

Verbal and Visual Rhetoric in a Media World

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9 Teaching for Thinking and Rhetoric The Contributions of Rhetoric to the Argumentative Writing of Students at a Greek Elementary School

SMARAGDA PAPADOPOULOU AND FOTINI EGGLEZAS

9.1 Introduction

An optimum medium for developing abilities such as critical thinking and analysis of an argumentative text down to its components, is the early systematic training of students in argumentative writing within a social context. An effective way of reaching this goal could be to expose the students to interactive practices conducive to writing as a social act – able to 'address self in society and social relation in self' (Shor 1987, p. 95). Rhetorical pedagogy is closely related to this effort (Freeley & Steinberg 2009, Johnson 1996, p. 46; Sternberg & Spear-Swerling 1996, pp. 66-8).

9.2 Theoretical framework: Rhetorical argument and metalinguistic coherence of arguments in writing

Argumentative theories underline the close relationship between argumentation and rhetoric as well as dialectics and their 'fruitful integration' (Eemeren & Houtlosser 2000, p. 296). Since the ancient Greek Sophists and Aristotle's *Rhetoric* until the *New Rhetoric* (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca) scholars have drawn attention to two attributes of the rhetorical argument relative to its teaching: 1) its necessary formation in a certain *context* through the interaction of arguer and audience for the achievement of persuasive language communication; and 2) its dialectic nature and practice (Tindale 1999; Tindale 2004, p. 89).

The first attribute of the rhetorical argument presents an affinity with proximity to theories that insist on the social construction of reality and knowledge (Berger & Luckmann 1996; Vygotsky 1978, p. 86; Vy

1981; Halliday 2002). As regards the second attribute of the rhetorical argument, its dialectic character is directly related to the development of thinking through the bipolar view of every subject matter (Billig 1993, p. 49). It seems that this would lead to the desirable empowerment of student's reasoning.

Children's preparation in the teaching of rhetoric depends a lot on metalinguistic procedures that help practitioners express themselves in terms of intellectual argumentation through writing and parallel thinking, for example Edward's De Bono *Thinking Hats* (1985). Accordingly, it provides a basic vocabulary and designs in-class teaching routines that may influence children and their maturity. Our option to use argumentation with children can be described as a method of persuasive attack on excessive rationalism, on vicious intellectualism and the kind of conceptual thinking that ignores the ever-shifting quality of real life experiences just to prove that formal logic is considered as an adequate representation of how minds really function. A strong influence on research at this level has been the work of theorists, psychologists, and language researchers such as Vygotsky (1978), as well as the furthering of his work by Rogoff (1990, p. 78), Luria (1976), Scribner and Cole (1981), Wertsch (1985) and many other researchers.

Our study on students at a Greek Primary school is also influenced by dialogic argumentation. Since ancient times, the study of '*dittoi logoi*' of *Protagoras* in Plato proved that human nature and human mind function in the same way in time. There is a physical inclination of humanity to argue and move forward with rational understanding and speech.

Socrates could not fight for writing debates in his era. He believed that a script is speechless, dead; it cannot defend itself from misunderstandings or awkward commentators. For Socrates, writing is a thinking process without motion and this is also said in *Faidros* by Plato, where writing appears more vulnerable in comparison with orality (275d3-275e6). The art of speaking well in Plato has moved towards the art of writing *well*, which involves a lot of persuasive writing. If something has changed since then, it is the revolution of typography that reduces demand for the oral exposure of thinking and the fact that writing has gained ground at every linguistic exposure.

What could be considered as the result of Socrates' debate in *Protagoras*, as to whether or not *virtue* «αρετή» [aretē] as *knowledge* «γνώση» [gnōsi] is an inherent quality or one that could be taught, influences our case study. Simultaneously, it answers this question by teaching argumentative writing

in educational institutions even with primary school children or with young adults.

9.3 The study: Data and methodological framework

9.3.1 Participants

Our case study¹ research describes a classroom intervention with 25 pupils of the fifth grade (eleven years old), of a public elementary school in an urban zone of Athens. Both the experimental group (E'1) as well as the control group (E'2) (24 students) in the same school shared a homogeneous middle class social background.

