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Narrative

Learning the Language of Academic Writing: Using the C3WP as a Scaffold in the Secondary English Classroom

JOHN LENNON

It was barely fifteen minutes after the school year had ended when one of my students strolled in with a bone to pick over the grade she received on the final research project for AP Language and Composition (AP Comp). Her topic was particularly contentious, and she had approached it in a way that was neither research based nor academic. Instead, she set out to demonize proponents of the other side of the conversation taking place, and—as if I didn't already know from her paper—it became increasingly apparent as we spoke that she was exceedingly passionate about the subject matter. As such, she had taken personal offense to my grading. I attempted to explain to her that the grade I assigned wasn't based upon the topic or her position on it; it was the approach. The assignment was meant to be a researched argument with an academic tone, and instead she came off as an angry, volatile crusader who had "'cherry-picked' her sources" (Brockman & Taylor, 2016). I had warned her of this several times during the revision stages of the assignment, but to no avail. At a stalemate now, she ended the conversation by telling me that I "should teach the class better if I wanted them to know how to write like that" and that the grade she received was more of a reflection of my teaching than it was her writing.

This unfortunate exchange haunted me over the summer, not because I believed the student's indictment of my teaching, but because I couldn't stop wondering what I could have done to help her. After all, this was an assignment that we spent a great deal of time preparing for already. The research assignment that this student was responding to is one that we do at the end of each year in my AP Comp classroom. Students are asked to come up with a research question of their own on a topic of their choice. The goal of this research assignment is to challenge students to apply the analysis, synthesis, and argumentation skills that have been emphasized over the course of the year. While the guidelines of subjects and style are wide open to allow for greater student choice, the evaluation of the argument is much more stringent. Students are to research their topic to answer their research question and then synthesize the sources they find into a culminating essay.

All semester long, the class had examined sample essays, read our textbook for writing strategies, drafted and revised emerging drafts, and discussed assignment expectations. How could this student have been so off the mark when all of her classmates had understood? There was only one "minor" problem, however, with my question. As I looked back on the work of my student's classmates, I found that they had also not fully grasped the basic premise behind writing a research-based academic essay. Sure, the other students were savvy enough not to demonize the opposing viewpoint in an angry, volatile way, but their writing still didn't demonstrate that they had entered a conversation, as academic writing is most commonly characterized today. Instead, they had chosen a topic, taken a side (admittedly, in a more objective way), and focused primarily on proving that they were right. In doing so, they used and correctly cited sources, but they merely quoted them, as opposed to leveraging the sources to make their own arguments. This reductionary view of argument not only limited my students' abilities as writers, but it also limited their ability to engage fully in the topics they studied. The need for a better way of teaching argument became increasingly important as I continued to reflect. I needed to find a way to better prepare my students to join an academic conversation prior to presenting them with a culminating assignment like this.

Over the next few years, I continued to be challenged and invigorated by teaching my AP students how to write researched argument in an academic way, but my pedagogy has been significantly enhanced, thanks to the College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP), an innovative program sponsored by the National Writing Project (NWP). This program focuses exclusively on evidence-based argument writing that makes use of nonfiction texts. NWP offers invaluable and highly

recommended professional development on this program, but the resources are available online for free.

Entering an Ongoing Conversation via Curated Text Sets

"What is an argument?" I ask my AP students on the first day of school, and common answers include "a debate," "when you're trying to persuade someone that you're right," and the ever-faithful "what I do with my younger brother when I'm mad at him." To many students, argument looks like a shouting match, so I introduce an alternative perspective by suggesting that argument is civil discourse, and I illustrate it via Burke's (1941) Parlor Metaphor:

> Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (p. 110-111)

Though my students do not know it, this metaphor is directly or indirectly referenced in two foundational C3WP texts: Graff and Birkenstein's (2017) *They Say, I Say: The Moves that Matter in Academic Writing* and Harris' (2006) *Rewriting: How to Do Things with Texts*. With or without the Graff and Birkenstein and Harris texts, Burke's metaphor makes perfect sense to my AP students, but only in the abstract. They don't know how to operationalize it. Moreover, I unwittingly never really taught them the concept explicitly, even though we discussed academic writing as conversation, until I improved my pedagogy with the C3WP strategy of curated text sets—an important element of each C3WP unit.

