ARGUMENTATIVE WRITING: RESEARCH AND DIRECTIONS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING

The following document is meant to help you understand current trends and directions in the research around teaching argumentative writing in history. Facing History and Ourselves is concerned with many aspects of a learner's identity—from moral philosopher to analytical thinker to ethical decision maker to historical reasoner—and recognizes the need for our students to become profound thinkers and writers. The following information is intended to help you consider how to support your students in this journey.

I. What We Want for Our Students as Thinkers and Writers

Growth Mindset and Writers' Dispositions

Recent research by Dweck[11] indicates that people can hold two different beliefs, or "mindsets," about intelligence: the "fixed" mindset (in which people believe they either are smart or stupid, good or bad at specific skills) and the "growth" mindset (in which people believe they can get better at things and are always learning). Facing History and Ourselves fully embraces the growth mindset; we hope to encourage students and teachers to see students through that lens.

Experts in the field of writing instruction indicate that in order for students to succeed as writers in college and careers, they need certain dispositions, perhaps even more than specific skills. These dispositions include curiosity; engagement; appreciation of craft; ability to reflect, analyze, synthesize, and revise; willingness to give and receive feedback; persistence in moving beyond the self; and valuing reading and writing as powerful tools for inquiry.[12]

When teaching writing, help students know that all writers are always learning and growing. Writing is *not* something you either "can" or "can't" do, something you are either "good at" or "bad at." Support and celebrate students' curiosity, persistence, and willingness to reflect on their own thinking and writing. Given Facing History's focus on intellectual, social, and moral development, we encourage teachers to "teach the writer, not the writing."[13] Help them learn about themselves as writers in ways that allow them to transfer that learning to future writing tasks and other life challenges.

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[11] Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008).

[12] Quate, "Lessons Learned" and "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing," CWPA, NCTE, and NWP, January 2011, *http://wpacouncil.org/files/framework-for-success-postsecondary-writing.pdf*.

[13] Lucy Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Writing* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

Argument

Students demonstrate their strong analytical thinking by crafting oral and written arguments. These skills are emphasized in the Common Core Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies. Specifically, Writing Anchor Standard 1 demands that students write arguments on discipline-specific content within a history classroom. This is not to be confused with merely writing a persuasive essay; the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) focuses on text-based historical writing that argues for a point of view.

The most commonly referenced model for written argument was developed by Stephen Toulmin.[14] Toulmin described six key elements/concepts with which an argument can be analyzed and constructed.[15]

Claim: the statement you are asking others to accept
Grounds: the basis of persuasion; the data, evidence, and reasons
Warrant: the link or "glue" that holds the evidence and claim together[16], explaining how and why the evidence helps prove the claim
Backing: the additional support for the warrant
Qualifier: indicates strength of the leap from claim to warrant; may limit universality of the claims
Rebuttal: acknowledgment of counterarguments; typically includes own claims, grounds, warrants

The CCSSI notes, "Crafting an argument frequently relies on using information; similarly, an analysis of a subject will likewise include argumentative elements. While these forms are not strictly independent, what is critical to both forms of writing is the use and integration of evidence. In historical, technical, and scientific writing, accuracy matters, and students should demonstrate their knowledge through precision and detail."[17]

Persuasion is a *subset* of argument, in which authors intentionally use rhetorical devices to compel their readers.[18] There are different types of argument, including those based on facts and reason, character, and values. Facing History emphasizes both reasoning and empathy when crafting written arguments and wants students to find their voice and claim their power by being able to argue for a point of view. At the heart of argument is the relationship between claims, grounds (evidence), and warrants (analysis). Students may better understand the kind of thinking you want them to do if you show them this visual and teach them the "language" of argument. Many students struggle when learning to craft effective analysis/warrants. Students need to make

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[14] Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

[15] "Toulmin's Argument Model," accessed October 22, 2011, *http://changingminds.org/disciplines/argument/making_argument/toulmin.htm*.

[16] Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, *Everything's an Argument,* 95.

[17] "Draft Publisher's Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in ELA & Literacy, Grades 4–12," accessed October 22, 2011, *http://www.ode.state.or.us/wma/teachlearn/commoncore/ela-publishers-criteria.pdf*.

[18] Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, *Everything's an Argument.*

explicit to their audience how the evidence supports the claim, rather than expecting readers to infer.

Critical Thinking

To be engaged citizens, students need to be able to analyze, question, and critique texts.[19] At Facing History, we encourage teachers to use learning-centered teaching strategies that nurture students' literacy and critical thinking skills within a respectful classroom culture.

As defined by experts in the field of literacy,

> *Critical thinking* is the ability to analyze a situation or text and make thoughtful decisions based on that analysis. Writers use critical writing and reading to develop and represent the processes and products of their critical thinking. For example, writers may be asked to write about familiar or unfamiliar texts, examining assumptions about the texts held by different audiences. Through critical writing and reading, writers think through ideas, problems, and issues; identify and challenge assumptions; and explore multiple ways of understanding.[20]

Teachers can help writers develop critical thinking by providing opportunities and guidance to

- read texts from multiple points of view;
- write about texts for multiple purposes, including (but not limited to) interpretation, synthesis, response, summary, critique, and analysis;
- craft written responses to texts that put the writer's ideas in conversation with those in a text;
- evaluate sources for credibility, bias, quality of evidence, and quality of reasoning;
- conduct primary and secondary research using a variety of print and nonprint sources;
- write texts for various audiences and purposes that are informed by research (e.g., to support ideas or positions, to illustrate alternative perspectives); and
- generate questions to guide research.[21]

Facing History has always emphasized critical thinking as a cornerstone of civic engagement. One can only engage with society if one asks the hard questions and views issues from many angles.

