

# AFFECTING ARGUMENT: STUDENTS LEARNING TO ARGUE AND ARGUING TO LEARN

Amy D. Williams

Educators have long extolled argument as a cornerstone of academic life and the basis of democratic citizenship. This positive view of argument relies on the belief that argument writing develops critical thinking skills, appreciation for complexity, curiosity about the world, and openness to many points of view. Yet after reviewing twenty-six years of empirical studies about teaching argument, George Newell et al. conclude that we actually know little about “how reasonableness and thoughtfulness develop in classroom contexts” (297). And some scholars contend that despite popular belief, argument writing may not encourage these qualities at all (DeStigter).

Contemporary public discourse offers ample evidence that teaching argumentation does not always result in open, thoughtful dialogue. Alarm over communication in the public square has shifted popular and scholarly attention to the role of affect in argumentation. Some bemoan a lack of civility (Baker and Rogers); others worry that calls for civility undermine progressive causes (Sugrue, Tomlinson). And some scholars suggest that affect—both the affect writers express in argumentative texts and the affect they experience while composing those texts—can undermine intellectual inquiry and learning (Felski; Jacobs; Smagorinsky; Tannen; Tompkins).

In this article, I follow these scholars in examining the affects writers experience as they learn about and compose argument essays. Specifically, I consider the affective obstacles writers may face as they learn to write arguments and how those obstacles prevent them from developing curiosity, openness, reasonableness,

and thoughtfulness. I argue that when argument instruction ignores the impact of affect, writers may learn the generic moves to make in an argument essay, but they are less likely to develop habits of mind that will help them succeed in college writing (Council).

My research uses one aspect of a writing classroom ecology—pedagogical discourse, or the spoken and written words teachers use when teaching argument—to explore the affects it provokes in students. The data for this paper come from a study conducted with high school writers learning to write arguments in a summer writing workshop. I share examples of students’ affective responses to pedagogical discourse, including affects that seem to close off open, generous, and critical thinking. I also show that when pedagogical discourse complicates narrow notions of argument as combative and competitive, students’ affective responses become more muted. These examples suggest that students’ affective responses to instructional discourse can reinforce an understanding of argument as a form of combat that works against the development of thoughtfulness and critical thinking. Conversely, pedagogical discourse can also encourage a reworking of these instinctual combative stances and affects.

Using these findings, I theorize a more productive role for affect in teaching and learning argument, and I offer instructional strategies writing teachers can use to improve argument-writing pedagogies. My purpose is to show how and why affect matters in argument writing—not just when it appears in our students’ texts but also as it operates in the ecology of our classrooms.

## **Affect, Argument, and the Limits of Reasonableness**

Peter Smagorinsky recently called for more attention to the “gut reactions” students experience as they argue and how they work to “rationalize [those reactions] through whatever justification they can come up with” (98). Like Smagorinsky, I am interested in gut reactions. Rather than labeling them “emotions” as Smagorinsky does, I use the word “affect” to draw more explicitly on recent work

in affect theory. Affect is how bodies move and become; touch and disturb; influence, alter, shape, entice, and resonate with other bodies and things (including objects, forces, practices, ideas, and values). Affect emerges in connections between things, as they provoke and respond to each other. A more inclusive category than emotion, affect embraces all the visceral sensations and intensities bodies experience—those we can identify and name and those that “remain uncapturable and hard to pin down” (Dutro 385). It is an ongoing, everyday rush of vibrations, movements, impulses, dispositions, thoughts, emotions, and feelings that work “beneath and alongside conscious knowing” and beneath and alongside articulation (Seigworth and Gregg 1).

I find this definition of affect helpful in understanding critiques of argument from the scholars I listed above, who describe the affect associated with academic arguments—the kind of arguments we often ask students to write. Felski calls argument an “affective stance that *orients* us in certain ways” (18, italics in original). Using literary criticism as an example of argument, Felski suggests that arguments begin in uncertainty, which almost immediately provokes sensations of fear, anger, repugnance, hyperalertness, and attentiveness. Tannen describes the “pain” of being on the receiving end of argument’s fear, anger, and repugnance (1663). While Felski and Tannen focus on argument’s negative affects, Tompkins notes that argument also exhilarates. She compares the affects provoked by academic arguments to those provoked by Western movies. In both, she says, the moment of violence is also a “moment of righteous ecstasy,” a “climax” that fills a “visceral need” and seems “biologically necessary” (587). Thus Tompkins paints academic argument’s affect as both “delicious” and “hardly . . . distinguish[able] from murderousness” (587).

We can admit a legitimate role for affect—even angry affect—in argumentative contexts and still grant that it may be inimical to openness. Felski complains that while argument’s ostensible goal is to nurture thoughtfulness, the authors of many published scholarly arguments seem to assume “the smartest thing you can do is see through the deep-seated convictions and heartfelt attachments of

others” (16). Tompkins and Tannen concur. A related critique comes from scholars who bemoan the neglect of rhetorical strategies such as silence and listening in argumentation (Glenn and Ratcliffe). By privileging oral and written discourse, both the academy and Western culture as a whole miss powerful opportunities to “negotiate and deliberate” in multiple ways and to create a different affective climate around argument (3). Taken together, these scholars suggest that our current academic culture does not promote open, thoughtful, and dialogic argumentation. More importantly, all agree that affect in argument is not just the “deployment of textual vehemence” (Tomlinson 57); it is an integral part of a writer’s experience while inventing and composing the argument.

