TOULMIN AND THE ETHICS OF ARGUMENT FIELDS: TEACHING WRITING AND ARGUMENT

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George Lakoff and Mark Johnson begin their work *Metaphors We Live By* with a description of

> . . . what it means for a metaphorical concept, namely, ARGUMENT IS WAR, to structure what we do and how we understand what we are doing when we argue. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. It is not that arguments are a subspecies of war. Arguments and wars are different kinds of things — verbal discourse and armed conflict — and the actions performed are different kinds of actions. But ARGUMENT is partially structured, understood, performed and talked about in terms of war. . . . Moreover, this is the ordinary way of having an argument and talking about one. (5)

For writing instructors who are involved in the teaching of argument, particularly those who recognize and articulate their profession within a traditional of the humanities, the dilemma is one of conflicting metaphors. On one hand, those of us who teach writing through a process approach may structure our teaching through a growth or benevolent nature metaphor. On the other hand, we cannot deny

the tenacity of the argument as war metaphor. We need only listen to our own voices and those of our students in the argumentative writing classroom:

> If you don't provide adequate support, your argument will fall.
> Your strategy should provide an excellent defense.
> Your line of attack should include better evidence.

Our students are often more to the point:

> If he uses that study, I'll blow him away.
> When she uses Hart's article, I'll just bring in my big gun authorities.
> We'll shoot him down if he tries that approach.

Lakoff and Johnson suggest that these metaphoric concepts are a major component of how human beings structure and understand their experience, making the argument as war metaphor even more pervasive. To break the war metaphor suggests that ethics must become a major consideration in teaching written argument. Analysis of Rogerian persuasion is one way of turning argument to a more ethical dimension. Though Toulmin's informal logic model is often perceived as just an alternative to formal logic, I would like to suggest that Stephen Toulmin's model of argument provides another way of moving argument to ethical considerations.

Many composition scholars have adopted Toulmin's model of argument as a reasonable rhetoric alternative to the teaching of classical syllogistic deduction. My own experience with syllogisms and writing students was only sometimes successful. My students did understand all the elaborate formalisms, but when the time came to write a paper based on deduction, something was missing. The world view that syllogistic logic encompasses encircled my students as well. Classical deduction presumes an acceptance of a single, objective truth, precluding much discussion about how that major premise came to be viewed as truth. My students furiously resisted the concept that a syllogism could be valid without being true. Moreover, great chasms opened up in my students' papers. If I had a student arguing that "voluntary prayer in the schools is constitutionally acceptable" as a major premise, followed by "a moment of silence is a form of voluntary prayer" as a minor premise, that student might write a paper with what amounted to two separate, unrelated sections. The first section would trace the legal history of voluntary prayer in this country, the second would trace the history

of moments of silence, and the two might never connect in the appropriate categorical fashion. The form dictated the substance and content of the paper, not the student's own sense of the weight of the argument. Instead, the student had "might and right" on her side, the compelling force of the obligatory deductive conclusion derived from two valid premises, never having to consider "truth" once a workable syllogism was found. The student often would not consider counter-arguments, alternative syllogisms, once her own syllogism was in place.

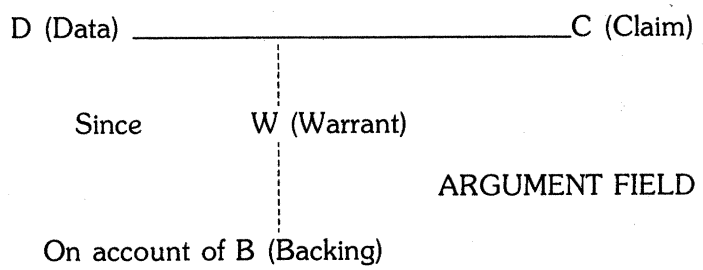
Ralph Johnson, evaluating textbook approaches to non-formal argument, in *Teaching Philosophy*, confirms our sister disciplines' concern with the same issue. After substantial critiques of philosophy's array of textbook approaches, Johnson nevertheless concludes in favor of non-formal argument analysis.