Historical Reasoning ("Disciplinary Literacy")

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[19] M. McLaughlin and G. DeVoogd, "Critical Literacy as Comprehension: Expanding Reader Response," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 48, no. 1 (2004): 52–62.

[20] "Framework for Success," CWPA, NCTE, and NWP.

[21] Ibid.

Students in Facing History classrooms have myriad opportunities to develop their general analytical thinking skills. They also have an opportunity to develop more specific "historical reasoning."[22]

Literacy scholars have begun to focus on this idea of "disciplinary literacy": the advanced, specialized literacies required for one to read, write, and think about specific content in ways most valued by a given academic discipline[23] and that advance disciplinary understanding.[24] Monte-Sano has researched the disciplinary literacy specific to "historical writing" (when students write arguments about historical events) and states the following:

- "Historical reasoning involves reading evidence from the perspective of those who created it and placing it into context. Such contextualization is central to history, in that historians may only interrogate artifacts from the past";[25]
- "In constructing historical arguments, writing is often inextricable from a disciplinary way of thinking and working with evidence. According to history experts, the use and framing of evidence in historical writing indicate key aspects of disciplinary reasoning, including recognizing biases in sources, comparing evidence, situating evidence in its context, and taking into account different perspectives and multiple causes";[26]
- Strong use of evidence in historical writing includes the following "benchmarks"[27]:
    - **Factual and interpretive accuracy:** offering evidence that is correct and interpretations that are plausible
    - **Persuasiveness of evidence:** including evidence that is relevant and strong in terms of helping to prove the claim
    - **Sourcing of evidence:** noting what the source is and its credibility and/or bias
    - **Corroboration of evidence:** recognizing how different documents work together to support a claim
    - **Contextualization of evidence:** placing the evidence into its appropriate historical context

Facing History materials invite and require strong historical reasoning, since students are required to examine evidence carefully, consider the assumptions and bias of specific authors or sources, and consistently come to strong interpretations about historical events.

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[22] Monte-Sano, "Beyond Reading Comprehension."

[23] Elizabeth Birr Moje et al., "Integrating Literacy Instruction into Secondary School Science Inquiry: The Challenges of Disciplinary Literacy Teaching and Professional Development," accessed October 22, 2011, *http://www-personal.umich.edu/~moje/pdf/MojeEtAlScienceLiteracyTeachingStrategies2010.pdf,* and Timothy Shanahan and Cynthia Shanahan, "Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content-Area Literacy," *Harvard Educational Review* 78, no. 1 (2008), 40–59.

[24] Monte-Sano, "Beyond Reading Comprehension," 218.

[25] Monte-Sano, "Disciplinary Literacy in History," 541.

[26] Monte-Sano, "Disciplinary Literacy in History."

[27] Benchmarks of strong use of evidence developed by Monte-Sano, based on prior thinking of Wineburg (199) as found in Monte-Sano, "Beyond Reading Comprehension," 213. Monte-Sano, "Disciplinary Literacy in History."

II. What This Means for Our Teaching

Teach Writing Processes

Anyone who has written—whether composing with traditional pen and paper or with the use of electronic technologies—knows that writing is messy, complex, and anything but linear. Students engage in myriad cognitive activities as they write.

Scholars no longer think of "the" singular linear writing process. Rather, the process is multifaceted and recursive.[28] As stated recently in the framework prepared by three leading writing organizations:

> *Writing processes* are the multiple strategies writers use to approach and undertake writing and research. Writing processes are not linear. Successful writers use different processes that vary over time and depend on the particular task. For example, a writer may research a topic before drafting, then after receiving feedback conduct additional research as part of revising. Writers learn to move back and forth through different stages of writing, adapting those stages to the situation. This ability to employ flexible writing processes is important as students encounter different types of writing tasks.[29]

Students need to learn to toggle back and forth between the messy thinking and putting that thinking into a coherent and clear written form. They also need to practice key rhetorical concepts to help them understand *why* they are writing. They need help thinking about concepts such as audience, purpose, context, and genre.[30] We see this writing as a crucial part of the journey of a Facing History student; it is a process where students test their assumptions and routinely reevaluate their ideas, thinking critically about the information they are studying and communicating these thoughts to the world around them.

Use Inquiry; Embed Authentic Experiences and Explicit Instruction

Overall, Facing History takes an inquiry approach: the curriculum is designed to engage students in the moral and philosophical questions regarding historical events and individual choices within a developmental context. Researchers have found that a similar "inquiry-based" mode of writing instruction has the greatest effects on student achievement.[31] Basically, this means that the teacher provides clear and specific objectives about the writing, chooses rich materials to engage students in the *thinking* that sits underneath the writing, and creates activities like small-group problem-centered discussions that invite high levels of peer interaction. This inquiry mode is in

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[28] Gert Rijlaarsdam and Huub van den Bergh, "Writing Process Theory: A Functional Dynamic Approach" in *Handbook of Writing Research*, ed. Charles A. MacArthur, Steve Graham, and Jill Fitzgerald. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006), 51.

[29] "Framework for Success," CWPA, NCTE, and NWP.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Hillocks, *Research on Written Composition*.