### **Researching Pedagogy and Affect**

To understand students’ affective experiences while writing argument essays, I conducted this IRB-approved study in an annual two-week summer workshop designed to improve high school students’ argument-writing skills and to encourage their college attendance. Jointly sponsored by a public school district and a large research university, the workshop enrolls approximately fifty 10th to 12th grade students each summer. The workshop prioritizes enrolling students who have failed a language arts class, have scored below proficient on a state-mandated assessment, or have been identified by a teacher as one who could benefit from focused pedagogical attention. Still, the population is diverse. Some students attend only to earn recovery credit for a failed language arts class. Others are hoping to hone their already strong writing skills. Several participants are enthusiastic writers—though not necessarily enthusiastic academic writers. Many are potential first-generation college students, attracted by the workshop’s goal of college matriculation. The workshop’s co-founders—from the public school district and the university—are talented, experienced educators committed to helping students succeed as writers and college students. Workshop faculty are secondary teachers from the school district who participate to further their training and career development.

The workshop teaches an acronym as a template for an argument essay: TIRE, or *Thesis* (in an introductory paragraph), *Ideas and Claims* (in body paragraphs), *Refutation* (usually in a penultimate paragraph), and *Ending*, or conclusion. Intended to help students on language arts proficiency tests and college entrance exams like the ACT, TIRE is what workshop founders call a “tool” students can lean on as they learn more sophisticated ways of developing and organizing an argument. The curriculum also encourages a robust writing process that includes a variety of research methods, ample revision, and practices of self-regulation and reflection.

The data I collected included the workshop’s curriculum materials, PowerPoint slides, classroom posters, teacher development materials, and handouts; observations and fieldnotes of workshop sessions and faculty meetings; interviews with key faculty and thirty students during the 2016 workshop; and anonymized free-response journals from twenty 2015 workshop students. The students composed the journals in a daily, timed activity during which they were instructed to “Keep your hand moving; Let your ideas flow from your brain to your paper; Don’t get too logical” (classroom poster, emphases in original). The workshop uses the freewrite journals as a way to develop and assess students’ increasing “fluency” (as measured by the number of lines written during each timed period). While the journals did not result from my intervention as a researcher, many of the daily prompts concerned the curriculum and writing process, making the journals a valuable source of information about students’ writing experiences.

For this article, I approach affect by paying attention to discourse—teachers’ discourse and students’ descriptions of their affective experiences. Some affect theorists might object to this linguistic focus. Affect, they would claim, is preliminary to discourse; it is an intensity that “does not necessarily have a narrative” (Edbauer Rice 201). Others might note that affect and discourse work in opposite directions, affect multiplying potentiality and “language enforc[ing] a closure” (Corder 18). I resist an affect-discourse binary. Affect cannot be only what is non-articulable; it includes both what can be expressed and the ineffable. Furthermore, affect needs discourse

because “the turn to affect opens up crucial questions about meaning-making practices, the articulation of the somatic with these, and issues about how the speaking subject makes sense of and communicates affect” (Wetherell 353). These “crucial questions” invite discourse into affect studies.

I used the workshop’s curriculum materials and my fieldnotes to identify prominent elements of pedagogical discourse—language or ideas that received emphasis through consistent repetition. I then read the journals, interview transcripts, and fieldnotes holistically, looking for and coding students’ responses to the discourse, especially those related to affective concerns such as embodiment, relationships, connectivity, and movement. I then used axial coding (Corbin and Strauss) to develop relationships between students’ affective experiences and discursive elements of the workshop’s pedagogy. However, these relationships may also reflect students’ past educational experiences. It is possible that the affective responses students describe are unique reactions to the workshop’s discourse, and it is also possible that the workshop’s discourse activates affects that originate in previous writing classrooms or other sites. Nevertheless, my methodology allows me to describe a relationship between discourse and students’ affect. Two repeated patterns in the workshop’s discourse demonstrate this relationship.

### **Pattern 1: Mixing Metaphors**

In Western culture, combat metaphors play a prominent role in talk about argument: we defend a position, attack an opponent, fight for our voice to be heard. Abundant research supports the role of such metaphors in structuring not just thought, but also emotion, behavior, and somatic sensations (Lakoff and Johson, Charteris-Black, LeMesurier). Whatever its linguistic and cognitive functions, metaphor also carries affective entailments. Because these affects often work beneath conscious knowing and beneath articulation, they may be particularly hard to dislodge.

