**Workshop: Strategies for Teaching Argument**

**Date**: 15 February 2012

**Time**: 1:30

**Room**: Allen 117

**In attendance**:

**I. Opening Remarks:**

* Introduce Brooke Rollins

**II. Brooke’s presentation:**

* Overview of agenda:
  + Handout: “grab bag:” go-to exercises for teaching argument; goal is to add to it collaboratively.
  + Part I: argument as invention. Not just stylizing their pre-existing ideas, but sifting through and discovering ideas.
    - Audience, artistic proofs/rhetorical appeals, kairos, stasis questions
  + Part II: analyzing arguments.
    - Toulmin.
* Why teach argument in writing classes?
  + Origins in 4th and 5th centuries—rhetoric invented as a pedagogical and philiosophical discipline to meet the demands of a burgeoning democracy. Arose alongside direct democracy in Athens.
    - No representatives, lawyers, trained specialists etc—everyone participated, and not only voluntarily (bringing and defending against lawsuits, discussing legislation, etc).
    - A practical, material need was to be able to persuade, defend themselves, etc.
      * Demands gave rise to educational industry, the discourse of which gave rise to what we now teach as argument.
* Rhetoric: are we simply manipulating people? Is it too forceful?
  + A common reservation from students, among others.
  + But it’s not just about advancing a preexisting claim.
  + It’s about discovering the claim, about adjusting it in light of other peoples’ views, situate and negotiate meaning, etc. It’s a forced relationality and a negotiation of meaning.
* The canon of invention
  + How can I come to these claims and put them in relation to others?
    - Protagoras’ *dissoi logoi*: require students to entertain both sides of the same argument. Idea is that I can’t arrive at a position until I have gone through both (all) sides of the argument.
      * Example: watched a Michael Moore documentary, take an issue from it, require students to write on it based on prior discussions, etc. Then (as a surprise) argue it from a vastly different (usually opposed) position. Asked to marshal all the strengths of multiple positions for a particular audience before deciding on their own position.
  + Raises question of audience. How do you ask students to consider it?
    - (Dotty): Have them write letters on difficult topics to a specific person—either write to parents explaining why a low GPA was actually a good thing or to write to a friend explaining why losing the BCS was a good thing. Also, writing a letter to parents of Carolyn Hacks (sp?) based on letter in The Advocate.
    - (Jean R): Write a performance review for a chosen music magazine. After reading and analyzing the magazine and thinking about its readers and their interests/expectations, they write as if they were a staff member at that publication.
    - (Mary): Students write a practical proposal for solving a community problem to a specific audience (committee, community leader, government leader, etc), to whom they will send their revised texts.
    - (Sharon): Service-learning with indigent women working to get back into mainstream society; the women and the students work together in groups to write to assigned stakeholders on issues they have identified. Focus on language, appeal to values, etc and how they must be adjusted to suit the audience.
    - (Nolde): for Rogerian argument, which relies on empathy--using a method-acting kind of approach. Adapt a routine or habit of their audience and report on what it was like to inhabit, in that small way, the position of their audience. “Walk a mile in my shoes” assignment.
    - (Peter): After having students write on both sides of a divisive issue, have students stage a debate or discussion based on the disposition of the audience (is it hostile, supportive, etc?) Ties in to contemporary political issues—how politicians rally their bases, attempt to change minds, etc.
    - (Anna): Students brought a short essay written to convince classmates to care about a particular issue; classes vote for the best proposal and Anna takes the winning issue and must craft a speech to deliver in free speech alley. Audience is other students (voters) and larger LSU community (who will here the speech). Issues include use of social media, budget issues, nutrition in dorm food.
  + Note that these exercises in audience all work to transform the thought itself, not merely to convince the audience of one’s preexisting ideas.
  + Raises question of how to appeal to a particular audience, at a particular moment, about a particular idea.
    - Rhetorical triangle: writer/ethos 🡪 audience/pathos 🡪 claim or argument/logos.
