of an argumentative essay in order to meet the needs of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2010). Not only are teachers linking argument to debate, but middle school English language arts classrooms are structured with activities that link reading and writing skills and strategies with a balanced approach to literacy instruction

(Tompkins, 2010). Reading strategies complement the writing process, and they give readers a purpose for reading. Balancing and aligning reading and writing in an English language arts classroom is a part of balanced literacy. Vacca and Vacca (2005) explain,

When teachers integrate writing and reading, they help students use writing to think about what they will read and to understand what they have read. Writing may be used to catapult students into reading. It is also one of the most effective ways for students to understand something they have read. Teachers can put students into writing to read or reading to write situations because the writing process is a powerful tool for exploring and clarifying meaning. (p. 357)

Along with the understanding of a balanced literacy classroom, Robb (2010) understands nine reading strategies to be essential in an English language arts classroom. They are "Activate prior knowledge, decide what's important in a text, synthesize information, draw inferences during and after reading, self-monitor comprehension, repair faulty comprehension, ask questions, build vocabulary, and develop fluency" (p. 15). These meaningful strategies present the teacher with opportunities to teach reading and writing in a connected way.

Reading and writing workshops (Atwell, 1998) are ways that middle school English language arts teachers extend those nine reading strategies and engage in Newell et al.'s (2014) social practice. Reading and writing workshops allow teachers to work collaboratively with students in order to scaffold instruction. Atwell understands, "A workshop is student-centered in the sense that individuals' rigorous pursuit of their ideas is the primary content of the course" (p. 71). In workshop instruction or effective reading strategy instruction, teachers help students to determine a purpose for reading. This correlates with Robb's effective reading strategy of

"deciding what's important in a text." When reading nonfiction text, a purpose for reading is to research. Effective research is also a claim of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2010). Argumentative writing begins with reading a text and synthesizing the information to make claims and warrants so the reading/writer can make inferences from the text (Hillocks, 2011). Based on these inferences, students use evidence from the text to back up the claims.

Argumentative writing is a shift in instruction in student writing; however, prior to the Common Core State Standards (2010), reading, writing and math skills were assessed on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT). This test assessed the strands that students were expected to master by the end of the grade level. Persuasive writing was the type of writing assessed in seventh-grade. The CMT prompt asked students to take a stance on a topic in society. Some topics included persuading others about the student's perspective about dress code, bullying in schools, or the school lunch menu. Students were to argue the side that favored without using textual evidence. This form of assessment only targeted student's prior knowledge. The Common Core State Standards' shift in writing now expects students to use evidence from the text to support their stance while they acknowledge and discuss the claim and counterclaim. The Smarter Balanced Assessment (2010) provides students with texts of differing opinions on provocative topics in society and then gives a writing prompt, asking students to write an argumentative essay.

In order to meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment (2010), middle school teachers utilize a balanced approach to literacy instruction (Tompkins, 2010). Tompkins asserts, "The balanced approach to instruction is based on a comprehensive view of literacy that combines explicit instruction, guided practice, collaborative learning, and independent reading and writing" (p. 17). A balanced approach to

instruction embodies reading literature and nonfiction, giving students the opportunity to use the internet and communicative technologies, literacy strategies that foster reading and writing skills, oral language or the opportunity to collaborate with peers and teachers, vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and spelling (Tompkins, 2010, p. 18). This balanced approach to literacy instruction embodies Newell et al.'s (2014) epistemologies and the characteristics of Atwell's (1998) reader/writer workshop; this approach provided the rationale for choosing the instructional intervention, integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) for this study.

Giving students the opportunity to write in a number of different genres is a part of a balanced literacy program. Expository and narrative writing are different genres of writing that students are expected to utilize in classrooms and are assessed on the Smarter Balanced Assessment (2010). Argumentative writing includes elements of persuasion, however, in former assessments such as the Connecticut Mastery Test, students were only required to activate prior knowledge and not use evidence from the text to support their thinking. Table 2.2 demonstrates the structural components of argumentative writing as assessed on a four point rubric from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (2010).

Table 2.2

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Rubric (2010), p. 1.

Smarter Balanced Argumentative Writing Rubric grades 6-12					
Score	Statement of Purpose/Focus and Organization		Development: Language and Elaboration of Evidence		Conventions
	Statement of Purpose/Focus	Organization	Elaboration of Evidence	Language & Vocab	
4	The response is fully sustained and consistently and purposefully focused: --claim is clearly stated, focused and strongly maintained --alternate or opposing claims are clearly addressed* --claim is introduced and communicated clearly within the context	The response has a clear and effective organizational structure creating unity and completeness: --effective, consistent use of a variety of transitional strategies --logical progression of ideas from beginning to end --effective introduction and conclusion for audience and purpose --strong connections among ideas, with some syntactic variety	The response provides thorough and convincing support/evidence for the writer's claim that includes the effective use of sources, facts, and details. The response achieves substantial depth that is specific and relevant: --use of evidence from sources is smoothly integrated, comprehensive, relevant, & concrete --effective use of a variety of elaborative techniques	The response clearly and effectively expresses ideas, using precise language: --use of academic and domain-specific vocabulary is clearly appropriate for the audience and purpose	The response demonstrates a strong command of conventions: --few, if any, errors are present in usage and sentence formation --effective and consistent use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
3	The response is adequately sustained and generally focused: --claim is clear and for the most part maintained, though some loosely related material may be present --context provided for the claim is adequate	The response has an evident organizational structure and a sense of completeness, though there may be minor flaws and some ideas may be loosely connected: --adequate use of transitional strategies with some variety --adequate progression of ideas from beginning to end --adequate introduction and conclusion --adequate, if slightly inconsistent, connection among ideas	The response provides adequate support/evidence for writer's claim that includes the use of sources, facts, and details. The response achieves some depth and specificity but is predominantly general: --some evidence from sources is integrated, though citations may be general or imprecise --adequate use of some elaborative techniques	The response adequately expresses ideas, employing a mix of precise with more general language --use of domain-specific vocabulary is generally appropriate for the audience and purpose	The response demonstrates an adequate command of conventions: --some errors in usage and sentence formation may be present, but no systematic pattern of errors is displayed --adequate use of punctuation, capitalization and spelling
2	The response is somewhat sustained and may have a minor drift in focus: --may be clearly focused on the claim but is insufficiently sustained --claim on the issue may be somewhat unclear and unfocused	The response has an inconsistent organizational structure, and flaws are evident: --inconsistent use of basic transitional strategies with little variety --uneven progression of ideas from beginning to end --conclusion and introduction, if present, are weak --weak connection among ideas	The response provides uneven, cursory support/evidence for the writer's claim that includes partial or uneven use of sources, facts, and details, and achieves little depth: --evidence from sources is weakly integrated, and citations, if present, are uneven --weak or uneven use of elaborative techniques	The response expresses ideas unevenly, using simplistic language: --use of domain-specific vocabulary may at times be inappropriate for the audience and purpose	The response demonstrates a partial command of conventions: --frequent errors in usage may obscure meaning --inconsistent use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling
1	The response may be related to the purpose but may offer little relevant detail: --may be very brief --may have a major drift --claim may be confusing or ambiguous	The response has little or no discernible organizational structure: --few or no transitional strategies are evident --frequent extraneous ideas may intrude	The response provides minimal support/evidence for the writer's claim that includes little or no use of sources, facts, and details: --use of evidence from sources is minimal, absent, in error, or irrelevant	The response expression of ideas is vague, lacks clarity, or is confusing: --uses limited language or domain-specific vocabulary --may have little sense of audience and purpose	The response demonstrates a lack of command of conventions: --errors are frequent and severe and meaning is often obscure
0	A response gets no credit if it provides no evidence of the ability to [fill in with key language from the intended target].				

Argumentative Writing and the Common Core

The standards movement emerged in the 1980's when President Ronald Reagan and Secretary of Education, Terrell H. Bell, appointed a group to serve on the National Commission on Excellence in Education. This commission was charged with publishing a report on the current state of the quality of education. The influential report began the call for higher standards and encouraged states to adopt higher expectations for all students (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Research related to the Common Core State Standards (2010) takes a number of different avenues. Wilborn (2013) focuses his work on teacher self-efficacy in implementing the Common Core State Standards within a 21st century learning skills framework by focusing on three experienced teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward instruction. The purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of teacher attitudes and ascertain teacher self-efficacy regarding their instruction. By using qualitative, instrumental, case study methods, Wilborn collected significant data by utilizing a beginning survey, observations, field notes, and interviews. The theories creating the lens for the research were constructivism, social learning theory, and situated learning theory. Wilborn's implications for further research prompted the present study on instructing the Common Core argumentative writing initiative due to the fact that teachers in Wilborn's study reported more student engagement when students utilized 21st century learning skills, one being collaboration. By understanding Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, Wilborn justified the study by citing, "Teachers' beliefs in their efficacy affect their general orientation toward the educational process as well as their specific instructional activities" (Bandura, 1997 p. 241). By giving students the opportunity to participate in 21st century learning, the environment and the classroom begin to take on a different structure when teaching the Common Core State Standards and argumentative writing.

The Common Core State Standards (2010) have provided education districts with a framework of expectations for teachers to tailor instruction, with an emphasis on what students should know from grades K-12, giving students the necessary skills needed to make them ready for post-secondary education, whether that be entering the work force or entering college. The 4C's are vital to the success of students being career and college ready: Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2006).

Allowing students to become rhetorical readers and writers is a way to fit the needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010) and utilize teaching 21st century skills (Fletcher, 2015). Argument literacy and rhetorical knowledge are the capstones of the Common Core State Standards, with new resources being published on how to address the ever-changing needs of the classroom. Hillocks (2011) offers a step-by-step guide on teaching and evaluating arguments and recommends teaching students the basics of formulating claims and backing those claims up with evidence, while Fletcher (2015) understands, "As we move forward this focus on argument literacy, we're being challenged to teach in new ways" (p. xix). In order to do this, Fletcher inspires teachers to bring the conversations to life, designing opportunities to discuss and debate by being open-minded inquirers.

Facilitating conversations in the classroom is an important concept of the Common Core State Standard (2010). Argumentative writing is another key concept because of the speaking and listening claims that serve as an anchor standard. The anchor standard states, "To build a foundation for college and career readiness, students must have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner" (CCSS, 2012a, Shift 2). Incorporating argumentative writing instruction with speaking and listening works in conjunction with new strategies to approaching curricula, resulting in

shifting approaches in pedagogy. Beach, Thein & Webb (2012) understand, "All of this suggests that as the primary facilitator of the classroom you will want to shift the focus from yourself, as the central initiator and evaluator of all interactions, to your students, as people interacting around important issues" (p. 203). These collaborative opportunities can take shape as classroom discussion or online discussion, giving teachers the opportunity to address the needs of the Common Core State Standards, argumentative writing, and 21st century learning skills.

Empirical Studies about Argumentative Writing

Empirical studies help link theory to pedagogy and influence teacher practices when it comes to classroom instruction. Newell, VanDerHeide, and Olsen's (2014) study on argumentative writing presents an influential study about argumentative writing. The authors acknowledged the shifts in student writing focus due to the implementation of the rigorous Common Core State Standards (2010) and analyzed thirty-one case studies on the way that teachers teach argumentative writing in the high school setting. The researchers selected three local teachers, recommended by administrators and colleagues, with reputations for being exemplary teachers of writing. This exploratory study took place over the course of two years and sought to find the ways that teachers were instructing their students in the argumentative writing process. The researchers collected various data, including three interviews with the three teachers, video and audio recordings, teacher and student surveys and classroom observations with field notes. The researchers interviewed the teachers, focusing on the teachers' goals, beliefs, assessment criteria and instructional strategies for teaching argumentative writing. The researchers researched how the instructional strategies fell into the identified epistemologies: structural, ideational, and social practice (as seen in Table 2.1, on page 15 where characteristics of each epistemology are cited). During the structural epistemology approach, teachers spend

more time on the components of the structure of an argumentative essay, where argumentative vocabulary is important and the assessment of the formal structure with a rubric is essential. During the ideational epistemology approach, value is placed on student ideas with using evidence to back up those ideas with literature as the foundation to encourage the thought process. Assessment includes looking at the development of ideas through the argumentative framework. The social practice epistemology approach pertains more to the strategies that encourage collaboration and debate with an importance set on the audience. These epistemologies were developed by the researchers during past research endeavors. Newell et al. (2014) state, "This conceptual framework permits us to study the underlying and often hidden curricula in teachers' approaches to argumentation, as well as what experiences and epistemic knowledge lead to teacher change" (p. 116). The way teachers adapt to new instructional approaches is a significant part of argumentative strategies and has implications for researchers of instructional strategies and encourages teachers to engage in reflective dialogue about their role as practitioners.

While the setting of Newell et al.'s (2014) study is in the high school environment, Chase (2011) investigates community college students' argumentative writing skills with the purpose of extending research on argumentative writing. The setting of this study is significant because national data cites that the number of 12th grade students who scored at or above proficient in reading in 2013 was 38%. This score was not measurably different from the 2009 assessment, but it was a four point drop since the 1992 assessment (IES National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). The researcher chose the setting of the community college because many of the learners were remedial readers and writers. One hundred and twelve student work samples were analyzed to see if students included argumentative elements in their writing. The elements were

coherence, cohesive, of high school quality, and how the learners' background learning abilities contributed to the argumentative essays. Through descriptive analysis, the study's findings suggest that the community college students' argumentative essays were of poorer quality than that of 12th grade high school students. Implications from this study are significant for remedial reading and writing programs and for the instruction of argumentative writing in middle and high school settings. The study's findings indicate that students struggling with writing must know the expectations of the writing project. This echoes Newell et al.'s (2014) structural epistemology. A strategy that the study cited as an intervention to support struggling learners was Self-Regulated Strategy Development. This strategy helps writers to plan, monitor, evaluate, revise and manage the writing process by modeling and guided practice. Mnemonic devices are used as strategies to remind learners of the writing process. The study used STOP, a mnemonic device, which stands for, "suspend judgment, take a side, organize your thoughts, plan more while you write" (p. 85). The study has implications for this present study on argumentative writing because Self-Regulated Strategy Development is an intervention for struggling writers and it addresses enhancing the structural epistemology of argumentation. The teacher-researcher of the present study developed an argumentative writing checklist as a way to help students with their own self-regulation of their writing. The teacher-researcher-created materials that are discussed in Chapter 3 are located in Appendix B and were created using the theoretical frameworks and research noted in this review of the literature.

While Chase (2011) investigates the structural components of argumentative writing, Sineath (2014) investigates a social practice approach to argumentative writing instruction. Sineath utilizes an 11th and 12th grade sample when using a quasi-experimental design to measure argumentative writing skills when students participate in classroom discourse. Two

types of discourse were introduced to the experimental and control group. The first was procedural facilitation, while the other method was linking ideas and pressing for reasoning. By looking through a sociocognitive learning theory framework, the study confirmed that linking ideas and pressing for reasoning interventions lead to improvements in argumentative writing. Hillocks's (2011) complements this when he discusses the characteristics of an effective argumentative essay embodying "claims, evidence, warrants, backing, and rebuttals," an adaptation of Toulmin's (1958) model as seen in Figure 2.2. The present study asks students to produce argumentative writing in the form of blogs, incorporating Newell et al.'s (2014) social practice and incorporating student writing productions in multimedia forums. This utilizes Sineath's (2014) pressing for reasoning intervention because the students must make comments on a peer's blog.

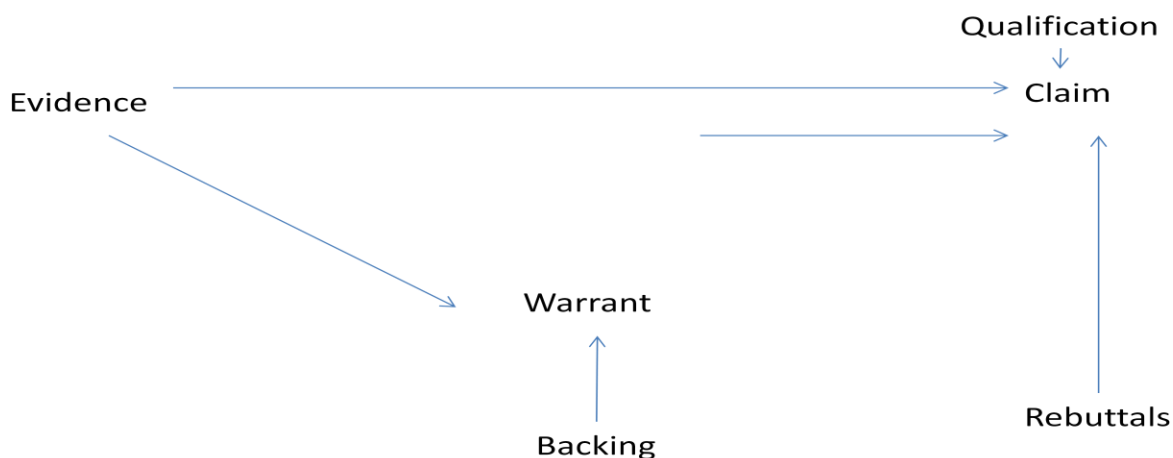


Figure 2.2: Toulmin's (1958) Theory of Argument from (Hillocks, 2011).

Sineath (2014) looks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by acknowledging that he is a scholar and practitioner, looking to design interventions that could be replicated and utilized in other English language arts classrooms. Sineath understands, "Such a relationship between social interaction and cognitive development suggests that the connection between the

two needs to be carefully examined in order to determine how altering the social context and discourse within it can augment student achievement" (p. 19). Sineath's study has implications for teachers and researchers because of the utilization of social learning theory. He directly ties discourse in class to success in writing. The quantitative data shows growth on pre-test to post-test argumentative writing prompts and reflects that pressing for reasoning and linking ideas has a greater effect on student writing than procedural facilitation.

Utilizing student discourse when instructing argumentative writing has been studied in the middle school as well as high school and post high school instruction. It coincides with Newell et al.'s (2014) social practice epistemology, and the use of the intervention, integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993), in the present study to encourage discussion in multimedia ways. Yeh (1998) "contrasted explicit instruction in heuristics for constructing arguments in combination with immersion in debate and peer response activities, with a version of the same approach that excluded explicit instruction but included the immersion activities" (p. 54). Through quasi-experimental, case study research, the researcher looked to compare two instructional strategies and look for the effect on students' voice and conventions in writing. Yeh also looked to determine the effects of the experimental and treatment groups and the students' metacognition knowledge of argumentative criteria and strategies. Although Yeh's study precedes the Common Core State Standards (2010) initiative, it has significant implications for middle school instruction. The findings suggest "the importance for combining explicit and immersion approaches" and giving students opportunity to immerse in the learning by debating and writing, again recognizing the components of a balanced literacy program that fosters structural, ideational, and social practice epistemologies (p. 77).

The literature in this section is significant because sociocognitive learning is the framework through which the researchers began their research in the different settings of middle school, high school, and post-secondary instruction. The differing methodologies employed also show a need for qualitative data from teachers and students and a need for metacognitive thinking from students and teachers as to how teachers teach and students learn to write argumentatively. This research impacted this present study on argumentative writing in the middle school and the rationale for an Action Research study. In this present study the teacher-researcher completed reflections on the lessons and student learning in order to guide the instructional planning process.

Argumentation and Disciplinary Literacy

Content area literacy or interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum is not new; however, disciplinary literacy is coming to the forefront of conversations in education when meeting the needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010). It is important to recognize that "content area literacy prescribes study techniques and reading approaches that can help someone to comprehend or to remember text better, whereas disciplinary literacy emphasizes the description of unique uses and implications of literacy use within the various disciplines" (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p. 8). In the past, content area literacy meant utilizing the strategies that English language arts teachers use in the classroom for understanding the text. Teachers were taught to have students preview, question, predict, infer, connect, summarize, and evaluate a text. Teaching students these strategies in the science and history classroom was a core component of an interdisciplinary curriculum. While these strategies are beneficial to students, it lacks the recognition of the different demands that each content area maintains. Disciplinary literacy

values the differences in the content areas and understands the importance of vocabulary and authors in different subject areas.

Argumentation also plays a pivotal role in disciplinary literacy. Shanahan and Shanahan (2012) recognize that "A student who could retell many facts from a history book but fail to grasp the author's underlying argument might, through disciplinary strategies, be able to analyze such reasoning or even to construct his or her own arguments from the information" (p. 16). This presents opportunities for content area teachers to utilize discourse strategies to encourage in "arguespeak" in different core subjects (Fletcher, 2015). Being a skilled student in audience analysis is vital to this concept because "students tend to identify different content areas by teacher personality, not by disciplinary distinctions in ways of thinking and communicating" (Fletcher, 2015, p. 104). Disciplinary literacy is pushing students to engage in becoming highly literate thinkers, something that is very important in the discussion of higher-order thinking skills that the Common Core State Standards (2010) has brought to light. Attributes of a highly literate thinker are that they pose questions, develop a logical reasoning, consider an issue from multiple perspectives, cope with ambiguity and conflicting ideas/tensions, seek complexity rather than simple answers, challenge another's opinion or viewpoint, think flexibly rather than rigidly, look for the marginalized or silenced voices in and out of the text (Adler & Rougle, 2005).

Understanding a literacy continuum is much like educators understanding Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) or Norman Webb's Depth of Knowledge Continuum (2005). The literacy continuum must move higher toward critical thinking skills instead of focusing on the basic skills of interdisciplinary learning.

In order to move away from basic literacy strategies of summarization across content areas, Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) explain, "Students need explicit teaching of sophisticated genres, specialized language conventions, disciplinary norms of precision and accuracy, and higher-level interpretive processes" (p. 43). This is backed up by the strategy of developing content area writers (Conley, 2012). When students write across all content areas, the needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010) are met, as well as disciplinary literacy. A content area writer is developed by expecting students to "write to learn, become strategic writers, guiding students to write to learn, teaching students to plan their writing, teaching students how to write, and teaching students how to review and revise" (p. 331). This has significant implications for middle and high school teachers because the student experiences must scaffold to fit their learning needs. It is also significant for teachers because the Common Core State Standards has integrated writing standards in social studies, science, and technical writing classes.

This has been reflected in a call for teachers to rethink their teaching practices. "Supporting the development of disciplinary literacy, from this perspective, requires content area teachers to foster students' engagement in practices that provide them with opportunities to gain access to knowledge as well as to gain opportunities to engage in critique of new knowledge and disciplinary practices" (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 588). These opportunities are made possible through language. Functional language analysis is a way for teachers to discuss content language and language patterns. "By helping students see how meaning is presented through language in their disciplines, teachers enable students to become independent readers who can not only comprehend but also reflect in critical ways on what they read" (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010, p. 596). By opening the discussion up about content language, students are able to analyze the authors' purpose by discussing experiential meaning, textual meaning and interpersonal

meaning. This takes the foundational strategies on the continuum to higher-order thinking skills, encouraging students to analyze and discuss, therefore, changing the meaning of content area literacy, and linking argumentation to disciplinary literacy. By utilizing language and writing across disciplines, teachers maintain the language of their content areas but also provide rich opportunities for students to engage in critical thought, writing, and language conventions about that topic.

Rigorous curriculum design is needed to address disciplinary literacy and increase student cognitive complexity. Teachers utilize Webb's (2005) framework and design lessons around four domains. Table 2.3 displays the four domains, with examples of activities for the four Depth of Knowledge (DOK) levels for a research project.

Table 2.3:
Depth of Knowledge, Webb (2005).

Recall and Reproduction Level 1 DOK	Skills and Concepts Level 2 DOK	Strategic Thinking Level 3 DOK	Extended Thinking Level 4 DOK
Students identify and list possible research topics.	Students create a works cited page.	Students choose and apply note-taking organizational strategies.	Students analyze and synthesize multiple sources in order to write a full-process research paper.

Extending student thinking is an important component of cognitive complexity. Teachers use the Depth of Knowledge continuum to design rigorous lessons that progress toward Level 4. Level 4 involves reading multiple texts, reflecting on what is important, synthesizing complex information, and applying it in a unique way that requires extended time. It demands deep understanding of multiple concepts such as author's purpose and intended audience (Webb, 2005).

Instructional Strategies that Foster 21st Century Learning

In the discussion of language in the classroom, it is significant to note that the environment and culture of the classroom plays a great emphasis on the strategies that are utilized (Kutz & Roskelly, 1991). The authors point out, "Much early research on language took place around isolated tasks in the setting of a school, like responding to a series of pointed questions" (p. 65). Participation in classroom discourse traditionally falls in a pattern where "the teacher initiates talk by a question or invitation, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response" (p. 73). Kutz and Roskelly discuss the traditional classroom culture as it applies to the English classroom and directly tie language to learning in the English classroom. The authors agree that traditional classrooms focus importance on teaching grammar rules, instead of developing meaningful opportunities for learners to engage in classroom discussion stating, "Learners acquire most important linguistic knowledge unconsciously in an environment that provides rich data; Because this is true, teachers can best facilitate the acquisition of new forms and uses by creating a language-rich classroom where students engage in real acts of communication" (p. 135). Kutz and Roskelly see this as possible by bringing imagination into the traditional classroom. By using imagination as a strategy, students use techniques in their writing and speaking such as juxtaposition, repetition, metaphor, and the activity of imagination, interpretation. Traditionally, interpretation has been a way for teachers to bring in an old text and have students reiterate the meaningful passages, without bringing to the text their own views and opinions. Teachers feel more comfortable with conversations about plot and point of view (Kutz & Roskelly, 1991). By making imagination "central to all classroom learning" so students could connect the classroom to their own thinking, dialogue is emphasized in the classroom and the "language we write is the language we speak" (p. 246).

As Kutz and Roskelly (1991) promote imagination and interpretation as important strategies to increase student discourse in the classroom, Gillies (2007) base their recommended strategies on the work influenced by Webb (1985, 1991, 1992), where it was reported that high quality discourse is a prominent influence on student achievement; however, Gillies (2007) provides strategies to help students to engage in meaningful dialogue together. Reciprocal teaching as developed by Palinscar and Brown (1984), utilizes small group instruction while generating questions to help students reading comprehension. Each student has a role and an opportunity to lead and contribute to the group. Students utilize specific strategies to direct the discussion such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing.

Collaborative Strategic Reading places great emphasis, as reciprocal teaching does, on teacher modeling. These strategies are geared toward reading comprehension; however, when students are given the opportunity to utilize the strategies of previewing, click and chunk, get the gist, and wrap up, students are able to use dialogue in small groups in order to enhance their understanding of the text (Gillies, 2007). Promoting dialogue in the classroom offers multiple opportunities for teachers to tailor their lessons to utilizing the strategies needed to create opportunities for conversations. Gillies recognizes scripted cooperation as a way for students of varying ages to discuss topics in small groups in a structured way. Roles are also assigned to keep student conversations on task. This supporting strategy guides the conversation and allows students to talk with the text in mind.

Research about Teaching Writing across Content Areas

In order to meet the needs of the Common Core State standards (2010), current research has been cited using a "literacy practices" approach in order to make the Common Core State

Standards (2010) become meaningful to curricula design (Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012).

Argumentative writing is a type of writing that encourages students to make claims and substantiate those claims with evidence from the text. This type of writing enables teachers to meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards in the different content area classrooms. Beach et al. explain, "In working at the middle school level, and planning with your social studies and science colleagues, you can also devise an interdisciplinary curriculum that revolves around topics and issues about which your students can read and write in your language arts class, and study in their social studies and science class" (p. 170).

Teague, Anfara, Wilson, Gaines, and Beaver (2012) note the significance of middle school education in forming students' perception toward their academic journey. Teague et al. determine that the purpose of their study is "to explore the instructional practices being utilized in core academic subjects in middle schools in a southeastern state" (p. 204). The study aims to give information to the stakeholders in education and for middle school teachers. Their literature review investigated research on the supposed positive effects of essential learning skills, such as reading, listening, asking questions, utilizing visual aids, using library tools, organization, and problem solving (Teague et al., 2012). Their research consisted of a firm analysis of the different strategies that teachers use and the call for more of Tomlinson's (2001) differentiated versus traditional teaching. Student engagement and collaboration are both instructional methods and learning principles that are recommended best practice for middle school students.

Brown, Anfara, and Roney (2004) address the same problem of significant reforms recommended to boost student achievement in middle schools. They state,

In 1989, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development offered middle schools, facing the dilemma of becoming "miniature high schools" (Johnson, Dupuis, Musial, &

Hall, 1994), hope of fundamental reform with *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century*. These recommendations-balancing academic, personal development and citizenship goals-represent a way to create an appropriate school environment that meets the complex needs of young adolescents. (p. 428)

The purpose of their study was to compare two types of middle schools, a high performing suburban school and a low performing urban school, to determine which factors played an important role in the way that the schools have adopted the “Turning Point” initiatives. Brown et al. (2004) state, “These intermediate outcomes have been identified to include teacher quality of life and job satisfaction, school and classroom climate, and student and school supports, resources, and stressors” (p. 433). The implications for further research were to research the important factors that play a role in middle school learning. Designing effective middle school writing interventions is a factor leading to high achievement in the middle schools.

Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed, and Stillman-Spisak (2011) noted that the purpose of their study was to put in place a reading intervention to address improving student comprehension of a text. The study was intended for stakeholders in education in Texas and Colorado. Their intervention used was Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR). By using cognitive psychology and sociocultural theory, Vaughn et al. (2011) noted that CSR is a collaborative approach that helps students understand the text by targeting vocabulary, using reciprocal and explicit teaching strategies and using technology in the classroom. Their literature review described the supposed positive effects of CSR on elementary students in the science and social studies classrooms. The authors state "Through a series of studies conducted over a decade, CSR has been developed, implemented, and evaluated using quasi-experimental and descriptive research designs" (p. 943). By analyzing the methodologies of previous literature on

the reading intervention, the authors were able to plan their own methodological route. By using a number of testing indicators, as mentioned above, the intervention of CSR showed positive results. Vaughn et al. (2011) affirms, "We designed this randomized control trial to provide rigorous experimental study examining the effects of CSR on the reading achievement of middle grade students" (p. 956). It was determined that students in the treatment groups outperformed students in the "business-as-usual groups" and there was a positive impact on reading comprehension.

Smart & Marshall (2012) also address the role of middle school literacy in their research on discourse in the science classroom and its impact on student engagement. By using the lens of sociocognitive theory, the authors look to "examine the role of the teacher in facilitating classroom discourse in supporting students' higher order cognitive processes within the middle school science classroom" (Smart & Marshall, 2012). Sampson, Enderle, Grooms, & Witte (2013) also use the science classroom as the setting for their work with writing by introducing the intervention of the Argument-Driven Inquiry Instructional Model. They introduced middle school students to this intervention because they saw a need for students to be able to write scientific arguments but noticed that many science teachers did not want to spend time teaching writing and would rather focus their time on the content itself. The ADI model was a significant, well structured intervention that built in eight stages for the students to focus on. They were "Identify the task and research question, collect and analyze data, develop a tentative argument, argumentative session (share the argument with the audience), write an investigative report, peer review, revise and submit, explicit and reflective discussion" (p. 651). The findings showed improved student engagement and gains from pre-to-post assessments. Understanding the way

that argumentation is taught after adopting the Common Core State Standards (2010) is essential to the research study.