The workshop purposefully uses alternatives to combat metaphors to encourage the idea of argument as dialogic learning rather than competition or combat. These new metaphors are *argument is conversation*

(dialectic problem-solving), *argument is mashup* (combining existing forms of knowledge to produce novel ideas), and *argument is acting like a college student* (being enculturated into patterns of thinking, writing, and behaving). The first two metaphors are rhetorically apt because they utilize vehicles—talking and making music—drawn from students’ areas of interest and expertise, while the “college student” metaphor points to an imagined future. Perhaps more importantly, these metaphors share some affective entailments with the more common combat metaphors while also differing in significant ways. For example, combat and conversation can both provoke excitement, anticipation, and apprehension, but combat is more closely associated with the fear, distrust, and extreme vigilance that move bodies, ideas, and beliefs apart. While conversation, like combat, can spark fear and uncertainty, it also arouses curiosity, interest, and wonder that combat does not. Unlike combat, conversation is an invitation to engage another body, idea, belief, or attitude without violence and sometimes with a willingness to be changed by the interaction.

The metaphor of a mashup may also produce beneficial affects. Workshop students know that mashups of film, video, or music generate new art forms from previously discrete, independent, and even contradictory elements. Perhaps even more than conversation, the metaphor of a mashup carries an expectation that relational reworkings will be fruitful. Thus mashup metaphors may elicit affects of excitement, aesthetic appreciation, and surprise and may facilitate sensations of creative movement. Additionally, because mashups reference art forms (music and film) that provoke powerful affective responses, the metaphor may elevate affects through association with those aural and visual stimuli (Anderson).

Despite the obvious attraction of these metaphors, they seemed to be a hard sell in the workshop. In 2015, most students still described argument in competitive terms, often using language associated with combat (fighting, reinforcing, beating, and, more graphically, “shoving an opinion down [someone’s] throat”). Others described argument as a contest that they were trying to win but did not include violent or threatening references. In all, three-

quarters of 2015 students described argument in competitive terms, suggesting that most understood and experienced argument metaphorically as an arena where the goal is to win (argument is a contest), even if winning requires some form of violence (argument is war).

In 2016, the workshop revised the curriculum to focus more explicitly on the metaphors of conversation, mashup, and college student. During the last week of the 2016 workshop, I interviewed students to understand their responses to the new curriculum (see Appendix). When I asked them to define argument, only three students spontaneously described argument using combat language. Of these, two students said argument is “fighting,” and one said it is “defending” a position. If students did not define argument in combative terms, I followed up with this question: “Some people, when they talk about argument, describe it as a fight or a war. How accurate do you think that is?” An additional eight students agreed with the metaphor. Together, eleven students, or 36.6%, approved an argument is combat metaphor. However, 40% ( $n=12$ ) of the students rejected the combat metaphor even when it was offered to them, and five students adopted the curriculum’s language of conversation ( $n=4$ ) and mashup ( $n=1$ ) in their answers (see Figure 1).

One 2016 student explicitly used the conversation metaphor to reject the combat metaphor: “I mean, to describe it as being a war, I feel like is a bit rash. I think it’s more like a conversation.” Even when students did not use conversation or mashup, the entailments of these metaphors seemed to help some students disassociate from more truculent metaphors. For example, one student disagreed that an argument is a fight or a war because “there are multiple sides, it’s calmer, it’s more civilized, it’s more diplomatic.” While not invoking conversation, this student’s answer clearly draws on its associations. The difference between students’ responses in 2015 and 2016 may reflect the more unguarded nature of journal writing versus face-to-face interviews. Nevertheless, it is significant that when the workshop’s curriculum emphasized alternative metaphors, only three students (10%) spontaneously used pugnacious language in defining argument. And nearly half rejected a combat metaphor

**Spontaneous descriptions of argument as combat or competition in 2015 journals (n=20)**

Response	Frequency	Percent of total
Argument=combat or competition	15	75%
Argument=conversation	0	0%
Argument=other or not addressed	5	25%

**Answer to question about accuracy of combat metaphors in 2016 interviews (n = 30)**

Response	Frequency	Percent of total
Argument=war (student offered or agreed with)	11	36.6%
Argument=not war	12	40%
Argument=conversation	5	16.6%
Argument=other	2	6.6%

Figure 1: Comparison of 2015 Journals and 2016 Interviews Coded for “Argument-as-Competition/Combat”

when it was presented to them. Both Tannen and Kroll (“Adversaries”) have theorized the value of non-combat metaphors. My data corroborates their claims.

Nevertheless, nearly 37% of students continued to conceptualize argument as combat, perhaps reflecting the prominence (and intransigence) of competitive metaphors in Western thought and language. As an example, the workshop’s thoughtful and intentional educators occasionally reverted to combat metaphors, even when they were trying to show something else. Two pedagogical exchanges that I captured in fieldnotes demonstrate the metaphor’s insidiousness. Both occurred during the 2016 workshop that prioritized using conversation and mashup metaphors.

On the first day, a faculty member introduces the idea of a mashup by displaying a slide with this quote from Mark Twain: “There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply

take old ideas . . . give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations . . .” After allowing students to discuss the quote with a neighbor, she asks if anyone agrees with the quote.

A student answers, “I believe the quote is true because even the television was a new idea . . . but there were drawings and stories and someone combined those ideas.”

After approving his answer and thanking him, the teacher asks, “Did anyone have the opposite?”

A student raises her hand. “I didn’t exactly have the opposite, but I thought it wasn’t completely true.”

The teacher responds, “So you see there are two spectrums—some who think one thing and some who think totally different and some who waffle in between.”