9.3.2 Procedure

The intervention programme with the experimental group was carried out for a total of seven months, once a week, for two 45-minute sessions (a total of 28 sessions). The control group got the standard training in argumentative writing according to the Greek national curriculum.

9.3.3 Purpose

The purpose of the intervention was the enrichment of the text structure of the students' written argumentative texts due to the integration of counter-arguments and rebuttals.

9.3.4 Description of the intervention

The following description aims to provide a clearer view of the cognitive and social strategies involved during the intervention.

a) *Direct instruction of basic elements of the argumentative genre.* This strategy was used more often during the first ten sessions in order to present the essential elements of the procedural knowledge of argumentation to students. Furthermore, the teacher-researcher presented some of the most used common places (cause and effect, antithesis, similarity) and some types of proof found in text-models (such as statistics, testimonies, quotative examples). Students were taught all the different expressions of modal

¹ This case study refers to data by F. Egglezou, PhD dissertation research work in progress submitted to the Department of Primary Education at the University of Ioannina, Greece in 2011 under the supervision of Associate Professor Smaragda Papadopoulou.

(*must, should, it may be useful, etc.*), which are necessary to the expression of a *thesis* as well as to the various connectives which characterize the identity of an argumentative text (oppositional, concessive, etc.). The time dedicated to this strategy varied from seven to ten minutes in each session.

b) *Modelling*. The model, based on the journey metaphor of argumentation, was called the 'train of argumentation'. As papercraft, it was placed in the classroom, above the blackboard, in order to remind students of the schema of an argumentative text (thesis/reason(s)/counter-argument(s)/rebuttal(s)/conclusion).

c) *Reading, listening and analysis of various text-models*. Students became familiar with argumentative common topics by reading and analysing advertisements. The reading of journalistic texts concerning, for example, the use of video games offered to students the chance to sort their arguments regarding this topic and to prepare a debate in classroom. In addition, the reading of Aesop's didactic fables and listening to various types of argumentative dialogues helped the primary school students to cultivate their critical thinking in a variety of contexts and to understand the multiplicity of argumentative functions: persuasion, catharsis, amusement, defence, attack, creation and resolution of differences (Andrews 2009).

d) *Oral interactions*. Questioning, doubting, searching for reasoning and working with vocabulary expansion and other tools led the students along alternative paths of creative and argumentative thinking. In the beginning, various language games contributed to the co-construction and confrontation of the first produced arguments, counter-arguments and rebuttals as well as to their linguistic and syntactic formation and expression. The topics of the children's exposure to persuasion and to argument were related to common conflicts in the family circle, among close friends and in their daily school life. Progressively, students wore the *six thinking hats* of De Bono (1985). The brainstorming technique was used for the invention of arguments relative to topics taken from mythology such as: *Theseus is trying to persuade his father, Aegeas, to allow him to go to Crete and kill the Minotaur. What are his arguments?* The realization of multiple role-playing debates, inspired either from the reading of a text or after listening to a political debate, helped students to create the necessary context for the development of their argumentation. The dramatization methods of argumentative dialogues found in ecological fairytales, progressively helped children understand a philosophical dialogue such as Plato's and the Socratic methods. Peer

collaboration and participation structures contributed to the creation of a new context.

e) *Individual or collaborative writing*. The produced oral argumentative discourse, either as an individual monologue or as a result of an 'exploratory talk' (Mercer 2000, p. 98) was always accompanied by argumentative writing of a simple or a more complex form. Groups of four students and students in pairs invented argumentative common topics by writing and reading a text. The individual writing represented various argumentative sub-genres. Exhortative argumentative letter-writing was among them.

f) *Observational learning*. Every three sessions, five written texts were randomly chosen and read by the students-authors in the classroom. These texts were evaluated by the classmates-observers who had, in this way, the opportunity to re-evaluate personal writing strategies (Braaksma, Rijlaarsdam et al. 2004, p. 4).

9.3.5 Data source and analysis

The corpus of data was composed: a) by transcripts from audio-taped and video-taped argumentative speech; b) by individually or collaboratively written texts; and c) by students' individual pre- and post-test in the form of an informal argumentative letter. Both the pre- and the post-test were carried out before and after the completion of the intervention. The effects of the intervention on students' writing were analysed in qualitative and quantitative terms (triangulation of data) in order to provide validity and reliability to the research.