> Logicians, as a breed, are not markedly different from other teachers. We teach as we were taught—at least until experience forces us to change. Most of us were taught in graduate school the elements of formal logic. When we found ourselves in front of a classroom full of students, we did what we had been trained to do. For reasons too numerous to mention here, it didn't work. It didn't satisfy . . . . All of this activity falls under the rubric of breaking the spell cast by formal logic, freeing ourselves from the bondage to it, and helping informal logic along into the mainstream of logical inquiry. I am convinced that we will all be better off as a result: our students, our colleagues, the general public. (142)

Though Johnson does not consider Toulmin directly in this article, his analysis of the failure of formal logic to connect with our students supports a movement to informal logic in the writing classroom. When formal logic is encompassed by the structuring war metaphor, our failure as humanists is even more complete. Taught alone, as the "right," "best," or "most intellectually demanding" approach to argument, we teach in formal logic, by implication, that there is one "right" answer, one truth, one valid approach. We foreclose the other options allowing our students to ignore the reasoning and values that lead to other non-formal arguments and conclusions. Comprehending and producing arguments in the real world has much to do with being able to envision underlying assumptions, the criterion Johnson calls "supplying missing premises" (137) and little to do with mastering the given categorical syllogism.

In short we foreclose our students' growth. If William Perry accurately describes our arriving male college students, then we stall the necessary insights for movement from dualism to relativism. How? By providing the right answer through formal logic, we allow our students' dualism to remain unchallenged and the views of others to remain unknown. If Carol Gilligan is correct about our women students' development, then we provide a too easy solution to the problems of how to value self within a community, a critical stage for further ethical development. Why? Because when we offer a structure to preclude further consideration of the issue, we close another door of opportunity. Academically, we may also stall growth, by pretending when we teach formal logic that we have all the right answers, our certain and valid conclusions, allowing that product model we exorcised out of beginning composition back in the door for a higher level writing class.

Toulmin's approach does suggest a reasonable alternative to classical deductive argument. And we should explore that alternative. I have included a diagram (Figure 1) on which the basic model is



Data:
Marg had the right-of-way
Two witnesses saw the accident.
No brake-tire marks on pavement.
Marg was unconscious.
John's speech was slurred.
John's walk was uncertain and his face was flushed.

Claim 1: John caused the accident.
Claim 2: Marg was seriously hurt.

The police officer required John to take a blood test.
John's blood alcohol level was .13.
Marg was bleeding around her face and her right leg was twisted in an unnatural position.
Witnesses estimated John's speed at 50 mph.

Argument Field Claim #1: Law
Argument Field Claim #2: Medicine

Warrant 1: Since an intoxicated driver is generally presumed to be at fault in an accident. . .

Warrant 2: Since the impact of a 2000 lb. auto moving at 50 mph on a human will generally cause serious injury. . .

Backing 1: *Indiana Code*: drunk driving at .10 blood alcohol and common law doctrine of negligence per se

Backing 2: Emergency medical records at Wishard Hospital in Indianapolis, Indiana, indicate this type of collision will result in serious condition.

Figure 1

demonstrated. A Toulmin structure, at the college level, demands a minimum of four parts, data, warrant, backing and claim. The claim is the part that the arguer seeks to prove, in this case that "John was at fault in this automobile accident." The data is simply the evidence, in this case that Marg had the right-of-way, confirmed by two witnesses; that there were no tire marks; that John appeared to be intoxicated by his weaving walk, his slurred speech and flushed face; that the police officer on the scene required John to take a blood test; and that the blood test indicated a blood alcohol level

of .13. Warrant is the third dimension of the model and the key element of difference from an ethical perspective. How do we view that data? How do we put it together? The warrant becomes the frame through which the data is viewed. As Toulmin states, using another metaphor, "warrants are hypothetical bridge-like statements" (105). The warrant here is "Since an intoxicated driver will generally be presumed to be at fault in an accident" and the backing for such a warrant is the Code of the State of Indiana, with statutes on fault in accidents, and those on definition of intoxication at .10 as drunk driving.