According to the C3WP website, a text set is a collection of pieces in various modalities that "represent multiple perspectives on a single topic, beyond pro and con" (NWP, 2018). These text sets are not a curriculum by themselves. Rather, each text set is a curated collection that allows students to enter a conversation in progress and interact with multiple perspectives meaningfully before committing to a thesis statement of their own. Whether they are the text sets pulled from the C3WP site or those curated by a teacher for their own classroom, text sets employed with C3WP mini-units are self-contained Burkean Parlors. Students read one text in the set each day over the course of a week or so—each time identifying the author's main point, identifying what appears to be the strongest evidence, connecting this evidence to the claim, and doing some informal writing about the text and to indicate where they stand on the topic. The hope is that each new text in the set will complicate and expand the students' understanding of the topic beyond their original viewpoint. To borrow from Burke (1941), students are then invited to put in their oar by writing a nuanced thesis statement as opposed to one that is *only* debatable and defensible.

These curated text sets, then, are an important element in demonstrating concretely to students that academic writing is conversation, not just "when you're trying to persuade someone that you're right," as my students often think when they first enter my class. Equally important, the curated text sets are designed to break the binary thinking that characterized my students' writing, especially (but not exclusively) the student who confronted me on the last day of school back in 2017. Harris (2006) reinforces the importance of breaking binary thinking when he says:

> We live in a culture prone to naming winners and losers, rights and wrongs. You're either in or out, hot or not, on the bus or off it. **But academics seldom write in an all-or-nothing mode, trying to convince readers to take one side or the other of an argument.** Instead their work assumes that any perspective on an issue (and there are often more than two) will have moments of both insight and blindness … That is to say, academic writing rarely involves the simple taking of sides, an attack on or defense of set positions, but rather centers on weighing options … (p. 24-25)

To clarify the importance of entering a conversation and breaking binaries, let's first take a closer look at just one of the many curated text sets available on the C3WP webpage. Before doing so, however, it's important to reiterate the pedagogical timing of the text set: *before* students write a thesis statement. In other words, it's by reading the text set and deeply considering multiple perspectives that students read and write their way to a claim—a very different approach

than my AP students had been taking. This helps emphasize the fact that research is meant to answer questions and draw conclusions, not reinforce bias or even previously held opinions, which is the issue the student who wanted to contend her grade at the end of the year had. The emphasis on having students read before developing a thesis helps to better illustrate this cardinal principle of the research and argumentation process as conversation.

The text set entitled "Protests" (NWP, 2018) is a great representative example for teachers new to the C3WP, and one that I have personally assigned to my AP students. This text set begins with the article "Top 10 American Protest Movements" published in the October 12, 2011 issue of *Time Magazine*. As the title implies, this article provides students with an overview of ten protest movements in the USA dating back to the Boston Tea Party. For Reading #2, the text brings students to the present moment with a mixed genre: a video and an article about Black Lives Matter. For the third text, teachers choose for their students one or more of seven remaining articles listed in the mini-unit, all of which offer different viewpoints on the outcomes of protests. This decision is made by the teacher in order to best suit the needs of their students. One of the strengths of this text set, and the C3WP in general, is its flexibility. In my AP class, for example, I don't technically assign a text or two from the third category. Instead, I invite students to consider what information or viewpoints are missing from the first two readings. Then, with these gaps in mind, they have the responsibility to choose two of the seven texts that they think might better inform them on the topic. With this approach, my students are all still entering the same "parlor," to continue Burke's metaphor; however, they are even more critically engaged because they must make their own choices for the third and fourth text in the text set. To clarify the text set, I've included an image taken from the C3WP webpage (NWP, 2018) (see Appendix A).