The qualitative analysis of oral and written texts was based on Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis which focuses on the linguistic and intertextual analysis. The first feature of analysis stresses not only grammar or vocabulary but, mostly, the textual organization. The second one relates the textual influences to broader social structures and the appearance of genres in the produced texts (Fairclough 1995, pp. 188-189; Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000, p. 448). In certain cases, a quantification of the data was carried out in order to achieve a clearer view of the obtained experience (Altrichter, Posch & Somekh 2001, p. 188).

The quantitative results of the pre- and post-texts of the experimental group were analysed in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics (Cohen & Ham 2000, pp. 80, 86). The reliability of the measurements identified for the analysis was checked by calculating Cohen's Kappa coefficient for two raters.

(Cohen 1960). Alpha values of 0.62 were obtained for the first observation regarding the existence of counter-arguments in the student's written text; and 0.82 for the second observation regarding the existence of rebuttal arguments. Therefore, there was evidence that the observation system used by the researcher was valid.

9.3.6 Analysis of the oral argumentative interactions

During the intervention, rhetoric contributed to the development of the desired oral argumentative abilities. Various language games contributed to the internalization of the basic vocabulary of the argumentative genre. In the game 'Explain to me, why...', students expressed their points clearly and gave sound reasons in order to support them. Completing their teacher's introductory phrase 'In my opinion...', students had the opportunity to make 'value', 'policy' or – more rarely – 'factual' claims. For example:

I believe that we should wear belts in the car, because we will be more secure in the case of an accident (Marianna).

At the same time, students started to use necessary introductory, argumentative phrases and progressively, a more frequent use of causal sentences for supporting arguments was noticed as well as the tendency to link their arguments, to arrange them in a more organized way.

Linguistic games which caused controversies served as a means to the development of students' bipolar thinking. The *Pumpkin of Arguments*, as a variation of a traditional Greek game, familiarized students both with the notions of a) the *justification* of their opinion; and b) the *negotiation* with the opposite one. The students, sitting in circles, tried to find arguments that strengthened the value of a certain job and counter-arguments that weakened the arguments of the previous player:

(Magia): In my opinion the best job is to be a nurse, because you help people recover. A nurse is a person who gives and receives care and love.

(Antigoni): I disagree that this job is the best one. First of all, it's very common to be a nurse and difficult to find such a job nowadays. It's also hard to always remain calm and not lose your temper when you see blood. On the contrary, I believe that the best job is to be a gardener. His creations make the whole world and the human soul more beautiful. At the same time he finds joy at work.

Another inventive-creative game that was applied in class, *The Piggy Bank and the Coins*, helped students view arguments and counter-arguments the two sides of a coin. Students used the necessary adversative and concessive connectives upon matters like: *Must men do household chores?* or *Should parents get a divorce?* The majority of them (83%) developed rational arguments. For example:

(Argument): Parents shouldn't get a divorce, because they make their children unhappy. (Nikos)

(Counter-argument): I disagree with the above argument, because if their relation in a crisis, children feel more hurt listening to their quarrels. (Dora)

After six months of practice, students were able to detect and criticize absence of correct dialogue habits. For example:

Catherine didn't respond to John's argument. (Sotiris)

Often, the exchange of opposite arguments in role-playing debates issued from the lecture and the conceptual extension of various fables, narrative, journalistic, mythological or texts of ancient Greek literature. Both in the use of imagination and logic were motivated in order to convince the audience of the soundness of the proposed claims.

Through the continuous role-playing debates students developed the notion of empathy or 'otherness' by repeating an argument in different forms, by adapting their arguments to the interests and the characteristics of their roles (Snider & Schnurer 2002, pp. 69-70) and by reasoning in different ways. The rhetoric varied, according to the person who was addressing its argument, according to the audience and the communicative goals of every situation.