What is intriguing about the Toulmin model, however, is that if you change the argument field from which the backing and warrant arise, you change the data available to support the claim. In the case of the accident, an entirely different frame operates when the claim is medical, even though the incident itself is the same. Unfortunately, though, the concept of the argument field has received but little attention from most composition researchers. Its most apparent application would be in those writing courses in which students are reading and writing among several disciplines. Its other application, perhaps more important, however, is in its ethical dimension. Toulmin suggests that criteria for evaluation of arguments will vary from field to field. He says:

> . . . the criteria or sorts of ground required to justify such a conclusion vary from field to field. In any field, the conclusions that "cannot" be the case are those we are required to rule out. (36)

Toulmin further suggests that through the examination of field-dependent criteria we may eventually arrive at field-invariant criteria for all disciplines, all claims in all areas. But until we have carefully examined the form, structure and differences among fields, we may have trouble imposing outside structural evaluations. Toulmin further develops the concept of intellectual disciplines and their development in his work *Human Understanding*. Here, the conception of argument field is developed in relation to intellectual disciplines.

Toulmin defines a discipline, a field, even a near-discipline, at least partially by its agreement on common goals and conceptions of its purpose. Why then should the teaching of this particular model, applied to academic disciplines, enhance students' tolerance? After all, we demonstrate through a preliminary analysis that the

individual disciplines have their own coherence of thought, and, thus, formal logic could be expected to apply. Toulmin makes two distinctions in *Human Understanding* that clarify this apparent problem. First, not all disciplines are, as he called it, "compact," those disciplines of the natural sciences in which goal and conceptions are agreed upon and explicitly known and discussed. We must thus reason that apart from these narrowly defined "hard" sciences other disciplines may require informal logic. Toulmin also suggests that the social sciences do not have the necessary compactness. Subdisciplines and subspecialties, each with separate warrants and backing, are, he posits, far more likely outside of natural science. Second, Toulmin also suggests there is a qualitative change in the dimension of the argument when ethical questions enter.

> In any culture and generation men [and women] acknowledge the authority of a dozen inherited approaches to ethical questions. Each of these approaches has its own rubric—"as a matter of self respect/morality/loyalty/etiquette/integrity/equity/religious commitment/simple humanity . . ."—and each defines a particular set of issues, considerations, and modes of argument. In any chosen culture and generation, furthermore, men [and women] do not merely continue applying all these different considerations and arguments in exactly the same way as their forefathers; they also attempt to refine their application, and to reorder their relative priorities, in light of the changing needs and conditions of life. (410)

How we best prepare our students to enter argument ethically, "the multivalued character of concrete ethical issues" (410), is through learning to use Toulmin's model as a tool of analysis of discipline-oriented issues, to come to know why and how a member of a discipline, a resident of a field, arrived where he or she did. A fact then is not just a fact. A fact is constrained by its context, its designated field. What facts are considered in determining a legal case are not necessarily the same to be considered in a medical case. What a linguist considers to be a fact of language an English teacher might reject. When a sociologist looks at families at risk, she sees a group with defined characteristics; when the psychologist looks at a family-at-risk, he sees a problem to be resolved. What happened to facts? Are we thus prevented from evaluating arguments? Toulmin's model suggests the answer is no, but we must first deter-

mine the argument field and its corresponding warrants and backing, before we have facts, or salient data.

This negotiability of facts and data between disciplines leaves an opening for developing our students' consciousness of the differences among the disciplines and the "backing," the reasons why some facts are considered and others are not. Rarely do our students receive explicit instruction in the philosophical backing of a discipline. The very idea may seem ridiculous in the late high school or early college years. History is history; those who aren't included weren't important is typical analysis. The rules of English grammar have always been the rules of English grammar is another typical analysis. Our students' perceptions of fields remain at the right and wrong, dualistic level.