Twain’s quote and the pedagogical exchange that follows seem intended to generate a range of responses that will become the material for an argument “mashup.” The first student eagerly draws on the mashup metaphor—showing how TV combines elements from different creative genres to produce a new medium. The second student disagrees, but only to qualify the first position as not “completely true”; she hesitates to reject it outright. Her response is notable since both the first student’s introduction of a truth value and the teacher’s request for “the opposite” invite a more competitive stance. The second student refuses to take the bait. Instead her answer (“not completely true”) “raises difficulties” around the question, nudging the discussion onto dialectical, conversational ground (Aristotle 265). Rather than pursuing this dialectical possibility, the teacher reinforces a competitive model by speaking of “two spectrums” that are “totally different” with those who occupy a middle ground as “waffl[ing],” a verb with mostly negative connotations.

Later in the workshop, an experienced faculty member teaches a lesson on writing an ending for an argument. She notes that the ending follows the refutation and, by way of review, asks, “What does refutation mean?”

A student answers, “To redirect. To stop and go in another direction.”

The teacher immediately replies, “Pretty close. Refute means to prove the other side wrong. It’s to see that you aren’t so sunk in your own idea that you can’t see another point of view. A refutation is where you can say, ‘Somebody might think differently than you do, but here is why I am right.’”

Here, the student’s answer is consistent with conversation and mashup metaphors. *Redirect*—commonly collocated with “the conversation”—suggests the possibility of change and of discovering new purposes or meanings. His answer also associates refutation with affects of movement and hints of embodiment (“stop . . . and go”). The teacher’s first response—“Refute means to prove the other side wrong”—misses an opportunity to nurture the student’s incipient affective openness. Perhaps sensing this, the teacher quickly moves to a position more aligned with argument as learning (“see another point of view,” “somebody might think differently”) before falling back on a more combative moral/ethical framework (“I am right”).

I share these episodes not to critique these teachers, who are both gifted educators. Rather, these instances exemplify the tremendous pull of competitive metaphors for argument and the way language betrays good intentions. On these two brief occasions, skilled teachers exhibited the kind of discursive slippage that likely happens all the time in the teaching of argument writing. Given the predominance of competitive, combative metaphors, such language is bound to appear in our discourse, despite our best efforts to reframe argument as a mode for learning. Students and teachers live in a society saturated with combat metaphors (Tannen’s “combat culture”), and this may explain why the 2016 curriculum revisions shift but do not eradicate existing conceptualizations of argument. Additionally, the metaphors of combat and communication are merely different ways of enacting a shared communicative goal. Given that all argument “aims to affect or change beliefs or actions,” it may be inevitable that one metaphor cannot fully replace the other (Ross and Rossen-Knill 183).

## Pattern 2: Considering the Other Guy

A second discursive pattern appears in the workshop's teaching of refutation, which they call variously "counter argument, counter claim, rebuttal, objection, [or] the other guy's ideas." Some of these terms, like counter and rebut, are so closely associated with antagonistic contexts (counterattack, counteroffensive, counterstrike) that connotations of hostility and fighting seem unavoidable. Even the less loaded term *objection* (with its juridical associations) seems at odds with openness and argument-as-learning. Most commonly, however, the workshop uses the language of "the other guy." For example, a PowerPoint slide states that the goal of refutation is to "reject ideas from the other side of your argument" and lists four bullet points suggesting how young writers might go about this:

- Understand what the 'other guy' thinks and why
- Think about the other perspective(s), pick 1 or 2 of the other's [sic] guy's ideas and decide what YOU think about those ideas
- Present a counter-argument explaining why you disagree with the other guy's ideas
- Reject the other guy's argument because it represents bad reasoning OR concede the point, but as less important than the ideas you have argued  
(workshop slide, emphases in original)

The word *other* appears six times on this slide alone, and the refrain of "What does the other guy think?" becomes a recurring motif in the discourse of workshop teachers and students. In essence, the words "other guy" become shorthand for refutation.

This language appears to have important affective consequences. While teachers use the "other guy" language to encourage empathy for the other guy's thinking, students often respond to the other guy's character. This unintended result may be due to the curriculum's consistent use of the word *other* to modify guy, an imagined or real person who disagrees with the writer. In the curriculum's PowerPoint slides and in teacher talk, the collocation of other and guy is so

consistent that linguistically it is the guy—not his idea or thinking—that is other. The repetition of *other* also emphasizes dissimilarity. The other guy is not just someone who sees things from an alternate perspective; he is intrinsically different, foreign, and alien. This discursive construction may work at the level of insinuation to suggest that workshop students and the other guy have nothing in common. If the students are learning to think like college students, the other guy must be ill-informed and unprincipled. Thus many students respond to the curriculum’s discourse by viewing the other guy as an adversary and his ideas as an attack on their own.