I pair the "Protests" text set with the "Making Moves with Evidence" mini-unit, which asks students to synthesize sources and make moves with evidence. The application of the writerly moves, identified by Harris (2006), in coordination with these sources allows for my students to practice the language of academic argument in a self-contained setting. These key moves—described in the next section—are what students must learn in order to move forward as academic writers on their own, and the rhetorical situation of a text set allows them to practice before moving beyond.

Putting in Your Oar and Leveraging Sources via the Harris Moves

As I previously indicated, my AP students knew how to use sources by quoting and citing them (some more skillfully than others), but they didn't leverage the sources for the purpose of "putting in their oar" (Burke, 1941) and making their own arguments in an ongoing conversation. To clarify, consider these two passages (Sample #1 and Sample #2) both written by two different of my own AP Comp students prior to the implementation of C3WP in my classroom:

Sample 1

> When it comes to people with an absence of a limb or who have had an amputation, there are 2,250 births where limb reductions have occurred. There are approximately 2 million amputees, and there are projected to be 3.5 million by 2030.

In Sample 1, the student simply lists fact after fact (without introductory signal phrases, quotation marks, and citations), and this pattern continues for several pages. In short, he aimed to inform readers of facts but never *did* anything with the facts. They sat separate from his own stance, positioned as parallel to his work rather than becoming integrated into it.

Sample 2

> The mass imprisonment of African American parents has had a devastating impact on 'the structure and functioning of African American families, with profound effects on children and their social and cognitive development. Incarceration affects children's well-being and compromises their life chances...This extensive ripple effect which starts with mass incarceration must not be understated. Imprisonment impacts far more people than just the [parent] serving time behind bars' (Ruiz, Kopak 2014, p. 9). The shift in the social structure of colored families when a member is incarcerated has negative effects on all members involved, the side effects have the potential to last a lifetime. More specifically, 'mass incarceration deprives thousands of children of important economic and social support from their fathers' (Leigh et al., n.d.).

The second writer creates a sample that is more skillfully crafted than Sample 1. Although she doesn't use introductory signal phrases, she does properly quote/cite her sources, briefly responds to the first text, and puts it in communication with the second source. Still, the quotations primarily

function as separate from her own voice (not embedded or integrated), so there are two languages competing for airtime: the voice of the author and the voice of the support, with little crossover (and far more emphasis placed on the support). Therefore, the student's argument lacks the elements of academic writing needed to enter into the conversation.

The question is, of course, what should students *do* with quotations? Aside from demonstrating that they know how to quote, cite them correctly, and list them on a works cited page, what is the goal of using quotations from sources? In the C3WP, teachers are trained to teach their students to leverage their quoted material—what I'll refer to as evidence—which requires a far more important and complex skill set than following documentation style (as important as that is). In fact, the whole point behind the C3WP is to teach students writing skills associated with nonfiction sources, materials, and evidence. It does cover basic skills, such as ensuring that students actually use source materials in their researched essays and learning how to distinguish the writer's voice from the source materials. Based upon the first two student samples, I believe that the majority of my AP students had mastered these two skills (though not all of my 10th graders had!).

However, other skills associated with using nonfiction sources are more complex, such as connecting evidence to claims and writing nuanced thesis statements. One of the most important C3WP skills is making use of the Harris Moves: authorizing, illustrating, countering, and extending. Though long familiar with Graff and Birkenstein's (2017) "academic moves," I had never heard of the Harris moves until I learned about the C3WP. Each of these moves is what Harris refers to as *rewriting* (Harris, 2006, p. 2). Rather than just regurgitating information from a source, Harris advises "to imagine yourself as *rewriting*—as drawing from, commenting on, adding to—the work of others" (Harris, 2006, p. 2) In other words, rewriting is the action we take when integrating sources into our own work. It is active—a concept that my students did not understand prior to the implementation of the C3WP. Harris (2006) suggests here that the act of using textual support is performative, and each move has key phrases and explanations behind it that the C3WP (NWP, 2018) highlights for its users (see Appendix B).