When teaching argument and research, we have the opportunity to make these differences in analysis by field part of our students' analytical tools. Moreover, this expansion in their repertoire also leads to a greater tolerance for multiple perspectives on a topic. They may not be so quick to reject a point of view as "wrong" if they first must examine the view from the backing of the argument field from which the view comes. Further, as Charles Kneupper suggests, "people are participants in multiple fields"; thus, our students also have this aspect, a field grounding their knowledge. Our students may have already declared an academic field, but they are also participants in religious, political, athletic, and avocational fields. Kneupper elaborates by stating:

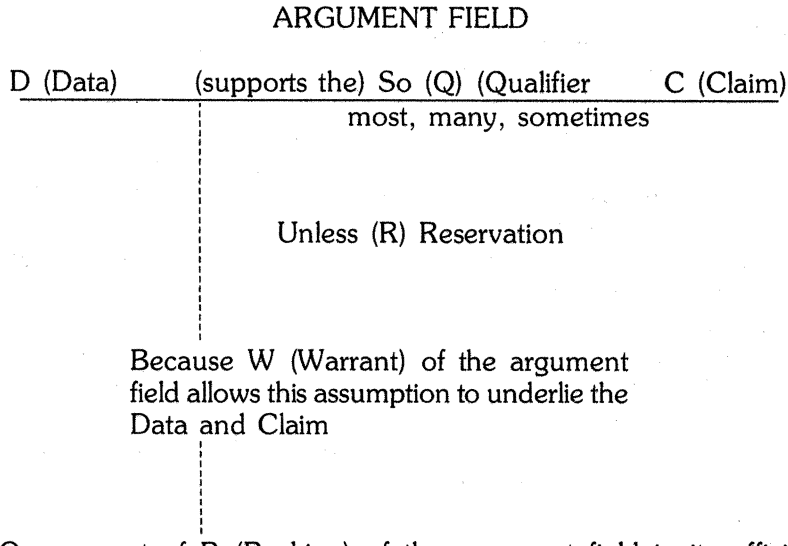
> Such a person may not advance the knowledge in any of these fields, but will still utilize the knowledge and constructs provided by these fields. Further, such a person may gradually increase in personal knowledge as he or she gains more experience in, more constructs from, a fuller comprehension of each of these fields. Fields focus upon, capture and emphasize some limited aspect or feature of human experience in the world. They enable and expedite common understanding and problem solving within that sphere. (83)

In the teaching of argumentative writing where the conflict of value systems may be explicit, we may use that surfacing of the ethical systems, the value systems behind fields of inquiry, to expand our students' world knowledge and more importantly to increase tolerance for the views of others.

So how might we teach the ethics of argument in conjunction with the Toulmin model? First, we need to come to a definition of ethics. Previously my discussion contrasting categorical deduction with informal logic defined ethics in argument only implicitly, as "not war," not just two opposing sides, from which only one can emerge as valid. Ethics in the argumentative writing classroom has further dimensions as a part of a liberal education. To become participants in the college experience, our students must come to understand the conventions of our discussion. Those conventions include a preference for the logical and the rational over the purely emotional and dramatic, a predilection for thorough analysis over the stereotype or hasty generalization, and the acknowledgement of the possibility of a number of points of view. Though this description is, of course, ideal, many observors suggest these are some of the underlying values of the liberal undergraduate education. Moreover, in re-examining William Perry's scheme of moral and ethical development, we can find a correspondence between acknowledging the possibility of many points of view and his stage of multiplicity. Students of college age move beyond dualism, or simple right and wrong, into discovery of multiple perspectives. From knowledge of these perspectives, Perry asserts these students will reach a stage of commitment. While most students experience multiplicity in unplanned settings — sheer contact with other students and coursework in various disciplines — it is possible to focus students' attention on multiplicity of viewpoint within an academic context. This focus on multiplicity of viewpoint then becomes the key to ethics in the argumentative writing classroom.