Barry Kroll notes that “the standard response to an attack, assuming one chooses not to retreat, is to block and counter attack. This is as true in written argumentation (e.g., refutation, rebuttal, counter claim) as it is in most martial arts” (“Adversaries” 452). In the workshop, students counter the other guy by foregrounding their superior understanding of issues and minimizing the weaknesses of their own arguments. Simultaneously they highlight the other guy’s limited grasp of the issue and dismiss his incisive observations. Students use various strategies to accomplish this. Sometimes they label the other guy as ignorant (“thick-skulled”) or naive (someone who “doesn’t really know” about the issue). One student, writing in support of laws to allow guns in schools, responds to objections by drawing attention to the other guy’s fears. In a journal, the student notes that gun control advocates are afraid of students accessing guns, afraid of teachers harming innocent people, afraid that the presence of guns encourages violence, and afraid that guns may accidentally discharge. While the student lists legitimate concerns, the litany of worries effectively paints the other guy as cowardly and his fears as exaggerated. Furthermore, by suggesting that the “other guy” is driven by fear, the student intimates that their relationship is fraught, not friendly, thus subtly drawing on the entailments of argument as combat (Felski).

A pattern of denigrating the other guy’s intellect, knowledge, or character is not unique to workshop students. “Positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation”—what linguist Theo Van Dijk labels the ideological square (39)—are common features

of adversarial discourse. But workshop students' use of these strategies suggests that as they write, they experience affects appropriate to adversarial situations. This orientation works against curious and hospitable engagement, as students retreat from what Dale Jacobs calls threshold places where they might patiently explore the relationship between their ideas and the other guy's.

The consistent use of the gendered, singular noun (*guy*) may also contribute to students' perception of argument as having just two sides. One journal prompt asked students to respond to this question: "What does the other guy think about my topic?" In answering, sixteen of the twenty student journal writers (80%) described argument as having just two sides. In contrast, I did not use the words *other guy* in any of the 2016 interviews. Of the thirty students interviewed, only thirteen (43%) described argument as two-sided (see Figure 2).

Students who saw argument as adversarial used commonplaces such as "there are two sides to everything," things are "very black and white," and there is no "middle ground." More positively, they sometimes reported finding research that compelled them to change sides or that forced themselves to think about the opposite side. Insisting on sides and setting the limit at two forecloses on a multitude of ways students could visualize the conversation (circles, octagons, hexagons, squares, triangles, networks, rhizomes, etc.). These restrictions seemed to reduce students' appreciation of an

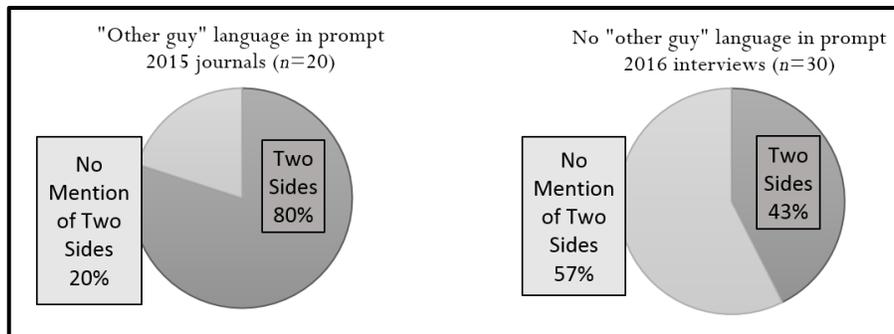


Figure 2: Students' Perceptions of Argument as Having Just Two Sides

issue's complexity. Furthermore, students often polarized the sides along moral or ethical lines. As one student said in an interview, "It's like there's two sides into the topic, and, like, one side is, like, about the good stuff, and then the other side is talking about everything that's bad and that's wrong."

The notion of two sides also works against some of the hoped-for entailments of conversation and mashup metaphors—curiosity, wonder, desire for engagement—that might reveal complexity and lead to learning. Rather than searching for nuanced answers, students who see issues as black and white look instead for evidence to prove they are on the "right" side. Besides discouraging openness and thoughtfulness, the "other guy" language, then, may also discourage rigorous research. The curriculum sometimes unintentionally contributes to scholarly insularity by suggesting that students find credible internet resources through which they can "learn both sides of the topic" and by directing students to let what they think (rather than what the research says) guide their response to the other guy's position. For example, one PowerPoint slide reads: "pick 1 or 2 of the other's [sic] guy's ideas and decide what YOU think about those ideas" (emphasis in original).

The workshop students' two-sided approach to argument is not unique. Ursula Wingate's study of first-year undergraduate students found that many students hold a similarly "narrow concept of argument," a tendency she links to curricula that focus on a "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" essay structure (149). And Tannen observes a similar pattern of simplifying arguments to two manageable positions in texts ranging from student papers to peer-reviewed articles, where authors position their work in opposition to someone else's that they then prove lacking in some way. Students may adopt these frameworks because they have been taught explicit formulas for writing argument essays or because they see established scholars using similar formats. But they may also adopt antagonistic stances because those stances align with affects that the workshop's pedagogical discourse provokes in them.

On its face, refutation encourages openness since students must consider ideas that differ from their own. Teaching students to include a refutation in their essay could prompt them “to examine their own perspectives to find connections with the perspectives of others” (Council 4). In the workshop, every student’s final essay included a refutation section—usually one paragraph immediately before the conclusion. The refutation section offers textual evidence of the author’s openness and critical thinking. But applying an affective lens to students’ experiences while writing these essays suggests that a text’s refutation section is not a wholly reliable indicator of students’ openness and learning.