As further clarification, the C3WP uses Bordelon's (2016) "Argument Highway" metaphor - based on the Harris (2006) moves - to help students (and teachers) better understand the moves that writers of argument might make:

- **The Highway:** the ongoing conversation the writer hopes to enter
- **The Driver:** the writer
- **The Passenger:** the audience
- **The Destination:** the claim being made
- **The Road:** the source material used
- **The Merge:** what Harris refers to as "coming to terms;" the way the writer joins the conversation
- **Road Rage:** the failure to respectfully engage with others in civil discourse
- **The Vehicles:** the moves we make as writers, with each of the vehicles representing a different move. For example, a police cruiser represents authorization because it has the authority to clear the road. Likewise, a bulldozer represents countering because it pushes back against the text.

Bordelon (2016) posits that if the road students travel as academic writers is the conversation taking place, then those traveling it are partaking in whatever conversation is in question. To do so, they must use several different vehicles to get their points across. To *forward* a text is to "begin to shift the focus of your readers away from what its author has to say toward your own project" (Harris, 2006, p. 38). This is accomplished through Harris's moves: *illustrating*, looking to texts for examples; *authorizing*, using the status of another speaker as support; *borrowing*, drawing on ideas from another writer for your own purpose; and *extending*, putting a spin on what a text is saying (Harris, 2006, p. 39). Additionally, Harris (2006) offers ways to counter arguments not by nullifying what someone is saying but "to suggest a different way of thinking" (p. 56). Each of these vehicles moves students towards reaching their destination as academic writers. Harris asks students to see these moves in real time and then to adapt them for their own writing and purposes. The C3WP units emphasize the skills necessary to do so.

Unlike the previously mentioned Sample 1 and Sample 2, the following examples are from students who enrolled in AP Comp the following year, after I had begun implementing the C3WP in my 10th grade classroom; therefore, they represent the outcomes of the C3WP protocols:

Sample 3

Internet addiction is a major issue in today's society and, if active on social media, it's also unavoidable. During Parnells presentation about posts on social media she mentioned, "With every like, you get a shot of dopamine," (Parnell, 2018). In saying this, Parnell points out the correlation between chemical addiction and internet addiction by associating likes with dopamine. In addition to Parnells findings about the correlation between

internet and chemical addiction, Savci states, "Those with internet addiction experience symptoms similar to those with behavioral or chemical addiction," (Savci, 2017, p.203). In making this comment, Savci urges us to understand the importance of acknowledging our addiction because, if not, the symptoms could pose a bigger problem.

Though the writer of Sample 3 may still be a novice academic writer, her use of source materials is more sophisticated, thanks to the C3WP. First of all, the writer does more than merely drop quote after quote, assuming they will "speak on their own behalf." Instead, she leverages the evidence by quoting and then explaining, albeit in a single sentence each, their connection to internet addiction. In addition, the student has thoughtfully paired and ordered the two sources—both of which *illustrate* her point (to quote from Harris) and build on each other. With continued practice over the course of the year, the student writer will learn and be better equipped to use evidence via other Harris moves, especially authorizing and countering, and she will more fully embed the evidence within her paragraph.

Sample 4

One example of food corporation research married with marketing practices comes from the National Confectioners Association. An article published in Food and Nutrition Research by O'Neil, Fulgoni, and Nicklas (2011) displayed findings that candy consumers are less likely to be overweight. In fact, the mean weight of candy consumers was 1.4 kg less than that of the non-consumers. The authors of the study found the data conclusive, however several other sources have brought up limitations of the article. Choi points out one of the major flaws, being that the study used data asking "people to recall what they ate in the past 24 hours" (Choi 2016, apnews.com). This data reveals that the answers from the subjects may not be a representation of their usual diet. Another limitation of the study is that it focuses only on candy and no other aspects of a diet. Saturated fat intake as well as carbohydrates other than sugar are known to impact weight (Pollan 2007, p.116). Pollan and Choi support both of these different limitations, making it apparent that sugar (candy) intake isn't the only food that impacts weight.