It was a pleasant surprise to notice that the voice of the 'other' was spontaneously introduced to the students' monologues. Furthermore, during classroom elections the students' arguments revealed personal values in the service of the common good and stressed that the notion of responsibility was interwoven with the notion of the consequent obligation. Sometimes arguments were addressed to the effective, future citizens of the society, as shown in the following examples (i), (ii):

(i) Also, some more notice boards will be added, in order to show more of our paintings. So, our classroom will not be dull, it will be colourful and we will feel happy. (Katerina)

(ii) Of course, if you want these things to be done you must, also, abide by your duties. Not everything depends on me. (Aris)

The continuous dialogic interactions highlighted the value of evidence in argumentation. Students came up with examples and testimonies in order to empower their arguments. As an audience they continuously examined the quality of the evidence offered. It was the case of the game *Let's weigh our friends' arguments and counter-arguments* upon subject-matters such as: *Should children go out alone for a walk?* Critically, students were looking for clarity, accuracy, logic, breadth, relevance and precision of the produced arguments (Paul & Elder 1999, pp. 10-11).

The exchange of student's ideas during the philosophical dialogue upon the topic of truth helped children's involvement in the 'practice of moral inquiry' and the cognitive and moral maturity acquired through it (Lipman, Sharp & Oscanyan 1985, p. 24). For example:

(Sebastian): ...uh... I feel guilty for one lie... When I was in kindergarten, I had told that my grandfather died and then he came to pick me up from school.

(Konstantinos O.): That was as big lie. Seb...

(Teacher): Why is it a big, a huge lie?

(Konstantinos, O): Eh...because human life is sacred and you can't play with it.

Parliamentary debates gave students the opportunity to defend their controversial viewpoints. The creation of definitions, the reference to own or common experiences and social representations contributed to the sense-making of the world and to its transmission to each other:

(Petros): Today, we are all here to argue about homework. Our team supports the idea that homework is necessary, as a brain practice for better results in classroom. For example, an athlete must train every day, if he wants to have the best scores in the races. He must also eat healthily and make some sacrifices. Another example is, as we all remember, that when we were little kids we used the little plastic sticks for counting. Our mum was showing us 30 sticks and we should count them.

(Jonathan): I disagree with your opinion, as homework isn't a brain practice.

We are talking about exercises relative to the lesson which intend to help you consolidate it. My team supports that homework shouldn't exist for several reasons. First, students prefer to do other activities such as sports. Consequently, they don't have time for doing their homework.

9.4.7 Analysis of the written argumentative texts

The oral controversies among students were reflected in their writing as a symbolic reappearance of internalized conversations which constituted students' thoughts (Bruffee 1984, pp. 641-2; McCarthy & McMahon 1992, p. 18). In Aristotelian terms, 'written words' became 'symbols of spoken words', which in their turn constituted 'symbols of mental experience' (Aristotle 1938, 16a, 3).

The analysis of the produced texts showed that the students' oral interactions brought about important changes to their writing. First, students became more sensitive to the purpose of the argument and to their audience. The rhetoric developed in the exhortative letter to the mayor in order not to cut down a hazel tree was, mainly, based on persuasive strategies. The majority of students (84%) used arguments that appealed to the mayor's motives, personal fears and bias. By contrast, the rhetoric developed in student apologetic letters intended to dissipate the accusations and to avoid the consequences. The majority of the apologetic texts were based on strategies such as the *denial* of the accusation or the *denial of intent* for the action (40% of the students), on *bolstering* (92%) and on *differentiation* (72%).

Second, the introductions and the conclusions of the text were better articulated and elaborated. For example:

My dear classmates, girls and boys. My name is Kalliopi and I believe that it would be useful to become the president of our class. I support this argument for the following reasons... (Kalliopi)

Also, writing became more lively and readable. The use of rhetorical common places proved useful to the *genesis* of arguments during the collaborative writing of students' advertisements. For example:

Do you not want to be sunburnt this summer? Buy now the new sun-screen A-BURNOL. It acts like a protective umbrella for your body!!!(topic of similarity)

(Petros)

From a stylistic point of view, a more frequent appearance of antithesis and rhetorical questions in the produced exhortative texts was noticed. Students, as sellers or as responsible citizens, were trying to persuade the addressees to accept their invitations to 'different forms of life', (Schwartzman 1988, p. 4). For example:

Another reason is that unlike you, the mayor of Vari organized tree planting and planted 2000 trees. And you can offer us not even one tree? (Konstantinos)

In addition, the produced texts were more coherent due to the extended use of connectives, which facilitated the expression of relations as justification, opposition and concession (Akiguet & Piolat 1996, p. 267). The extended use of subjective epistemic modality markers attested to a better conceptualization of the self, of others and of society and to the capacity of a better negotiation of personal ideas.