In this study the framework for argumentative writing uses structural competencies, as noted in Newell et al.'s (2014) study. In this study teachers in the district use the Common Core Writing Companion (by Perfection Learning, 2013). In this workbook, there are many chapters on meeting the writing needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010). Table 2.4 displays the current approaches teachers use when teaching writing in the middle school.

Table 2.4:
Approaches to argument.

Common Core Writing Companion, 2013	Hillocks, 2011	Fletcher, 2015
Analyze the prompt.	Write the claim.	Academic writing begins with academic reading (rhetorical approach).
Take notes on your sources.	Based on evidence of some sort.	Listen to conversations we want to join.
Organize your ideas.	A warrant that explains how the evidence supports the claim.	Make inferences and observations based on the arguments of other people.
Write the draft.	Backing supporting the warrants.	Listen and postpone judgment.
Revise your essay.	Qualifications and rebuttals or counter arguments that refute competing claims.	Bring the conversation to life; know the kinds of questions writers ask so students can identify arguments. Include question of fact, definition, quality, and policy.

Note. Adapted from Fletcher (2015), Pearson Learning (2013), and Hillocks (2011).

In the school in the present study instruction in argumentative writing also uses standards-based questions, academic vocabulary, debate, and standards-based rubrics to assess the quality of

essays. The teaching of argumentative writing extends to post-secondary schooling as well, with a structure presented for argumentation.

Van Blerkom and Mulcahy-Ernt (2005) present strategies for students for argumentative writing in college classrooms. The strategies that they include in argumentative writing resemble many of the steps taken in middle school classrooms. In order to create solid arguments, they recommend, "Presenting key points, providing evidence, find a refutational text" (p. 416) in order to determine the arguments and facts as support. These strategies are important because the Common Core State Standards (2010) addresses college and career readiness as the rationale for the shift in writing practices.

The Present Study

In the present study the teacher-researcher questions "How do teachers foster a structural, social, ideational classroom (Newell et al., 2014), while maintaining balanced literacy strategies?" Newell et al.'s and Hillocks (2010), and Toulmin's (1958) models are significant for this study. Many classrooms use structural, social, and ideational epistemologies; however, many classrooms place much emphasis on the structural process of argumentative writing. The Common Core State Standards also place emphasis on the structural elements of writing. Fostering a classroom that addresses more of a social and ideational epistemology allows the teacher-researcher to design an intervention package that combines structural, social and ideational epistemologies and augment cognitive complexity in argumentative writing. This teacher-researcher selected the integrated writing intervention developed by MacArthur, Graham and Schwartz, (1993) to determine the impact it had on students' argumentative writing that students publish on a blog site because integrated writing utilized an instructional approach

supportive of Newell et al. (2014), Hillocks (2010), and Toulmin's (1958) models. The teacher-researcher hypothesized an integrated writing intervention would support the English language arts classroom instruction in argumentative writing while fostering collaboration among students and multi-media representations of writing through blogging.

Integrated Writing Intervention

The integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) that the teacher-researcher utilized in the classroom involved specific steps for writing instruction. The five components of integrated writing that the teacher-researcher used in the seventh-grade classroom where the research took place were (a) status-checking, (b) mini-lessons, (c) student writing, (d) peer and teacher conferences, and (e) group sharing of publishing. Integrated writing follows a specific, daily structure of classroom lessons for students with and without disabilities in writing. Wright (2006) describes the intervention as,

An integrated approach to classroom writing instruction designed to accommodate the special needs of disabled writers, as well as those of their non-disabled peers. In this instructional approach, the student writes about authentic topics that have a 'real-world' purpose and relevance. Student writing is regularly shared with classmates and the instructor, with these audiences creating a sustaining social context to motivate and support the writer. Students receive instruction and feedback in an interactive manner, presented both in lecture format and through writing conferences with classmates. Technology (particularly computer word processing) is harnessed to help the writing disabled student to be more productive and to make use of software writing tools to extend his or her own capabilities in written expression. (p. 2)

Throughout the intervention, status-checking was utilized to keep track of students' points of confusion. Atwell (1998) utilized status-of-the-class checking to help students set goals for the writing process. By allowing students to be a part of the learning process, the teacher engaged students in the goals and objectives of the classroom. It was also a way for teachers to design mini-lessons based on the areas where students continue to struggle.

Atwell (1998) discussed mini-lessons as the capstones to writers' workshop. Atwell also understood that during the mini-lesson, teachers display their expertise and instill good reading and writing practices in their students. Atwell looked to her students to also share what they know and what they are struggling with. Through status-checking the teacher is able to assess where the mini-lessons must focus. The planning of the mini-lessons come from student and teacher feedback, classroom writing data, standards, and a knowledge of what effective readers and writers need to do. Atwell understood that the writing conference encourages a "community of writers and readers" (p. 150). She also recommended giving students mini-lessons on features of kids' writing. The features included procedural, literary craft, written conventions and strategies of good readers.

Integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) stresses the importance of writing every day. Writing allows students the opportunity to express their learning in meaningful ways. Student writing is the basis for the classroom discussion in the conferences. Graves and Graves (1994) value the relationship between reading and writing and see writing as a powerful tool because it "requires a reader to manipulate information and ideas actively" (p. 125). During classroom instruction, a strategy for producing student writing is to break it down into parts of the essay. It is a way for teachers to look at the student's writing process and offer feedback for improvement (Fisher, Brozo, Frey & Ivey, 2011). Integrated writing helps students

follow the model of read-write-pair-share. It is a way to promote "peer interaction and accountable talk to facilitate learning" (Fisher et al., 2011, p. 94), which is essential in conferencing. Giving students and teachers the opportunity to engage in meaningful conversations about writing is a way of giving descriptive feedback. Checklists are a way to foster conversations around the elements of writing. Atwell (1998) uses conferences as a part of a readers/writers program as a way to enhance collaboration, a 21st century skill.

Research on effective feedback in the classroom is based on letting students know how they are doing and the progress that they are making in reaching a goal (Wiggins, 2012). Wiggins understands seven major components in effective feedback. The feedback must be goal-referenced and tangible, transparent, actionable, user-friendly, timely, ongoing and consistent (Wiggins, 2012). Also conferences should encourage revision and should include descriptive feedback rather than being evaluative. Sachse-Brown and Aldridge (2013) see evaluative feedback as a way to give grades or numerical value on the written work. Rubrics help to generate the grade for these conferences. Descriptive feedback generates a conversation and gives the writers ways to revise their work.

Blogging

This teacher-researcher used the intervention of integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) strategies for writing instruction. In order to meet the needs of the "group publishing" aspect of the intervention, the teacher-researcher utilized a blogging site for students to publish their argumentative work. Along with blogging, strategies were incorporated into the classroom in order to build collaboration among middle school students; however, empirical research in this area is scarce (Pytash & Ferdig, 2014). In a recent EBSCO search under the key

words "using blogs to teach argumentative writing," one hundred and forty one results were found over the last ten years, while few pertained to argumentative writing and the Common Core State Standards (2010). Recently, blogging has been looked to as a strategy in the classroom, as a type of writing genre, and a way to engage students in social practice (Lamonica, 2010; Hew & Cheung, 2010; Efimova & de Moor, 2005; McGrail & Davis, 2011; Penrod, 2007). While blogging serves as a strategy to address the "group publishing," supplemental strategies were incorporated into the intervention package. Those strategies were progress monitoring through weekly writing prompts, teacher/student conferences, peer conferences, collaborative groups, using the language of the Common Core State Standards (2010), and using argumentative vocabulary.

Research supports utilizing blogs in classrooms. Lamonica (2010) focused her research on elementary students and found an increase in student engagement, motivation, and a positive improvement in writing skills. The study also cited an increase in vocabulary instruction, which is significant to the present study because utilizing standards-based language is an essential component when creating instructional materials that meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards (2010). Lamonica utilized sociocognitive learning as a theoretical lens as well as New Literacy Studies (Larson and Marsh, 2005) because the researcher framed the study around student collaborative efforts happening in a technological learning environment. Lamonica was a passive observer through Action Research, observing and interviewing teachers and students. Lamonica reported increased vocabulary, motivation, and student writing skills by citing evidence through student work samples.

Tarantino, McDonough and Hua (2013) understand that student connections made through social media have a positive impact on the classroom. Social media also presents

teachers with a viable way to give feedback to students and for peers to give feedback. This internet strategy could also extend to different content areas. Tarantino et al. (2013) understand that social media is linked to achievement and encourage educators to build assessment tools that foster this type of collaborative learning environment. Hew and Cheung (2010) discusses the value of using social media to extend student learning in a collaborative online environment. Students are also given the opportunity to maintain electronic portfolios through using blogs, a type of Web 2.0 technology, and go back to those portfolios to take a second look at their writing. Hew and Cheung compiled their journal as a literature review of all studies incorporating Web 2.0 interventions and the researchers found positive results when it came to blogging. Of the three studies that Hew and Chung read, two reported positive gains from pre-to-post assessments, while one reported no drops or gains. Hew and Cheung provided a concise literature review and acknowledged that more research must be done in the field. While blogs provide an online opportunity, Hew and Chung suggest that teachers still give questions for students to ponder and encourage more collaboration in the writing. Efimova and de Moor (2005) also see the potential for collaboration through the use of blogs. Giving students the opportunity to read what their peers are writing about on the same topic gives students a way to analyze other comments before formulating their own. The researchers also see blogs as a way to utilize collaborative research by including links to other articles or posts that they feel their peers should read. McGrail and Davis (2011) collected pre and post-test and student work samples, through qualitative analysis on the influence of blogs on elementary students. The student work samples from the blogs were used to assess the intervention and how blogging influenced student writing development. McGrail and Davis found that blogging takes dedication and allows collaboration in the classroom to take place in an environment beyond the classroom walls.

A main component of the intervention is for students to read authentic nonfiction articles. Ainsworth (2010) recommends that lessons surround "engaging learning experiences" (p. 159). Authentic conversation could ensue around provocative issues in society if the teacher chooses nonfiction articles that elicit a thought provoking response from students.

In order to address units surrounding argumentation, Hillocks (2011) recommends utilizing a "systematic unit planning" approach (p. 180). Table 2.5 displays Hillocks's (2011) approach.

Table 2.5:
Hillocks (2011) Systematic Unit Planning.

- 1.) Select a concept to examine. Does it have generative power? Can youngsters apply the concept to many reading and life experiences? Will students find the concept interesting?
 - 2.) Define the concepts in such a way that it can be differentiated from noninstances and seeming instances.
 - 3.) Select works that involve the concept or quality.
 - 4.) Build a unit that moves from simple to more complex texts and that provides for a gradual release of teacher responsibility.
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Note. Adapted from *Teaching argument writing, grades 6-12: Supporting claims with relevant evidence and clear reasoning* by Hillocks (2011).

The teacher-researcher utilized Hillocks's (2011) systematic unit planning, research on argumentative writing, and the review of the relevant research to create teacher-researcher materials for the teacher and the students to use during two instructional cycles. The materials will be further discussed in Chapter 3 and are located in Appendix B.

Operationally Defined Terminology

In this study a number of key terms are used, which are operationally defined as follows:

Anchor Standards: The Common Core State Standards' (2010) anchor standards were created with the goal of having a student exit high school prepared for post-secondary education or the workforce. The broad anchor standard is then translated into grade specific standards involving literature, informational text, and foundational skills in K-5, but then becoming more complex in the standards for grades 6-12 by adding literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects (Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012).

Argument: A student's ability to formulate a stance based on the nonfiction text that they are presented with. Students were asked to write persuasively, in the past, grounded in their own opinion; however, the Common Core State Standards presents a shift in writing to valuing a student's stance grounded in evidence (Hillocks, 2011; Fletcher, 2015).

Blogs: Web 2.0 Tools is the term which refers to a group of internet applications, such as wikis, podcasts, social networks and blogs used for discussion with a group of individuals (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010).

College and Career Readiness: The standards were created with keeping in mind the recommended skills for a K-12 student to have when entering college or the workforce. The recommended skills were created in 2009 by the National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (Hillocks, 2011).

Common Core State Standards: In 2009, the Common Core State Standards were created after much collaboration with state and education leaders. The Common Core State Standards

were adopted by forty-eight states and they serve as a blueprint for districts to align curriculum to five major claims in the English standards: Reading, Writing, Language, Speaking and Listening. The creation of the claims based on teacher input, collaboration with the National Educators Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the best state standards that were already in existence (Fletcher, 2015).

21st Century Skills: The skills needed for a 21st Century learner are referred to as the 4C's; critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009).

Teacher-Researcher in Action Research

The planning of engaging lessons and instructional activities around argumentation, reflecting on effective strategies for teaching argumentation, and revising instruction based on student learning has made up the teacher-researcher's epistemology and ontology in the present study. Greene's (2007) characteristics of pragmatism reflect that “current truth, meaning, and knowledge as tentative and as changing over time” (p. 83), which is the reason that the teacher-researcher chose to engage in conducting Action Research, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. This teacher-researcher formulated research questions based on John Dewey's (1949) theory of knowing as discussed in Biesta (2010). The theory of knowing drives the research through the beginning research questions.

The initial research questions surrounding student learning, student feedback and teacher reflection in Chapter 1 guided the literature review. The research questions for this Action Research study were developed based on a need for a writing intervention in the classroom to support argument writing instruction. The research questions were refined after a concise

literature review. Qualitative and quantitative data were utilized through two Action Research cycles in order to investigate the intervention of integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993). The teacher-researcher used Dewey's (1949) roles of objectivity and subjectivity in reference to transactions versus experience with regard to how the teacher-researcher gained knowledge. Biesta (2010) concurs, "Experience is, therefore, the way in which living organisms are implicated in their environment" (p. 106). Biesta (2010) agrees with Dewey's experimental learning indicating that "Learning is, therefore, basically a process of trial and error, and in one sense, this is indeed how Dewey argues that living organisms learn" (p. 107).

The world that the teacher-researcher is researching and interacting in is not an objective environment. Biesta (2010) recognizes "the worlds we construct are constructed for our own individual purposes, for our own attempts to address the problems we face" (p. 112). Dewey's theories are prominent in pragmatism because pragmatism is a "combination of action and reflection" (p. 112). The teacher-researcher is a part of the pedagogical environment that is being studied, engaging in practitioner Action Research.

Pragmatism as a construct allowed the teacher-researcher in the present study to choose applicable forms of qualitative and quantitative data and analysis techniques to determine if the intervention strategies were working as expected in the classroom. Another important component of Action Research is reflection. Reflective practice, first used by Schon (1983), is a part of teaching practices; however, Norton (2009) understands that many educators fall short in grasping the true meaning and understanding of the term. The teacher-researcher in the present study engaged in reflection as a way to address the successes and the challenges in the classroom through revision or refinement on the strategies noted in student feedback, which showed to

where they attributed their success. Norton distinguishes that the "academic who is a reflective teacher, learns by her mistakes and keeps improving, from the academic who is a reactive teacher who does the same things year after year and blames the students, or the institution, or gives some other reason, rather than examining her own practice" (p. 22). Hendricks (2013) warns that "reflection involves more than simply thinking about practice" (p. 28). Norton and Hendricks both agree that reflection is a part of professional teaching and research activities and must be systematic.

Hendricks (2013) notes that reflection is the first part of the Action Research process because of the problem identification in arguing in support of reflective practice. This teacher-researcher identified the problem in the classroom as a need for a writing intervention when instructing argumentative writing. The teacher-researcher conducted a literature review around argumentative theories, instructional theories, writing intervention and collaboration through technology. The teacher-researcher used on-going reflection, which did not end after the problem was identified. Hendricks recommendation to use reflective journals and memos was followed, allowing the researcher to synthesize trends across successes and challenges. The teacher-researcher followed Norton's (2009) suggestion of collaboration with other staff members. Hendricks and Norton agree that when an educator looks to be transformational and looking to better his or her teaching craft, reflective practice has a strong place in schools. For instance, formation of data teams is one way for Action Research to take place in schools. Through focus groups, staff surveys, and the discussion of data, problems can be identified and research-based interventions can be put into place.

Norton (2009) understands that many educators simply do not know how to reflect on practice when arguing against reflective practice. It is difficult for teachers to see weaknesses in

their own teaching and difficult to bring their challenges up to peers and administrators. Norton (2009) also notes the "considerable investment in terms of time and energy" (p. 55). Several dilemmas occur when incorporating reflection into practice. First, many teachers do not know how to be reflective practitioners. Metacognition (thinking about thinking) is a difficult task for adults. It is also one that takes time and energy. Adults run the risk of being overly critical of themselves and injuring their professional confidence. Norton realizes "reflective practice and Action Research can be criticized as being too inward looking and concerned only with the 'here and now' of immediate practical problems in teaching and learning" (p. 56). Reflection is a vital element of Action Research. Hendricks (2013) places a great deal of emphasis on it. Hendricks explains, "The process of Action Research begins with systematic, critical reflection" (p. 32). The wrong action steps will be formulated if the wrong problem is reflected upon. Encouraging students to be a part of the reflection process is also important. Continuing to ask students reflective questions about their learning is a valuable data source that will guide the process.

Overarching Research Hypotheses

The overarching research hypotheses for this study are the following:

1. Teaching argumentative writing will improve structure, ideation, social practice and cognitive complexity in student writing samples of blogs as measured by the Depth of Knowledge Framework level 4 continuum.
2. Teacher-researcher's praxis will improve as a result of conducting the Action Research project.

Research Questions

In this Action Research study the research questions are the following, followed by the independent and dependent variables:

Iteration 1: Does Integrated Writing positively impact student argumentative writing in structure, ideation, social practice and cognitive complexity, as measured by the argumentative checklist and cognitive complexity checklist?

Iteration 1 Sub Question A.) Does student feedback positively reflect using Integrated Writing within an argumentative framework?

Independent Variable 1: Argumentative checklist created with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from the literature (CCSS, 2012; Hillocks, 2011; Newell et al., 2014).

Independent Variable 2: Cognitive Complexity Checklist created with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from the literature on Webb's (2005) Level 4 Cognitive Complexity Continuum.

Dependent Variable 1: Student writing samples of full process argumentative essays written on a blogging site.

Dependent Variable 2: Student writing samples of one paragraph of argumentative writing written on a blogging site as a blog comment.

Iteration 2: Does modification to the conference schedule, conference discussion and instruction during the drafting process of writing in Integrated Writing positively impact student argumentative writing in structure, ideation, and cognitive complexity in student writing samples as measured by the argumentative checklist and cognitive complexity checklist?

Iteration 2 Sub Question B.) Does student feedback positively reflect the refinement of the intervention, Integrated Writing, within an argumentative framework?

Independent Variable 1: Argumentative checklist created with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from the literature on (CCSS, 2012; Hillocks, 2011; Newell et al., 2014).

Independent Variable 2: Cognitive Complexity Checklist created with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from the literature on Webb's (2005) Level 4 Cognitive Complexity Continuum.

Dependent Variable 1: Student writing samples of full process argumentative essays written on a blogging site.

Dependent Variable 2: Student writing samples of one paragraph of argumentative writing written on a blogging site as a blog comment.

Teacher-Researcher Reflection Question: Was the teacher-researcher successful at improving her own instructional capacity as a result of deep reflection and analysis of two iterations of using Integrated Writing?

Additional Research Questions for Chapter 6 Discussion

- 1.) How did the components of the intervention package (status-checking, mini-lesson, student writing, peer and teacher conferences, group sharing and publishing) improve in Iteration 2?
- 2.) Was the teacher-researcher successful at improving her own instructional capability?

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Study Design (Methodology Statement)

An Action Research design was adopted to implement and measure the instructional strategies of the integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) that impact student argumentative writing in a middle school classroom. The researcher was the teacher in the classroom for the study that spanned from the Fall of 2015 to the Spring of 2016. The teacher-researcher used the intervention to measure, through qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis, the impact on student argumentative writing, as evidenced through student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. The data analysis from the Iteration 1 guided the refinements made to the intervention in Iteration 2.

The teacher-researcher designed the study as Action Research because the purpose was to increase student achievement in argumentative writing and to refine the teacher's instructional practice. Action Research involved a cyclical process including plan, act and observe, reflect and revise (Hendricks, 2013). The research questions, data collection, data analysis and reflection guided the planning and revision of the Iteration 2. Research questions, data collection, data analysis and reflection in Iteration 2 provide implications for extended research, coinciding with Hendricks recommendation that Action Research is an "unending reflective process" (p. 10).

Procedures

Role of the Researcher

The teacher-researcher adopted a pragmatic stance during the study in the seventh-grade middle school classroom where the integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) was introduced. The teacher-researcher was an emic-insider during the intervention phase of Iteration I and II. The teacher-researcher acted as an etic-outsider while analyzing the data using specific procedures including descriptive statistics, thematic analysis, (Hendricks, 2013) and memo sorting (Charmaz, 2006) to reduce bias (Merriam, 2009). Table 3.1 displays the teacher-researcher's worldview matrix.

Table 3.1:
Worldview Matrix.

Researcher's Worldview	Post Positivism	Constructivism	Pragmatism
<p>Ontology: (Reality) What are the different perspectives that the teacher-researcher documents as reality?</p>	<p>From an objectivist stance, the teacher-researcher observed student learning and recorded student progress during the reading of the student blogs and blog comments to determine the impact of the intervention on argumentative writing.</p>	<p>From a subjectivist view, multiple perspectives were voiced on Integrated Writing. The teacher, along with 18 student participants contributed feedback to the efficacy of the components of the intervention. The feedback from the teacher and the 18 student participants reflected the modification to Iteration 2 of instruction.</p>	<p>"Singular and multiple realities" guided the teacher-researcher's data sources of student blogs and blog comments measured by the argumentative checklist and the Webb's level 4 checklist. The student reflections, teacher reflections and teacher memos all contributed to utilizing an objectivist and subjectivist approach. Multiple data sources contributed to the teacher-researcher's</p>

<p>Epistemology: (Knowledge) What is the role of the teacher-researcher and the researcher's relationship to the participants?</p>	<p>The teacher-researcher was an etic outsider during data analysis. Two volunteer teachers also aided the teacher-researcher during data analysis to add credibility and limit bias during the scoring of the blogs and blog comments on the measure of the argumentative checklist and Webb's (2005) cognitive complexity level 4 continuum. The teacher-researcher used a post-positivist perspective when scoring the student work samples of the blogs and blog comments and analyzing the data from the measures of the argumentative checklist and Webb's (2005) cognitive complexity level 4 continuum through descriptive statistics (Hendricks, 2013).</p>	<p>The teacher-researcher used an interpretivist perspective when employing thematic analysis (Hendricks, 2013) on the data sources of the student reflection questions 1, 2, and 3 and the teacher reflection journal questions 2 and 3. The teacher-researcher used the data sources to gain knowledge from multiple sources and multiple participants.</p>	<p>subjectivist view when answering the research questions. Student reflection questions 1, 2, and 3 aided the teacher-researcher in feedback from the student participants. The teacher memos, teacher reflection journal questions 2 and 3 also helped the reader to reflect on Integrated Writing.</p>
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Axiology: (Values) What values are brought to the study?	During the planning of the instructional cycles, unit, and measures, the teacher was an etic outsider. The teacher-researcher used a validation method of the materials that were created, discussed below. The teacher omitted names during data analysis and was assisted by two volunteer teachers to aid in the scoring of the student blogs and blog comments on the argumentative checklist and Webb's Cognitive Complexity continuum.	The researcher was the teacher in the classroom and maintained an emic insider during instruction of Integrated Writing. During the analyzing of student feedback, the teacher-researcher employed inter-rator reliability through checking the themes with the student participants to address bias.	"Multiple stances and perspectives, both objective and biased."
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Note. Adapted from Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011).

Intervention

The MacArthur, Graham and Schwartz (1993) integrated writing instructional intervention includes the following activities: status-checking, mini-lessons, student writing, peer and teacher conferences, and group sharing or publishing. The teacher-researcher created two, four-week instructional units on argumentative writing, employing the intervention. Students were instructed on the components of an argumentative essay and required to write one argumentative, full-process essay weekly on a blog site. Students were given teacher-researcher-created materials that were created from the literature on argumentation. The components of the intervention are discussed below.

Status-Checking (Instruction)

The teacher-researcher taught students to reflect on their progress through the strategy of status-checking. Students were asked to be reflective about the learning goals and objectives associated with their argumentative writing assignment. The teacher-researcher used the status-checking strategy at the start of the lessons to assess what the students were struggling with in their argumentative writing. The students were encouraged to ask questions and discuss their points of confusion during the status-checking. The teacher-researcher planned the mini-lessons after reflecting on the feedback from students. Weekly productions of argumentative blogs measured on the argumentative checklist and the Webb's Cognitive Complexity checklist also provided the teacher-researcher weekly student data for the status-checking strategy of the intervention. The teacher-researcher reflected on student learning through reading the argumentative blogs and determining the frequency of use of argumentative elements on the checklists, reflecting on student learning and instruction through writing daily memos, writing a weekly teacher reflection based on student blogs and incorporating feedback from student reflections.

Explicit Instruction (Instruction)

The teacher-researcher planned the mini-lessons and delivered the instruction to the students through explicit instruction (Goeke, 2009). The teacher-researcher explicitly instructed students on thesis statements, claims, counterclaims, APA format and the learning standards that were identified for students to be successful in argumentative writing as noted by Toulmin (1958), Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011), and Newell et al. (2014). The teacher-researcher explicitly instructed the students within ten minutes of the start of the class

and modeled the writing process for the students. Explicit instructions were delivered to whole groups, small groups and during conferences during Iteration 2.

Student Writing (Instruction)

Writing instruction included pre-writing, drafting, citing and analyzing textual evidence, writing thesis statements and topic sentences. The students were given class time to draft and write the body of their blog and upload their final argumentative drafts on the blog site. Students produced one full process, five paragraph argumentative blog weekly for two, four week iterations of research, totaling seventy-two typed blogs in Iteration 1 and Iteration 2.

Peer and Teacher Conferences (Instruction)

Iteration 1: Students used the argumentative conference checklist and the cognitive complexity checklist to guide the conversation on argumentative blogs with peers and with the teacher-researcher. The teacher-researcher conducted writing conferences after final drafts were uploaded onto KidBlog. The teacher-researcher gave the students feedback on their blogs, and individually instructed students on errors within the argumentative framework based on the models of Toulmin (1958), Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011) and Newell et al. (2014).

Iteration 2: The teacher-researcher modified the conference schedule in Iteration 2 after analyzing data and reflections from Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher modified the conference discussion during Iteration 2 to focus on the Ideational Epistemology. The teacher-researcher used the conferences to deliver modeling and explicit instruction to assist students with the weaknesses in writing found through Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher scheduled peer and

teacher conferences during the drafting process, so students could revise their work before uploading to the site, KidBlog.

Group Sharing or Publishing (Instruction)

Students were instructed on how to read their peers' work and commented on a peer's blog in order to foster collaboration and debate through the blog site.

Intervention Instruments

The teacher-researcher created intervention instruments for Iteration I and 2 as seen in Appendix B. The teaching materials included a unit, a unit research plan, essential questions, nonfiction reading articles (not included in the appendix), a teacher reflection journal template, and a teacher memo template.

The research plan changed after Iteration 1 to reflect procedural and instructional changes. Data from Iteration 1 reflected student weaknesses in the Structural Epistemology of a claim and warrant based in evidence. Data from Iteration 1 reflected student weaknesses in the Ideational Epistemology. Data from Iteration 1 reflected student weaknesses in the synthesis category of cognitive complexity. The teacher-researcher made modification to Iteration 2 to focus on the areas of weakness and incorporate student feedback on utilizing conferences and collaboration. The teacher-researcher held conferences during the student drafting process of blogs instead of after the blogs were uploaded as in Iteration 1. The conference conversation also centered on discussing with students how they would propose a solution to the essential question, using evidence from the article. The conferences also were used as a way to deliver explicit instruction and modeling during Iteration 2.

The student materials included an annotating checklist, graphic organizer, student reflection questions, an argumentative writing conference and a cognitive complexity checklist. The student materials did not change from Iteration 1 to Iteration 2. The articles were changed during Iteration 2 to reflect four different societal topics. Four different essential questions were written for Iteration 2 of instruction.

The measures included a cognitive complexity checklist created by the teacher-researcher from Webb's (2005) Cognitive Complexity Level 4 continuum (QN), a teacher-researcher created argumentative checklist (QN), and researcher memos (QL). The teacher reflection journal (QL) and the student reflections (QL) were also considered when measuring the strengths and challenges of the intervention.

The teacher-researcher vetted the teacher materials, student materials and measures through a validation process for creating instructional materials. The validation process began during a needs assessment of the local conditions in the Spring of 2015 that guided a concise review of literature on argumentation (Toulmin, 1958, Hillocks, 2011, Newell et al., 2014), a review of the seventh-grade level Common Core State Standards (2010) expectations (displayed in Table 3.2), feedback from students, and feedback from an "expert panel." The needs assessment guided the intervention identification and the materials that were created by the teacher-researcher through the literature.

Table 3.2:
Common Core State Standards (2010) Argumentative Standards.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.d
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.	Establish and maintain a formal style.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.a	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.c	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.e
Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.	Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.	Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

The teacher-researcher utilized the grade level Common Core State Standards (2010) to guide the planning process. Wiggins and McTighe (2004) assert that planning processes begin with a backward design. The teacher-researcher looked at the grade level standards in order to understand the standards that students are assessed on in their argumentative writing. The teacher-researcher used the standards to guide the unit and instructional materials that were created.

The teacher-researcher revised the materials and incorporated feedback from the students after the four week needs assessment in the Spring of 2015. Before the teacher-researcher handed out the materials to the students in October of 2015, the teacher-researcher disseminated the materials to an “expert panel” of eight, seventh-grade English language arts teachers, including a Literacy Coach and a Literacy Interventionist. The teacher-researcher received feedback on the materials that were uploaded on Google Drive. The "expert panel" reviewed the materials based on the Unit Development Criteria (Equip Rubric, 2014). The essential questions were reviewed

based on the Checklist for Evaluating/Developing Item/Question Quality (achievethecore.org).

The teacher-researcher revised the materials, incorporating feedback from the "expert panel" and from the students during the needs assessment of the local conditions. The steps that the teacher-researcher took during the validation process are in Table 3.3. The materials are discussed below.

Table 3.3:
Validation Steps, Stasaitis (2016).

Steps that the teacher-researcher took to validate materials
Create materials based off of Toulmin (1958), Hillocks (2011), Newell et al. (2014).
Create materials based on the Common Core State (2010) grade level Standards.
Create materials during needs assessment of local conditions in 2015.
Administer materials to students during the needs assessment.
Get feedback from students and revise.
Disseminate materials to the "expert panel."
Request feedback from the "expert panel."
Incorporate feedback and revise.

Instruments

Unit (Teaching Material)

The district literacy team, comprised of a Literacy Supervisor, Literacy Coach, Literacy Interventionist, and a Literacy Teacher created unit templates, adapted from CCS-ELA Systems of Professional Learning and Curriculum and from Lois Lanning (2014). The district teachers, including the teacher-researcher, were encouraged to create meaningful instructional units, inclusive of argumentative writing, based on the Common Core State Standards (2010). The

teacher-researcher created two, four week instructional units, focusing on argumentative writing. The teacher-researcher followed steps to unit planning as seen in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4:

Unit Development Guidelines Lois Lanning (2014).