Unlike the writers in the other examples, the student writer from Sample 4 not only illustrates his claim with evidence, but then also counters that evidence, providing a more nuanced approach. This student explores the limitations of the article by O'Neil, Fulgoni, and Nicklas (2011), which are examined by Choi (2016) in order to further his own argument. This limitation takes the naysayer in his argument and dismantles the counterclaims being made. Furthermore, this student also connected this instance of countering back to Pollan (2017), which was one of the key texts earlier on in his piece. By doing so, he not only integrates another source into the conversation, but he also further demonstrates the limitations of the counterclaim. The next step for this author would be to employ authorization in order to fully embed the evidence in to the argument *and* ensure that the audience understands the authority of the sources from which it comes.

Joining the Conversation

In our classroom, joining the conversation takes many forms, but none more important than the independent research project my AP Comp students complete. Having participated over the school year in the C3WP mini-units and protocols, my students are better equipped to step up to the challenge of academic writing. They reach out to real experts in the field to ask questions; build their own text sets that provide multiple perspectives beyond pro/con, just like the curated text sets have modeled; and evaluate their sources and evidence in accordance with the C3WP mini-units. After implementing the C3WP, I saw the majority of my students go from haphazardly interjecting quotes to support their initial bias on a topic to making solid attempts to embed, integrate, and leverage sources to support a new claim developed from careful consideration of sources that represent a variety of perspectives outside their own. Furthermore, it is this respect for multiple perspectives that helps them better understand the research process.

Are my students still novice academic writers, and am I still a novice at teaching with the C3WP? Of course. However, I feel better equipped to help my students learn that academic writing is best understood as conversation, and my students are more likely to start to figure out how to position themselves as participants in that ongoing conversation.

Readers recognize that my students, my pedagogical struggles to teach academic writing, and even my uncomfortable "chat" with the unhappy student are not unique. Rather, I believe that they are all too common. I hope that my experience serves as a model of why we must constantly revisit our practices as educators to ensure our students are getting what they need. For high school students, the nu-

ances of academic writing and argumentation are part of a new language. Like any new language, it is necessary to learn the moves, strategies, and characteristics that make its fluent speakers successful before students can carry on a conversation. What students need from us here is to introduce Burke's Parlor Metaphor and then do the translating for them as we walk them into that parlor, help them listen to multiple perspectives on a given topic, and then guide them as they put in their oar. They need the opportunities to learn and practice these skills in an environment that fosters risk taking and growth in their writing. The C3WP and associated resources provide one excellent platform for this. Significantly, I believe I learned as much about academic writing (and the teaching of it) as my students did.

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Appendix A

Sample Text Set: Protests from the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program, available at https://sites.google.com/nwp.org/c3wp/home

Sample Text Set: Protests

Sample Text Set

Students explore the issue of protesting by reading one or more texts about the history on protesting, reading about current movements through text and video with the transcript in hand (divided into the text),and then exploring the effectiveness of protests through other articles.

Reading #1

"Top 10 American Protest Movements" introduces some historical background of protests. Time magazine gives a summary of 10 movements in the US.

"Top 10 American Protest Movements" *Time*.12 October 2011. Web. 12 July 2016.

Reading #2

The following article or video should be provided in order to introduce context to current movements and protests.

1. "From the Best of Time to Harsh Reality: Holiday Week Ends with 7 Shot Dead." *NewsELA*. 11 July 2016. Web. 12 July 2016.
2. "Black Lives Matter Movement Explained" Washington Post. 21 June 2016. Web. 12 July 2016. A transcript of this video can be found here.

Reading #3

You can select from the following articles (which can also be excerpted to reduce reading time) which provide information about viewpoints on what really is accomplished by protesting and treatment of protesters.