9.3.8 Quantitative results

The quantitative analysis of students' pre- and post-argumentative tests was carried out using the software programme SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). There were two basic criteria of analysis. First, the awareness of the argumentative structure due to the appearance of the following structural elements: a) statement (0-1); b) supporting arguments of the statement (0-1); c) counter-arguments (0-1); d) rebuttal arguments (0-1); e) conclusion (0-1). Each element was marked with one point, if it was present at least once in the text, creating a rating scale from 0 to 5. Second, the number of counter and rebuttal arguments appeared in the produced texts.

The intervention was the independent variable of the research (YES/NO) (Verma & Mallick 2004, p. 201). Students' awareness of the argumentative text structure and the number of the produced counter- and rebuttal arguments constituted the dependent variables. Two kinds of statistical controls were used: a) the Paired Sample T-Test for the analysis of results referring to the experimental group (E'1) before and after the intervention; and b) the Independent Samples T-Test, appropriate for the confrontation of means of two independent groups (Voelkl & Gerber 1999, p. 139), in our case the experimental group (E'1) and the control group (E'2).

Data obtained from the argumentative post-test of the experimen-

tal group indicated that the mean score of awareness of the argumentative text structure increased significantly from $M=3,2$ ($SD=1,47196$) to $M=4,6$ ($SD=1,04403$) between its pre- and post-test (Figure 9.1), producing a bilateral significance ($p=,000<0,005$) for a confidence level of 95%.

In addition, the statistical analysis of the post-test revealed a significant difference relative to the awareness of the argumentative text structure between the mean score $M=4,56$ ($SD=1,04403$) of the experimental group and the mean score $M=2,54$ ($SD=1,21509$) of the control group (Figure 9.2). The application of the T-test control attested to a bilateral significance ($p=,000<0,005$) in favour of the experimental group for a confidence level of 95%.

FIGURE 9.1

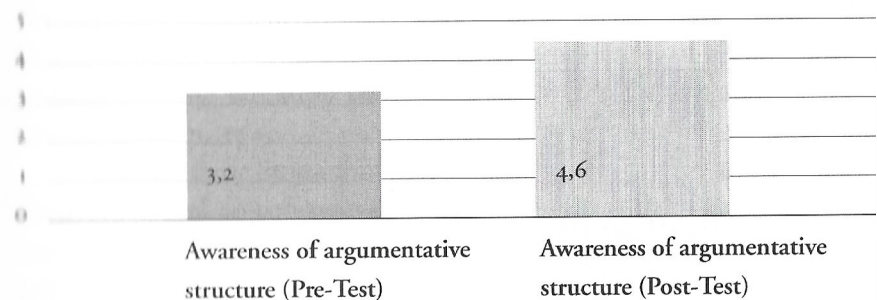
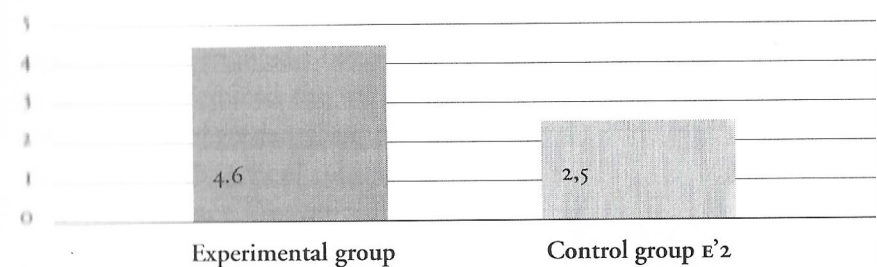


FIGURE 9.2 AWARENESS OF ARGUMENTATIVE TEXT STRUCTURE (POST-TEST)



With regards to the mean score of the counter-arguments in the pre-test it was noticed that the experimental group (E'1) produced a lower score ($M=1,04$, $SD=1,136$) than the experimental group ($M=1,17$, $SD=1,34$), although no further significant difference was noticed ($p=,813>0,005$). A

the accomplishment of the intervention the post-test of the experimental group attested to a significant increase of the mean score of the counter-arguments ($M=1,92$, $SD=1,256$) in contrast with the mean score of the control group E'2 ($M=0,33$, $SD=,702$) (Figure 9.3).