Steps to Curriculum Development
Decide on a unit title.
Identify a major concept to serve as a suitable conceptual lens for your study.
Web the subtopics and concepts study, around the conceptual lens, unit title, and web strands.
Using the concepts from the unit web, write 8-12 generalizations to focus the unit work to deeper levels of thinking and understanding.
Write focus/guiding questions.
Identify the critical knowledge (know) and the key skills (do) that students must learn within the unit.
Design the culminating performance task and rubric.
Include suggestions for differentiation, within unit assessments, learning resources.
Write an engaging scenario that teachers will use to start the unit.

The teacher-researcher began the planning for the argumentative unit by considering backward design components (McTighe and Grant, 2004). The teacher-researcher used the Common Core State Standards (2010), Toulmin (1958), Hillocks (2011), and Newell et al. (2014) to create the theoretical themes from the literature that were used to create the conference checklist and cognitive complexity checklist that students used to guide the discussion of an effective argumentative writing production.

Research Plan (Teaching Material)

The teacher-researcher created two research plans for two iterations of argumentative instruction in order to document the days of the instructional cycle. The teacher-researcher created the plan for Iteration 1 before students received instruction. The teacher-researcher created the plan for Iteration 2 after a six week data analysis based on the data from Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher incorporated student feedback from the student reflections and coded the data from the teacher reflection journal and the student writing samples, in order to guide the planning of Iteration 2.

Essential Questions (Teaching Material)

The teacher-researcher formulated essential questions based on the interests of the seventh-grade students. Informal discussions with students in the Spring of 2015 were conducted about topics in society that students had read about, heard about in the media, and wanted to discuss in class. The students agreed on the topics for the class writing tasks. Those topics were healthy eating, technology and school-centered issues. The teacher-researcher created four essential questions for Iteration 1 and four different essential questions for Iteration 2. The questions are as follows:

Iteration 1

- 1.) Should soda and candy be a part of the school lunch?
- 2.) Should you think twice before eating fast food?
- 3.) Do uniforms affect student learning?
- 4.) Is homework beneficial?

Iteration 2

- 1.) Is the internet helping or hindering society?
- 2.) Should cell phones be allowed in school?
- 3.) Should the driving age be lowered?
- 4.) Does television and video violence desensitize society?

Articles (Teaching Material)

The teacher-researcher utilized a website for nonfiction articles to pass out to students entitled, NEWSLA.COM. The teacher-researcher searched the website for articles that dealt with the topics of interest that the students cited. The teacher-researcher also found articles on the website, SCHOLASTIC.COM. The articles that were chosen were vetted by using the Common Core State Standards (2010) seventh-grade lexile band recommendations of 925L-1185L for reading complex texts.

Weekly Teacher Reflection Template (Teaching Material)

The teacher-researcher created a weekly reflection template. The template included questions that guided the teacher-researcher reflection about the student work. They were based on the argumentative principles that were created utilizing the literature of Toulmin (1958), Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011), and Newell et al. (2014). After the teacher-researcher looked at the student work samples, the teacher-researcher documented the areas of strength and weakness in the student blogs in relation to the argumentative principles that the blogs exhibited. The teacher-researcher created goals for the students and a reflection on instructional practices that would impact the argumentative writing elements that students were

not including in their blogs. The teacher-researcher reflections drove the planning decisions for Iteration 2. The weekly reflection template is in Appendix B.

Daily Teacher-Researcher Memos (Teaching Materials)

The teacher-researcher created a daily teacher-researcher memo template. The template included questions that drove the teacher-researcher's reflection on student learning of the argumentative elements and the intervention. The memo template was adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart's (1982) suggestions for reflecting on Action Research. The reflections were completed daily, in order to reflect on student learning and teaching practice. The teacher-researcher memo template is in Appendix B.

Student Materials

Annotating Checklist

The teacher-researcher created the annotating checklist based on Toulmin (1958), Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011), and Newell et al. (2014), as a tool for students to use when reading the nonfiction articles. The annotating checklist provided students with a way to organize their thoughts when reading. The students highlighted and annotated the articles. The students looked for evidence from the text to back up the claims and counterclaims that they made in their writing. The checklist is in Appendix B.

Graphic Organizer

Students began pre-writing activities after they read the nonfiction articles. The teacher-researcher created a graphic organizer for students to use as a pre-writing tool based on the argumentative principles of Toulmin (1958), Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks

(2011), and Newell et al. (2014). The graphic organizer was organized with text boxes for the introduction to the paper, claim, counterclaim, and evidence. The graphic organizer was based on the literature about argumentative elements. The student input and the organizer was shared with other seventh-grade English language arts teachers and the Literacy Coach. Feedback was provided to the teacher-researcher and the teacher-researcher revised the organizer. The graphic organizer is located in Appendix B.

KidBlog

Using KidBlog was a strategy giving students the opportunity to produce their argumentative work using multimedia technology. Blogging is a way for students to express their writing in an internet application that allows students to comment on each other's writing. KidBlog is a password protected site designed for teachers working with student writing skills. The site was accessed by the teacher, students, and parents, all who had a password. Students produced one full process argumentative blog every week for two Iterations of instruction. The teacher-researcher secured a grant in the Fall of 2015 for this research, and with the grant money the teacher purchased ten laptops for students to access the KidBlog site.

Argumentative Conference Checklist/Cognitive Complexity Checklist

The teacher-researcher created an argumentative conference checklist and a cognitive complexity checklist as a measure and as a student material. The students used the checklists during conferences to bring an argumentative focus to the conference. The conference checklists were created from the literature on argumentative writing (Toulmin, 1958, Common Core State Standards, 2010, Hillocks 2011, and Newell et al., 2014) and cognitive complexity (Webb, 2005). Students used the checklists during peer-peer and peer-teacher conferences. The teacher-

researcher created the checklists with three check boxes for the students to reflect on their own work, the peers to look for the inclusion of the argumentative elements, and for the teacher to look for the inclusion of the argumentative elements. The Common Core State Standards were the guides for the grade level expectations for the students to achieve in their blog writing. The expectations in the standards aligned with Hillocks's work on argumentation that many teachers utilize when teaching argumentative writing. Hillocks discussed the basic elements of Toulmin's argument as claim, evidence, warrants and rebuttals. The structural focus of the writing included Hillocks argumentative elements, and Newell et al.'s epistemologies of structural, ideational, and social practice. The Common Core State Standards also provided structural competencies that were included in the argumentative checklist. The checklists also used the theoretical themes (Glaser, 1978) that the teacher-researcher used when data analysis began. The checklist was a way for the teacher-researcher to measure the inclusion of the argumentative elements. The conference checklists are in Appendix B.

Student Reflection Questions

Students answered three reflection questions about the instruction that they received on argumentative writing at the end of Iterations 1 and 2. The questions were:

- 1.) What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?
- 2.) What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?
- 3.) What instructional strategies will help you to improve your argumentative writing?

Measures

Webb's Cognitive Complexity Framework Checklist (Measure)

The teacher-researcher read the blogs and analyzed cognitive complexity in the blogs by seeing if they fit into the categories in the Level 4 cognitive complexity continuum (Webb, 2005). The Depth of Knowledge chart is used by educators as a teaching tool to increase the planning of rigorous lessons to promote cognitive complexity in student thinking. The cognitive complexity continuum, Level 4 theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) were designing-creating, connecting, synthesizing, applying concepts, critiquing, analyzing, and proving. The teacher-researcher created a checklist with the Cognitive Complexity categories to gauge the frequency of use in student blogs and blog comments.

Argumentative Conference Checklist (Measure)

The teacher-researcher utilized the argumentative writing conference checklist to analyze the data from student blogs and student blog comments. The students were given the checklist in advance to inform them of the argumentative elements, derived from the literature, that they would be assessed on in their blogs. Students used the checklist during peer and teacher conferences. The teacher-researcher used the checklist to determine the inclusion of the argumentative elements in the blogs.

Teacher-Researcher Matrix (Measure)

The teacher-researcher matrix or the teacher-researcher memos is included as a teaching material and as a measure to measure the efficacy of the intervention based on classroom observations and reflections from the teacher-researcher. The memo template was created from

Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) with guiding questions to foster daily reflections created by the teacher.

Bounding the Case

Participants / Location/ Sample

The participants were from a seventh-grade, middle school classroom, located in Connecticut, and chosen out of a convenience sample because the researcher was the teacher in the classroom. The location site is a general education, urban middle school, comprised of 85.4% students eligible for free and reduced lunch. The total enrollment of the student body is 1206 students.

The rationale for the study of student writing in the district was that there were low seventh-grade scores on standardized tests; 23% of seventh-grade students attending the middle school met goal on the state's standardized writing assessments (State Department of Education 2010-11). The middle school is divided into three houses; each house services sixth to eighth grade students. Each teaching team is comprised of a social studies, science and math teacher, while two reading and language arts teachers teach students in a ninety-minute block. There were eighteen student participants in the study during Iteration 1 and Iteration 2. The students were grouped heterogeneously, none identified as eligible for special education services.

The teacher-researcher obtained Instructional Review Board (IRB) approval from the university where the teacher-researcher studies. Eighteen student participants and their parents/guardians were given an invitation letter in order to grant the teacher-researcher permission to use their work (without names), and the invitation letter was discussed with parents at the school-wide open house in October of 2015. Data collection of student work began

after permission forms were passed out and returned. The teacher-researcher used passive permission to inform parents of the argumentative curriculum unit that students were studying. Information was put on the invitation letter on how to opt out of the study or eliminate the students work from being used in the study. All students were participating in the unit, as argumentative writing instruction is a district requirement.

Criteria for student selection did not exclude participants based on age, gender, or ethnicity. Students were given an opportunity to "opt-out" of the research by contacting the researcher. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all eighteen participants, and students used numerical identification on the blog site where they uploaded their argumentative writing. The invitation letter and the IRB permission to research notice are located in Appendix A.

Data Collection

Data that was collected for the present study included a teacher reflection journal, teacher memos, student reflections, student blogs, student blog comments, and observational data.

Teacher Reflection Journal (Written Artifact)

The weekly teacher reflection journals focused on the strengths and weaknesses of the student argumentative writing samples. The questions that guided the teacher's reflection were the following: (1) What area of the argumentative framework needed improvement to meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards grade level expectations? (2) What integrated writing instructional strategies will be used to target the focus areas? (3) Did the teacher use **Specific Measureable Attainable Realistic Timely** goals for the next week of instruction?

Daily Teacher-Researcher Memos (Written Artifact/Measure)

The teacher-researcher compiled daily memos derived from Kemmis and McTaggart (1982) four recommendations:

- 1) What is the plan to improve what is already happening?
- 2) How will the plan be implemented?
- 3) What are the observable effects of the action in the classroom?
- 4) What are reflections on further learning, further planning and action?

Student Blogs (Written Artifacts)

The teacher-researcher collected seventy-two student blogs during Iteration 1 and seventy-two student blogs during Iteration 2. These blogs contained full page argumentative writing responses to the prompts. The argumentative conference checklist and cognitive complexity checklist was used as a measure and guided the teacher-researcher in checking the frequency of use of the argumentative elements and cognitive complexity level 4 categories. The teacher-researcher pulled the argumentative essays from the blog site, KidBlog, and copied them onto a word document.

Student Blog Comments (Written Artifacts)

The teacher-researcher collected student comments on their peers' blogs and shared aspects of the intervention.

Student Reflections (Written Artifacts)

Eighteen student participants wrote reflections on their own work and on the instruction using three questions:

- (1) What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?
- (2) What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?
- (3) What instructional strategies will help you to improve your argumentative writing?

Data Analysis

Data Preparation

The teacher-researcher prepared data for analysis by removing any identifiers of the student or school name. The researcher maintained the confidentiality of the participants during the organization of the data sources. The researcher prepared a folder for each student participant, replacing names with numerical numbers. The data collected that was discussed above was analyzed through quantitative and qualitative analysis procedures.

The researcher kept in mind the cyclical nature of Action Research in order to analyze data, as one of the method's distinguishing characteristics. Herr and Anderson (2005) acknowledge, "Each cycle increases the researcher's knowledge of the original question, puzzle, or problem" (p. 5). The data analysis from Iteration 1 guided the refinement to the intervention in Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher analyzed the teacher reflection journal questions 2 and 3 through open-coding and derived codes from the literature in the intervention of integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham and Schwartz, 1993) as seen in Table 3.5 and Table 3.6. The coding guided the planning of Iteration 2 and the coding from Iteration 2 has implications for extended research.

Table 3.5:
Codes that emerged from Teacher Reflection Questions Iteration 1.

What integrated writing instructional strategies will be used to target the focus areas?	Did the teacher use Specific M easureable A ttainable R ealistic T imely goals for the next week of instruction?
Derived Coding	Open-Coding
Conferencing	Goal-setting
Delivering mini-lessons	
Status-checking or progress monitoring	

Table 3.6:
Codes that emerged from Teacher Reflection Questions Iteration 2.

What integrated writing instructional strategies will be used to target the focus areas?	Did the teacher use Specific M easureable A ttainable R ealistic T imely goals for the next week of instruction?
Derived Coding	Open-Coding
Conferencing	Goal-setting
Delivering mini-lessons	
Status-checking or progress monitoring	

The teacher-researcher analyzed the Teacher Memos that were completed on a daily basis by derived codes from the literature on the intervention, integrated writing. The codes that were derived from the teacher memos during Iterations 1 and 2 were status-checking, delivering mini-lessons, student writing, peer and teacher conferencing and group sharing and publishing.

The teacher-researcher analyzed student writing samples of blogs by using the Argumentative Checklist to measure frequencies and measured cognitive complexity of student

writing by using the Cognitive Complexity Checklist to gauge the strengths and weaknesses in argumentative elements and cognitive complexity of student blogs. Descriptive statistics (Hendricks, 2013) was employed.

The teacher-researcher analyzed student blogs weekly in order to document students' frequency of use of the argumentative elements derived from the literature. The frequency counts of the argumentative components were graphed for the class as a whole to gauge student progress on meeting the argumentative elements recommended from the literature. Each argumentative element in the checklist received a 0 or 1 numerical score for the inclusion and quality of development of the argumentative element. The teacher-researcher displayed the classroom data weekly, so students were aware of their progress. The argumentative checklist was created with theoretical codes derived from Newell et al.'s (2014) argumentative epistemologies, the Common Core State Standards (2010), and Hillocks (2011). The researcher analyzed eighteen student blogs and student blog comments weekly, totaling seventy-two blogs and blog comments during Iteration 1 and seventy-two blogs and blog comments for Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher documented the frequency of use of the argumentative elements. The argumentative elements used to code the blogs are summarized in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7:

Argumentative Epistemologies: Adapted from Toulmin (1058), Hillocks (2011), Common Core State Standards (2010), Newell et al. (2014).

Structural Components of Argumentative writing	Ideational Components of Argumentative writing	Social Practice Components of Argumentative writing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the topic • Claim • Warrant based in evidence • Analysis of evidence • Rebuttal • Cite appropriately • Transition words • Use of argumentative vocabulary • Use multiple sources • Conclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore your own idea • Use evidence to back up your idea • Tie your idea to the authors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize your audience • Comment on peers blogs • Use evidence to support counter arguments

The teacher-researcher analyzed cognitive complexity with the checklist created according to the categories based on the Level 4 cognitive complexity continuum, which includes designing-creating, connecting, synthesizing, applying concepts, critiquing, analyzing, and proving.

The teacher-researcher printed student reflections from eighteen students after Iteration 1 and Iteration 2. The researcher employed thematic analysis (Hendricks, 2013) to build general themes from specific examples in the data (p. 155). Coding procedures varied depending on the student reflection question. A grounded theory approach (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) was used to open-code reflection question 1 and 3, while derived themes from the literature were used to code reflection question 2 as seen in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8:

Codes that Emerged from Student Reflection Questions Iteration 1

Open-Coding	Derived Themes from Newell et al. (2014)	Open-Coding
1.) What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?	2.) What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?	3.) What instructional strategies will help you to improve your argumentative writing?
Collaborating with peers/teacher in the classroom	<i>Structural Epistemology:</i> Identifying the counterclaim Analyzing textual evidence Citing/writing evidence Organizing Introducing both sides of the argument	Utilizing teacher-created materials
Writing a draft	<i>Ideational Epistemology:</i> Exploring own ideas	Collaborating with peers
Utilizing a graphic organizer		Writing a draft
Making annotations		
Accessing KidBlog		
Teacher/peer modeling of argumentation		

The themes from Iteration 1 guided the planning of Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher utilized the feedback from the students to revise the intervention cycle's conference schedule, conference discussion and emphasis on the drafting process. Student reflections from Iteration 2 were coded the same way as Iteration 1 and are in Table 3.9. The codes from Iteration 2 have implications for extended research.

Table 3.9:
Codes that Emerged from Student Reflection Questions Iteration 2

Open-Coding	Derived Themes from Newell et al. (2014)	Open-Coding
1.) What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?	2.) What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?	3.) What instructional strategies will help you to improve your argumentative writing?
Conferencing with drafts	<i>Structural Epistemology:</i> Identifying the counterclaim Analyzing textual evidence Citing/writing evidence Organizing Introducing both sides of the argument	Teacher modeling of argumentation
Conferencing with peers	<i>Ideational Epistemology:</i> Exploring own ideas	Collaborating with peers
Utilizing drafting materials		Utilizing teacher-created materials
Making annotations		Reflecting on final thoughts
Teacher/peer modeling of argumentation		

Bias

Addressing the teacher-researcher's positionality and acknowledging that the teacher is the main instrument in data collection and analysis addresses the bias and beliefs held by the teacher. Hendricks (2013) points out that the objective of Action Research is not to generalize the findings but to contextualize strategies and approaches to teaching argumentative writing. In order to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, steps were taken to address that the teacher-researcher conducted insider Action Research (Herr & Anderson, 2015). The following three steps were used: (1) acknowledging that the teacher-researcher is the main

instrument in data collection, (2) using "Self-critique and reflexivity to gain some distance from the familiar" (p. 11), (3) the teacher-researcher wrote weekly reflection journals during the instruction of the two iterations to add depth and breadth to the qualitative data coded for themes. The reflection journals were completed after reviewing blogging data allowing the researcher to further reflect on areas of strengths and weaknesses in the students' inclusion of argumentative elements in their writing.

Sampling

The sample was selected out of convenience as the researcher is the teacher in the 7th grade classroom. The convenience sample is made up of one English Language Arts class, involving 18 heterogeneously grouped students, none being identified as special education students.

Teacher-Researcher and Students

Students were informed, as well as their parents, that the research was being completed in order to improve student argumentative writing and the teacher's instructional strategies. Students were not graded on a rubric, and the writing samples were not graded as summative assessments. The writing samples were used to display the argumentative elements and help the students to improve in areas of weakness. Students were given numerical numbers to use on all documents, and the only time that the teacher knew the identity of the person's writing was during the conferencing. Students used the argumentative writing checklist with the derived themes during conferences. The official coding was done later in the week by the teacher-researcher after student work was printed from the blogging site. Numerical numbers were the only identifiers of the data. In order to address the bias and beliefs that the teacher-researcher has

toward her students, two volunteer seventh grade teachers in the building were asked to assist in the coding process. The two volunteer teachers agreed to assist in the weekly coding of the eighteen student blogs and blog comments. They had no interaction with the students and knew them only by their numerical numbers. The teachers did not know the gender of the students, academic performance, race or any other identifiers. The two teachers were trained in the scoring of argumentative writing and had previously taught units on argumentative writing. Evidence was highlighted in the student blogs to show inclusion of the theoretical themes of the argumentative elements during coding. If there was disagreement on the inclusion or quality of the argumentative elements between the three teachers, a conversation was held about the blog. An agreement was made by a majority vote among the three teachers.

Credibility of the Findings

The teacher-researcher used Creswell (2007) and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendations for increasing the credibility of the findings. This included triangulation of data sources to look at the research questions from different perspectives and using a form of expert audit by consulting two other teachers for support in the holistic scoring process of argumentative writing. Member-checking was also employed where students provided feedback concerning the themes that emerged from their work after the teacher coded their reflections and blogs.

Triangulation of Data Sources

The teacher-researcher used triangulation (Patton, 2001) of the data sources. The data sources that were triangulated were the student blogs and blog comments, measured by the argumentative and cognitive complexity checklists, the teacher-researcher memos, the teacher-

researcher reflection journal, and the student reflections. The data analysis of the data from Iteration 1 guided the teacher-researcher's deep reflection and planning a refinement to the intervention in Iteration 2.

Use of Rich Data

The teacher-researcher copied student blogs onto a Microsoft Word document from the blog site and totaled seventy two pages from Iteration 1 and seventy two pages from Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher memos from Iteration 1 and 2 totaled twenty three typed pages. The teacher-researcher copied student reflections onto a Microsoft Word document from the blog site and totaled eighteen pages from Iteration 1 and eighteen pages from Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher copied the teacher reflection journal and it totaled ten pages from Iteration 1 and ten pages from Iteration 2. The data from two iterations of research totaled two hundred twenty three transcribed verbatim pages to represent the students and the teacher.

Member Checking

The teacher-researcher employed member checking (Creswell, 2009, 2012) with participants in all stages of data analysis. The teacher-researcher shared the emergent themes that presented in the student reflections and the teacher-researcher updated the students on their individual progress during writing conferences. Students were aware of their progress on the argumentative checklist and the cognitive complexity checklist.

Limitations

The limitations in this study included the small convenience sample and the inability to generalize findings and results about the population of the research site. The purpose of this

study was to improve students' use of argumentative elements in their writing with the support of an instructional intervention and to improve the teacher's writing instructional strategies and “to generate new knowledge” that was "relevant to the local setting” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 67).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The results of this Action Research study are presented in this chapter organized by data sources and research questions.

Quantitative Data Iteration 1 Argumentative Checklist

The teacher-researcher analyzed student blogs weekly in order to document students' frequency of use of the argumentative elements derived from the literature on Toulmin (1958), the Common Core State Standards (2010) and Newell et al., (2014), as seen in the argumentative checklist in Table 4.1. Students were instructed on the argumentative elements that were required to write a successful argumentative blog through the integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993). The students were provided with an argumentative checklist that was used weekly during student conferences with a peer and with the teacher-researcher. The checklist was utilized as a teaching tool and as a way to track students' progress in using argumentative elements in their blogs. The students held conferences with peers before the blogs were uploaded to KidBlog and then held conferences with the teacher after the blogs were uploaded during Iteration 1. The argumentative checklist was completed during conferences with the teacher and with their peers and used to guide conversation about writing. The students kept their weekly checklists so they could set weekly goals on what argumentative elements they needed to work on, while the teacher recorded the frequencies of the whole class. The whole class frequencies were used to guide planning and instruction and as a way for the teacher-researcher to set weekly goals for student learning.

Table 4.1 is provided as descriptive statistics of the blogs. The frequency counts of the argumentative components were graphed (Hendricks, 2013) for the class as a whole to gauge student progress on meeting the argumentative elements recommended from the literature. The teacher-researcher used the checklist from Iteration 1 to aid in the planning of Iteration 2. The argumentative elements that students did not improve frequency on from the beginning to the end Iteration 1 are bolded in Table 4.1. Those argumentative elements were 1) claim, 2) warrant based in evidence, 3) explore your own idea, 4) use evidence to back up your idea, 5) more than one source, 6) comment on a peers' blog. Iteration 2 was planned with a focus on improving the claim and warrant as noted in the structural epistemology and the ideational epistemology categories.

Table 4.1:
Argumentative Element Frequencies, Iteration 1, Stasaitis, 2016.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Structural				
Introduction to the topic	67%	39%	94%	83%
Claim	100%	95%	100%	94%
Warrant based in evidence	94%	83%	100%	83%
Analysis of evidence	72%	61%	94%	72%
Rebuttal	44%	61%	100%	78%
Cite appropriately	28%	17%	50%	78%
Transition words	44%	44%	94%	72%
Use of argumentative vocabulary	33%	50%	94%	72%
Use of multiple sources	44%	83%	94%	72%
Conclusion	44%	83%	94%	72%
Ideational				
Explore your own idea	28%	.06%	33%	17%
Use evidence to back up your idea	17%	0%	28%	17%
More than one source	44%	0%	28%	17%
Tie your idea to the authors	11%	0%	28%	17%
Social Practice				
Recognize your audience	61%	100%	78%	83%
Comment on peers' blogs	100%	100%	78%	83%
Use evidence to support counter arguments	61%	61%	78%	72%

These argumentative elements were focused on as a high priority for designing instruction in the planning of Iteration 2. Analysis of the weekly numerical data guided the planning for the next week of instruction. Analysis of numerical data from Week 4 guided the planning for Iteration 2. Students struggled with the argumentative elements focusing on the Ideational Epistemology; therefore, the teacher-researcher planned Iteration 2 with keeping in mind the points that students struggled with and planned integrated writing instruction (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) on the epistemologies that needed more improvement. The six argumentative elements that students struggled with are explained in Appendix D with evidence from student blogs.

Quantitative Data Iteration 1 Cognitive Complexity Checklist

The teacher-researcher designed the study grounded in the principals of the Common Core State Standards (2010), research on argumentative writing instruction (Toulmin, 1958; Hillocks, 2011; Newell et al., 2014), integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham, & Schwartz, 1993) as an intervention, 21st Century skills with technology exposure and cognitive complexity (Webb, 2005).

The cognitive complexity continuum, Level 4 theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) that guided the teacher-researcher created cognitive complexity checklist student were 1) design/create, 2) connect, 3) synthesize, 4) apply concepts, 5) critique, 6) analyze, and 7) prove. Table 4.2 displays descriptive statistics (Hendricks, 2013) of student frequencies that were recorded when writing argumentative blogs with cognitive complexity. The seven cognitive complexity Level 4 elements are explained in Appendix D with evidence from student blogs.

Table 4.2:
Cognitive Complexity Frequencies, Iteration 1, Stasaitis, 2016.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Structural				
Design/Create	67%	70%	67%	67%
Apply Concepts	83%	85%	90%	90%
Analyze	72%	61%	94%	72%
Prove	44%	83%	94%	72%
Ideational				
Connect	11%	0%	28%	17%
Synthesize	17%	0%	28%	17%
Social Practice				
Critique	61%	61%	78%	72%

Qualitative Data Iteration 1

Student Reflection Questions 1, 2 and 3, Teacher Reflection Journal Questions 2 and 3, Teacher Memos

Student Reflection Question 1 (SRQ1) asked students: "What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?" Six themes emerged during thematic data analysis (Hendricks, 2013) and open-coding. A grounded theory approach was utilized when analyzing the qualitative data of the Student Reflection Question 1 (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). The themes were collaborating with peers/teacher in the classroom, writing a draft, utilizing a graphic organizer, making annotations, accessing KidBlog, and teacher/peer modeling of argumentation. These themes were used to plan instruction for Iteration 2.

Collaborating with Peers/Teacher in the Classroom

The writing conference was one of the integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) strategies that was discussed by students, as evidenced in student reflections. Students sat down with their peers during conferences to go over the checklist to see if their

writing included the argumentative elements that were needed to write a successful blog. The conferences consisted of peer conferences and teacher/student conferences. Student 1201 wrote, "I love letting our peers respond to our writing on the writing checklist" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). This quote shows that the argumentative checklist brought meaning to the conversation.

Classroom collaboration extended the feedback more than the conferences did. Student 1216 wrote, "Another thing that really helped me was the conference because the conference showed me what I did wrong, what I did right, what I needed to fix, and how to fix the errors in my blog" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016) while Student 1213 wrote, "Group work helped me because I like to communicate with my peers" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Communication with peers was a strategy of integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) that called for collaboration. Student 1209 remarked, "The group/partner work helped me a lot because I got to hear other people's opinion, rather than just my own, which I think made my blogs better" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1201 acknowledged, "If we just did the (conference checklist) ourselves, yes we would point out our flaws, but everyone has bias, so (working with others) was a huge help" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Writing a Draft

Students discussed the ease of writing blogs when they were able to have a draft in place first. Students were directed to do pre-writing; however, many drafts were incomplete before they began blogging. Student 1205 wrote that, "...writing a draft before we write the blogs on the website because it helps me get all information organized and it helps me fix my mistakes" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Writing the blogs seemed time consuming to some students,

Student 1206 acknowledged: "I now realize that if I write down my thoughts before I write I can get things done quicker" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Students wrote their first drafts down on paper during class, and then uploaded their work to the blog site. Student 1207 cited, "I think I can improve my writing by just practicing and revising" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1206 affirmed: "When I wrote down my quotes and analyzations about the text it really helped me..." (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1216 acknowledged, "The graphic organizer was almost like a rough draft of what I was going to do" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Utilizing a Graphic Organizer

Students referenced the graphic organizer in their reflections of pre-writing. Students also wrote about the impact of the organizer. The teacher planned for the graphic organizers to be done as a pre-writing activity. Student 1215 wrote, "What helped me in the blogs was using my graphic organizer and reading my peers blogs for guidance" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1217 referred to the organizer and the checklist noting, "The graphic organizer and the reading checklist helped me to organize my thoughts more clearly..."(SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1216 stated, "What especially helped me with the blogs was the graphic organizer because with it I knew what to write and how I was going to write it" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1213 affirmed, "The graphic organizer showed me the steps to writing a blog" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1218 wrote, "The organizer was the best part of the blog because when I got to write the blog, I was prepared and organized" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Making Annotations

Students were provided with annotation guides to focus their reading on looking for the elements that they could use to present an effective argumentative blog. Annotation guides and articles that were read in class were discussed in student reflections. Student 1214 reflected, "A couple strategies that helped me with the blogs were to highlight and annotate the articles" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1217 cited, "The annotating checklist helps me to prepare my writing and get my thoughts and ideas together in an organized manner" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1206 discussed the mini-lessons on annotations: "I also think that when we had the APA lesson, it helped me annotate better" and "Even the lesson about APA citing was a great help" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Students were instructed on APA format because the Common Core State Standards (2010) do not document a specific citation association.

Accessing KidBlog

Students reflected on the online access that the blogs provided. Student 1202 stated, "What helped me during the blog was the research because I had little knowledge about the topics but then I looked it up and I learned more about the topics" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1207 reiterated, "One way KidBlog helped me was making me want to do it" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Teacher/Peer Modeling Argumentation

The teacher-researcher used mini-lessons when instructing students on blog formats, blog expectations, and APA citations of blogs. Students reflected on the impact that teacher modeling and peer modeling had on their writing. Student 1215 stated, "What helped me in the blogs was using my graphic organizer and reading my peers blogs for guidance" (SRQ1, Iteration 1,

February, 2016). Student 1217 wrote, "The exemplar blogs helped me to see how others did it and gain more experience on what to do and formulate my writing to look similar to theirs" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while also reflecting on the mini-lessons: "The guidelines for APA helped me to cite properly" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1209 affirmed, "By staying focused, following a guide, and practicing, I think we will be masters at argument writing" (SRQ1, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Student Reflection Question 2 (SRQ2) asked, "What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?" This question asked students to reflect on their own writing and the weaknesses that they discussed about their argumentative blogs during teacher/student conferences. The teacher-researcher coded the reflections with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from Newell et al.'s (2014) study. The two derived codes that students reflected on were Structural and Ideational.