Let me offer an example of what this focus on multiplicity might mean in actual classroom practice. One approach I have found useful is to present an overview of the Toulmin model at the same time I provide a set of apparently contradictory facts. I ask my students to attempt to account for how the "facts" came to be, in spite of their contradictions. Figure 2, a sample exercise, illustrates an issue presented in such a way as to highlight the necessity of analyzing multiple perspectives. The topic in this exercise was the policy question of whether or not English should be made the official language of the United States. Students had been asked to read a variety of materials including the 1984 California ballot initiative on requesting the U.S. Congress to make English the official national language, various editorials appearing in newspapers, and Rudolph

Troike's review "Synthesis of Research on Bilingual Education." After reading these materials, students compiled a list of data from the various sources. Their lists were compiled and made a part of the exercise.



DATA:

English speakers cannot do business with speakers of Spanish only.

In Miami, Tuscon, El Paso and Los Angelos more than 30% of elementary grades instruction is carried out in Spanish.

Bilingual education is more costly than monolingual education and thus requires federal aid to local schools.

Bilingual ballots cost more to print.

Bilingual ballots have been available in New Mexico since 1912.

Bilingual ballots have been required in federal elections since 1975.

Foreign language ballots are unnecessary because all immigrants must pass an English language literacy test.

Twenty million citizens of the United States were born in households in which English was not the first language.

All other major immigrant populations to the United States have mastered English.
Dade County, Florida declared itself officially bilingual in 1975.
A ballot proposition in California in 1986 enforcing English as the official language of California won 73% voter approval.
In Los Angelos County, bilingual ballots account for only 2% of costs.
The language of the home is the dominant language of any speaker.
In areas of language contact, most speakers know enough of the two (or more) languages to communicate minimally.
Students who begin their elementary education in their native language and then transfer it to a second language test better on standardized examinations of language ability and aptitude.
Students who are forced to be educated in a completely non-native language environment are more likely to become drop-outs.

Argument Field #1: Language Purists
Probable Warrants:
A single language is a unifying element of a country.
Other immigrant groups have been capable.
Bilingualism allows students to be lazy and undisciplined.
English is the best world language, now the language of international business and commerce.
Bilingualism is costly.
Anyone born in the US speaks English.

Argument Field #2: Linguists
Probable Warrants:
All speakers of any language have at least minimal language learning aptitude.
Language learning which makes use of previous language experience is most effective.
Language learning alienation occurs when the speaker's first language is institutionally banned.
The language of the home is the native language.
All languages are roughly equivalent in complexity, and no one language is superior to any other language.
Social and economic factors provide their own motivations to learn prestige languages and dialects.

What claims can you develop for each of the two argument fields?

List at least four claims, allowed by the warrants, and supported by at least part of the data. List four claims below. Include the necessary warrants and the data relevant to each claim.

Figure 2

Initially, the mere compiling of the data had little effect on students' perspectives on the issue. Central Indiana being a place of little linguistic variation, students generally saw no problem in adopting English as an official national language. They knew only those who spoke some intelligible dialect of American English, so the original claims they generated simply reiterated that English should be the official U.S. language. By providing some probable underlying warrants to the argument, I was able to suggest that the problem was more complex than it appeared on the surface. In being asked to link warrants with appropriate data, students were able to see what data they were forced to reject when they selected one set of warrants over another. For example, many of my students selected the claim that English should be the official language by using "language purist" warrants of a single language being unifying and that other immigrants have been capable of learning English. But troublesome to many of these students was the realization that they had to reject all the data on bilingual education and they had to ignore the significant number of American citizens, born in this country, who did not use English as a first language. Alternatively, students who had selected the "linguist" warrants were forced to reject the possibility that a single language could be a unifying factor and that there were very real governmental costs involved in providing multilingual services and functions. Such dissonance required some resolution and students were to return to the original packet of readings and attempt to synthesize the conflicting points of view, generating new claims. Four collaborative groups responded in the following ways:

> One side wants English to be the official language while the other believes bilingualism should be available in the educational system. The two are not necessarily opposites. Maybe the U.S. English law could be written so bilingual services are still available.
>
> The cost and education sides are not really in opposition. The educators believe students should learn English, but on a

gradual basis. The people concerned with other bilingual costs in government and business could eliminate the problem through bilingual education.