### **An Affective Theory for Teaching Argument**

As a result of this research, I believe that argument writing instruction is more likely to result in thoughtfulness, curiosity, and openness when it produces affects that support those habits of mind: namely, affects associated with connectivity, relationships, and movement. Before giving an example from the data, I outline recent scholarship that aligns connectivity, relationships, and movement with argument as a form of learning.

As I noted above, Krista Ratcliffe has proposed listening as an inventional strategy that interrupts argument’s negative affective cycle. Rhetorical listening occurs in the “shared atmosphere” of gaps between self and other—the “excess” where we adjoin but do not overlap (71). Ratcliffe uses the imagery of an energy field to represent these places of “non-identification.” Containing everything that cannot neatly fit within a framework of difference and commonalities, these energy fields become places of pure affective movement and connection, places where multiple relationships form and reform, and places where openness is born.

The relational possibilities of Ratcliffe’s energy fields mirror Dale Jacob’s metaphor for argument as a kind of hospitality centered in threshold spaces where encounters between the self and others occur. Prioritizing the “gathering” (rather than the competing) sense of the word *agon*, Jacobs proposes argument as a form of hospitality that invites bodies and ideas over thresholds of division and into

shared space. Hospitality is thus movement that engages rather than vanquishes. Both Ratcliffe's rhetorical listening and Jacobs's hospitality are affectively relational—they emerge in purposeful movement toward and recognition of an ineluctable interdependence of bodies, objects, and things. In this affective betweenness, binaries of self and other collapse into more nuanced and productive connections.

I explore the idea of relational/connective/moving affect by considering the writing experience of a workshop student I call Jordan. Jordan was an outlier among students because of the metacognitive way he talked about his attempts to develop openness as a writer. His journal suggests that affect helped him practice “new ways of being and thinking in the world” as he wrote an argument essay (Council 4). Jordan described himself as a confident writer, citing a history of teachers praising his writing ability. He recounted the positive feelings he experiences when he finishes a writing assignment and said he motivates himself to write by imagining people in the future reading and praising his work. His writing confidence, then, appears fully relational and affective; it relies on intensities that form between others' responses (real and projected) and his own writing body.

In turn, this positive and secure writerly identity seems foundational to his openness and learning. Other scholars have noticed a connection between writing confidence and experiencing writing as learning (Johnson and Krase), and this appears true for Jordan as well. For example, Jordan described “opening” himself to other views by asking his mother questions about his ideas and claims. He said he knows that his mother will answer in ways that challenge his thinking, and he admits often not liking the answers he receives. Jordan's learning strategy (asking questions) represents a “risky revelation of the self” and a willingness to “plunge on alone, with no assurance of welcome from the other” (Corder 26). Significantly, Jordan said he asks his mother difficult questions because his mother “knows” that he is “smart” and a skilled writer and “thinker.” It is telling that Jordan follows the description of his courageous practice with an immediate affirmation of his intellectual and writerly identity, the affective and relational basis of which he has already established.

Jordan also experiences openness as movement. He likes writing about questions and issues for which he doesn't have a ready response because, he said, "it gives you space and room to look around, research, and gather thoughts and information, that you may have not thought of before." Here he figuratively represents the experience of openness as embodied sensations that encompass temporality ("space and room"), require movement ("look and gather"), and ultimately lead to knowledge (things "you may have not thought of before"). Jordan's conceptualization of openness aligns with Kroll's invitation for students to "'think' about patterns of argument with their muscles and sinews and joints" ("Adversaries" 464). Thus Jordan enacts, albeit tentatively, an affective and embodied model of openness that writing teachers could encourage.

With my research and Jordan's experience in mind and with the goal of encouraging argument as a form of learning, I have made changes in my first-year writing classes—changes that I hope arouse affects of connection, relationship, and movement. I believe these affects support the development of both openness and critical thinking more generally.

First, I introduce my students to Lakoff and Johnson's idea of conceptual metaphors. We discuss the everyday language associated with these metaphors. For example, I ask, "What language or figures of speech do we use that suggests we conceptualize time as money?" We also explore the affective consequences language and metaphors impose on bodies: "If you conceptualize time as money, how do you experience time? How else might we conceptualize time? How would this change our experiences?" Many of my students come from or have lived in cultures that conceptualize time through metaphors other than money. Their experiences contribute to a robust discussion in which students explore different metaphors and the behaviors, values, and lifestyles those metaphors support. For example, I have had several students describe the more relaxed relationship to time they see in Polynesian countries. They speculate that island cultures may conceptualize time using metaphors related to ocean tides, allowing people to experience time as consistently

abundant. These discussions help students see how metaphors can constrain our ability to think and act in certain ways.

Second, we explore students' experiences with argument and openness. I ask my students what they think the word *argument* means. We talk about when, where, and how they have argued, and I ask them to describe those experiences. While some students have had experiences where argument felt like cooperation and learning, most describe it as a competitive or confrontational activity. I ask them how many times they have mentioned having an argument with a boyfriend, girlfriend, parent, roommate, coworker, or boss and had someone respond, "That's great! What did you learn?" We talk about the predominance of competitive orientations to argument and the prevalence of combat metaphors. We list language associated with argument and combat and the affects that language could produce. We talk about how an argument-as-combat metaphor might limit the ways we respond to new or challenging information.