Structural

Under the umbrella of structural components in argumentative writing were the categories identifying the counterclaim (CC), analyzing textual evidence (A), citing/writing evidence (CE), organizing (O) and introducing both sides to the argument (I). Students discussed many aspects of the structural epistemology in their reflections.

Organization

Student thought processes and organization were noted when student 1209 wrote, "I definitely needed to work on my time management skills" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while student 1210 affirmed, "I have a very hard time planning and getting my thoughts out on paper" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1202 wrote, "I need to work on organizing my blog better so the information is not all over the place..." (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Introductions

Many students focused their area of improvement on the organization aspect in the structural epistemology and on their introductions. Student 1206 noticed, "I really need to introduce both claims in my introduction..." (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1208 recognized, "If my introductions were better, I feel my overall blogs would be better" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1208 reflected, "I realized I needed to fix things like better introductions, better ways of stating my analysis of every quote, better conclusions, and the way I cited" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while also understanding, that the student needed to work on "better introductions, better ways of stating my analysis of every quote, better conclusions, and the way I cited" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Counterclaim

Many students focused on writing counterclaims. Student 1201 stated, "I still need to work on my rebuttal" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while the student also wrote that they needed to find more evidence to support the counterclaim by stating "...finding textual evidence that would support (counterclaim) is hard but my main problem is analyzing..." (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Analyzing

Students discussed difficulty in analyzing. Student 1218 noted, "Some weaknesses in my blogs were my analyzing skills" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1207 reaffirmed 1201's statement by saying, "It is also hard for me to find good backing up statements" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016), also signaling a weakness in analysis.

Citations

Many students discussed their use of citations. Student 1202 noticed: "I need to work on citations and quoting the article..." (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016) while Students 1205, 1211 and 1207 reflected that their weakness was the way that they cited and they wanted to improve their format.

Ideational

Students struggled with coming up with their own ideas in the blogs. Many students cited and acknowledged that they needed to work on this component. Student 1213 acknowledged, "I need to come up with my own ideas" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016) while Student 1214 admitted difficulty by stating, "Some things I had trouble on were doing the ideational parts of the blog" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016), as well as Student 1218 recognizing trouble with the ideational component by citing, "Writing my own ideas" (SRQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Student Reflection Question 3 (SRQ3) asked students, "What instructional strategies will help you to improve your argumentative writing?" Three themes emerged during the thematic analysis (Hendricks, 2013). A grounded theory approach was utilized when analyzing the qualitative data of the Student Reflection Question 3 (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). The three themes were teacher-created materials, collaborating with peers and writing a draft. These themes were used to plan instruction for Iteration 2.

Teacher-created materials

Students reflected that the teacher-created materials helped them to stay organized or helped with the writing process. Student 1209 felt, "By staying focused, following a guide, and practicing..." that he was able to be successful in the blog (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1201 was more specific stating, "The graphic organizer helped to determine a clear

outline for your blog" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1204 agreed, "The graphic organizer really helped me" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Students also reflected that utilizing the graphic organizer would help in future writing endeavors. Student 1211 wrote, "The graphic organizer will really help me in the future" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February 2016).

Collaborating with Peers

Students discussed collaborating with their peers during their reflections. Students wrote about the opportunity to work with groups and partners and to read each other's blogs on the website. Student 1205 wrote, "I think that reading other students' blogs will help me with my blogs because it shows me what to do and how to do things..." (RQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1209 appreciated the collaboration in the form of modeling by saying, "Another thing that can help me is getting examples or reading other blogs to see how you can set yours up" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). While this is a form of modeling, students reflected on this instructional opportunity of collaborating. Student 1209 reflected, "The group/partner work helped me a lot because I got to hear other people's opinions..." (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1218 recommended, "My writing can be more successful by studying, practicing and seeing example blogs" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Students also discussed conferences in their reflections. Student 1208 stated, "Mrs. Stasaitis had pointed out mistakes I made during the conferences so that next time I write a blog I can fix my mistakes" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016), while Student 1208 discussed, "The conferences helped me a lot when you would tell me my weaknesses" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Students also noted that group work affected their work. Student 1213 stated, "Group work helped me because I like to communicate with my peers" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Writing a Draft

Students were given class time to write during the intervention cycle. Many students used the term "drafting" when discussing time to write in class. Student 1202 wrote, "The next steps to writing a successful blog are writing out a rough draft" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Student 1206 affirmed, "Another thing that was useful was writing a draft" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016). Students discussed ways that they could improve their writing and many discussed the revision process. Student 1207 suggested, "I think I can improve my writing by practicing and revising" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016) while Student 1210 expressed the difficulty involved stating, "I have a very hard time planning and getting my thoughts down on paper" (SRQ3, Iteration 1, February, 2016).

Teacher Reflection Journal Question 2 (TRJQ2) asked, "What integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) instructional strategies will be used to target the focus areas?" The theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) that presented themselves through coding and data analysis were conferencing, delivering mini-lessons and status-checking or progress monitoring. The derived themes were three strategies from the integrated writing intervention.

Conferencing

The teacher reflected on the teacher conferences and the teacher quotes identify success with student improvement. The teacher stated, "Allowing students to discuss their initial own ideas before writing about the claim and counterclaim is beneficial" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 2). The teacher also utilized the conferences for students to collaborate. The teacher noticed, "I will have students discuss their own ideas so they could still collaborate with their peers" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 3). The teacher also reflected, "Students need to stay organized in their writing so a focus on the graphic organizer, conference

with students, and creating text boxes to determine where students are struggling to offer small group instruction in those areas" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 1). The teacher utilized conferences to continue instruction. "Through peer work, I will model chunking of paragraphs..." (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 3).

Delivering Mini-Lessons

The mini-lessons were planned based on student need. The teacher's instructional strategies focused on structural components of the argumentative essays. The teacher stated, "I will model chunking of paragraphs" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 3) while recognizing, "Modeling strong introductions is a way to address the thesis statement, and giving students group work that students could work with their peers on introductions is a plan for next week" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 2). The teacher reflected on planning for future instruction by stating, "Mini-lessons will also be a way for me to deliver instruction on conclusion paragraphs and exemplar paragraphs discussing the ideational component" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 1). The teacher noticed more success with components of the structural epistemology stating, "The mini-lessons will allow me to hone in on argument vocabulary and transitions between paragraphs" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 1). The teacher noticed success with modeling lessons stating, "Data shows explicit instruction and modeling will help students to work on argumentative components" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 4), while planning, "I will have exemplar paragraphs in each conference so students could see what is expected of them" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 4).

Status-checking (Progress Monitoring)

The teacher utilized conferences as a way to find out student struggle points. The teacher reflected, "Students need to stay organized in their writing so a focus on the graphic organizer, conference with students, and creating text boxes to determine where students are struggling to offer small group instruction in those areas" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 1), while noticing, "The data (student reflection) shows students enjoyed peer work and conferencing" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 4) and "Data (Student Reflection, Teacher Memos) shows explicit instruction and modeling will help students to work on argumentative components" (TRJQ2, Iteration 1, February, 2016, Week 4).

Teacher Reflection Journal Question 3 asked the teacher to: "Did the teacher use **Specific Measureable Attainable Realistic Timely** goals for the next week of instruction?" One theme emerged through thematic analysis (Hendricks, 2013). A grounded theory approach was utilized when analyzing the qualitative data of the Teacher Reflection Journal Question 3 (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). It was goal-setting. The teacher focused on identifying goals based on the weaknesses in the student writing. The teacher-researcher set goals weekly for student progress. The teacher used the checklist to identify the goals of improvement in introduction to the topic, rebuttal and cite appropriately, after Week 1 data was recorded. These argumentative elements were categorized under the Structural Epistemology. The teacher assessed that the goals were met by a 10% increase in the frequency of use after instruction during Week 2. During Week 2 the teacher cited that students dropped in the percentage of inclusion of the introduction to the topic. Students achieved the rebuttal section with an increase to 61% of the students including this element in their blogs. Students dropped instead of increased in citing appropriately. The teacher set goals for Week 3 after noticing deficiencies in the category of the

Ideational Epistemology. There was evidence that students were not exploring their own ideas. The teacher recorded that .06% of students included the exploration of their own ideas. The percentage of students who included an introduction jumped from 67% to 94% at the conclusion of Week 3. Rebuttals jumped from 44% to 100%. There was also improvement in the inclusion of the students' own ideas. There was a jump from .06% to 33%. After these teacher-created SMART goals were achieved, the teacher focused on the areas of exploring your own idea, using evidence to back up your idea, using more than one source, and tying your ideas to the authors. The intervention cycle ended with those SMART goals not being achieved after instruction in Week 4.

The teacher utilized a component of the intervention, mini-lessons, to plan instruction around the student weaknesses found through analyzing the blogs, as evidenced in the teacher plan. The researcher analyzed the blogs and blog comments as a way to use status-checks, a component of the intervention. The weekly, status-checks aided the teacher-researcher in the planning of the mini-lessons. The status-checks were also utilized during class and at the end of the week during the blog coding. The teacher-researcher identified the goals of, "introduction to the topic, rebuttal and cite appropriately" after Week 1 (TRJQ3, Iteration 1, Week 1, October, 2015). This guided the planning of the weekly mini-lessons. The teacher-researcher planned, "(T) (Mini- Lesson) Instruction on finding claims and counterclaims in the articles" (Teacher Plan, Iteration 1, Week 2, October, 2015). The teacher continued to plan throughout the Iteration of instruction on structural components. The teacher planned, "(T) Mini lesson on citing relevant quotes and explaining them" (TP, Iteration 1, Week 3, October, 2015). The teacher plan showed evidence of planning mini-lessons around student weaknesses that were seen in the blogs. There

is evidence in the teacher plan for Iteration 1 that the mini-lessons were taught and then not revisited.

The teacher-researcher analyzed the Teacher Memos (TM). The teacher-researcher completed the memos on a daily basis to foster reflection. Five derived themes emerged during theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978) of the teacher memos. They were the identified strategies of the integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) and the literature on argumentative writing.

Status-checking

The strategy of status-checking allowed the teacher-researcher to gain an understanding of student weaknesses in their blog writing, based on observations from the classroom. The teacher-researcher utilized researcher memos to continue the cyclical Action Research process. Students volunteered to discuss areas of argumentative elements in which they were successful and elements in which they needed more guidance and support during status-checking. The teacher-researcher utilized status-checks by planning entry slips into the classroom, reading elements of the essays such as the claim, counterclaim, introduction and conclusion. The teacher-researcher planned instruction tailored to student need because of status-checks. The weekly coding of the argumentative elements on the writing checklist guided the planning for the next week of instruction. Setting SMART goals in the teacher journal also gave the teacher a way to set goals for student learning. The Blogs and Blog Comments provided the main source of status-checks. The teacher-researcher designed the checklist off of the codes from the literature and analyzed each blog with the codes on a weekly basis. The status-checks were done in the classroom on an informal basis, but they were also done in a more formal setting with checking

off the codes that the blogs exhibited. The status-checks also guided the planned mini-lessons. This is evidenced in an excerpt from the teacher memos when the teacher stated:

Status-checking was done while I was on the computer reading student blogs. I made comments on blogs and pushed them to think further by asking (the students) questions about the structural components. During status-checking, students were still in need of help with APA and thesis statements. More explicit instruction will happen in order to address this. Students also seemed to be including rebuttals. More modeling of structural components will be done next week. (TM, Iteration 1, Week 2, Day 5)

Mini-Lessons

The mini-lessons were planned based on student weaknesses in argumentative writing that were determined through the status-checks. Mini-lessons were delivered through direct instruction and small group instruction. The mini-lessons focused on APA citation, thesis statements and conclusions. There is evidence that the teacher-researcher planned a great deal of modeling for students to see exemplar writing, primarily in structural competencies as evidenced in the teacher memos. The teacher-researcher plan and the teacher memos are evidence that mini-lessons and modeling were used at least twice:

I continued to explicitly teach students and model strong thesis statements. Kids liked being recognized from last week's blogs. I find that I could design my modeling and explicit instruction off of student work. It recognizes good work and pushes students to want to be noticed for exemplar work. During the mini-lessons, students like looking at their peers work. It makes the work more relevant to student learning. (TM, Iteration 1, Week 3, Day 1)

Student Writing

A main component of student writing was giving students the opportunity to pre-write, draft, upload and publish blogs. It allowed students to collaborate and share their work and engage in discussion. The teacher reflected,

The convenience of computers in the classroom is essential to the success of the program. Having 10 computers for student use allows students to work in class in an online environment and collaborate with each other about a provocative topic in society. As I read the blog comments, I noticed that students were engaging in debate and using the text to support this. (TM, Iteration 1, Week 3, Day 4)

The teacher-researcher tried to communicate feedback through the blog site, but it did not work as well as giving feedback in the conferences. The teacher-researcher wrote,

On the blog site, I kept putting feedback on student blogs with questions on how they could propose a solution to make both sides of the argument viable. I want them to move away from agreeing with the claim or counterclaim. While this worked, I think it only helped their thinking process. They did not improve their responses. (TM, Iteration 1, Week 4, Day 4)

Peer and Teacher Conferences

The teacher-researcher planned the conferences schedule to foster collaboration between student-to-student, teacher-to-student and teacher-to-teacher. The teacher-researcher held a conference with two other teachers during weekly data analysis of the frequency charts to tally class percentages. The teacher-researcher had the opportunity to discuss student progress and growth on the argumentative blogs with other colleagues. The teacher-researcher reflected in the memos:

Students enjoyed the ability to upload and comment on each other's blogs. During beginning data analysis, there was a drop in percentage of introduction to the topic. After a discussion with my two teacher volunteers, they deemed that the drop was because we were no longer looking for the inclusion of an introduction, but for a thesis statement.

(TM, Iteration 1, Week 2, Day 5)

This quote is evidence of the usefulness of discussing and understanding student work with other colleagues. It was important for students to discuss their work with each other, while being important for the teacher-researcher to discuss student work with other teachers. The teacher-researcher noticed a weakness in the conferences. Students would check off the box for the Structural or Ideational Epistemology area without the students achieving the target. This was evident during the conference of the final drafts between the teacher-researcher and the student. The student and the teacher-researcher would discuss the areas of deficiency and the teacher-researcher recommended to the students how to apply their new learning to the next week's blog. The percentages did not improve as much as anticipated, primarily in the area of the Ideational Epistemology, noticed through analyzing the blogs with colleagues. The teacher-researcher wrote,

The peer writing conferences are enjoyable for students and they like the collaborative time that they are getting when they are working together; however, I notice that students are not giving many pointers on student writing. This is because the students are unsure of solid argumentative structures at this point. As I walked around the room, I notice conference checklists checked for areas that the students did not achieve. As I begin thinking about the revisions needed for Iteration 2, I will need to plan my conference schedule differently. (TM, Iteration 1, Week 3, Day 3)

The teacher-researcher reflected that the conference schedule should change during Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher realized that the conferences provided the vehicle for the components of the intervention after reviewing the memos, reflecting,

Conferencing with students after their blogs have been uploaded has been ineffective. It has been my hope that the students would take the discussion from the conference into their next week's blog. I want to give students an opportunity to go back to this blog. This could be altered by planning the teacher conferences through the drafting phase. During data analysis, I noticed that many structural goals were achieved, such as the introduction, rebuttals, and APA citations. Week 3 proved to be a strong week in the study; however the ideational components still show students struggling. Conferences would open this discussion up more, giving student's ideas on what opinions they could include in their blogs. In planning for next week, I will keep instructing on structural elements, but tell students to focus on the ideational components in their student conferences. (TM. Iteration 1, Week 3, Day 5)

Group Sharing and Publishing

Bloggng has been linked to engagement in recent studies and the teacher-researcher saw engagement in the sample. Students were motivated to upload their work in the blog forum and anxiously await feedback and comments from their friends. Uploading argumentative essays gave students the opportunity to engage in debate with each other and was also a form of modeling to other students. The user friendly site, KidBlog also provided opportunity for students to stay engaged. Students were able to easily access the password protected site, maintain anonymity and were able to upload photos to represent their blogs. The blogs also provided students with a way to keep their work in an online portfolio.

Summary of the Findings of Iteration 1 and Revision to Iteration 2

Merging the quantitative data sources and the qualitative data sources guided the teacher-researcher's revision to Iteration 2.

Two quantitative data sources and six qualitative data sources were sequentially merged to guide the planning of Iteration 2. Planning focused on utilizing feedback from the students that conferences were a way that they learned and a form in which they would like to continue participating. The teacher/researcher planned conferences to focus on individualized instruction of the ideational epistemology that was cited as a student weakness from the quantitative data sources.

Another revision to Iteration 2 of instruction was the scheduling of the conferences. The students engaged in conferencing with each other and with the teacher during the drafting stage of their writing during Iteration 2. The blogs were uploaded in final draft form after the conferences were held. This allowed the conferences to be used to reinforce instruction.

The students were provided with many of the same teacher-researcher created instructional materials that they were provided with during Iteration 1. The students were provided with the same teacher-researcher created checklist that was used weekly during student conferences with a peer and with the teacher.

Quantitative Data Iteration 2 Argumentative Checklist

There was an increase in students' frequency of use of argumentative elements, as seen in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3:
Argumentative Element Frequencies, Iteration 2, Stasaitis, 2016.

ITERATION 2				
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Structural				
Introduction to the topic	94%	100%	100%	100%
Claim	100%	100%	100%	100%
Warrant based in evidence	100%	100%	100%	100%
Analysis of evidence	89%	94%	100%	100%
Rebuttal	100%	100%	100%	100%
Cite appropriately	83%	94%	94%	100%
Transition words	100%	100%	100%	100%
Use of argumentative vocabulary	100%	100%	100%	100%
Use of multiple sources	100%	100%	100%	100%
Conclusion	67%	61%	83%	89%
Ideational				
Explore your own idea	94%	78%	100%	100%
Use evidence to back up your idea	72%	56%	89%	89%
More than one source	44%	56%	83%	89%
Tie your idea to the authors	67%	56%	83%	89%
Social Practice				
Recognize your audience	100%	100%	100%	100%
Comment on peers blogs	100%	100%	100%	100%
Use evidence to support counter arguments	72%	72%	50%	75%

Table 4.4 displays the data from Week 4 of Iteration 1 to Week 4 of Iteration 2 in order for the reader to visualize the student improvements on the argumentative elements.

Table 4.4:
Argumentative Element Frequencies Iteration 1 and Iteration 2, Stasaitis, 2016.

	ITERATION 1	ITERATION 2	TOTALS
	Week 4	Week 4	
Structural	Structural	Structural	Structural
Introduction to the topic	83%	100%	17% Increase
Claim	94%	100%	6% Increase
Warrant based in evidence	83%	100%	17% Increase
Analysis of evidence	72%	100%	28% Increase
Rebuttal	78%	100%	22% Increase
Cite appropriately	78%	100%	22% Increase
Transition words	72%	100%	28% Increase
Use of argumentative vocabulary	72%	100%	28% Increase
Use of multiple sources	72%	100%	28% Increase
Conclusion	72%	89%	17% Increase
Ideational	Ideational	Ideational	Ideational
Explore your own idea	17%	100%	83% Increase
Use evidence to back up your idea	17%	89%	72% Increase
More than one source	17%	89%	72% Increase
Tie your idea to the authors	17%	89%	72% Increase
Social Practice	Social Practice	Social Practice	Social Practice
Recognize your audience	83%	100%	17% Increase
Comment on peers blogs	83%	100%	17% Increase
Use evidence to support counter arguments	72%	75%	3% Increase

Quantitative Data Iteration 2 Cognitive Complexity

The teacher-researcher designed the study grounded in the principals of the Common Core State Standards (2010), research on argumentative writing instruction (Toulmin, 1958; Hillocks, 2011; Newell et al., 2014), integrated writing as an intervention (MacArthur, Graham, & Schwartz, 1993), 21st Century skills with technology exposure, and cognitive complexity (Webb, 2005).

The cognitive complexity continuum, Level 4 theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) that student writing progressed on were 1) design/create, 2) connect, 3) synthesize, 4) apply concepts, 5) critique, 6) analyze, and 7) prove.

Table 4.5 is evidence from student blogs of student growth toward the goal of meeting the objectives of the fourth and highest level in the continuum. This shows the weekly progress in student cognitive complexity.

Table 4.5:
Cognitive Complexity Frequencies, Iteration 2, Stasaitis, 2016

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4
Structural				
Design/Create	94%	100%	100%	100%
Apply Concepts	85%	90%	90%	100%
Analyze	89%	94%	100%	100%
Prove	67%	61%	83%	89%
Ideational				
Connect	67%	56%	83%	89%
Synthesize	72%	56%	89%	89%
Social Practice				
Critique	72%	72%	50%	75%

Table 4.6 is evidence of a change in frequencies of the Ideational Epistemology. The table is a comparison in the Ideational Epistemology category from Iteration 1 to Iteration 2.

Table 4.6:
Comparison of Ideational Iteration 1 and Iteration 2, Stasaitis, 2016

Iteration 1 Ideational	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4
Explore your own idea	28%	.06%	33%	17%
Use evidence to back up your idea	17%	0%	28%	17%
More than one source	44%	0%	28%	17%
Tie your idea to the authors	11%	0%	28%	17%
Iteration 2 Ideational				
Explore your own idea	94%	78%	100%	100%
Use evidence to back up your idea	72%	56%	89%	89%
More than one source	44%	56%	83%	89%
Tie your idea to the authors	67%	56%	83%	89%

Qualitative Data Iteration 2

Student Reflection Question 1, 2 and 3, Teacher Reflection Journal Question 2 and 3 and Teacher Memos

Iteration 2 replicated the same student reflection journal questions, teacher reflection questions and teacher memos.

Student Reflection Question 1 (SRQ1) asked students, "What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?" Five themes emerged during thematic data analysis (Hendricks, 2013). A grounded theory approach was utilized when analyzing the qualitative data of the Student Reflection Question 1 (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). They were conferencing with drafts, conferencing with peers, utilizing drafting materials, making annotations and teacher/peer modeling of argumentation. The themes were used to report the feedback from the students from Iteration 2 of instruction.

Conferencing with Drafts

Conferencing with drafts was one of the components of integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) that students discussed. The teacher-researcher made the revision to Iteration 2 that conferences would be done with the drafts instead of with the final product. The teacher continued to individually teach students the components of an effective argumentative blog during the conferences with the drafts. The checklist was utilized to keep students focused on the requirements for their blogs. Student feedback was positive about the revision to the conferences in Iteration 2. Student 1201 stated, "I feel conferencing with our drafts before we typed them helped me to fix mistakes before I had a complete blog. It showed me what I was doing right and what I should improve on" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). This student understood the goals of the conference and appreciated the individual attention that the teacher

was able to give. Student 1205 gave positive feedback to the conference revision stating, "Conferencing with my teacher was most productive with writing my blog. Listening to her conference with other kids and her telling them their mistakes also helped me" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1208 also approved of the conference revision affirming,

The blogs, I feel without a doubt, have had a great influence throughout the school year. An instructional strategy that helped me write my argumentative blog was conferencing before commencing in the action of posting a blog. This helped me fix what was wrong immediately after mistakes were made rather than waiting to write my next blog to fix the issue. (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Student 1209's quote reinforces the importance of the conference schedule. The student states,

An instructional strategy that helped me write my argumentative essay was conferencing before posting a blog, instead of after. This helped me fix what was wrong immediately rather than waiting to write my next blog to fix the issue. Also, hearing what was wrong before I posted it left the idea of a correct blog fresh in my mind. It was easier to remember how to write a good blog if I could hear my mistakes right away. (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Student 1211 remarked on the drafting process by stating, "There were many things that helped me in this blog cycle but one thing that really helped me this blog cycle is the conferences. These helped me because when you would tell me what I am doing wrong and then the next (draft) I can fix what I did wrong and I can fix the problem" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016); while Student 1216 discussed, " For example, when we did the conferences with a peer and the teacher

it helped improve my writing and showed me what I did wrong and what I needed to fix in my blog" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Some students discussed other strategies that they felt were beneficial. Student 1210 gave positive feedback about the drafting process stating, "Some instructional strategies that helped me were the teacher and peer conferences for the drafts, the graphic organizers, and the drafting and revising process. These helped me to organize my writing, correct my writing, and improve my argumentative skills" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1214 discussed the checklist affirming,

Some strategies that helped me to write my essays (were) to have a writing conference checklist, to conference with Mrs. Stasaitis before we write the blog instead of after, and to have an annotating checklist. To conference with peers helped me a lot to fix my mistakes. And when we conferenced with Mrs. Stasaitis, I was able to fix the mistakes that my peers weren't able to notice. (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Conferencing with Peers

Conferencing with peers emerged as another theme from the student reflections as the students referenced the conferences again. Students brought drafts to their peer conferences and discussed the elements of the argumentative blog. Students used the checklist to guide their conversation. Student feedback was positive when discussing the peer conference. Student 1201 stated, "I also like having our peers check off what they saw in our blog and give us advice on how to do it better. The constant repetition of constructive criticism helped me remember what I need to include that I had forgotten to previously" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). This student

discussed constructive criticism, which is essential to the conferencing process. Student 1208 also noted peer opinions as a strength in the conferences writing, "Hearing other classmates' opinions about my blog was above and beyond a great way of help, things such as grammatical errors were fixed and new ideas were formed" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1210 appreciated the help that peers offered by affirming, "These (conferences) helped me to organize my writing, correct my writing, and improve my argumentative skills" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1207 also cited the peer conferences as having value by offering, "Something that helped me during the blogs was being able to conference with someone else. Being able to read someone else's blogs and help them while they help me with my blog was very helpful because they told me what I should fix or redo" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Utilizing Drafting Materials

The students referenced the teacher-created materials in their student reflections, as well as the instructional strategies that the teacher utilized through the intervention. The "utilizing graphic organizers" theme was initially coded separately. The teacher-researcher combined graphic organizer into the "Drafting Materials," upon further analysis. Student 1202 understood, "The strategies that helped me the most with my argumentative writing was to highlight the quotes that interested me first before writing my essay because it had given me a guideline for writing" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1205 cited the graphic organizer for his/her writing success stating, "The graphic organizer helped me most with writing my blog" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Student 1206 noticed the ease of writing when a pre-writing organizer was completed first by writing, "There were many things that helped me write blogs this cycle. The thing that really helped me the most, however, was the graphic organizer. The graphic organizer was really the thing that really helped me out. It was very easy to copy things down from a page. I also finished the blogs twice as fast" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Students were instructed to pre-write and more emphasis was placed on the drafting process during Iteration 2.

Students found this to be a beneficial change to the iteration of instruction. Student 1213 affirmed that the organizer was an integral part of their drafting process by stating, "The graphic organizer helped me write my argumentative essay. The organizer helped show me what to include in my essay so that my essay wouldn't be all over the place. I could see myself doing better in the future by using the graphic organizer" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

There is evidence that many students attributed their blogging success to the drafting materials that helped them with their conference. Student 1214 wrote, "Some strategies that helped me to write my essays were to have a writing conference checklist, to conference with Mrs. Stasaitis before we write the blog instead of after, and to have a organizing checklist" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1215 discussed the checklist and the organizer affirming,

The instructional strategies that helped me write my blog were using my graphic organizer and surprisingly my writing conference checklist. The graphic organizer helped me a lot with organizing my quotes so I can quickly and easily write and type my argumentative essay. Also my writing conference checklist helped me a lot because I used it to go down the line of requirements to make my blog professional. (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Overall, students reflected on the planning process being an essential revision to Iteration 2 and the students recognized the change and provided positive feedback. Student 1216 cited, "The graphic organizer also helped me write my blogs as it helped me organize what I had to do and how to do it. I also used the writing conference checklist as a guide to know what I had to have in my blog" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1217 also appreciated the drafting process by stating, "I believe that the graphic organizer really helped me to put all my thoughts in order, which makes it easier to write, instead of writing off of my head. I planned my writing much better" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Making Annotations

The themes of Annotating and Drafting Materials were initially combined in the analysis of the blogs; however, upon further analysis they were separated to show the themes that emerged pertaining to the reading instruction. Students were given the weekly reading materials and an annotating organizer, guiding them in the annotating process that directly pertained to reading argumentative essays. Students discussed the annotating guide in their reflections. Student 1203 discussed, "The strategies that helped me the most with my argumentative writing was to highlight the quotes that interested me first before writing my essay, because it had gave me a guideline for writing. Also, annotating was a help because it let me make little notes around each quote that I had highlighted so it gave me back up or analysis for the quotes" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while student 1205 backed up, "Annotating the packets with the little boxes on the side with questions also helped me with my argumentative writing" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Teacher/Peer Modeling of Argumentation

Modeling was planned in Iteration 2 to target the student weaknesses in argumentative writing that were cited from Iteration 1. The teacher modeled in the mini-lessons, as well as during the Student Conferences. The teacher modeled thought process, blog writing, introductions, thesis sentences and conclusion. Students received a great deal of modeling throughout the intervention. Many students discussed the teacher's use of modeling in their student reflections. Students did not directly state the word modeling, but it is implied in their quotes. For example, Student 1207 stated, "Another thing that were helpful was when we was showed how to do something on the board. For example, one time we were showed how to cite correctly using the smart board. It was very helpful when the teacher told us exactly how to do it once then I just understood it" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). This student discussed a lesson that was done on the Smart Board. Student 1212 discussed the modeling of the Structural Epistemology by stating, "The instructional strategies that helped me to write my argumentative essays were learning how to state two sides, give a claim, and not only that but do some sort of paragraph that is ideational. Not only do you want to quote things from other people to state a point but you always want to give your opinion on it" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). The students discussed the teacher's use of modeling many times when they discussed argumentative elements that fell in the Structural Epistemology category.

The teacher focused on the Structural Epistemology aspects of blog writing and the teacher-researcher planned mini-lessons around those argumentative elements. Student 1217 appreciated the APA modeling by affirming, "I think the APA lessons and citation worksheet taught me how to cite in different ways and be able to cite properly. While I think the study

guide was the most helpful because you made examples of what an introduction should be like and what a conclusion and body paragraph should be like" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Student Reflection Question 2 asked, "What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?" This question asked students to reflect on their own writing and the weaknesses that they noticed. The teacher-researcher coded the responses with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from Newell et al.'s (2014) study coinciding with the coding of Iteration 1. These codes were the most frequently cited by students as weaknesses in their blogs. The two derived codes were Structural and Ideational.

Structural

Under the umbrella of structural components in argumentative writing fell identifying the counterclaim (CC), analyzing textual evidence (A), citing/writing evidence (CE), organization (O) and introducing both sides to the argument (I). Students reflected on areas of the Structural Epistemology that they felt they needed to improve.

Organization

Students discussed struggles with the organization of their blogs when they discussed multiple weaknesses and conclusions. Student 1216 wrote, "The things that I need to work on to improve my argumentative writing are the vocabulary I use, tying my idea to the authors, and also the use of transition words" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016). This student's quote is an example of the student needing to better organize the blog in order to write a clear conclusion. Student 1206 wrote, "Also, I need more help with my conclusions. I am writing my conclusions but I feel like something is missing. I am doing it ok but I really want to make it better. Also, I

need help with setting up stronger ideas for my own personal claims" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016). This quote is an example of a student citing multiple weaknesses in their blogs.