    - Useful to think about them as a triangle because it links the three; any time one changes, the others must change too. Demonstrates the interrelationality of the appeals; there are no universals.
    - Lessons/exercises:
      * have students analyze the ethos that they create on their Facebook pages
      * read divergent essays on hunger (including lifeboat ethics) and then conduct a lifeboat ethics debate, then discuss which appeals were most successful.
  + *Kairos*: the qualitative measure of time: what is timely? What is the moment and what is the best way to respond to it?
    - At the center of the rhetorical triangle.
    - Require students, in all assignments, to include a “nod” to the appropriate moment.
      * i.e. enduring, clichéd issues aren’t timely if we’ve been recycling them for years (changing the drinking age). Ask them to choose a timely issue that is relevant to the audience and transforms the content.
* Hermagoras’ (then Cicero and Quintillian’s) stasis questions (see handout)
  + *Stasis* means *issues*.
    - A way to exhaustively, and logically, consider a single issue.
    - Originated, like Toulmin, in law courts.
  + A mode of invention; a heuristic; it narrows down the types of claims that can be made in an argument and puts them in relation to each other. Prevents one from jumping ahead to, say, evaluating before defining terms.
    - Narrows topic
    - Highlights assumptions of writer/audience
    - Prevents argument at cross-purposes
    - Helps students decide what to say
    - Helps to identify where the issue is at this moment in time—at what level are most of the arguments taking place on a given topic?
  + Exercise (see handout)
    - Answer given questions, then use answers to develop a claim or thesis.
  + Question: do you teach the questions all at once?
    - Can work to teach long essays on multiple stasis questions, but can also feel forced.
    - Alternative is to use all the questions at once as an invention tool for a single longer essays—let students choose which level to approach.
* Toulmin system (see handout)
  + From 1958’s *The Uses of Argument.* Response to analytic philosophers’ pure logic, designed to address “real” issues and problems.
    - Uses: gives a vocabulary for asking students to identify and analyze underlying assumptions. Can be powerful and also problematic.
    - Drawbacks: it can bog down. Was developed for the legal system, not the writing classroom. Can be tough to sort out the terms in a real-life argument (reason versus warrant, etc).
  + Review handout
    1. Claim
    2. Reasons
       - Combine 1 & 2 as a thesis statement
       - Assertion to be established🡪support why that idea is reasonable
    3. Warrant
       - The unstated assumption, principle, value, belief that the audience must accept in order for the argument to work.
       - A good way to address problematic ideological approaches that crop up sometimes. Identify warrant and consider whether it will work with the given audience.
    4. Grounds
       - Specific supporting evidence that helps audience to accept your reason(s). A useful point of analysis—choosing what type(s) of grounds will be most effective with the audience.
    5. Backing
       - If the warrant might be questionable—if the audience might not accept it—this is the case you make for the warrant.
    6. Rebuttal(s)
       - Anticipate objections to either reason/grounds or warrant/backing
    7. Qualifier
       - A way to soften the claim based on anticipated rebuttal(s)
  1. Handout: an introductory, imperfect way to introduce these ideas. Another, more developed Toulmin exercise is also included in main handout.

**III. Questions/comments:**

* Thesis statement as claim plus reasons—students sometimes struggle to include both; sometimes only have one reason but a good paper can develop from it. How do you approach that?
  + After developing multiple reasons through writing, work to categorize them under one overarching reason (i.e. are they all causal? All about violence? All about social responsibility?).
  + Might be worth avoiding the terminology “thesis statement” as it conjures high school writing and might foster formulaic thinking.
  + Requires multiple drafts to achieve this.
* Can use Toulmin to play with inductive/deductive arguments—mapped it on to Declaration of Independence.

**IV. Closing Remarks:**

* Next workshop: Wednesday after Mardi Gras (Leap day!). Service Learning with Kristi Kayser-Arrazattee from CCELL plus Sharon Andrews, Ann Martin, Corrie Kiesel and Rick Moreland. Same time, same place.