I then ask students to consider where and when they feel open to new things, ideas, people, or experiences. I ask them to describe affects associated with openness. What does openness feel like in their bodies? What sensations do they experience when they encounter new things without resistance? What language and metaphors do they associate with those experiences? Together we try to imagine metaphors that capture affects of openness—connection, relationships, and movement—and apply them to argument ("argument is visiting a new country," "argument is meeting a new friend," "argument is speed dating"). We make these new metaphors a prominent part of classroom discussions. I encourage alternatives to the combat metaphor and warlike language because, with Kroll and Tannen, I believe these new metaphors can shift students' cognitive and affective responses.

Besides the metaphors students create, I use the argument-as-conversation metaphor and Burke's idea of the parlor extensively (in part because the word *parlor* always elicits some laughter). I also try to monitor the language I use. For example, instead of asking what the "other guy" thinks, I ask, "What additional ways are there of thinking about this issue? How do those ways of thinking make

sense to people?” Still, I know that I cannot eliminate all combative and competitive language; I am constantly correcting myself as I teach. I also know that alternative metaphors are unlikely to fully replace combat metaphors. So I have found it helpful to involve my students in critiquing the relationship between metaphor and affect and to offer my own pedagogical language for critical analysis.

I also know that not all students experience combat metaphors negatively. And there are times when an adversarial response is appropriate (Tomlinson). I tell students that I want their repertoire of argumentative stances to match the variety of argumentative situations they will encounter in and outside of my classroom (Kroll “Differently”). I find it helpful, then, to encourage my students to practice many ways of learning from and communicating within difference. To prevent students from becoming sedimentary about any single argumentative approach, I try to help my students see that it is only *after* they have learned about an issue and the positions surrounding it that they can choose an appropriate argumentative stance. If they begin with an adversarial orientation, it becomes hard to enact different moves or to forge different connections later on. One way I forestall students’ committing to a particular stance is by having them begin researching a topic in groups, posing and answering broad research questions around that topic rather than around a thesis (or around a thesis masquerading as a research question). I encourage students to see themselves as nomads, traveling through and mapping the conversation they find in the literature. The metaphor of traveling prepares students to discover and evaluate unfamiliar ideas and perspectives; the metaphor of mapping keeps them situated in a relevant conversation. After working as a group to understand the existing landscape of the issue, students decide individually on a claim, thesis, and argumentative stance. In the end, a student may still take an adversarial, combative approach to argumentation, but I always appreciate the conversations that lead to that choice.

Finally, I look for ways beyond the essay to assess students’ learning. The formulaic conventions of essay templates like TIRE do not inherently demand sincere conversations in which one works

out—through back-and-forth engagement with others’ perspectives—what one truly believes. Additionally, students’ texts do not always faithfully reflect their experiences while writing. Following TIRE or similar formats, students may include a token refutation without seriously appreciating other people’s ideas. Conversely, as noted above, students may produce essays that show little sign of openness despite having rich dialectal experiences while researching and writing. One pedagogical implication of my study, then, is the need to evaluate what an argument essay can reveal about student learning. An essay that includes a refutation may indicate that a student is developing openness as a habit of mind. But we will have a better sense of their “willingness to consider new ways of being and thinking in the world” (Council) if we also understand their affective experiences while writing.

We might, then, ask students to reflect on their affective experiences while writing the essay. At what points in the writing process did they experience affects associated with connectivity, relationships, and generative movement? When were those affects, in the words of one student in my study, “shut down”? Asking students to become aware of affect doesn’t mean that students will be able to control their affective responses—affect is, by its very nature too diffuse, emergent, and unpredictable for that. But we can teach students to slow what Kathleen Stewart calls “the quick jump” from affect—the tight chest, the racing heart, the fluttering stomach, the quivering legs—to thoughts and evaluations. If students resist the urge to label affects (“I’m angry”) or interpret affects (“She’s wrong!”), they are better able to view their affective responses as invitations to explore new “ways of approaching the complex and uncertain objects [ideas, perspectives, people] that fascinate because they literally hit us or exert a pull on us” (Stewart 4, see also Dutro). Ultimately, students may also learn to cultivate affects that support openness.

## **Conclusion**

Affect matters. We may want to assume that teaching argumentative writing will develop our students into open and curious thinkers—

the possibility certainly exists. But we cannot presume that outcome without taking into account students' affective responses, which can undermine teachers' efforts to make argument writing a learning activity. Affect can hinder students' ability to practice the openness, curiosity, and critical thinking that argument writing is designed to promote. If we accept argument writing as a pedagogical imperative, we must also accept an obligation to think about the affects writers experience in writing arguments and how those affects sustain or compromise openness, curiosity, and thoughtfulness. The pedagogical strategies I describe in this article—examining metaphors, imagining new metaphors, talking about affect, and finding multiple ways to assess openness and learning—can help students recognize and appreciate the affective milieu within which they encounter and produce arguments. When students understand that openness and curiosity are both cognitive and affective responses, they are more likely to develop these habits of mind. If our writing pedagogies acknowledge the affective dimensions of argument, our students will be more likely to experience argument as learning.