Introductions

Student 1208 reflected, "Some other things in my previous blogs I realized needed fixing were things like better introductions, better ways of stating my analysis of every quote, better conclusions, and the way I cited, (personally out of them all if my introductions were to be better I feel my overall blogs would be better)" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Counterclaim

Student 1201 reflected that the Structural Epistemology is vital to the argumentative essay stating, "I still need to work on tying my claim to my counterclaim. I have all the basic elements of an essay but just making it flow is an important part" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016). The Structural Epistemology also includes the conclusion component of argumentative writing. Student 1206 wrote, "Also, I need more help with my conclusions. I am writing my conclusions but I feel like something is missing. I am doing it ok but I really want to make it better. Also, I need help with setting up stronger ideas for my own personal claims" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Analyzing

Many students cited difficulty with analyzing textual evidence during Iteration 2. Student 1202 stated, "I need to work on my analysis so I can explain my quotes or my ideas better and create a perfect description of my essay so anyone who reads it will understand the writing and

be able to get a deeper understanding of the blog" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1203 understood,

I need to work on my analysis to improve my writing because I have noticed that I don't state the actual analysis and just tend to give only a little data instead of getting straight to the point or doing it correctly. Also, another thing I struggle with is my introduction. I usually write run on sentences and put in information that I could have just put in the claim paragraphs. My problem is that I do not get straight to the point. (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Students reflected on the inclusion of analysis in their writing and also discussed claims and counterclaims. Student 1217 reflected,

The things that I feel that I need to work would mainly be things like my analysis, my rebuttal, and I want to be able to improve on my claim and body paragraph. I think I should use better words for my analysis besides "this shows" or "states." I think that would make my analysis a lot stronger. I believe I could improve on my claim and body paragraph with stronger quotes and making better claims. (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Citations

Students reflected on the grammatical and vocabulary aspect of writing as well as citing textual evidence. Student 1205 wrote, "For my argumentative writing to be better I need to work on my grammar and instead of using aren't and shouldn't I should use are not and should not. I also think that I need improvement on citing from articles and getting better quotes" (SRQ2,

Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1216 discussed, "The things that I need to work on to improve my argumentative writing are the vocabulary I use, tying my idea to the authors, and also the use of transition words" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Ideational

Many students noted that they struggled with coming up with their own ideas for the argumentative blog after data analysis of Iteration 1. Many students reflected that they didn't know how to write down their own ideas. Student 1207 reflected, "Another thing I need help on is my 'I propose' paragraph. I always needed to rewrite my 'I propose' paragraph several times because I didn't back up my thoughts or connect it to the author. I was always missing something. I am getting better, but still need to work on it a bit more" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1206, "Something I personally think that I need to work on in my blog is my 'I propose' paragraph. I think I need to become better on writing my 'I propose.' Also I'm not good at exploring my own idea because sometimes I do not know much about the topic so I cannot say anything about it" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Prior knowledge to the weekly topic was a struggle for some students, but others reflected that the text was useful when coming up with their own ideas. Student 1206 understood, "I need work with exploring my own idea. I feel like I should add another quote to the idea" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1209 felt that organization was very important stating, "Something I need to work on to improve my argumentative writing is organizing my thoughts, especially on my 'I propose' paragraph" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Students understood that the Ideational Epistemology of the argumentative blog gave them an opportunity to express their own opinions. Student 1215 wrote, "The things in my argumentative

writing that I need to work or improve on are my selection of quotes and exploration of original ideas" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Students also recognized that the Ideational Epistemology involved more than just giving an opinion about the topic. Student 1212 wrote, "What I need to work on to improve my argumentative writing is giving more evidence to improve my 'I propose' and to make sure it goes along with my point. You can't state something and give it the wrong piece of text evidence. You want to make sure it fits" (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1213 recognized the importance of relevant evidence while another student saw the importance of the conclusion stating:

I need to work on my 'I propose' statement and conclusion. I always get confused on what to include in my 'I propose' statement. Mrs. Stasaitis told me that my conclusion is just an overall statement about what the whole argumentative essay is about. And my 'I propose' statement needs to state my own opinion and textual evidence to back up my claim. (SRQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Student Reflection Question 3 (SRQ3) asked students, "What instructional strategies will help you to improve your argumentative writing?" Four themes emerged during thematic analysis (Henricks, 2013). A grounded theory approach was utilized when analyzing the qualitative data of the Student Reflection Question 3 (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). The themes were teacher modeling of argumentation, collaborating with peers, utilizing teacher-created materials and reflecting on final thoughts.

Modeling of Argumentation

The integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) utilized specific instructional strategies that incorporated modeling. The teacher modeled correct citations, sentence structure and thesis sentences during mini-lessons. The teacher modeled the thought process of working through the Ideational Epistemology characteristics during conferences. Students recommended that a continued emphasis on modeling is needed in moving forward. Student 1201 confirmed, "I feel ways to help me and other students is to do more modeling. We need to see examples of good introductions conclusions and analyses. If we can see good examples, we can mimic their outline and add our own words to make it original" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). This student understands the benefit in learning from others. Student 1209 also saw the benefit in learning from other students' work stating, " Models of other peoples' 'I propose' paragraphs might help me recognize ways to properly express my ideas, use evidence, introduce evidence, and tie my idea to the authors." (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Students recommended that the teacher provide the students with exemplar examples of student writing in the future. This form of modeling continued to help students learn from each other. Student 1207 reflected, " Something that can help me in the future would be simply practicing an argumentative essay, and continuing to read other peoples essays because I always pick things up that I did not do correctly from someone else's essay" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1203 agreed stating, "I think that if I read other students' drafts it will help improve my argumentative writing, especially my introductions and analysis" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while Student 1215 confirmed, "The instructional strategies that I will use to improve my argumentative writing in the future are to read more argumentative work from

others to get an idea on what I am doing wrong and what I should to fix my issue" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Collaborating with Peers

Students addressed collaboration as a strategy in moving forward as evidenced in student reflections. Collaboration was done through the intervention in the form of group work, conferences and commenting on each others' blogs. Collaboration addressed the Social Practice Epistemology. Student 1213 stated that she would like to keep conferencing to help understand his/her strengths and weaknesses by stating, "And when I was able to conference with friends, I was able to understand what I needed to fix" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1216 also discussed the conferences stating, "For example, when we did the conferences with a peer and the teacher, it helped improve my writing and showed me what I did wrong and what I needed to fix in my blog" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Giving students collaboration time through the intervention is a valuable way to deliver instruction. Student 1210 affirmed, "Some instructional strategies that will help in the future are group conferences" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Utilizing Teacher-Created Materials

Many students discussed the instructional materials that they would like to use in moving forward with instruction. Student 1208 continued to tie in modeling along with teacher-created activities stating, "Some instructional strategies that helped me improve my argumentative writing are the graphic organizer and peer/exemplar blogs. I really enjoy using graphic organizers; with them I am always able to get my thoughts down on paper in an organized format" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1209 also referenced modeling in their

reflection on teacher-created materials affirming, "Some instructional strategies that may help me improve my argumentative writing are the graphic organizer and models" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Students continued to reference teacher modeling and other students focused on teacher materials. Student 1202 stated, " The instructional strategy that will help me improve is the graphic organizer, which will help me get all of my ideas in order so I can then just put them onto paper without worrying if I didn't explain enough or missed something because I would have already had it organized" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016), while student 1203 agreed, "Also if I use the graphic organizer to my advantage it can help improve my writing as well" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Student 1207 discussed using the checklist to guide the conference discussion and found this beneficial in moving forward. The student reflected, "Also, using the argumentative checklist was very helpful because I can use it to see what I have already completed and to see what I need to add on. I also think these are helpful because I can see how I have progressed using these" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Other students recommended in their student reflections that the teacher should continue to use the Annotating Checklist during reading. Student 1213 confirmed, "In the future, I honestly think that the Annotating Argumentative Articles Checklist will help me, because if I ever need it again I'll just skim through it and remember all the other things that aren't on the checklist that I have to include" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016) while Student 1206 reflected,

I feel like the graphic organizers will really help me with my essays because I love the fact that I can just look at the page and pluck information out of it. Also, annotating will continue to help me. It works well because I don't have to look at the whole article to find

information. I can just look at the notes in the margins and the highlighted section.

(SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016)

Student 1205 also discussed annotating stating, "I think that learning more about the topic I'm writing my argumentative essay on and using the Annotating Argumentative Articles Checklist would help me more with my argumentative writing" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Reflecting on Final Thoughts

The final theme that emerged from Student Reflection Research Question 3 was student final thoughts. Students closed out their reflections with comments about the iteration of instruction. Students had positive feedback to offer. Student 1201 wrote, "Overall, we have had so many tools to help us with our blogs and we have all improved our writing immensely" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Student 1208 wrote, "Overall the blogs have come a long way. With the help of Mrs. Stasaitis and peers, I feel that my blogs have gotten better, as have my classmates' blogs, I've learned a lot from this project/experiment and hope to learn more in 8th grade" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016) and also affirming, " I really do enjoy taking the time out of my day to do blogs. Doing these blogs for me personally helps me in reading and writing. Doing these blogs personally is a way to better express yourself and your opinions" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Lastly, Student 1209 reflected, "The blogs have come a long way. With the help of peers and Mrs. Stasaitis, I feel that my blogs have gotten better, as have my classmates' blogs I've learned a lot from this project and hope to learn more in 8th grade" (SRQ3, Iteration 2, May, 2016).

Teacher Reflection Journal Question 2 (TRJQ2) asked, "What integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) instructional strategies will be used to target the focus areas?" The theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) that presented themselves through coding and data analysis were conferencing, delivering mini-lessons and status-checking. The derived themes are the strategies of the integrated writing intervention. The derived themes from Iteration 2 will be used in moving forward as recommendations for further research.

Conferencing

The teacher reflected on the conferences and the teacher quotes identify a revision to the conference schedule and more mini-lessons and status-checking during the teacher/peer collaboration. The conference schedule was revised after completing the data analysis for Iteration 1. The conferences took place during the drafting process. Conferences are a useful component of the intervention that should be used in the planning of instruction. The weekly status-checks of the argumentative elements that were included in the blogs guided the future planning of instruction. The teacher-researcher used the conferences to deliver instruction. The teacher stated, "There has been a drop in the conclusion. I attribute this to many students allowing the 'I propose' paragraph to take the place of the conclusion. I will discuss this with them through conferencing. I will continue to status-checking during conferences to assess student need" (TRJQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016, Week 2). The teacher also reflected that the change in the conference schedule was beneficial to student progress stating, "Also, holding conferences before the uploaded blogs has been vital" (TRJQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016, Week 3).

Delivering Mini-Lessons

The teacher delivered mini-lessons to the whole class, small groups and to individual students during conferences during Iteration 2. The teacher planned to utilize mini-lessons more frequently after the data analysis for Iteration 1. Modeling was also used throughout the mini-lesson portion of the intervention to demonstrate to students exemplar work. The teacher noticed, "I will use modeling during the mini-lessons and continue to status check. The weekly blogs are a large part of the status-checking component of the intervention. By having data to analyze weekly, it allows me to see where students are struggling and excelling" (TRJQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016, Week 1). The cyclical process of the instruction was very beneficial. Weekly analysis of student work guided the planning of instruction. The teacher saw a rise in percentages of student argumentative elements present in the blogs during Week 3. The teacher affirmed, "I attribute the success to the modeling and mini-lessons" (TRJQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016, Week 3). The teacher also added, "Continuing to model and use mini-lessons will be targeted to help the structural components" (TRJQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016, Week 4) when planning future instruction.

Status-checking

Student writing is an essential component to the intervention. Blogging was a way for students to write final drafts of an argumentative essay in a multimedia, engaging forum. The teacher-researcher utilized status-checks during class and during the weekly reading of student argumentative blogs. The teacher-researcher utilized the status-checks to drive the planning around student strengths and weaknesses. The teacher affirmed, "I will use modeling during the

mini-lessons and continue to status-check. The weekly blogs are a large part of the status-checking component of the intervention" (TRJQ2, Iteration 2, May, 2016, Week 1).

The teacher-researcher also analyzed Teacher Reflection Journal Question 3 (TRJQ3) to triangulate the data to this research question. Teacher Reflection Journal Question 3 asked the teacher to "Did the teacher use **Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic Timely** goals for the next week of instruction?" One theme emerged through thematic analysis (Hendricks, 2013). It was goal-setting. A grounded theory approach was utilized when analyzing the qualitative data of the Teacher Reflection Journal Question 3 (Lincoln and Denzin, 2005). The teacher focused on identifying goals based on the weaknesses in student writing. Goals were set weekly and identified. The teacher identified the goals of cite appropriately, analysis of evidence and conclusion after status-checking the blogs of Iteration 2. These argumentative elements fell under the category of Structural Epistemology. The teacher assessed that the goal of cite appropriately was met by an 11% increase, but continued instruction was needed on analysis of evidence and conclusion. The teacher identified during Week 2 that the teacher needed to continue to plan instruction around the topics of analysis and conclusion while also planning instruction on the characteristics of the Ideational Epistemology. The teacher assessed that many goals were met during Week 3 of instruction. An increase of 10% or over was achieved in the areas of analysis of evidence, conclusion, explore your own idea, use evidence to back up your idea, more than one source and tie your idea to the authors.

The teacher set a new SMART goal during Week 3 to focus on students using evidence to support their counterclaims when commenting on a peer's blog. An increase of 15% was recorded during Week 4 of instruction, therefore, signaling that the students met the SMART goal. Iteration 2 of instruction ended with all SMART goals being achieved.

The teacher-researcher planned instruction for Iteration 2 after analysis of the data from Iteration 1. The teacher plan was created based on student weaknesses that were identified from question 3 of the Teacher Reflection Journal. The weekly data from the student blogs and blog comments served as the status-checks of the intervention and guided the planning for the following week of instruction During Iteration 2.

The teacher-researcher analyzed the Teacher Memos (TM) (Data Source 3). The teacher-researcher completed the memos on a daily basis to foster reflection. Five themes emerged during the theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978) of the teacher memos. They derived themes were the strategies of the integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993).

Status-checking

The strategy of status-checking allowed the teacher-researcher to gain an understanding of student weaknesses in their blog writing, based on observations from the classroom. The teacher-researcher utilized the researcher memos to continue the cyclical Action Research process. The teacher-researcher used the weekly student argumentative blogs to gain an understanding of writing strengths and weaknesses. The teacher-researcher created argumentative checklist allowed the teacher-researcher to analyze the elements of argumentative writing that were challenges for students. The teacher-researcher utilized the daily reflective memos reflect on the intervention. The teacher-researcher wrote, "Students did a great job working together on the first paragraph. Through status-checking I am able to see students understanding that the thesis statement frames the paper. They will write their drafts tonight and I will workshop with them before they upload" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 1, Day 4). The teacher-researcher also utilized status-checking to reflect on student feedback in order to plan effective

instruction, stating, "The pace of this iteration seems to be moving more seamlessly. Students have expressed that they like conferencing before the final drafts because they can see their mistakes before they upload" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2 Day 1).

The teacher-researcher also used status-checking when making observations of instruction happening in the classroom. The teacher-researcher noticed,

Having students work in stations throughout the block is very helpful. All eighteen kids are engaged and working on what they need to in order to be able to upload their blogs. During conferences, I reminded students to work on textual analysis and citing appropriately. I continued to model good Ideational paragraphs. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2 Day 4)

The teacher-researcher utilized teacher memos to encourage reflection. The status-checks of the argumentative elements used in the blogs provided the student data use to plan effective instruction. The teacher-researcher stated,

After reviewing data from the previous week, I decided that I wanted to keep working on analysis and conclusion in the structural epistemologies, but I wanted to continue my focus on ideational components as well. Using explicit instruction to show students sentence starters and using textual evidence to support their views was essential. This allowed me to model for students the meaningful way to write this section. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 3, Day 1)

Status checks were also done during group work. The teacher-researcher stated, "During status-checks, I made sure to visit the peer groups and discuss the importance of the conclusion. I

notice that many students are simply ending their blog with their 'I propose statement'" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 3, Day 4).

Mini-Lessons

The teacher-researcher utilized status-checking to guide the future planning of mini-lessons that were relevant to student weaknesses in argumentative writing. Mini-lessons were planned for the whole class. The teacher-researcher modeled exemplary writing and answered questions. The teacher-researcher also delivered mini-lessons in small groups and during conferences during Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher connected the strategies of the status-checks and mini-lessons throughout the cycle of instruction as evidenced when reflecting, "Continuing to plan mini-lessons around the Structural Epistemology is essential to the unit. Today, during status-checking, students were pulling quotes and citing appropriately. I notice that students are greatly improving in this area" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 3, Day 2). The mini-lessons were also used to deliver instruction through the conferences. The teacher-researcher stated, "As I plan for the last week, I would like to plan more modeling and offer more guidance through the conferences" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 3, Day 5). The teacher-researcher gave mini-lessons to different group sizes as a revision to Iteration 2 with modeling playing a role in the mini-lessons. The teacher-researcher reflected,

As I began the last week, I looked at the data analysis from the previous week. Students made great strides and continue to work hard. They achieved my Smart goals but I think a few reminders were necessary like using evidence in peer comments on the blogs.

Students seemed to have left out the evidence in their comments. Also, continuing to pull

exemplar blogs from the previous week turned out to be a fun way to keep students engaged and striving to be better. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 4, Day 1)

Student Writing

Student writing guided the process of Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher put an emphasis on the drafting process during Iteration 2 of instruction. The teacher-researcher planned time to instruct students on thesis statements, conclusions, giving own ideas and citing textual evidence. Students used graphic organizers to pre-write and they brought drafts to peer and teacher conferences. The teacher-researcher reflected, "Giving students the opportunity to pre write with graphic organizers is helpful, although still students are reluctant to do them. I stress the importance of them, but pre writing is different for all of my learners. Moving forward, I want to give them different organizers so they could change their organizers if they wanted" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 4 Day 3).

The teacher-researcher also reflected on chunking paragraphs. The teacher-researcher noticed that this gave students small writing goals, instead of thinking about the final product, stating, "Students did a great job working together on the first paragraph. Through status-checking I am able to see students understanding that the thesis statement frames the paper. They will write their drafts tonight and I will workshop with them before they upload" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 1, Day 4). Conferencing with students during the drafting process brought the intervention strategies together. Students knew the weekly plan and expressed that they liked conferencing with their student writing during the drafting process.

Peer and Teacher Conferences

The teacher-researcher used the conferences as a way to bring together the strategies of the intervention. The conferences were utilized as another way to deliver targeted instruction. The student writing provided the main source of status-checks that the teacher-researcher used to drive the mini-lessons during Iteration 2 of instruction. Students also received mini-lessons during individual student conferences. The teacher-researcher did this by utilizing instructional stations reflecting, "Having students work in stations throughout the block is very helpful. All eighteen kids are engaged and working on what they need to in order to be able to upload their blogs. During conferences, I reminded students to work on textual analysis and citing appropriately. I continued to model good Ideational paragraphs" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2, Day 4). The teacher-researcher also reflected on the pace of Iteration 2,

The pace of this cycle seems to be moving more seamlessly. Students have expressed that they like conferencing before the final drafts because they can see their mistakes before they upload. The teacher conferences are merely to foster discussion and to allow students to think about the ideational component of their blogs. Setting the classroom up with stations has also helped. Some students are using the computers, while some are reading the next weeks articles, while others are conferencing. Every student is engaged and working. Through last week's data analysis, SMART goals will focus on analysis, cite appropriately, and conclusions. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2, Day 1)

The teacher-researcher recognized that the conferences were a vital component of the intervention; however, without the student writing and the status-checks, the intervention could not be monitored and conferences could not be planned.

The teacher-researcher reflected that a focus on the Ideational Epistemology approach during conferences was important in Iteration 2. The Ideational Epistemology approach asks students to think deeply about a societal issue. The teacher-researcher reflected,

During conferences, I focused students on discussion surrounding the ideational epistemology of the blog. The data from Iteration 1 showed that student weaknesses fell in that area. By asking students 'What do you propose happens to find common ground in the debate?' students were able to discuss their thoughts. After blogs, are uploaded, I predict that students will be able to express themselves better in written form. Moving forward, I will continue to use conferences to guide student writing. Peer conferences will also be used. They will ask their partners the same question that I asked them to continue to fuel discussion and create critical thinkers. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 1, Day 5)

Group Sharing and Publishing

The Group Sharing and Blogging component of the intervention aided the teacher-researcher in encouraging students to meet the Social Practice Epistemology in their writing. Students continued to comment on each others' blogs but participated in more discussion with peers in the classroom setting. The teacher-researcher wrote, "Having students work in stations throughout the block is very helpful. All eighteen kids are engaged and working on what they need to in order to be able to upload their blog" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2). The teacher-researcher also wrote, "Giving students ample time for students to work together, work with myself and upload final drafts have been beneficial. I am able to further the discussion from the week and discuss areas of improvement with the students. As I plan for the last week, I would

like to plan more modeling and offer more guidance through the conferences. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 3, Day 5).

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The discussion of the findings of this Action Research study, utilizing qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis is of eighteen, seventh-grade students. The researcher, who was the teacher, conducted the study. This discussion is organized first according to the data then by the research questions.

Quantitative Data Iteration 1 and 2

The teacher-researcher investigated students' use of argumentative elements in blogs and blog comments while also investigating student progress toward demonstrating cognitive complexity in argumentative writing during Iteration 1 and 2.

The teacher-researcher recorded student inclusion of argumentative elements in weekly student blogs during two iterations of research. There was significant improvement during Iteration 2 on the inclusion of cognitive complexity elements and argumentative elements in student blogs and student blog comments as seen in Table 4.4 (p. 104).

After the data analysis of Iteration 1, the teacher-researcher set the goal to focus on the claim, write the warrant based in evidence, explore your own idea, use evidence to back up your idea, use more than one source, and tie your idea to the authors. The students demonstrated an increase in each argumentative element during Iteration 2 as seen in Table 4.3 (p. 103).

There is a significant change in student recorded frequencies in the argumentative elements checklist as seen in Table 4.4 (p. 104). The teacher-researcher attributes the increase in

student inclusion of argumentative elements to the revision to the intervention plan. The revision to the teacher-researcher instructional intervention plan in Iteration 2 was the conference schedule, the focus on the drafting process of writing to continue delivering mini-lessons and the focus of conferences on the Ideational Epistemology. The conferences were done with students during the drafting process during Iteration 2. Holding conferences with students during the drafting process provided the teacher-researcher with more opportunity to utilize the other components of the intervention during the conferences. The teacher-researcher utilized the conferences as a way to individually instruct students on argumentative elements during the drafting process.

Cognitive Complexity

The teacher-researcher investigated students' progress on the cognitive complexity continuum (Webb, 2005) checklist. The theoretical themes (Glaser, 1978) that the teacher-researcher used to code the blogs and blog comments were design, connect, synthesize, apply concepts, critique, analyze, create and prove.

Design/Create

Students effectively designed arguments on the weekly articles that they were given to read by the teacher. The teacher-researcher noticed that students were lacking a clear thesis statement after reviewing student blogs in Iteration 1. Students ended Iteration 1 with achieving 67% in designing/creating a thesis statement. Thesis statements are important when designing an effective argument. The teacher-researcher focused on the designing of an effective argument in Iteration 2 by modeling and giving mini-lessons during the teacher/student conferences.

Connect

Students utilized KidBlog as a way to connect to each other in an online environment. The Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014) encourages students to make a connection to the text and to each other. The students in the sample responded weekly to their peers' blogs when leaving a blog comment on their peer's blog. The teacher-researcher provided the students with the opportunity to collaborate in an online environment to meet the needs of the Social Practice Epistemology. Table 5.1 demonstrates high frequencies of students fulfilling the argumentative element of social practice and connection. Students were engaged in the blogging, and feedback from students is evidence that they were engaged in the opportunity to get on the computers. The blogging site engaged students in reading and learning from another.

Table 5.1:
Social Practice, Iterations 1 and 2, Stasaitis, 2016.

Social Practice	Social Practice Iteration 1 Wk 4	Social Practice Iteration 2 Wk 4	Social Practice Totals
Recognize your audience	83%	100%	17% Increase
Comment on peers blogs	83%	100%	17% Increase
Use evidence to support counter arguments	72%	75%	3% Increase

Synthesize

Synthesis was difficult for students during Iteration 1, as reflected in the low frequencies of student inclusion of the Ideational Component (Newell et al., 2014). The teacher-researcher recorded that 17% of students synthesized in the blogs at the end of Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher observed that 83% of students utilized prior knowledge in their blogs, but they did not use textual evidence during Iteration 1. The blogs that achieved synthesis were the ones that utilized prior knowledge, textual evidence, and an opinion that was formed with using textual

evidence. The teacher-researcher focused on encouraging critical thinking during individual student conferences as a revision to Iteration 2 of instruction. The teacher-researcher asked students to reflect on their own opinions and on how the textual evidence from the text applied to their proposition on ways to address the societal issue from the texts.

Apply Concepts

The teacher-researcher instructed students on applicable concepts to argumentative writing during Iterations 1 and 2 of instruction. The teacher-researcher formed mini-lessons and instruction on how to cite appropriately by using APA, incorporate argumentative vocabulary in blogs, use teacher and peer modeling of the blogging format, create thesis statements, provide clear introductions to the argument, and cite relevant information and transitional sentences. The teacher-researcher chose the concepts to foster instruction on argumentation after weekly reflect on student work.

Cite Appropriately by Using APA

The teacher-researcher understood the importance of students citing their evidence and giving credit to the sources to the articles where they evidence was found. Students found difficulty with this and many times did not cite correctly at the beginning of Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher recorded that 72% of students struggled with citations during Week 1 of Iteration 1. The teacher planned modeling and explicit instruction during Iteration 2 to address the low frequencies from Iteration 1 in inclusion of an appropriate citation. The teacher-researcher continually reinforced modeling and explicit instruction on the concept of citations during Iteration 2 of instruction. The teacher-researcher understands that reinforcing instruction on citing evidence is needed for future instruction.

Creating Thesis Statements and Introduction

Students were asked to write an introduction to their blogs. The teacher-researcher instructed students to create thesis statements in their introductions. The teacher-researcher noted that students did not create strong thesis statements in the beginning weeks of Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher recorded that 33% of students did not write clear introductions during Week 1 of Iteration 1. The evidence from the blogs shows students asking open-ended questions to open up their arguments. Effective thesis statements include the claim and the counterclaim, as noted in the research on argumentative writing (Hillocks, 2011). The teacher-researcher recommended to students to include the claim and counterclaim in their thesis statement. The teacher-researcher modeled exemplary thesis statements during Iteration 2, and the teacher continued to explicitly teach introductory sentences and thesis statements during the mini-lessons and the student conferences.

Incorporating Argumentative Vocabulary in Blogs

The teacher-researcher instructed students on argumentative vocabulary to incorporate in student blogs. The teacher-researcher used the instructional strategies of modeling and explicit instruction to provide instruction to students through the intervention on vocabulary. The students needed continued work after Iteration 1, with the teacher-researcher recording that 28% of students still struggled with using argumentative vocabulary in their blogs at the end of Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher instructed students to clearly discuss the claim and counterclaim. The teacher-researcher modeled the use of argumentative words to incite a debate through the blog cite.

Analyze

The teacher-researcher instructed students to include the textual evidence that supported their claim and counterclaim in student blogs. The teacher-researcher instructed students to analyze the textual evidence by explaining the significance of the evidence in relation to the student's argument. Analyzing textual evidence is a part of writing that is important for students in argumentation and in other forms of writing. Iteration 1 data reflected that students need continued support in analyzing textual evidence, with the teacher-researcher recording 28% of students struggling at the end of Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher gave more instructional support on analyzing textual evidence in mini-lessons that were delivered to the students during Iteration 2 of instruction.

Critique

The teacher-researcher instructed students to use blog comments to critique the arguments of their peers. The teacher-researcher noted effective critiquing when students were engaged in a debate with their peers, as evidenced by the high student frequencies of including the Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014). The teacher-researcher recorded that 83% of students commented on a peer's blog at the end of Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher continued modeling for students during Iteration 2 by engaging with students in a teacher/student debate on the blog site. The teacher-researcher posed questions on the blog site to aid students in critical thinking.

Prove

The teacher-researcher instructed students to prove their point in the conclusion of student blogs. Student conclusions provided evidence of students proving their point. The

teacher-researcher instructed students that proving their point was a way for students to conclude their arguments. Students needed extra work on the argumentative element of proving a point during Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher recorded that 28% of students were not writing a conclusion during Iteration 1. The inclusion of the conclusion and the proving element improved in Iteration 2 by 17%. The students displayed writing that went deeper than restating the claim and counterclaim. Many students discussed their opinion in the conclusion and how the research backed up the reason that they took a side in the argument.

Qualitative Data Iteration 1

The teacher-researcher found importance in gaining feedback from students on student learning during the iterations of the intervention. The teacher-researcher asked students to be reflective about their learning and about the teacher instructional strategies that helped them achieve success in their blog writing. Costa and Kallik (2008) discuss the importance of valuing student reflection on their own learning. They suggest interviewing students and giving them guiding questions to focus their reflection. The guiding question that the teacher-researcher asked students to answer during their reflections was, "What instructional strategies helped you to write the argumentative essay?" The student themes that emerged were collaborating with peers, writing a draft, using a graphic organizer, making annotations, accessing KidBlog, and student/peer modeling argumentation.

Collaborating with Peers

Feedback from students was evidence that they found collaboration to be an integral part of their blogging success. This evidence supports Vygotsky's (1978) "Zone of Proximal Development." Vygotsky understands that by working with a "More Knowledgeable Other,"

students of differing learning abilities have an opportunity to learn from each other. Students expressed engagement in the conferences when the checklist was used to guide the conference. Communication and collaboration helped the students to learn from each other and write a successful blog as part of the integrated writing intervention.

Writing a Draft

MacArthur, Graham and Schwartz (1993) recommend that student writing be at the forefront of integrated writing and conversation in the student conferences. The teacher-researcher encouraged students to write drafts and blogs weekly. Students participated in a writers' workshop with their argumentative drafts and engaged in conversation about drafts during writing conferences with their teacher and with their peers. Student reflections on writing the draft supported the research about using a writers' workshop when teaching argumentative writing (Atwell, 1998).

Graphic Organizer

Student reflections supported the utilization of the graphic organizer in class. The teacher-researcher instructed students to engage in a pre-writing activity before the students began the drafting process. Students identified this instructional strategy as impacting the organization of their argumentative blogs.

Making Annotations

Student reflections support the utilization of the teacher-researcher created annotation guide. Student reflections cited the annotation guide to be a helpful strategy when reading the nonfiction texts. The teacher-researcher created the annotation guide with recommendations

from the research. Robb (2010) suggests nine reading strategies to be essential in the Language Arts classroom in order to connect reading and writing. The teacher-researcher annotation guide utilized Robb's strategies. Robb recommends encouraging students to build prior knowledge and to decide what is important in the text. The teacher-researcher chose diverse non-fiction articles on societal issues to aid students in these strategies. Student reflections were evidence that the annotations helped students understand those articles.