The bilingual educators' approach describes ways to teach English to non-English speakers by gradually introducing English, along with using their own language as they study. English is still the goal for both groups. Those who are bilingual will have the advantage of being able to communicate in more than one setting.

Bilingual education could be a less expensive alternative in the long run as its intent is to move the student from one language to another. In this way, every speaker is looked on as a potential resource instead of as a burden. Though both articles leaned toward English as the main language, the U.S. English position abandons all attempts to support speakers of other languages, while bilingual educators have a more thoughtful approach.

Even if the students remained steadfast in their support of English as an official language, they were now ready to qualify that stand, to acknowledge the viewpoints of linguists and educators experienced in the problem. Upon reconsidering the California ballot initiative, many remarked on the value of having voters understand what they were voting on, difficult if language was a barrier. Further, many were particularly concerned with the image of a six-year-old child entering school and finding himself or herself in a totally foreign language setting. Were they accommodating multiple perspectives? I would suggest that the answer must be yes, and by the previous definition of ethics in this context, they were beginning to meet the components of the definition. They were considering the issue from a logical and rational point of view rather than "but I don't want to learn to speak Spanish" being the guiding principle. Their analysis was now more thorough, less stereotypical, recognizing that not everyone born in the United States speaks English in the home. And they were able to encompass more than a single perspective, while taking a position.

Had this particular issue been taught within the categorical, deductive approach, my experience tells me the syllogisms would have demonstrated little, if any, accommodation to multiple perspectives. I suspect I would have received many essays guided by the

following syllogism: linguistic accommodation is too costly for the United States; bilingual education is linguistic accommodation; therefore, bilingual education is too costly for the United States. Though far more sophisticated syllogisms are possible, rarely does the beginning student of written argumentation make them. By seeking a categorical form, the student must necessarily assert oppositions: one is either in a category or not in the category. And we are left once again with the war metaphor: for or against.

Let me offer a final example of this movement from one of my own students last year. The particular student in question was male, early twenties, a very articulate conservative. His strong rejection of socialist or Marxist analysis of historical events precluded his use of some of the typical analytical tools of his field, history. He had decided that any economic analysis of historical events was indicative of a left-wing approach. Thus, in a previous history class, when this student attempted to analyze a situation he posits in his paper — that the Russian officer corps was in part responsible for the Russian Revolution of 1917 — he was unable to make his case. What had previously precluded success was that he did not want to use social or economic analysis to clarify the historical context, feeling that to do so would violate his personal conservatism. Two aspects of the argumentative writing class using Toulmin came into play. First, his fellow history majors in class read his work, commenting on how his analysis differed from theirs, correctly identifying the lack of a warrant in his work allowing him to use social and economic factors. Second, his use of Toulmin to study his own intended field allowed him to see that social and economic context provided him the necessary warrant to make his case, this time successfully. He no longer believes his professor was critiquing him on the basis of his politics and he knows how to warrant his own arguments from his home field. He had taken a first step toward toleration, my claim for the benefits of using this approach.

Finally, rather than structuring our conception of argument through the war metaphor, we might want to use a growth metaphor. The act of arguing can then form around cycles, growth, fertilizing, flowering, seeding, and weeding. With the growth metaphor, argument can be seen as flowering and bearing seeds, rather than as destroying and dominating. Disagreements no longer need to be battlefield sites; sites may be fields where ecological balance may be achieved. The dark side of the war metaphor—the

stark, ashen, lifeless place of battle—is sterile. We need to replace this sterile metaphor with a productive one. Battlefields have their brief moment of glory in time; gardens may be timeless.

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