### Works Cited

- Anderson, Ben. "Becoming and Being Hopeful: Towards a Theory of Affect." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 24, 2006, pp. 733-52.
- Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*. 2nd ed. Translated by George A. Kennedy, Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Baker, Peter, and Katie Rogers. "In Trump's America, the Conversation Turns Ugly and Angry, Starting at the Top." *New York Times*, 20 June 2018, [www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/us/politics/trump-language-immigration.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/20/us/politics/trump-language-immigration.html). Accessed 22 August 2018.
- Charteris-Black, Jonathon. *Politicians and Rhetoric: The Persuasive Power of Metaphor*, Palgrave, 2005.
- Corbin, Juliet M., and Anselm Strauss. "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria." *Qualitative Sociology*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1990, pp. 3-21.
- Corder, Jim. "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1985, pp. 16-32.

- Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and National Writing Project. *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*. CWPA, NCTE, and NWP, 2011.
- DeStigter, Todd. "On the Ascendance of Argument: A Critique of the Assumptions of Academe's Dominant Form." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2015, pp. 11–34.
- Dutro, Elizabeth. "How Affect Theory Can Support Justice in Our Literacy Classrooms: Attuning to the Visceral." *Language Arts*, vol. 96, no. 6, 2019, pp. 384-89.
- Edbauer Rice, Jenny. "The New 'New': Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2008, pp. 200–12.
- Felski, Rita. *The Limits of Critique*. University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- Glenn, Cheryl, and Krista Ratcliffe, editors. *Silence and Listening as Rhetorical Arts*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2011.
- Jacobs, Dale. "The Audacity of Hospitality." *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory*, vol. 28, no. 3 & 4, 2008, pp. 563-81.
- Johnson, J. Paul, and Ethan Kruse. "Affect, Experience, and Accomplishment: A Case Study of Two Writers, from First-Year Composition to Writing in the Disciplines." *Journal of Teaching Writing*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2012, pp. 1-26.
- Kroll, Barry M. "Arguing Differently." *Pedagogy*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2005, pp. 37-60.
- . "Arguing with Adversaries: Aikido, Rhetoric, and the Art of Peace." *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 59, no. 3, 2008, pp. 451–72.
- Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- LeMesurier, Jennifer Lin. "Somatic Metaphors: Embodied Recognition of Rhetorical Opportunities." *Rhetoric Review*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2014, pp. 362-80.
- Newell, George E., Richard Beach, Jamie Smith, and Jennifer VanDerHeide. "Teaching and Learning Argumentative Reading and Writing: A Review of Research." *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2011, pp. 273-304.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Southern Illinois University Press, 2005.
- Ross, Donald, and Deborah Rossen-Knill. "Features of Written Argument." *Argumentation*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2016, pp. 181-205.
- Seigworth, Gregory J., and Melissa Gregg. "An Inventory of Shimmers." *The Affect Theory Reader*, edited by Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth, Duke University Press, 2010, pp. 1-25.
- Smagorinsky, Peter. "Emotion, Reason, and Argument: Teaching Persuasive Writing in Tense Times." *English Journal*, vol. 107, no. 5, 2018, pp. 98-101.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Duke University Press, 2007.

- Sugrue, Thomas J. "White America's Age-Old, Misguided Obsession with Civility." *The New York Times*, 29 June 2018. [www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/opinion/civility-protest-civil-rights.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/29/opinion/civility-protest-civil-rights.html). Accessed 16 August 2018.
- Tannen, Deborah. "Agonism in Academic Discourse." *Journal of Pragmatics*, vol. 34, no. 10-11, 2002, pp. 1651-69.
- Tomlinson, Barbara. *Feminism and Affect at the Scene of Argument: Beyond the Trope of the Angry Feminist*. Temple University Press, 2010.
- Tompkins, Jane. "Fighting Words: Unlearning to Write the Critical Essay." *The Georgia Review*, vol. 42, no. 3, 1988, pp. 585-90.
- Wetherell, Margaret. "Affect and Discourse—What's the Problem? From Affect as Excess to Affective/Discursive Practice." *Subjectivity*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2013, pp. 349-68.
- Wingate, Ursula. "'Argument!' Helping Students Understand What Essay Writing Is About." *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, vol. 11, 2012, pp. 145-54.
- Van Dijk, Teun A. "Opinions and Ideologies in the Press." *Approaches to Media Discourse*, edited by Allan Bell & P. Gerret, Blackwell, 1998, pp. 21-63.

**APPENDIX**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (QUESTIONS RELEVANT TO FINDINGS OF THIS ARTICLE)**

I want to ask some questions about the writing you do in school and at the workshop. And I just want to say again that this isn't a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

- How important do you think it is to be able to write argument essays like the one you are writing here in the workshop?

*Probe:* Where else do you think you might write an essay like this?

- Think about writing an argument and try to describe what it feels like while you are writing—your emotions or thoughts or how your body feels.
- How would you define argumentative writing?

*Probe:* Some people describe argument writing as a fight or war? How accurate do you think that is?

- What do you think you are good at in writing argument essays?