Accessing KidBlog

The teacher-researcher utilized the research on a Balanced Approach (Tompkins, 2010) to writing instruction. The teacher-researcher gave students the opportunity to use the internet and communicative technologies and upload an argumentative blog weekly. Blogs are a type of Web 2.0 application. Student feedback on their engagement in the blogs supported Hew and Chung's (2010) research on student engagement and achievement. Students reflected that online access boosted their engagement by giving students a different way to produce writing. Student reflections support the research on engagement when using the internet to produce meaningful writing in a collaborative environment.

Student/Peer Modeling Argumentation

Student reflections supported the research that observational learning from the teacher and peers was influential on their writing. The teacher-researcher modeled effective utilization of argumentative elements during conferences and mini-lessons. The teacher researcher planned modeling based on Bandura's (1977) belief that humans process information actively and they reflect on the behavior and consequences attached to it. Bandura places importance on observational learning and discusses that it could not occur unless cognitive processes are at

work. Bandura recommends assessing if social learning is successful by reviewing student attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. The student reflections supported this research that observational learning had an impact on their writing.

Student Reflection Question 2 asked, "What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?" The question asked students to continue to be reflective of their progress and cite their weaknesses in the argumentative blogs. Students used their individual checklists to guide their response. The derived codes were from Newell et al.'s (2014) study. They were Structural (Counterclaim, Analyzing, Citations, Organization, Introduction, Evidence) and Ideational (Own Ideas).

Structural

The components of the blogs that students struggled with were a part of the structural epistemology. Students discussed in their reflections the claim, counterclaim, analysis of information and introductions. The teacher-researcher placed emphasis on the mini-lesson component of the intervention that was tailored to the two epistemologies in designing Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher planned mini-lessons based on the research from Chase (2011), Hillocks (2011). The authors' utilize the Toulmin (1958) framework. The structural components of claim, counterclaim, and analyzing information and introductions are essential to writing an argumentative blog. Students noted in their Iteration 1 reflections that they would like to improve on the structural components. The teacher-researcher planned Iteration 2 instruction incorporating mini-lessons to address this. The teacher-researcher delivered mini-lessons to the whole-class and to small group conferences during Iteration 2.

Ideational

Sineath's (2014) investigation on the effect of classroom discourse was influential when reflecting on student reflections. Students noted that they needed more instruction in the Ideational Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014). Students reflected that they struggled with coming up with their own ideas to use in the blogs. Table 5.2 also reflects student low frequencies in the Ideational Epistemology. The teacher-researcher modified the plan for Iteration 2 conferences in order to aid students in the Ideational Epistemology. The teacher held discussions with students in the form of debate, encouraging students to press for reasoning and to link ideas together in an argument (Sineath, 2014).

Table 5.2:
Ideational Epistemology Frequencies, Iteration 1, Stasaitis, 2016.

Ideational				
Connect	11%	0%	28%	17%
Synthesize	17%	0%	28%	17%

Student Reflection Question 3 asked students, "What instructional strategies will help you improve your argumentative writing?" Three themes emerged: utilizing teacher-created materials, collaborating with peers, and writing a draft.

Teacher-Created Materials

The teacher-researcher created materials to help students stay organized and understand the expectations in the blogs. The teacher-researcher materials were research-based and also used the Common Core State Standards (2010). Students expressed that they liked the graphic organizer, checklist and annotation guides during Iteration 1. The materials also included teacher-chosen reading materials, based on the seventh-grade lexile band and societal issues that

were relevant to middle school students. The positive feedback on the teacher-created instructional materials from student reflection feedback led the teacher-researcher to incorporate the same type materials during Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher chose different articles and wrote different essential questions to provide students with differing reading materials.

Collaborating with Peers

Student reflections were evidence that students enjoyed collaboration with their peers and looked to their peers' blogs as models and examples. The teacher-researcher planned for more collaboration in Iteration 2 after reading student reflections. The teacher-researcher planned collaboration time for peers in order to foster the theoretical framework of a sociocultural classroom.

Writing a Draft

Students discussed drafting in their reflection. The teacher-researcher revised the planning schedule to place a strong emphasis on drafting and collaborating time because of the Ideational Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014) struggles cited from Research Question 1, as seen in Table 5.1. The teacher-researcher recommends placing a strong emphasis on the drafting process. The teacher-researcher planned for students to use their collaborating time working with their peers and getting feedback on their drafts. The teacher and the peers gave feedback on the draft before the blogs were uploaded, providing the teacher-researcher with more instructional time during conferences.

Qualitative Data Iteration 2

Student Reflection Question 1 (SRQ1) asked students, "What instructional strategies helped you to write your argumentative essay?" Five themes emerged during thematic data analysis (Hendricks, 2013): conferencing with drafts, conferencing with peers, utilizing drafting materials, making annotations and teacher/peer modeling of argumentation. The themes were used to report the feedback from the students from Iteration 2 of instruction.

Conferencing with Drafts

The teacher-researcher revised Iteration 2 in order to utilize the conferences as a vehicle for further instruction on argumentative blogs. Students brought drafts of blogs to conferences with their peers and to conferences with the teacher during Iteration 2. Students held conferences with the teacher with final drafts of blogs during Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher gained feedback from students on the revision to the instructional intervention. The teacher-researcher found the feedback vital to continuing to reflect on effective instruction on student writing. Students discussed the opportunity to learn from their peers during the conferences and learn from their teacher. The teacher-researcher had an opportunity to individualize instruction tailored to student needs based on the inclusion and quality of elements, as guided by the checklist, by conferencing with students during the drafting cycle. This gave the students the opportunity to continue to revise and see writing as a cyclical process, involving reflection and revision.

Conferencing with Peers

Students reflected on the opportunity to learn from their peers in a collaborative setting. Students reflected that they were engaged in the peer conferences and this is supportive of allowing students to engage in high quality discourse, one of the strategies that Gillies (2007)

recommends after presenting a study on student dialogue. Giving students the opportunity to work together received positive feedback from students after Iteration 2 instruction. The teacher-researcher researched the theoretical underpinnings of this study in order to plan effective instruction. Student feedback supported that working with a "More Knowledgeable Other" (Vygotsky, 1978) helps students to learn from each other in a collaborative learning environment.

Utilizing Drafting Materials

Student feedback was positive for the teacher-created materials, leaving implication for further teacher-created materials with support from the research to help students during the drafting process. The graphic organizer was essential to students mapping out their blogs. The teacher-researcher recommends further support to students and use teacher/created materials for students who have difficulty organizing their thoughts.

Making Annotations

A Balanced Approach to literacy instruction (Tompkins, 2010) connects reading and writing instruction. It is especially difficult to write an argumentative blog if the student doesn't understand the articles that are presented. The teacher-created annotation guide and guided instruction on annotating a text was essential for student instruction on determining the claim and counterclaim. Students annotated the text, looking for supportive evidence to back up their warrants. Feedback from students on the strategy of annotation was positive and students reflected that it helped them to write their blogs more efficiently. The teacher-researcher understands that annotating a text helps students to become strategic writers, a component of disciplinary literacy (Shanahan and Shanahan, 2008). This has significant implications for

student reading and writing across content areas and supports the literature on helping students to critically reflect on what they read (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010).

Teacher/Peer Modeling of Argumentation

The teacher-researcher utilized the conferences to provide the vehicle of instructional strategies such as modeling during Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher found significance in student feedback that supported modeling. Students reflected that working with the teacher or peer was beneficial to their thinking process. Pairing students together is also supportive of working with a "More Knowledgeable Other" in order to achieve the "Zone of Proximal Development" (Vygotsky, 1978).

Student Reflection Question 2 asked, "What do you need to work on to improve your argumentative writing?" This question asked students to reflect on their own writing and the weaknesses that they noticed. The teacher-researcher coded the responses with theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978) from Newell et al.'s (2014) study coinciding with the coding of Iteration 1. These codes were the most frequently cited by students as weaknesses in their blogs. The two derived codes were Structural and Ideational.

Structural

Students reflected that they needed more instruction on the structural components of argumentative writing. The teacher-researcher planned the lessons to vary between three argumentative epistemologies that Newell et al.'s (2014) study discussed. The teacher-researcher reflected that previous writing instruction to students in her classroom centered on the structural elements needed to write an effective essay. Newell et al.'s study backed up the teacher-

researcher's reflection, citing that the teachers in thirty-one case studies focused much of their instructional time on teaching the structural components of argumentation. The teacher-researcher understood the need for instruction on structural elements but balanced the instruction between the ideational and social practice epistemologies, per Newell et al.'s implications and recommendations for teachers.

The structural component that students discussed in their reflections as needing continued instruction was analyzing. The data from Research Question 1 contradicts the student feedback. Students included 100% of the structural argumentative elements during Iteration 2 Week 4 on the teacher-created conference checklist that was used by the teacher to code the blogs. This has implications for further research because, although students demonstrated inclusion of argumentative elements, student reflections were evidence that they still want further instruction.

Ideational

Student reflections affirmed that they still needed instruction on the Ideational Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014). The teacher-researcher recommends that this has implications for further instruction on guiding students to use critical thinking in their work by formulating opinions based in the evidence from the text. The teacher-researcher recommends that this also has implications for disciplinary literacy (Shanahan and Shanahan, 2008). The teacher-researcher recommends that fostering critical thinking skills and utilizing content area vocabulary is essential to an environment that encourages opinion and imagination.

Student Reflection Question 3 asked students, "What instructional strategies will help you improve your argumentative writing?" Four themes emerged. The themes were modeling of

argumentation, collaborating with peers, utilizing teacher-created materials and reflecting on final thoughts.

Modeling of Argumentation

The students discussed that modeling was a strategy that helped them to see how to accomplish the structural components of the argumentative blog. They noted that when they were given an example, they knew better how to write the argumentative element. Modeling of argumentation was done in teacher-student conferences during Iteration 2 of instruction. Modeling argumentation to students individually is supportive of creating individualized learning plans.

Collaborating with Peers

Student reflections were evidence that students enjoyed collaboration with their peers and looked to their peers' blogs as models and examples. Students discussed collaboration during Iteration 1 and during Iteration 2, leaving implications for further time for collaborating on argumentative writing.

Teacher-Created Materials

The student reflections discussed the teacher-created materials that helped them to draft and pre-write during Iteration 2. This supports the revision to the intervention cycle of the conference schedule. Students utilized the graphic organizer and the argumentative checklist before the final drafts were uploaded to the blog site.

Reflecting on Final Thoughts

The positive feedback from students is evidence that students felt Integrated Writing to be a viable instructional intervention for instruction on argumentative writing. Students discussed that they liked being included in the instructional process and overall felt that their writing improved through the cycles.

Qualitative Data Iteration 1 and 2

Teacher Reflection

Teacher Reflection Journal Question 2 (TRJQ2), Teacher Reflection Journal Question 3 (TRJQ3) and the Teacher Memos (TM) were the data sources that were used to answer the Researcher Reflection Question. The teacher-researcher also references the Teacher Plan (TP) in this section.

Teacher Reflection Journal Question 2 asked, "What integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) instructional strategies will be used to target the focus area?" The themes that emerged from the teacher reflections were conferencing, mini-lessons and status-checking.

Conferencing

The teacher-researcher reflected that the conferences were a great way to sit down with students and give them individualized instruction on their writing. Students enjoyed talking with their peers and work with the teacher. The teacher-researcher observations of students guided the teacher reflections. The teacher-researcher planned conferences in Iteration 1 and Iteration 2 based on the research about the benefits of using a readers/writers workshop (Atwell, 1998). The

teacher-researcher planned to utilize the conferences of the intervention during the drafting process in Iteration 2 to further deliver mini-lessons. The teacher-researcher also employed status-checks during the conferences during Iteration 2. The teacher-researcher used the weekly blogs as the main source of data for the status-checks during Iteration 1.

Delivering mini-lessons

The teacher-researcher began each class with a fifteen minute mini-lesson on the structural components of the argumentative blog during Iteration 1. The teacher-researcher reflections and the teacher plan show that mini-lessons were delivered once, but not reinforced during Iteration 1. The data from the Iteration 1 frequency chart affirms that there were drops in student frequencies of the inclusion of argumentative elements. The teacher-researcher reinforced the mini-lessons throughout the interval of instruction to provide clear, consistent argumentative instruction during Iteration 2. The teacher reflections also cited the importance of modeling during the mini-lessons to the whole group and to individual students during conferences.

Status-Checking

The teacher-researcher recommends that using data-driven decision making to guide instruction is essential when planning instruction. The teacher-researcher found importance in focusing on the areas of student struggles when creating the plan for instruction. Using the data from Iteration 1 of the research is essential in planning Iteration 2 instruction around the needs of the students.

The teacher reflection journal question 3 asked, "Create Specific Measureable Attainable Realistic Timely Goals for the next week of instruction." The teacher-researcher understands that

educators are encouraged to set goals in the school where the research study took place. Educators set quarterly and yearly goals for students and track those goals for evidence of student growth on the teacher evaluation process in the state where the research study took place. The teacher-researcher set student learning goals weekly by utilizing the data from the student argumentative checklist. The teacher-researcher continued to utilize the Action Research process by completing weekly teacher reflections on data. The use of the teacher reflection journal supports Norton's (2009) view on the purpose of education research. Norton concludes that it is for the "improvement of practice, the individual's professional learning, educative responsibility and educative values" (p. 64). The teacher-researcher concludes that the use of weekly teacher journal reflections, with the utilization of multiple forms of student data, is a way to status-check the student learning goals, and the teacher-created instructional goals. The teacher-researcher's goal in improving self-efficacy was done through reflection. This supports Bandura's (1986, 1993) focus on reflection being the capstone to self-efficacy.

The teacher-researcher recommends that the status-checks were a large component of the intervention, and the teacher journal reflection question helped the teacher to reflect on the weekly data and student progress when writing argumentative blogs. The weekly status-checks also helped the researcher to plan the next week of the instructional cycle around the student areas of weakness found in the blogs. The teacher-researcher understands that mini-lessons were important to the intervention, but it is important to note that in the teacher plan during Iteration 1 mini-lessons were given and then not revisited. The teacher-researcher recommends that students need reinforcement of lessons, particularly in lessons about argumentative writing. The teacher plan shows that the teacher tailored the mini-lessons around the needs of students and continued to provide mini-lessons during conferences during Iteration 2. This was a beneficial use of the

strategies of the intervention because the teacher-researcher reinforced the lessons that were tailored to the individual need of the student.

The teacher memos were a way for the teacher-researcher to continually observe student learning, in order to continue to cyclical cycles of Action Research. The integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) intervention strategies guided the teacher reflection. The teacher-researcher created the template based on Kemmis and McTaggart's (1982) recommendations for Action Research. The teacher-researcher memos presented the teacher with the opportunity to reflect daily and plan instruction based on observations of student learning. The teacher-researcher reflections from the memos demonstrated that conferences were the vehicle for the instructional strategies of integrated writing. This is evidenced in the revised plan to the teacher plan.

The teacher memos, along with the teacher reflection journal, were essential for reflecting on student learning. The teacher-researcher was able to continually revise and observe student learning with keeping the action cycles in mind. The memo template, included in Appendix B, was a viable teacher-created material for the teacher to utilize. The guiding questions encouraged reflective thought based on the observations of the classroom.

Implications for Practice

The teacher-researcher noted significant implications from this research study for instructional planning for student writing, incorporating student feedback in teacher planning and engaging in teacher reflection to refine practice. The data to the research questions on student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection suggest the integrated writing intervention (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) to be a viable instructional vehicle when the

intervention strategies are intertwined. The data from Iterations 1 and 2 are evidence that the capstone to the intervention, conferences, were a way for students to engage in individualized learning. The teacher-researcher tailored instruction to the individual needs of the student. The teacher-researcher utilized the conferences as a way to deliver mini-lessons, apply status-checking, assist students in the drafting process and give students a way to collaborate and learn from their teacher and from each other.

Implications for Student Writing

The teacher-researcher finds significance in finding innovative ways for students to demonstrate 21st century learning. The teacher-researcher recognizes the importance of planning instruction with the goal of fostering critical thinking skills in a rigorous classroom environment that impacts student cognitive complexity. This study has significant implications for continuing to encourage students to collaborate with each other in diverse online environments. The teacher-researcher reflected that student feedback was positive about the opportunity to write argumentative blogs. Writing blogs expanded traditional classroom learning and writing in an online environment and boosted student engagement and collaboration. Future studies that could impact student collaboration in an online environment could focus on the utilization of Google Classroom and other Google Applications that foster collaboration.

The blogs gave students an opportunity to read their peers' work. The classroom environment of blended learning allowed the students to learn from each other. The teacher-researcher provided the students the opportunity to read their peers' blogs and formulate opinions that agreed or disagreed with their peer. The blogs also served as a way to implement an online portfolio system. Student work was stored and saved with the opportunity to go back and revise

previous work. Online portfolios allowed students to access their previous work and the portfolios gave students the opportunity to reflect on their own growth. The intervention strategies fulfilled Newell et al.'s (2014) assertion that effective argumentative instruction takes place when the three epistemologies are present.

Implications for Student Feedback

Encouraging students to reflect on their learning and the instructional strategies that help them learn was an essential component for the teacher in developing instruction based on the needs of the students that were tailored to the individual. Students reflected on their learning and understood that they had a stake in the teacher's lessons. Student thought and reflection is the capstone to utilizing multiple forms of data when discussing student progress and building self-efficacy. This has implications for data-driven decision making. Educators, at times, bring quantifiable data to meetings and to planning processes in order to make instructional decisions. It is important to bring student reflections as well. This helps educators make curricular decisions based on varying data sources.

Implications for Teacher Reflection

Teacher reflection ties into data-driven decision making. When teachers reflect on what is successful in their classroom and what is not, the teacher makes planning decisions based on student need. Listening to individual student feedback helps the teacher to make decisions that are based on student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. The daily memos were essential to recording observations and the weekly journals based on student writing data added the argumentative expectations element to the reflections.

Recommendations for Research

The following recommendations for future research have been provided by the teacher-researcher after intense reflection on two data cycles of research. Practitioner Action Research guided the purpose and planning for the cycles of instruction. Chapter 6 provides replicable steps to be transferred to secondary education settings. Appendix B provides transferrable teacher-created materials.

Content Recommendations

The teacher-researcher recommends that the strategies of the intervention, integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993), be utilized as the instructional vehicle to deliver instruction in order to replicate this study. Further research questions could include the teacher-researcher's initial questions surrounding student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. The intervention and the initial questions could be transferred across content areas.

The teacher-researcher recommends that the intervention and blogging could be applied to different writing standards, such as narrative and expository, and across content areas, primarily in Social Studies and Science in Secondary Education. The teacher-researcher recommends a focus on the literature review, the intervention strategies, technology integration and the Common Core State Standards (2010) to guide the language of teacher-created materials. Utilizing the blogs across content areas could also measure the engagement of students in the class and provide students with the opportunity to collaborate. The teacher-researcher recommends the use of other technology applications, such as Google Classroom, to foster student collaboration. The Common Core State Standards provides writing standards for grades

6-8. Table 5.3 includes the writing standards that the Common Core State Standards address besides argumentative writing.

Table 5.3:
Writing Standards Grades 6-8, Common Core State Standards, 2010.

<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2</u>	Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.
<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.A</u>	Introduce a topic clearly, previewing what is to follow; organize ideas, concepts, and information into broader categories as appropriate to achieving purpose; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.B</u>	Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.C</u>	Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.
<u>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.2.D</u>	Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
Students' narrative skills continue to grow in these grades. The Standards require that students be able to incorporate narrative elements effectively into arguments and informative/explanatory texts. In history/social studies, students must be able to incorporate narrative accounts into their analyses of individuals or events of historical import. In science and technical subjects, students must be able to write precise enough descriptions of the step-by-step procedures they use in their investigations or technical work that others can replicate them and (possibly) reach the same results.	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas clearly and efficiently.

The teacher-researcher recommends creating relevant, applicable teacher-created materials to utilize as instructional tools with students. The standards and the research guided the

teacher-created materials for this study. The teacher-researcher recommends utilizing the language of the literature and understands that it is essential for creating and designing meaningful, relevant curricula in the 21st century. Future studies could explore the Depth of Knowledge (Webb, 2005) framework and applying the intervention to other writing genres, such as informative and narrative. Upon more extensive research, possible research questions could include the following:

Student Writing

1.) Does Integrated Writing positively impact student narrative/expository writing?

Student Feedback

2.) Does student feedback positively reflect using Integrated Writing in a narrative/expository framework?

Teacher Reflection

3.) Was the teacher-researcher successful in improving instructional capacity as a result of two iterations of using Integrated Writing in a narrative/expository framework?

The teacher-created materials included in Appendix B may also aid in the planning process of future instruction. The teacher-researcher recommends creating checklists or rubrics with the research-based requirements cited in the literature and vetting the materials through a district/school wide validation process that includes students and professionals. Utilizing the standards and literature review on the topic of writing is essential in moving forward. The teacher-researcher recommends that the research consulted takes into account the standards of the time, but the teacher-researcher recommends that the researcher also uses research and

literature that is relevant to the research area to make the study identify in a more timeless setting.

Methods Recommendations

Action Research was a viable methodology when exploring student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. The teacher-researcher was able to be a reflective thinker and reflective planner through Action Research. Norton (2009) understands that this, "involves some transformation from previously held assumptions to adopting a new framework" (p. 23).

Reflective practice involved becoming an active learner in the classroom. Reflective practice also involved the teacher being a part of the teacher-researcher's own professional development. Action Research is more than revising instruction. It is connecting theory to practice and ensuring that the instructional cycle is connected to the relevant literature (Hendricks, 2013).

Planning interventions and researching relevant literature on the intervention is also an important step to the Action Research process. The intervention should be clearly described, along with how it pertains to the study and how it relates to other literature. The action that the researcher takes should be based with a strong theoretical foundation that guides the intervention plan.

Limitations

The teacher-researcher addressed the limitations that occurred with student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. The following limitations could occur to effect transferability of the study to other settings.

Students, who participated in the case study, completed two cycles of argumentative instruction through integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993). The teacher-researcher understood that the convenience sample was not a representation of the student population of the school where the research was taking place. The students who participated in the study were not identified as having special services. Students in the sample did not receive accommodations. The students in the sample represented a population of students who were meeting the standards that were assessed on the Smarter Balanced Assessment (2010). The students in the study ranged from average to above average reading and writing abilities. The students produced one full argumentative blog weekly. The teacher-researcher acknowledges that the task of writing a full argumentative blog was a challenge. The teacher-researcher instructed the students in the convenience sample during a ninety-minute block setting. Students also wrote their blogs on laptop computers. The laptops were purchased by the teacher-researcher with grant money. The students in the sample had been exposed to computers in the past and did not need further support in typing or navigating the website. Many students worked on blogs from their computers at home, which is another potential limitation for the study. Access to computers in the classroom was a beneficial component of the study. Future research utilizing blogs must take into account time and technological restraints. If the research was conducted in a traditional forty-five minute classroom, the teacher-researcher recommends that the cycle of instruction is doubled from four weeks to eight weeks. The teacher-researcher recommends that students collaborate with written blogs if access to technology is not present in the classroom.

The teacher-researcher found importance in encouraging student feedback. The teacher-researcher acknowledged that asking for feedback from students has time constraints. Students

answered guiding reflection questions at the end of the two, four week cycles of instruction. The teacher-researcher recommends gaining oral and written feedback. The teacher-researcher understands its importance to the Action Research process. The teacher-researcher found that it was a way to include students in the teacher's decision making process. If time limits the ability to ask students to engage in deep reflection, surveying student needs or orally asking for student feedback is recommended by the teacher-researcher.

The teacher-researcher in this study engaged in planning and reflection on the unit individually. Planning and reflecting is important to fostering collaboration with other teachers. While the teacher-researcher consulted two volunteer teachers on her students' learning, the other teachers were not instructing the same unit with their students. Future studies could engage multiple teachers planning and reflecting on the same intervention and unit of instruction, but with their own students.

Chapter 6 contains two additional research questions aiding the design of the Action Research study and fostering reflection and growth on the teacher's instructional strategies. The teacher-researcher presents applicable strategies and recommendations to aid in the transferability in Chapter 6.

Context of the Research

It is important to note that at the time the research was conducted, the school in Connecticut was adapting to the Common Core State Standards (2010) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment (2010). The teacher-researcher structured the research around relevant literature on argumentation that has stood the "test of time." The school where the research took place teaches

argumentative writing based on Toulmin's (1958) argumentative elements. The school where the research took place designs lessons by using the language of the Common Core State Standards.

Schools have been adopting standards-based reform since the 1980's. Standards have changed and new standards have emerged since that time. The teacher-researcher found importance in including the Common Core State Standards (2010) because this study was a "snapshot in time;" however, the teacher-researcher used relevant research spanning from 1958 to the present time on argumentation. The teacher-researcher acknowledges that using varying research will expand the significance of this study on argumentation. The use of argumentative writing will serve students well in the future no matter what assessment they take. Fostering critical thinking skills is a way to combine a balanced literacy classroom, integrate reading and writing, a way to plan cognitively complex lessons around argumentation, and a way to expand to other content areas through disciplinary literacy.

Incorporating technology in a traditional classroom is also a new concept for the school where the study was completed. The teacher-researcher had the only classroom that utilized blogging for the vehicle of instruction and had one of five classrooms in the building where laptops were readily available to the students. As students are compelled to become a part of Generation Z, having access to technology from an early age will not be such a challenge. The teacher-researcher concludes that the aspect of student writing in the form of blogs will sustain the test of time and leave implications for future research on the inclusion of technology in classrooms.

CHAPTER 6: REFLECTION

The overarching hypotheses guided this teacher-researcher reflection in Chapter 6. The reflection was written in 1st person and is evidence of the deep reflection done by the teacher-researcher. The teacher-researcher created two additional research questions in order to guide reflection on the intervention and the two instructional cycles.

My initial research questions surrounded student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection. These initial research questions, with the goal of researching what would influence student learning in argumentative writing, guided my literature review. I decided to employ the intervention, integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) and investigate student learning in argumentative writing through the intervention. The intervention's five strategies were conferencing, status-checking, delivering mini-lessons, student writing and student publishing. The last strategy of the intervention allowed me to have students produce their argumentative writing in a blog. Tying in a multimedia aspect to the learning gave me my most important data source, student blogs.

I implemented practitioner Action Research as my methodology for the action research study involving my own seventh grade students after developing my research questions. I looked to Hendricks (2013) for systematic steps for designing my study. She understands that practitioners choose Action Research to investigate a purposeful sample when the researcher is close to the participants. Hendricks also recommends collecting a variety of data.

I also thought about my purpose for research. Hendricks (2013) recommends that researchers choose Action Research when the goal of the research is not to generalize results,

however, recommending, "It is reasonable to conclude that their results are applicable to settings with similar contexts" (p.5). While my purpose was to investigate student argumentative writing, it was also to generate knowledge about my own teaching practice and share my results with colleagues in my school and with the literacy facilitators in my district. Hendricks recommends developing a plan for a cyclical process by planning, acting and observing, reflecting and revising. I was able to revise and refine the instructional cycle through deep reflection on the descriptive data that was collected, with recommendations for expanded research. I utilized a guiding reflection question to reflect on the revision to Iteration 2.

How did the components of the intervention package (status-checking, mini-lesson, student writing, peer and teacher conferences, group sharing and publishing) improve in Iteration 2?

The components of the intervention package were revised after the teacher's deep reflection to Iteration 1. The conferences became the center of the intervention and tied the status-checks, mini-lessons, student writing and group sharing together during Iteration 2 of instruction. I embedded the components of the intervention package in order to seamlessly connect them into one instructional vehicle and placed an importance on the student drafting and revision process.

Conferences

Evidence of the conference schedule change during Iteration 2 can be found in the revision to the teacher plan. The teacher plan to Iteration 1 is located in Appendix B. The

teacher's plan to Iteration 2 is located in Appendix C. The students held conferences with their peers before their final drafts of their blogs were uploaded to KidBlog, I outlined,

(S) Students bring to class drafts of blog 1

(T) Teacher conferences are held on first drafts of blog 1

(S) Students peer review blog 1 (Teacher Plan, Iteration 2 Week 1, Appendix C).

The conference schedule was a positive change to Iteration 2. I reflected in the memos,

During conferences, I focused students on discussion surrounding the Ideational Epistemology of the blog. The data from Iteration 1 showed that student weaknesses fell in that area. By asking students, 'What do you propose happens to find common ground in the debate?' students were able to discuss their thoughts. After blogs are uploaded I predict that students will be able to express themselves better in written form. Moving forward, I will continue to use conferences to guide student writing. Peer conferences will also be used. Students will ask their partners the same question that I asked them to continue to fuel discussion and create critical thinkers. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 1, Day 5)

There is also evidence of the positive change to the conference schedule found in the weekly teacher reflections. I stated,

Students made significant improvements this week. There is a strong improvement in the Ideational Epistemology. I am happy with student progress and I notice that many students are using 'I propose' to extend their response to make the argument relevant to their own views. Eliciting social awareness and change is instrumental in blogging. By modeling and giving students the sentence starter, they are making great strides. Discussing the Ideational Epistemology in conferences has been a positive change in

Iteration 2. Students come to conferences prepared with a draft. The draft creates a positive conversation around the weekly topical essential question. (TRJ, Iteration 2, Week 2)

Students discussed the conference schedule, indicating a positive revision to Iteration 2 as evidenced in the coding of the student reflections from Iteration 2. Student 1205 stated, "Conferencing with my teacher was most productive with writing my blog. Listening to her conference with other kids and her telling them their mistakes also helped me" (SRQ1, Iteration 2, May, 2016). Students discussed the revision to the conference schedule as having an impact on their argumentative writing.

Status-checking

I continued to use the status-check component of the intervention during the weekly data analysis. Status-checks continued to happen during conferences as well as a revision to Iteration 2. The status-checks happened during the final drafts of the blogs during Iteration 1. Status-checks happened during the drafting stage and during the final drafts of the blogs in the intervention in Iteration 2. This was a positive change to the intervention package. An example of this is in the researcher memos, "Students did a great job working together on the first paragraph. Through status-checking I am able to see students understanding that the thesis statement frames the paper. They will write their drafts tonight and I will workshop with them before they upload" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 1, Day 4). I also did status-checks throughout the week. I separated the blog into different segments, focusing on each paragraph and thesis statement instead of waiting until the conferences. The teacher plan indicated:

(S) Students read and annotate articles

(S) Students work on laptops reading and commenting on other students' blogs

(T) (Mini Lesson) Instruction on finding analyzing evidence, citing appropriately, and conclusions

(T) Status-checking on analysis in blogs (Teacher Plan, Iteration 2 Week 2, Appendix C).

This is evidence of planning to do status-checks after mini-lessons on analyzing and citing evidence. I also used status-checks on a daily basis as evidenced in the teacher memos stating, "During status-checks, I made sure to visit the peer groups and discuss the importance of the conclusion. I notice that many students are simply ending their blog with their 'I propose statement'" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 3, Day 4). I plan to continue to engage students in writing a clear, concise conclusion in moving forward.