1. "Why Street Protests Don't Work." The Atlantic. 7 April 2014. Web. 12 July 2016.
2. "Latino Police Shootings Stay Under the Radar." NewsELA. 11 August 2015. Web. 12 July 2016
3. "Americans Don't Like Protests. But Protests May Work Anyway." The Washington Post. 25 August 2014. Web. 12 July 2016
4. Tom Head. "Why Protest Events are Not a Waste of Time." Civilliberty.About.com. http://civilliberty.about.com/od/historyprofiles/tp/Why-Protest.htm. Date accessed: 12 July 2016
5. "What Makes a Successful Protest." Pacific Standard. 10 September 2015. Web. 12 July 2016
6. "'Shady persons of color': College protesters apply scornful tag to dissenting minorities." Fox News US. 10 May 2016. Web. 12 July 2016.
7. "Ali, Smith and Carlos Protests Left Lasting Impressions. Will Kaepernick's?"ABC News. 30 August 2016. Web. 1 September 2016

Appendix B

Making Moves with Sources from the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program, available at https://sites.google.com/nwp.org/c3wp/home

The Move	Why Use It	Example NOTE: Authors often use more than one move with a single quote	Some Language for Making the Move
ILLUSTRATING When you look to other texts for examples of a point you want to make	Illustrating further clarifies your point and provides greater explanation; use illustrating to define a critical concept or idea.	The fact is, some students do have a ton of homework. In high school we see a kind of divergence—between those who choose or find themselves tracked into less-rigorous coursework and those who enroll in honors classes or multiple Advanced Placement courses. And the latter students are getting a lot of homework. "In the 2012 NAEP survey, 13 percent of 17-year-olds reported doing more than two hours of homework the previous night." That's not a lot of students, but they're clearly doing a lot of work. -KQED article, "What Kinds of Homework Seem to be Most Effective?"	• *Demonstrates* • *A famous example of* • *Often seen in* • *Explains* • *Affirms* • *Illustrates* • *Reinforces*
AUTHORIZING Invoking the expertise or status of another to support or validate your thinking	Authorizing adds weight and experience to your argument; use authorizing when you want a powerful voice to support your position or reinforce a concept.	Education expert Tom Loveless decided to find out which view is correct. On Tuesday, he issued a report of his finding. "News stories about increasingly overburdened children are real," he says. "However, such cases are not common. The homework load has been pretty stable over the last 20 or 30 years, he said." –Newsela article, "Complaints About Homework Go from Too Little to Too Much"	• *A study led by* • *An expert in the field* • *Many studies* • *According to* • *Researchers* • *Data makes clear* • *Authorities*
EXTENDING When you put your own spin on the terms or concepts that you take from other texts	Extending is the act of taking another's thinking and putting your own spin on it; use extending to recast or refine a key idea or concept.	In a follow-up paper, Robert Fairlie and Ariel Kalil find that "Though the children given free computers ended up using them a lot, the other parts of their lives didn't seem to suffer. They spent at least as much time as their peers at school activities or social gatherings. They spent just as much time doing homework." The researchers don't really know the answer to this question. It could be that students were sleeping less, or spending less time eating or exercising. It could also be that having a computer at home saved students time going from a computer lab to home, for example. -Newsela article, "Having a Home Computer Benefits Students Socially, but Not Academically"	• *To take it a step further* • *A logical extension* • *Expanding on this idea* • *Provides more insight* • *Can be applied to* • *Bridges* • *Does not go far enough* • *Yes, and*
COUNTERING When you develop a new line of thinking in response to the limits of other texts.	Countering is when you have considered a perspective offered in a text, but you see potential to push back on limitations, such as the logic, use of evidence, or credibility of a text.	The researchers, Robert Fairlie and Jonathan Robinson, found that children who got free computers didn't do better academically. But, they didn't do worse either. "Grades and standardized test scores were more or less the same between the two groups. . .[they] concluded that owning a computer is unlikely to make short-term difference in schooling for low-income kids.". . It's important, of course, not to overgeneralize the results from these studies. What's true for low-income students is not true for all students. And, what was true in 2009 is not necessarily true today. The Internet may be more addicting than it was five years ago." -Newsela article, "Having a Home Computer Benefits Students Socially, but Not Academically"	• *Yes, but* • *To some degree* • *It is not sufficient to say* • *On the other hand* • *Although he/she makes a good point*