Group Sharing and Publishing

The students had the same requirements for the group sharing and publishing aspect of the intervention package during Iteration 2 of instruction. The students continued to use KidBlog to upload their blogs and comment on each other's work. The group sharing component did change when the teacher required students to write their blog in segments. Students worked with their peers during conferences on different segments of their blog. For example, students worked together to refine their thesis statements, introductions and conclusions. The students were able to break down the reading and feedback that they gave to their peers. An example from the teacher memos is, "Students did a great job working together on the first paragraph. Through status-checking I am able to see students understanding that the thesis statement frames the

paper. They will write their drafts tonight and I will workshop with them before they upload" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 1, Day 4).

Changing the conference schedule also provided more of an opportunity for students to work in stations. I reflected, "Having students work in stations throughout the block is very helpful. All eighteen kids are engaged and working on what they need to in order to be able to upload their blogs. During conferences, I reminded students to work on textual analysis and citing appropriately. I continued to model good Ideational paragraphs" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2, Day 4). This was beneficial in the group sharing process.

Mini-Lessons

I planned the mini-lessons in order to utilize the strategy of modeling. I pulled exemplary blogs each week and the students looked forward to seeing their peers' work on display. An example of this is when I reflected, "Focusing on analysis today is a structural component of the blogs, however still very important to student writing as we move forward. Modeling structural components is effective for students. They have expressed that they like seeing examples" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2, Day 2). I referenced modeling in the memos citing, "Although I focused on structural components of the blog this week, I did not want to lose the progress that I have made with the ideational epistemology. Continuing to model effective ideational paragraphs is essential to Iteration 2" (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2, Day 3). The conferences kept the mini-lessons present in the discussion as well. I continued to instruct students on the epistemologies during conferences. I reflected,

The pace of this iteration seems to be moving more seamlessly. Students have expressed that they like conferencing before the final drafts because they can see their mistakes before they upload. The teacher conferences are merely to foster discussion and to allow students to think about the ideational component of their blogs. Setting the classroom up with stations has also helped. Some students are using the computers, while some are reading the next weeks articles, while others are conferencing. Every student is engaged and working. Through last week's data analysis, SMART goals will focus on analysis, cite appropriately, and conclusions. (TM, Iteration 2, Week 2, Day 1)

Student Writing

The student argumentative writing production did not change during Iteration 2. Students were still asked to utilize the teacher-created argumentative checklist and the cognitive complexity checklist as a guide to the elements of an effective argumentative blog. Students were still required to produce one blog a week. Students were still asked to read and comment on peers' blogs weekly. Students were engaged in the blogging process, and I continued to foster a balanced approach to reading and writing in a technology-blended classroom environment.

Was the teacher-researcher successful at improving her own instructional capability?

I was successful at improving my instructional capability. I revised the instructional plan for Iteration 2 by using status-checks to drive instruction during conferences. Also, the weekly teacher reflection journal guided my instruction for the following week. Keeping a journal with student work that was produced weekly helped me to look at student argumentative writing and

develop lessons to target student areas in need of improvement. I also looked to student feedback to help me in the planning process.

I wrote this reflection question to help me to formulate recommendations for future practice on how to improve instructional abilities when teaching student argumentative writing.

Recommendations for Student Writing

Instructing argumentative writing elements is an important part of the recommendations for instructing student writing. Developing teacher-created materials that incorporate a balance between timeless research, strategies, and the standards, are vital to engaging students in the necessary elements that they learn for the different genres of writing. I also recommend using teaching tools, such as the Depth of Knowledge (Webb, 2005) to provide meaningful, rigorous, learning opportunities. Creating checklists with growth continuums for student progress is a meaningful way to blend concept-based and standards-based learning. The teacher-created argumentative checklist and cognitive complexity checklist was essential for creating discussion on blogs. It also guided the status-checks and mini-lessons that I delivered.

Student writing was developed by the consistency of requiring an argumentative, full process, blog weekly. Student writing productions are significant. Students should be encouraged to write during class with the guidance of their peers and teachers. Conferences are a way to tailor instruction to individualized learning and growth. Conferences are the most beneficial to students when discussion is guided by a checklist or rubric and when student writing is at the forefront of the conference. The conferences should also be the vehicle for other instructional strategies. I was able to assess learning, model exemplar blogs and question students to

encourage deeper thinking. The intervention worked best when the strategies were blended in a seamless way. Conferences were also a way to tailor instruction to the individual.

Giving students the opportunity to write in a multimedia environment also fostered engagement, debate and collaboration. The online forum of blogging helped students easily access their peers' blogs and gave them an opportunity to read and comment. I recommend using online sites that foster collaboration. Google Classroom can be utilized with student writing and collaborating on projects.

The blogging site also served as an online portfolio. The school where the study took place uses hard copy portfolios. By allowing students to type in an online portfolio environment, student work is saved and can be revisited for further editing and learning. The online portfolio system extends student learning and is a portfolio that can easily follow students as they progress in grade levels.

Recommendations for Student Feedback

Action Research allowed me to reflect on various examples of student learning so I could revise and refine my instructional strategies. Incorporating student feedback on how they learned, what they needed improvement on, and what instructional strategies impacted their learning was essential to the study. I recommend asking for student feedback throughout the instructional iteration. The feedback could be given to the teacher orally or written. Utilizing "exit slips" and asking students what they learned or what they found challenging about the lesson is also very useful. The question remains, "What do we do with the feedback that we receive from students?"

Incorporating feedback from all of our students can be challenging; however, tailoring our teaching to the individual learner is important and pushes us further into individualized learning and action plans. I recommend making students a part of SMART goal setting and encouraging students to be a part of their own action plans. Gaining feedback from students helps the teacher to become more reflective and gives another piece of student data, aside from data from written tasks.

Recommendations for Teacher Planning

I recommend encouraging all teachers and school stakeholders to participate in practitioner Action Research. Encouraging teachers to reflect weekly on data and reflect daily on observations of learning can be a daunting task, but encouraging reflection is vital to teacher growth. Revising lesson plans and making an area for reflective questions to be answered after the lesson is delivered is a recommendation.

Scheduling changes that would foster teacher collaboration on student work and feedback is also important. The opportunity to discuss student work and data with two volunteer teachers was vital to the success of my study. It would have been beneficial and would have added another aspect to the reflection on student work and instructional strategies if we all of the teachers worked on the same unit. Sharing strategies and collaborating on student learning is a recommendation for further practice.

Below are recommendations for continuing the profound research on student writing. Table 6.1 identifies the applicable steps to differentiate the learning with varying ability levels.

Table 6.1:
Steps to Achieve Transferability with Students of Varying Ability (Differentiation for Diverse Learner), Stasaitis, 2016.

Identify grade level of focus (7-12).
Identify argumentative writing standards.
Identify grade level lexile bands.
Consult research on instruction of argumentative writing.
Poll students on societal interests.
Find articles, in the grade level lexile bands, on the students' interests.
Plan lessons utilizing integrated writing.
Use the teacher-created plan and teacher-created materials.
Develop essential questions.
Begin integrated writing instruction.
Collect weekly blogs.
Reflect on student work.
Reflect on student feedback.
Revise and refine instruction.

Table 6.2 identifies the applicable steps to transferring instruction to different writing types.

Table 6.2
Steps to Achieve Transferability in Different Writing Types, Stasaitis, 2016.

Identify grade level of focus (7-12).
Identify writing standards (Ex. Narrative, Expository) (Chapter 5).
Identify grade level lexile bands.
Poll students on interests in reading so the teacher could choose relevant, engaging reading materials.
Consult research on instruction of narrative/expository writing.
Find articles, in the grade level lexile bands, on the students' interests.
Plan lessons utilizing integrated writing.
Use the teacher-created plan and teacher-created materials.
Develop essential questions.
Begin integrated writing instruction.
Collect weekly blogs on the form of writing that is targeted.
Reflect on student work.
Reflect on student feedback.
Revise and refine instruction.

Table 6.3 identifies the applicable steps to transferring instruction across content areas.

Table 6.3

Steps to Achieve Transferability across Content Areas, Stasaitis, 2016.

Identify grade level of focus (7-12).
Identify argumentative writing standards.
Identify grade level lexile bands.
Poll students on societal interests.
Consult research on instruction for the content area.
Find articles, in the grade level lexile bands, on the students' interests.
Plan lessons utilizing integrated writing.
Use the teacher-created plan and teacher-created materials.
Develop essential questions.
Begin integrated writing instruction.
Collect weekly blogs.
Reflect on student work.
Reflect on student feedback.
Revise and refine instruction.

Table 6.4 identifies tips to students that can be transferred across grade levels and content areas when writing argumentatively.

Table 6.4

Student Tip Block, Stasaitis, 2016

Tips for Students When Writing Argumentatively:

- Read and annotate the article with the argumentative writing annotation guide.
 - Use the graphic organizer to pre-write your ideas.
 - Keep in mind your audience.
 - Use a thesis statement stating the claim and counterclaim in the introductory paragraph.
 - Argue the claim and the counterclaim in subsequent paragraphs.
 - Cite applicable evidence to support the claim and counterclaim.
 - Add your own solutions to the argument.
 - Back up your perspective to the argument, citing relevant evidence from the text or other applicable sources.
 - Use argumentative vocabulary like "I propose," "claim," "counterclaim," "prove" and "argue."
 - Write a conclusion that revisits the claim and the counterclaim.
 - Gain feedback from your peers and teacher.
 - Write your argumentative response or produce an argumentative response in a multimedia environment!
-

One constant will remain. It is the passion that educators have for setting high standards for student achievement and the ability to continually improve their teaching craft. Systematic reflection on student work, reflection on teaching practice and continual learning from student feedback are important aspects in promoting excellence in teacher pedagogy and practice. The effect that teachers have on student learning is invaluable. When teachers place importance on student writing, student feedback and teacher reflection, cyclical cycles and ACTION exist, bridging the gap between research and pedagogy in ways that will lead to sustained student learning and achievement.

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APPENDIX A

**IRB INVITATION LETTER TO STUDENTS AND APPROVAL FROM THE
UNIVERSITY OF BRIDGEPORT IRB COMMITTEE**

IRB Invitation letter and Approval

North End Middle School

534 Bucks Hill Road

Waterbury, CT 06704

203-574-8242



Common Core State Standards and Argumentative Writing through a 21st Century
Framework: A Case Study

September 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians/Students:

My name is Mrs. Stasaitis and I am your child's 7th grade English Language Arts teacher. I am also a student in a doctoral program at the University of Bridgeport. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my degree in Education and I would like to invite your child to participate in my work.

I am studying the impact that blogging has on argumentative writing. Argumentative writing is a style of writing that asks the student to formulate a stance and opinion based on a societal issue that we read about in class. Argumentative writing is an important part of the district curriculum. The Common Core State Standards stress its importance, and students are asked to write argumentatively on the Smarter Balanced Assessment that they will take in the spring 2016. Blogs are also an important part of the study. Blogging is a way for students to express their writing in an internet application that allows students to comment on each other's writing. The site used for blogging, KidBlog, is a password protected site and it is designed for teachers working with student writing skills. The site can only be accessed by the teacher and students, along with parents, who have a password. Utilizing a blog fulfills the Common Core State Standards expectations for expressing our writing in multimedia ways. At the

bottom of this letter you will find the applicable sites to further take a look at if you wish.

If your child decides to participate, their responsibility will be to create one blog and comment on one blog weekly. They will be provided time to do this in class if needed. All of my students will be working on argumentative writing and blogging whether they choose to be in the study or not, as it is a part of the 7th grade curriculum. The blogs will be assessed by a rubric and an argumentative writing checklist (which you will find at the bottom of the letter), and students will have an opportunity to work on argumentative writing in a number of different ways in the classroom (teacher-student conferences, group work, peer editing, debates) in order to improve their writing skills.

In choosing to participate, students are expected to maintain appropriate standards regarding behavior. Students will be making comments about readings that we have done together in class. They will be asked to make claims, and to back those claims up with evidence from the reading. Their responses will be centered on the topics that we have discussed in class. The blogging site is meant to be a professional forum for students to talk about the readings, not for personal conversations or for anything that does not relate to the content material. Every time a post is made in the blog, I receive an email, and I immediately review the posting to make sure that it contains appropriate and respectful material. Please be advised, and remind your child of the district/school cyber bullying policy. A link to policy # 5131.911(a) can be found at the bottom of the page. Cyber bullying will not be tolerated in the blogs.

You or your child may decide to not take part in the research. It will not be held against the student in any way and it will not affect their grade in the class. Your child will still be participating in the class and working on argumentative writing and blogging as this is part of their regular responsibility as a student; however, all data pertaining to your individual child will be omitted when I write about my research. Also, if for any reason, you or your child chooses to opt out of the study, all information pertaining to your child will be safely discarded and any of their work will be omitted from the study without any penalty. If you or your child chooses to opt out, please contact me via email, or phone call.

In conclusion, I am inviting you to take part in a twelve study, where I will work together with your child on improving their argumentative writing skills. I will speak with your child in great length about the study and provide them with opportunities to ask any questions that they may have. Please note that any and all

information obtained from your child will be confidential and they or the school will not be identified in any way.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Stasaitis (MStasaitis@Waterbury.k12.ct.us)

Mrs. Stasaitis

cc. Mrs. Gilmore 203-574-8242

Mrs Gilmore

You may talk to the IRB Administrator at (203) 576-4973 or irb@bridgeport.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Relevant Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.a

Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.b

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1.c

Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.

APPROVAL OF RESEARCH



October 7, 2015

Ms. Maria Pesce Stasaitis
School of Education
University of Bridgeport

Dear Ms. Stasaitis:

On *October 1, 2015* the full IRB approved the following human subject research:

Type of Review:	<i>Initial</i>
Project Title:	Common Core State Standards and Argumentative Writing through a 21 st Century Framework: A Case Study
Investigator:	Maria Pesce Stasaitis
IRB ID:	2015-10-01
Funding Agency:	<i>N/A</i>
Grant Title:	<i>N/A</i>
Grant ID:	<i>N/A</i>
IND or IDE:	<i>N/A</i>

Before October 1, 2016 or within 30 days of study close, whichever is earlier, you are to submit a completed "UB HRP-212 FORM: Continuing Review Progress Report" and required attachments to request continuing approval or study closure.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of October 1, 2016, this research expires on that date.

In conducting this research you are required to follow the requirements listed in the *Investigator Manual*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Christine Hempowicz".

Christine Hempowicz, Ed.D.
IRB Administrator
Cc: Patricia Mulcahy-Ernt, Ph.D.

126 Park Avenue • Bridgeport, CT 06604 • Tel: 203.576.4973 • E-mail: irb@bridgeport.edu

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH PLAN ITERATION 1

ANNOTATING CHECKLIST

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

WRITING CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

TEACHER REFLECTION JOURNAL TEMPLATE

TEACHER REFLECTION MEMO TEMPLATE

Research Plan Iteration 1

Week 1: Should soda and candy be a part of the school lunch?

Day 1

- (T) Introduce the study and explain IRB forms
- (T) Leave time for Opt-out
- (T/S) Set up blogging site with student numbers (students names are left out to protect identity)
- (T) Administer student log in passwords

Day 2

- (T) Introduce the argumentative standards
- (T) Discuss the study and any questions
- (T) Explicit instruction on Toulmin model
- (T) Explicit instruction on APA format
- (T) Pass out exemplar argumentative essay during mini lesson

Day 3

- (S) Students read articles, complete graphic organizers, annotation guides in groups
- (T) Teacher status-checks

Day 4

- (S) Students bring drafts of blogs
- (S) Students conference with their peers using the conference checklist
- (S) Students discuss their essays with their peers
- (S) Students upload argumentative essays on blogging site

Day 5

- (S) Students are given class time to comment and read other student blogs, while students peer conference with each other
- (T) Teacher conferences are held on blog 1
- (T) Logs the data from the argumentative elements checklist
- (T) Teacher plans weekly lessons to target weaknesses found

Week 2: Should you think twice before eating fast food?

Day 1

- (T) Explicit instruction of argumentative vocabulary and transition words
- (T) Pass out articles for essential question 2
- (T/S) Students work in groups while the teacher-researcher individually holds writing conferences that needed to be finished from week 1

Day 2

- (S) Students read and annotate articles
- (T) (Mini Lesson) Instruction on finding claims and counterclaims in the articles
- (T) Discuss thesis and topic sentences

Day 3

- (S) Students use graphic organizers to begin planning their writing
- (T/S) Hold writing conferences with students as a way to help the planning process

Day 4

- (S) Students are given time to write blogs
- (T) The teacher-researcher is also on a laptop writing feedback and commenting on the students arguments
- (S) Students are allowed to collaborate about the topic on the blog site

Day 5

- (T/S) Conferences are held on the blogs
- (S) Students review blogs in peer groups
- (S) Students continue to work on the computer, reading and commenting on other student's blogs

Week 3: Do uniforms affect student learning?

Day 1

- (T) Explicit instruction on thesis statements and introductions
- (T) Pass out articles for week 3
- (S) Students work in groups discussing articles while teacher-researcher finishes individual conferences from week 2

- (T) Discussion of being advocates and proposing how to weigh in on the debate.

Day 2

- (S) Students continue reading and annotating articles
- (T) Mini lesson on citing relevant quotes and explaining them
- (T) Reviewing peers thesis and topic sentences

Day 3

- (S) Students begin planning and pre-writing their papers
- (S) Begin writing conferences

Day 4

- (S) Students are given the blended learning environment to work on their blogs
- (T) The teacher-researcher is also on a laptop writing feedback and commenting on the students arguments
- (S) Students are allowed to collaborate about the topic on the blog site

Day 5

- (T) Conferences are held on the blogs
- (S) Students review blogs in peer groups
- (S) Students continue to work on the computer, reading and commenting on other student's blogs

Week 4: Is homework beneficial?

Day 1

- (T) Explicit instruction of transitions and argumentative vocabulary
- (T) Modeling strong "I propose" paragraphs
- (T) Pass out articles for week 4
- (S) Students work in groups discussing the articles
- (T) Teacher finishes conferences from week 3

Day 2

- (S) Students continue reading and annotating articles
- (T) Mini lesson on APA format

Day 3

- (S) Students begin planning and pre-writing their papers
- (S) Begin writing conferences with each other

Day 4

- (S) Students are given the blended learning environment to work on their blogs
- (T) The teacher-researcher is also on a laptop writing feedback and commenting on the students arguments
- (S) Students are allowed to collaborate about the topic on the blog site

Day 5

- (T) Conferences are held on the blogs
- (S) Students review blogs in peer groups
- (S) Students continue to work on the computer, reading and commenting on other student's blogs
- (S) Students write their reflections

Annotating Argumentative Articles Checklist

Claim 1: “Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.”

Before Reading	
Think about the weekly EQ. What is your purpose for reading the article?	
What is your background knowledge about the topic?	
Do you see any vocabulary words that are unfamiliar?	
What predictions can you make based on the title?	
What are you asked to do in the essential question? How will you annotate to help you answer the question?	
During Reading	
What claim is being presented in the article?	
Cite three quotes that back up that claim. 1.)	
2.)	
3.)	
What is the counterclaim being presented in the article?	
Cite three quotes that back up the counterclaim. 1.)	
2.)	
3.)	
Can you connect the claim or counterclaim to issues in society that you are aware of?	

How can you analyze the quotes for the claim?	
How can you analyze the quotes for the counterclaim?	
After Reading	
Think about the claim. Do you notice any weakness by your analysis of the evidence?	
Think about the counterclaim. Do you notice any weakness by your analysis of the evidence?	
How might you use this information in the future?	
Do you agree or disagree with the author?	
What helped you the most in this reading to organize your thinking?	

Adapted from: Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011), Newell et al. (2014) Created by: Stasaitis, 2016 (Unpublished Dissertation)

Argumentative Essay Graphic Organizer

Introduction to the topic:

Claim:

Counterclaim:

Evidence to back up the claim:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Evidence to back up the counter claim:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Analyze the quotes and make inferences:

Explore your own ideas...Are their weaknesses in the arguments? Weaknesses in the facts?

Analyze the quotes and make inferences:

Writing Conference Checklist

Claim #1: Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.

How do we understand what we read?

Claim # 2: Students can produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences.

How do we write and present effectively?

Anchor Standards:

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1)
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4)
- Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6)

Did I argue my point?	Me	Peer	Teacher
Structural			
Introduction to the topic			
Claim			
Warrant based in evidence			
Analysis of evidence			
Rebuttal			
Cite appropriately			
Transition words			
Use of argumentative vocabulary			
Use multiple sources			
Conclusion			
Ideational			
Explore your own idea			
Use evidence to back up your idea			
Tie your idea to the authors			
Social Practice			
Recognize your audience			
Comment on peers blogs			
Use evidence to support counter arguments			

Adapted from: Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011), Newell et al. (2014)

Created by: Stasaitis, 2016 (Unpublished Dissertation)

Cognitive Complexity Checklist

Continuum

	Me	Peer	Teacher
Structural			
Design/Create			
Apply Concepts			
Analyze			
Prove			
Ideational			
Connect			
Synthesize			
Social Practice			
Critique			

Adapted from: Webb (2005) Level 4 Cognitive Complexity
 Created by: Stasaitis, 2016 (Unpublished Dissertation)

Teacher Reflection journal

	Frequency	%
Structural		
Introduction to the topic		
Claim		
Warrant based in evidence		
Analysis of evidence		
Rebuttal		
Cite appropriately		
Transition words		
Use of argumentative vocabulary		
Use multiple sources		
Conclusion		
Ideational		
Explore your own idea		
Use evidence to back up your idea		
More than one source		
Tie your idea to the authors		
Social Practice		
Recognize your audience		
Comment on peers blogs		
Use evidence to support counter arguments		

Teacher Reflections:

- 1.) What area of Newell et al.'s (2014) model and Hillock's (2011) argumentative framework need improvement in order to meet the needs of the Common Core State Standards grade level expectations?
- 2.) What integrated writing (MacArthur, Graham & Schwartz, 1993) instructional strategies will be used to target the focus areas?
- 3.) Did the teacher use **Specific Measureable Attainable Realistic Timely** goals for the next week of instruction?

Adapted from: Common Core State Standards (2010), Hillocks (2011), Newell et al. (2014)
 Created by: Stasaitis, 2016 (Unpublished Dissertation)

Researcher Reflection Memos

The following researcher memos were done on a daily basis to represent the thick descriptions of the actual classroom environment. The memo template was adapted from Kemmis & McTaggart's (1982) suggestions for Action Research. The reflections were completed daily, in order to examine the strengths and weakness of the intervention.

Kemmis & McTaggart (1982)

- 1.) To develop a plan of action to improve what is already happening;
- 2.) To act to implement the plan;
- 3.) To observe the effects of action in the context in which it occurs; and
- 4.) To reflect on these effects as a basis for further planning, subsequent action and on, through a succession of cycles. (p. 7)

Questions:	What is the plan to improve what is already happening?	How will the plan be implemented?	What are the observable effects of the action in the classroom?	Reflections on further learning, further planning and action.
WEEK 1				
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
WEEK 2				
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				

WEEK 3				
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
WEEK 4				
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				

Adapted from: Kemmis & McTaggart (1982) Created by: Stasaitis, 2016 (Unpublished Dissertation)

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH PLAN ITERATION 2

Iteration 2 Research Plan

Week 1: Is the Internet Helping or Hindering Us?

Day 1

- (T) Discuss the reflections from Iteration 1
- (T) Inform Students about what we learned from the data in Iteration 1
- (T) Discuss the goals and pacing of Iteration 2
- (T) Tell students that we will be doing conferences before the blogs instead of after

Day 2

- (T) Status-Checking - questions from Iteration 1
- (T) Questions from previous blogs
- (T) Explicit instruction on Toulmin (1958) model
- (T) Explicit instruction on APA format
- (T) Pass out exemplar argumentative essay during mini lesson

Day 3

- (S) Students read articles, complete graphic organizers, annotation guides in groups.
- (T) Teacher status-checks
- (S) Students begin drafting their introduction paragraph

Day 4

- (S) Students conference with peers on introduction paragraph and thesis statement
- (T) Mini lesson on transition words

Day 5

- (S) Students bring to class drafts of blog 1
- (T) Teacher conferences are held on first drafts of blog 1
- (S) Students peer review blog 1

Week 2: Should cell phones be allowed in school?

Day 1

- (T) Explicit instruction of argumentative vocabulary and transition words
- (T) Pass out articles for essential question 2
- (T/S) Students work in groups while the teacher-researcher individually holds writing conferences that needed to be finished from week 1.
- (S) Work on laptops to publish their blogs
- (S) Blogs are due by the end of the day

Day 2

- (S) Students read and annotate articles
- (S) Students work on laptops reading and commenting on other students' blogs
- (T) (Mini Lesson) Instruction on finding analyzing evidence, citing appropriately, and conclusions
- (T) Status-checking on analysis in blogs

Day 3

- (T) Mini Lesson on ideational components of argumentative essays
- (S) Students draft their argumentative essays
- (S) Work in peers to begin conferencing

Day 4

- (S) Students are given time to work with peers and the teacher on conferencing
- (T) The teacher conferences with students on their first drafts
- (S) Students are allowed to begin writing final drafts of blogs after they conference with peer and teacher

Day 5

- (T/S) Conferences are held on the blogs
- (S) Students continue to work on the computer, reading and commenting on other student's blogs

Week 3: Should the driving age be lowered?

Day 1

- (T) Explicit instruction on ideational components
- (T) Discussion of bringing our own opinions into argumentation
- (T) Pass out articles for week 3
- (S) Students begin annotating and pre-writing activities

Day 2

- (S) Students continue reading and annotating articles
- (T) Mini lesson on APA (reviewing citing sources)
- (T) Status checking questions on APA and grammar

Day 3

- (S) Students continue planning and pre-writing for their blog
- (T) Begin writing conferences on 1st draft

Day 4

- (S) Students conference with each other on their blogs
- (T) The teacher is status-checking on the peer groups and offering help as needed

Day 5

- (T) Conferences are held on the 1st drafts of the blogs
- (S) Students review blogs in peer groups
- (S) Students can write their blog on the website when a peer and the teacher have seen their blog

Week 4: Does television and video violence desensitize society?

Day 1

- (T) Explicit instruction on the components of an effective argumentative essay
- (T) Pass out articles for week 4
- (S) Students work in groups discussing the articles
- (T) Teacher finishes conferences from week 3
- (S) Students finish their blogs on the website
- (S) Students finish commenting on peers' blog on the site

Day 2

- (S) Students continue reading and annotating articles
- (T) Mini lesson claim and counterclaim

Day 3

- (S) Students begin planning and pre-writing their papers
- (T) Begin writing conferences
- (S) Students begin peer conferences
- (T) Mini lesson on analyzing evidence

Day 4

- (T) Continue conferencing
- (S) Continue peer conferences on 1st draft
- (S) Students write their blogs after conferences and revisions

Day 5

- (T) Conferences are held on the blogs
- (S) Students review blogs in peer groups
- (S) Students continue to work on the computer, reading and commenting on other student's blogs
- (S) Students write their reflections

APPENDIX D
STUDENT WRITING SAMPLES

Quantitative Data Iteration 1 Argumentative Checklist

1.) Claim

Definition: The claim is the main argument that the student makes about the text that they are reading (Hillocks, 2011).

Data: There was a drop in student recorded frequencies of identifying the claim in their argumentative blogs from 100% in Week 1 to 94% in Week 4, equaling a 6% drop in students writing the claim.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The Week 1 essential question was, "Should candy and soda be allowed in schools?" Students received a check for including a claim if they mentioned candy, soda and schools. If they missed one of the concepts of the essential question, they did not receive a check.

Samples that Did Not Receive a Check:

Student 1201: "Candy can cause many health problems" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1).

The blog above did not receive a check for frequency for including the claim, because the argument of the text was not about candy.

Student 1203: "Schools have a big impact on a child's life" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student only mentioned school in the claim.

Samples that Did Receive a Check:

Student 1202: "Candy and soda shouldn't be allowed in schools because they cause serious health issues like diabetes, heart problems, high blood pressure, and sometimes death" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1).

The blog above did receive a check for including the claim because the student cited the elements of the essential question and took a stance on the argument.

Student 1206: "Although there are many reasons why we shouldn't ban candy and soda from schools, there are a lot of convincing reasons why we should ban candy and soda from schools" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1).

The blog above did receive a check because the student took a stance on the debate, but also acknowledged the counterclaim.

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on strengths and weaknesses in the claim samples from Cycle 1 to plan modeling and mini-lessons on the concept of claim for Cycle 2.

2.) Warrant Based in Evidence

Definition: The warrant is the explanation of how the evidence supports the claim (Hillocks, 2011).

Data: There was a drop in student recorded frequencies of identifying the warrant based in evidence in student argumentative blogs from 94% in Week 1 to 83% in Week 4, equaling an 11% drop in students writing the warrant based in evidence.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The Week 4 essential question was, "Homework, too much or too little?" Students received a check for including the warrant or statement of the evidence supporting the claim. Students did not receive a check if they missed citing the evidence that backed up the warrant.

Samples that Did Not Receive a Check:

Student 1216: "Students shouldn't be able to have to spend all of their time trying to find the internet when they don't have any. Students might not even be able to do their homework because they might not have the kind of internet access other students have and when they go to the library they might not even be able to have access to a computer" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student did not discuss evidence from the text.

Student 1214: "In my opinion, I believe that homework is not needed much in schools. When I was in the 5th-Grade, my teacher did not give me homework from April-June. And at the end of the school year, I had straight A's in all four marking periods" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student used personal experience instead of textual evidence.

Samples that Did Receive a Check (warrant based in evidence is underlined):

Student 1202: Kids have no time for friends. They can't have fun because of the countless hours of work, and most importantly they don't have time for their families, which is terrible to have no time for their families. They miss out on a lot. Take Amma

Ababio. She is an eleventh grader and is taking advanced classes; she does homework from 5 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. on school nights; her phone is off; her computer is off, except for research, and she even does homework while eating dinner (Pittsburgh Post- Gazette, 2014, p.2). (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4)

The blog above received a check because the student wrote a statement that backed up the claim and grounded the statement in evidence from the text.

Student 1205: "Research says that homework would allow, "more learning and a better chance to understand things"(Gazette,2014, p.2). And it does! Homework can help kids practice things they've learned in class to try to get a better understanding.

The blog above received a check because the student included the warrant after the textual evidence and backed up the claim that students should get homework every night.

Implications for Cycle 2: The teacher-researcher utilized the data on strengths and weaknesses in the warrants based in evidence from Cycle 1 to plan modeling and mini-lessons on the identifying textual evidence to support the claim.

3.) Explore Your Own Idea

Definition: To propose an original idea that would influence the societal issue that the students read about (Newell et al., 2014).

Data: There was a drop in student recorded frequencies of exploring an idea in their argumentative blogs from 28% in Week 1 to 17% in Week 4, equaling an 11% drop in students writing the exploration of their own idea.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The Week 3 essential question was, "Do Uniforms affect Student Learning?" Students received a check for including the exploration of their own idea that would be a way to connect the claim and the counterclaim. Students did not receive a check if they did not include the paragraph, or if they wrote a paragraph with an opinion.

Samples that Did Not Receive a Check:

Student 1218: "My opinion is that we shouldn't wear uniforms because some families can't afford uniforms, or not even food, or a house to live in, so how do you even think they would get school uniforms? And also wearing uniforms is violating the students rights" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student mentioned their opinion. The student did not propose a solution to the debate about uniforms.

Student 1217: "In conclusion, we should have uniforms eradicated so kids will get the chance to express themselves freely without hassle or judgment" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

This blog did not receive a check because the student gave an opinion, without proposing another way to look at the debate about uniforms.

Samples that Did Receive a Check (exploration of own idea is underlined):

Student 1209: Though uniforms might stop a little bullying and make kids feel safe, I don't think that's a good reason to take away every other kids' right of expression. I think schools should have a dress code that allows just a little more freedom. Just allow things such as blue jeans and different colored collared shirts. This way kids can still feel safe knowing others won't bully them because they're still basically wearing all

the same things, and other kids can express themselves a little more. I think this idea will work because in the article it says, "Kids need to express themselves but other kids don't want to get bullied because of what they wear." (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

The blog above received a check because the student proposed that school uniforms have a place in school, but uniform requirements should be structured with more freedom for student expression.

Student 1202: Instead of a uniform, have a dress code, where kids can wear whatever they want, but with no vulgar language or inappropriate pictures. In the article, it discusses that many schools with uniforms have increased attendance and graduation rates but their academic rates have not gone up. This may be because of students feeling that their not unique. (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3)

The blog above received a check because the student proposed that schools adopt dress codes instead of uniforms.

Implications for Cycle 2: The teacher-researcher utilized the data on strengths and weaknesses in the exploration of original ideas from Cycle 1 to plan discussion time in conferences and also the implementation of a starter to their sentence. The sentence starter that is used in Cycle 2 is, "I propose."

4.) Use Evidence to Back up Your Idea

Definition: The utilization of textual evidence to back up the original idea that the student explored (Newell et al., 2014).

Data: There was no increase or decrease in student recorded frequencies of using evidence to support an original idea in student argumentative blogs from Week 1 to Week 4. The students stayed at 17%.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The Week 3 essential question was, "Do Uniforms affect Student Learning?" Students received a check for including the evidence to support their own idea. Students did not receive a check if they did not include the textual evidence.

Samples that Did Not Receive a Check:

Student 1201: "Schools should have somewhat of a dress code to keep students dressing modestly and age appropriately. For example, shorts must be a reasonable length and pants pulled all the way up" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student gave their opinion, without proposing a solution grounded in evidence.

Student 1205: "Maybe dress code shouldn't be in schools. Let kids express themselves and their families. In conclusion, uniforms should not be in schools so students can have their freedom" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student gave their opinion and did not give textual evidence.

Samples that Did Receive a Check (textual evidence is underlined):

Student 1209: Though uniforms might stop a little bullying and make kids feel safe, I don't think that's a good reason to take away every other kid rights of expression. I

think schools should have a dress code that allows just a little more freedom. Just allow things such as blue jeans and different colored collared shirts. This way kids can still feel safe knowing others won't bully them because they're still basically wearing all the same things, and other kids can express themselves a little more. I think this idea will work because in the article it says, "Kids need to express themselves but other kids don't want to get bullied because of what they wear." (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

The blog above is the same student example used previously. The blog above did receive a check because the student proposed a solution to the debate and backed up the solution with textual evidence. The textual evidence is underlined in the above student sample.

Student 1202: Instead of a uniform, have a dress code, where kids can wear whatever they want but with no vulgar language or inappropriate pictures. In the article, it discusses that many schools with uniforms have increased attendance and graduation rates but their academic rates have not gone up. This may be because of students feeling that their not unique. (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3)

The blog above is the same student example used above. The blog above did receive a check because the student proposed a solution to the debate and backed up the solution with textual evidence. The textual evidence is underlined in the above student sample.

Implications for Cycle 2: The teacher-researcher utilized the data on strengths and weaknesses in the exploration of original ideas with textual evidence from Cycle 1 to plan discussion time in conferences and also the implementation of a starter to their sentence. The sentence starter that is used in Cycle 2 is, "I propose." The teacher-researcher planned modeling and mini-lessons on finding textual evidence to support the "I propose" paragraph.

5.) More than One Source

Definition: "Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources" (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.8, 2010).

Data: There was a drop in student recorded frequencies of utilizing more than one source for evidence in their argumentative blogs from 44% in Week 1 to 17% in Week 4, equaling a 27% drop in students utilizing more than one source.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The Week 2 essential question was, "Should you think twice about eating fast food?" Students received a check for including the evidence from more than one source to support their own idea. Students did not receive a check if they did not include the textual evidence from more than one source or if they did not use textual evidence from the sources.

Samples that Did Not Receive a Check:

Student 1210: I personally believe that people should only eat fast food every once in a while. I would rather be satisfied by a homemade meal while being healthy at the same time. If you want to ensure the quality of your food, try cooking it yourself. You'd be surprised at how healthy and delicious it is compared to fast food. When you cook your own food, you can not only guarantee the quality of it, but you can put whatever you want into it and dress it up any way you like. There are many flavors and options you can choose from. (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 2)

The blog above did not receive a check because the student discussed a personal belief without textual evidence to back it up.

Student 1214: "As a result, fast foods may or may not be the thing to blame for people in the United States to be or become obese. People may just cook unhealthy foods at home, or just fast foods being so unhealthy, that is what leads to the problem of people all over the United States to struggle with the problem of being obese" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 2).

The blog above did not receive a check because the student did not use any textual evidence to back up their statement.

Samples that Did Receive a Check:

The teacher-researcher reported a 0% of students utilizing multiple sources of textual evidence during Week 2 of the instructional cycle.

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in utilizing multiple forms of textual evidence to support original ideas from Cycle 1 to plan discussion time in conferences on the utilization of evidence. The teacher-researcher planned modeling and mini-lessons on finding multiple forms of textual evidence.

6.) Comment on a peers' blog

Definition: Engage in a debate with other students about the articles on societal issues (Newell et al., 2014).

Data: There was a drop in student recorded frequencies of commenting on each others' blogs from 100% in Week 1 to 83% in Week 4, equaling a 17% drop in students writing the warrant based in evidence.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The Week 2 essential question was, "Should you think twice about eating fast food?" Students received a check commenting on a peers' blog and engaging in a debate. Students did not receive a check if they did not make a comment on a peers' blog.

Samples that Did Not Receive a Check:

The teacher-researcher reported 100% of students commenting on each others' blogs during Week 2.

Samples that Did Receive a Check:

Student 1214: I agree with you. I do believe that fast foods are the problem. Although kids can eat junk foods at home, they cannot be nearly as unhealthy as fast foods. Even if fast foods are not to blame, they are a big problem. Children may eat junk foods at home, whenever they do not eat fast foods, but, it cannot be as bad as eating fast foods. A quote says, "One of four Americans eat fast foods every day." That can be really unhealthy. Kids may eat so much of that, and then become overweight, or even obese. Overall, fast foods are to blame for most of the obesity in America. (Blog Comments, Cycle 1, Week 2)

The blog comment above received a check because the student agreed with their peers' blog and added to the argument.

Student 1216: Although you have clearly stated why we shouldn't eat fast foods, there is another side to the story that proves to be a bigger problem than fast food. That problem is kids eating too much junk food in their lives. For example, in the text it states that

"children who frequently eat at fast food restaurants will go home and do what they generally do when not eating at a fast food restaurant. They'll scarf cookies and chips. They will chug sugar sweetened soda from a bottle, and heat up frozen pizzas"(Los Angeles Times, p.4).This means that when kids aren't at a fast food restaurant they're just at home eating sugary snacks. But since kids spend more time at home than a fast food restaurant this means that kids are eating more unhealthy foods at home than at a fast food restaurant. Children eat more unhealthy foods at home than they would at a fast food restaurant because children spend more time at their home than at a fast food restaurant. Plus in the same article it states, "Children who go to fast-food restaurants a lot tend to eat food that would probably make many of them overweight or obese anyway"(Los Angeles Times). So this means that children who go to fast food restaurants a lot just eat more junk food at home. Children should be worrying about junk food rather than fast food. (Blog Comments, Cycle 1, Week 2).

The blog comment above received a check because the student disagreed with their peers' blog and gave textual evidence in support of their debate.

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in commenting on a peers' blog from Cycle 1 to plan more time on the laptops to encourage students to read each others' blogs.

Quantitative Data Iteration 1 Cognitive Complexity

1.) Design/Create

Definition: "Student remembers, or recalls, appropriate previously learned information" to create or design a project (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

Students were given the opportunity to utilize the design component of cognitive complexity. Students were instructed on designing and creating effective arguments to support the claim and counterclaim of their blogs. The students demonstrated progression toward cognitive complexity by creating effective thesis statements and designing their blogs around them.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1202: Candy and soda shouldn't be allowed in schools because they cause serious health issues like diabetes, heart problems, high blood pressure, and sometimes death. My opinion is that cafeteria foods are junk foods. They have grease, trans fat, and way too much sugar. We should just ban cafeteria foods. If we ban candy, soda, and other junk food we should also ban cafeteria foods which aren't healthy either (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1).

The blog above is not an example of cognitive complexity because the student did not create a clear thesis statement during Week 1 of the instructional cycle.

The blog below is an example of the work from the same student. Student 1202 improved during Week 2, showing progress on the continuum of the design of an argument stating (thesis statement is underlined):

Student 1202: There has been a debate on whether homework is beneficial. Homework is not beneficial because it ruins children's lives because they have no time for social interactions, on the other hand Homework helps show a student's strengths and weaknesses in a certain subject. In this essay you will see the pros and cons of homework then you choose is "Is Homework Beneficial or not? (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4)

Student 1201: "Right now there is a huge debate on whether or not sugary snacks should be allowed in school. It could have a great outcome but what happens if when kids are older they don't know how to make healthy choices" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1)?

The blog above is not an example of cognitive complexity because the student did not create a clear thesis statement during Week 1 of the instructional cycle. The student did not present both sides of the argument.

The blog below is an example of the work from the same student. Student 1201 improved during Week 3, showing progress on the continuum of the design of an argument stating (thesis statement is underlined):

Student 1201: "Many schools all over the country have a uniform. Proponents feel that uniforms are a great step toward encouraging kids to focus; while, opponents say it stunts a kids freedom of expression and individuality" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 3).

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in creating and designing an effective argumentative blog from Cycle 1 to plan more time drafting thesis statements and utilizing a planning graphic organizer.

2.) Connect

Definition: "Student translates, comprehends, or interprets information based on prior learning" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to connect to each other in the online forum. The teacher-researcher instructed students to connect to the argumentative blog that their peers were writing, in order to engage in a debate about the topic. Kidblog helped the students to fulfill the Social Practice epistemology (Newell et al., 2014) and encouraged students to connect to each other in an online forum. Students commented on each others' blogs and engaged in a debate. Students were able to connect their thoughts to their peers through discussion and collaboration.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1204: "I didn't see a counterclaim in your paragraphs but I have to disagree on your "yes" section because sometimes kids eat too much junk food. If we go back to text, it says "About a third of American children are overweight or obese (Vilsack, p. 1)." This shows how kids are getting obese for eating too much junk food and this is very risky in a child's life" (Blogs Comments, Cycle 1, Week 1).

The blog comment above is not a strong example of cognitive complexity because the student did not engage in a debate during Week 1 of the instructional cycle. The student critiqued the other students' blog structure and did not support their argument with strong textual evidence.

The blog comment below is an example of the work from the same student. Student 1204 improved during Week 3, showing progress on the continuum stating (connection is underlined):

Student 1204:

I have to disagree on your "no" side because in my opinion you should think twice about eating fast food because if you don't have a limit on fast food you will start to get health issues and also in my opinion fast food and "junk food" are the same exact thing! I think this because it all depends on how many times you eat fast food and also eating to much of it is life threatening. In the article it says, " Health researchers who blame fast food for a long list of ailments, including diabetes and obesity, argue that value menus make such meals even more accessible (Chicago Tribune, 2013, p.3)." This shows how fast food has many risks. (Blog Comments, Cycle 1, Week 2)

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in connecting from Cycle 1 to plan more time collaborating on the computers.

3.) Synthesize

Definition: "Student originates, integrates, and combines ideas into a product, plan, or proposal that is new to him or her" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

Students were given the opportunity to utilize the synthesis component of cognitive complexity. The teacher-researcher instructed students to combine their own ideas with the text and utilize sources to help prove a point. The Ideational Epistemology and in the Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014) were on the writing checklist to guide the conversation toward student synthesis. The students demonstrated progression toward cognitive complexity by synthesizing utilizing textual evidence.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1203: Also another problem that causes children to not benefit from homework is that some kids do not have television sets and/or computers and/or can't afford them which causes the child's parent or guardian to have to drive or walk all the way to the library to do homework or a project that will most likely not benefit them in the long run. (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4)

The blog above is an example of the student taking the evidence from the text and expanding on it with their own prior knowledge; however, the student did not use direct information from the text.

The blog below is an example the student synthesizing in the conclusion of the blog. The student expressed their own thoughts and synthesized with textual evidence (synthesis is underlined).

Student 1206: In conclusion, homework does not benefit students so it should not be in schools. I think that all it does is take away time from kids' childhood. When you are a

kid you are supposed to live your life like a kid would, but if homework gets in the way of that, then it shouldn't be in schools. In the article it states, "Amma Ababio figures that she does homework from 5 p.m. until 11 p.m." (Post-Gazette, 2014, pg.2). This proves my point! This 11th-grader should be making bonds with other people; however, because of homework she can't because of all of the work that the teachers give her.

What would you do if this was your daughter/son? Would you accept all of the homework that they are giving him/her? (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4)

The blog below is an example of the student demonstrating synthesis in a blog comment (synthesis is underlined).

Student 1207: Homework is *not* beneficial. Giving homework is just a waste of time. Students go home after 6 hours of school and shouldn't have another 1-2 hours of homework. But some students get even more. In the article it says, "She figures she does homework from about 5 p.m. to 11:30 p.m. on school nights"(Pittsburgh Post-Gazelle, 2014, p.2). Also, homework is not the same for everyone; someone might get hours and hours while someone else gets just one hour or maybe nothing. In the article it states, "He figures he spends 'maybe an hours tops'" (Pittsburgh Post-Gazelle, 2014, p.2). This shows how homework is unevenly given out but not only that but homework doesn't help them understand what they are doing more than just learning it in class. "He doesn't think the homework helps because he learns from paying attention in class" (Pittsburgh Post-Gazelle, 2014, p.2). All these quotes show how homework is not beneficial. (Blog Comment, Cycle 1, Week 4)

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in synthesis from Cycle 1 to plan more time collaborating with students during peer/teacher conferences to guide their formation of their own ideas to the societal issue.

4.) Apply Concepts

Definition: "Student selects, transfers, and uses data and principles to complete a task or problem with minimum direction" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher kept a teacher plan when planning the mini-lessons of the intervention. The mini-lessons that the students were instructed on were: APA, argumentative vocabulary, modeling blog format, thesis statement, introduction, citing relevant information and transitions. The students' ability to apply concepts of the mini-lessons is evidenced in student writing:

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

APA (citations are highlighted in the above examples):

The teacher-researcher utilized the mini-lessons to model and give explicit instruction on APA. Many of the blogs samples that have been highlighted above display proficient credit given to the textual sources. The citations are highlighted.

Thesis Statement and Introduction (Thesis statement is underlined):

Student 1212: "Is homework beneficial? A big debate on homework has formed over years. Is there too little or too much? It depends! Some students and parents think there is too little while some argue there is too much" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4).

The blog above is an example that demonstrates the student not framing the blog with a thesis statement. The student did not provide a thesis statement with the claim or counterclaim, but it opens up the argument.

The blog below is an example of a blog addressing the claim and counterclaim in the thesis statement (thesis statement is underlined).

Student 1201 wrote, "Many schools all over the country have a uniform. Proponents feel that they are a great step and encourage kids to focus; while, opponents say it stunts a kid's freedom of expression and individuality" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1).

Argumentative Vocabulary (Argumentative vocabulary is underlined):

Student 1204: "These people claim you shouldn't think twice about fast food because it's cheap and it's affordable" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 2).

Student 1212 used argue by stating, "But on the other hand, people argue that they need more homework" (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4).

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in applying concepts from Cycle 1 to plan more time modeling and giving mini-lessons to students.

5.) Analyze

Definition: "Student distinguishes, classifies, and relates assumptions, hypotheses, evidence, or structure of a statement or question" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to analyze the textual evidence that they were using to support their claim and counterclaim.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum (analysis is underlined):

Student 1202: This means people feel when the government gets involved in children's problems and try to force them to change it makes the situation worse. Getting rid of junk food makes no sense. Instead the government can fund classes where students learn to make healthy decisions in their diet and have cafeterias serve real food and not some by product, factory made, artificial slop that can cause serious sicknesses and it isn't just in schools restaurants and fast food chains like McDonalds where someone found parasites (tape worms). (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 1)

The blog above is an example that demonstrates the student analyzing the quote that they used in their blog. Many students used the sentence starter, "This quote means..." during Cycle 1.

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in analyzing textual evidence from Cycle 1 to plan more time modeling and giving mini-lessons to students on analyzing textual evidence.

6.) Critique

Definition: "Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to engage in debate when writing blog comments on their peers' blogs as a way to fulfill the Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014).

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1217: I agree with your statement that kids should only get a small amount of homework. It will help kids not feel overburdened with homework but instead get a good feeling that it will be quick. "The laptops we do have, the batteries aren't working. You can check out a laptop, and the next 30 minutes its dead. The sad part is, if you don't have a computer you can't do your homework" (Rumor, 2014, Miami). This shows that kids with no laptops at home should be given a small work load and mainly writing assignments so they won't fail. (Blog Comments, Cycle 1, Week 4).

The blog comment above is an example that demonstrates commenting on a peers' blog. The student does not critique the argument that the peer was making.

The blog comment below is an example that demonstrates a student adding to their peers comment, but does not demonstrate the student engaging in a debate. The peer blog is not referenced; therefore, the student cannot critique the argument of their peer.

Student 1217: I have to disagree on your "no" side because in my opinion you should have to think twice about eating fast food because if you don't have a limit on fast food you will start to get health issues and also in my opinion fast food and "junk food" are the same exact thing! I think this because it all depends on how many times you eat fast food and also eating too much of it is life threatening. In the article it says, " Health researchers, who blame fast food for a long list of ailments, including diabetes and obesity, argue that value menus make such meals even more accessible (Chicago Tribune, 2013, P.3)." This shows how fast food has many risks. (Blog Comments, Cycle 1, Week 2)

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in critiquing from Cycle 1 to plan more collaborative work and debates in the classroom.

7.) Prove

Definition: "Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria" (Webb, 2005). This is the same definition that is used above.

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to prove their point. Students discussed both the claim and the counterclaim in their paragraph addressing the Structural Epistemology and

students were encouraged to discuss their own views in their paragraph addressing the Ideational Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014).

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum (proving is underlined):

Student 1206: In conclusion, junk food as a whole causes childhood obesity. It is my personal opinion for the reasons that I stated in my essay. Since there is a lot of evidence for both sides of the argument it would be hard to make a decision. Which side would u pick? Does junk food cause childhood obesity? Or is it just fast food that causes it?

(Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 2)

The blog above is an example of a student proving their point in the conclusion to their blog.

The blog below is an example of a student using textual evidence to support their opinion.

Student 1218: There has been a debate on if homework is too little or too much. I say yes there is too much homework but at the same time there's too little because according to the story it said "kindergarten homework is limited to 10-15 min." That quote means they have too little because they have to do vocabulary words, spelling, math and reading that should take them about 20-25 minutes. According to the story it states, "10 minutes per night growing to 40-60 min in grade 5." That quote means that kids have less homework. (Blogs, Cycle 1, Week 4)

Implications for Cycle 2:

The teacher-researcher utilized the data on the weaknesses in proving from Cycle 1 to plan more time modeling and giving mini-lessons to students on proving the point with textual evidence.

Iteration 2 Cognitive Complexity

1.) Design/Create

Definition: "Student remembers, or recalls, appropriate previously learned information" to create or design a project (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

Students designed effective arguments beginning with a strong introduction and thesis statement. The teacher-researcher gave mini-lessons and group work around introducing the claim and counterclaim to the weekly topical essential questions during Cycle 2 of instruction. The teacher-researcher's goal was to give students the opportunity to effectively introduce their arguments and design their blog around the thesis statement to meet the need of the cognitive complexity continuum.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1202 designed a thesis statement in Cycle 2 stating, "There has been recent debate over technology, if it's helping or hindering people's lives. Some say technology is hindering the youth, because teens are becoming lazy and wrapped up in phones, televisions, and tablets; however, some parents say technology is helping their kids with school work" (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 2).

The blog above is an example of cognitive complexity because the student used the word "however" to frame the argument around the claim and counterclaim (thesis statement is underlined).

The blog below is an example of cognitive complexity because the student discussed his/her own opinion, but still designed the blog around the claim and counterclaim (thesis statement is underlined).

Student 1203: Should cell phones be allowed in schools? Cell phones are useful tools in classrooms around the world. They can help teenagers by allowing them access to a calculator or to define words on a search engine, especially when there are no computers in the classroom; however, teens are abusing their power by visiting inappropriate websites or cheating on work during class time. Also, they distract students when they go off when the student is working. (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 2)

The blog below is an example of cognitive complexity because the student designed the blog around the claim, counterclaim and research (thesis statement is underlined).

Student 1208: Throughout the years there has been an ongoing debate on whether video games and TV lead to violence. Researchers claim there is a definite link to increased aggression in children who play violent video games; however, other experts question and counter the claim stated by raising awareness of the statement, whether video games and TV correlates with criminal violence or juvenile delinquency. Insufficient evidence exists about whether this claim is true. (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 4)

2.) Connect

Definition: "Student translates, comprehends, or interprets information based on prior learning" (Web, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to connect to each other in the online forum. The teacher-researcher instructed students to connect to the argumentative blog that their peers were writing, in order to engage in a debate about the topic. KidBlog helped the students to fulfill the Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014) and encouraged students to connect to each other in an online forum. Students commented on each others' blogs and engaged in a debate. Students were able to connect their thoughts to their peers through discussion and collaboration.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1206: Although the internet might distract us and make us lose time, there is no denying that the internet has been a big help to us. We can access all types of information, so when it comes to school, teachers need to give us more research time on the computers. According to Warlick, (2005) the internet provides us with a "vast global digital library." The internet can grant us a lot of information if we just look. That is why teachers should give us more research time, because the longer we look the more we will find. In conclusion, the internet has been a great help to us over the years; however, people can get a little distracted when it comes to keeping track of time. (Blog Comments, Cycle 2, Week 1)

The blog comment above is an example of cognitive complexity because the student connected to another student's argument. This blog is also an example of a student connecting their own prior knowledge to the topical essential question (connection is underlined).

The blog comment below is an example of a student progressing toward cognitive complexity. The student made a connection to their peer, but did not connect their response to textual evidence (connection is underlined).

Student 1217: I agree with your statement that parents should teach kids about the consequences of getting behind the wheel while intoxicated and or on drugs or with a phone. Parents should educate their children about the things that could happen to them if they are on drugs or drunk. Even texting behind the wheel is dangerous because of the accidents that could happen. If parents are not teaching their kids valuable life skills then we cannot even trust parents to be able to drive well either. (Blog Comments, Cycle 2, Week 2)

The blog comment below is an example of a student demonstrating cognitive complexity. The student made a connection to their peer and a connection to the article by utilizing textual evidence (connection is underlined).

Student 1212: I disagree with what you said, "Maybe it's not always their fault, but videogames and TV should not be as disturbing as they are. Video game designers (need) to think about children/adults and what the outcome can be of playing these violent games. Maybe they should consider making new friendlier games." It is not always the video game designers fault. People are aware of what these games are and how violent they are. These are the types of video games people enjoy. There are many

"friendlier" games out there. People choose what they find amusing to them. Also, parents should be aware of what their kids are purchasing and what they buy for their kids. A lot of kids get away with things. The article specifies, "He found that kids who played the bad guy in shooter games often felt guilty" (p.2). They should feel a little guilty; it's really not funny to blast someone's head off for no reason. Most videogames have a story that gives it away. Games aren't appropriate for these kids and parents should watch what they are playing. (Blog Comments, Cycle 2, Week 4)

3.) Synthesize

Definition: "Student originates, integrates, and combines ideas into a product, plan or proposal that is new to him or her" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

Students were given the opportunity to utilize the synthesis component of cognitive complexity. The teacher-researcher instructed the students to combine their own ideas with the text to utilize sources to help prove a point. The Ideational Epistemology and the Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014) were on the writing checklist to guide the conversation toward student synthesis. The students demonstrated progression toward cognitive complexity by synthesizing textual evidence.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1210: In the end, I think that technology might not be for everyone but it is probably something that should be considered for learning purposes. I propose that students engage in technology when given a specific assignment. A quote to back up my

proposition says, "It guides teachers in their instructional planning; tech directors in their procurement, implementation, and support planning; and better prepares children for their future" (Warlick, p.4, 2005). This quote further explains the good uses of technology.

(Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 1)

The blog above is an example of cognitive complexity. The student synthesized through the claim and the counterclaim and proposed a way to bridge the claim and counterclaim by utilizing textual evidence (synthesis is underlined).

The blog below is an example of cognitive complexity. The student stated the textual evidence that backed up his/her opinion on the solution (synthesis is underlined).

Student 1206: Cell phones have greatly increased the communication levels between parents and students via phone call. It has proven itself to be a useful resource in school; however, despite all of the facts teachers still believe that cell phones are the main distraction in class. I propose that cell phones be allowed in school for appropriate use. According to Ritter (n.d), "I trust my kids to make responsible and respectful choices; I expect teachers and school administrators to the same" (p.2). If a phone is out and being used appropriately, than teachers have no reason to confiscate it. In conclusion, cell phones have been greatly helpful for students and parents when it comes to communication; however, teachers have strongly affirmed that it is the main reason why kids are distracted and failing their classes. Do you believe that cell phones are a distraction in schools? (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 2)

The blog below is an example of a student progressing on the continuum toward synthesis. The student did not add textual evidence.

Student 1214 wrote, "I propose, that children should play video games, but not for long amounts of time. Children, who play violent video games, may end up as violent as Adam Lanza" (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 4).

4.) Apply Concepts

Definition: "Student selects, transfers, and uses data and principles to complete a task or problem with minimum direction" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The deep reflection from Cycle 1 had implications for the planning and instruction of Cycle 2. The teacher-researcher planned to focus on the Ideational Epistemology, while continuing to structure instruction on the Structural Epistemology. The teacher-researcher utilized the conference strategy of the intervention. The teacher-researcher continued to utilize mini-lessons during conferences, intertwining the strategies of the intervention. Students showed improvement in applying concepts as evidenced in the argumentative elements frequency chart. Table 4.7 displays the argumentative elements in the Ideational Epistemology in Cycle 1 to Cycle 2.

5.) Analyze

Definition: "Student distinguishes, classifies, and relates assumptions, hypotheses, evidence or structure of a statement or question" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher focused on instructing students with vocabulary to help them introduce their analysis during Cycle 2 of instruction.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum (analysis is underlined).

Student 1205 stated, "This statement shows that the internet is helpful for teachers and students. The article talks about Beacon High school in NYC; the teachers rely on digital assignments to help their students understand Shakespeare" (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 1).

The blog above demonstrates cognitive complexity because the student explains the textual evidence.

The blog below demonstrates cognitive complexity because the student utilized argumentative vocabulary during analysis.

Student 1215 wrote, "This indicates how much time Alexis has been playing and probably why it has taken such a strong influence on him. Alexis wasn't the only one affected" (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 4).

The blog below demonstrates cognitive complexity because the student utilized argumentative vocabulary during analysis.

Student 1208 wrote, "This statement proves the fact that cell phones are very important not just for emergencies but incorporated for a better more organized way of learning" (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 2).

6.) Critique

Definition: "Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to engage in debate when writing blog comments on their peers' blogs to fulfill the Social Practice Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014). Students were able to critique and add to the arguments of their peers.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum:

Student 1216 wrote: I disagree with your statement, "Children, who play violent video games, may end up as violent as Adam Lanza." As most kids who play video games end up fine later on in their lives (there are some students that) video games help out. The main cause for kids being violent is their mental sanity and how they are growing up. But video games can still cause violence if the wrong types of people play video games. However no matter what, video games can still benefit kids rather than cause violence. For example, in the text it states, "First person shooter games are one of the most hated types of video games. However, Bavalier said they can help improve vision and the ability to pay attention" (p.3). So this means that video games can benefit kids rather than hurt them and video games are better for kids to play so they can improve their senses. So this is why video games benefit kids rather than cause violence in them. Video games don't actually cause violence in kids even if they play for long times it's more about the sanity of the kid. (Blog Comments, Cycle 2, Week 4)

The blog comment above is an example of cognitive complexity because the student critiques his/her peers' blog and engages in debate.

The blog comment below is an example of cognitive complexity because the student engaged in a debate with his/her peer.

Student 1211 wrote: I disagree with you. I believe that the driving age should not be raised. I say that because in the passage it states, "If your neighbor robs a bank, should you go to jail? No. If your classmate gets in an accident should your driving license be taken away? Of course not! Raising the driving age will punish all young drivers for the mistakes of a few of their peers." (p.1). This shows that just because some teens get in car accidents doesn't mean that they should ruin it and make the driving age rise. This is one reason why I disagree with you. (Blog Comments, Cycle 2, Week 4)

7.) Prove

Definition: "Student appraises, assesses, or critiques on a basis of specific standards and criteria" (Webb, 2005).

Samples from Blogs and Explanation:

The teacher-researcher instructed students to prove their point. Students discussed both the claim and the counterclaim in their paragraph addressing the Structural Epistemology and students were encouraged to discuss their own views in their paragraph addressing the Ideational Epistemology (Newell et al., 2014). The students were able to prove their points by utilizing textual evidence to back up the claim and counterclaim.

Student Samples of Progression on the Continuum (proving is underlined):

Student 1208 wrote: Cell phones shall not be posed as a threat and were not meant to be. So why do you now ask schools and teachers to prohibit them and exile them from schools? Cell phones pose and set the standard for new learning and economic instability with their low costs. In a recent article published by the Arizona Republic,

Natalie Milman a George Washington University education technology professor states that, "With mobile apps and the internet at their fingertips, teachers and students are now using phones as clickers to answer questions, providing feedback on student progress, and also to document labs, collaborate on group projects and capture teachers' notes"(Milman, n.d, p.5).

The blog above demonstrates cognitive complexity because the student utilized textual evidence to prove his/her point.

The blog below demonstrates cognitive complexity because the student utilized the textual evidence to support the point that the student proved.

Student 1210: Cell phone usage should be prohibited and exempt from school classrooms. In a recent statement by Jesse Scaccia (A former English teacher) claims, "I can tell you cell phones don't belong in the classroom. A student with a cell phone is an uninterested student, one with a short attention span who cares more about socializing than education. When I was teaching, too often I turned around from writing something on the blackboard to find students text-messaging or otherwise playing with their phones" (Scaccia, n.d, p.1). (Blogs, Cycle 2, Week 2)