The initial mean score of rebuttal arguments of the experimental group $M=0,32$ ($SD=,627$) was low as well as the mean score of the control group (E'2) ($M=0,79$) ($SD=1,641$). No further significant differences were noticed. In the post-test, the experimental group increased the mean score of the rebuttal arguments to $M=1,12$ ($DS=0,881$) in contrast with the control group (E'2) which decreased the score to $M=0,42$ ($DS=0,929$) (Figure 9.4).

FIGURE 9.3 NUMBER OF COUNTER-ARGUMENTS (POST-TEST)

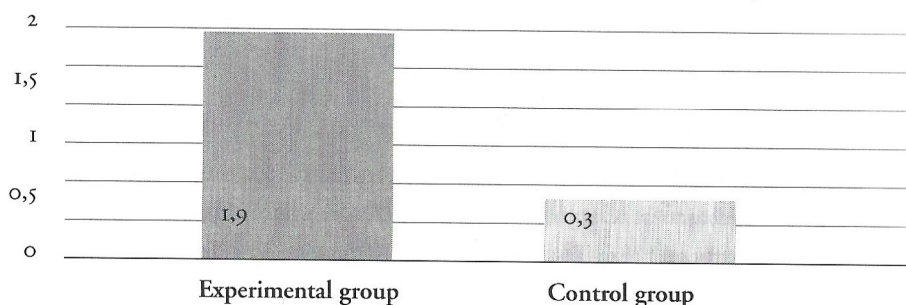
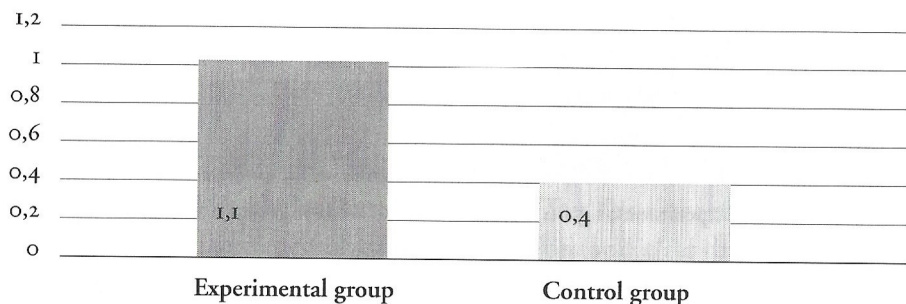


FIGURE 9.4 NUMBER OF REBUTTAL-ARGUMENTS (POST-TEST)



The use of the T-Test revealed a significant difference in favour of the experimental group (E'1), not only in the production of more counter-arguments ($p=,000<,05$) but, also, in the production of more rebuttal arguments ($p=,009<,05$) in confrontation with the control group (E'2) for a confidence level of 95%.

9.4 Conclusions

The results that appear in the previous figures, stress the instructional strength of rhetoric to the teaching of argumentative reasoning, speaking and writing in a school context and encourage its further application in pedagogy. A noteworthy point found by the research was that even the experimental group continued to encounter difficulties in the production of rebuttal arguments until the end of the school year. The 'weak point' of the opposite argument wasn't always recognizable in order to be refuted. Students were, often, just limited to the production of a counter-argument irrelevant to the semantic content of the previous argument (Gáratea Melero 2004, p. 334).

Despite these limitations of the study, it was clearly indicated that a cooperative and co-constructive context based on the principles of active learning, can be affected by rhetoric and that argumentation contributed as a didactic technique to the efficient teaching of thinking and arguing (Gáratea 2003, p. 342). The familiarization of students with ill-structured problems of real life in different contexts activated the generation of their ideas (Duro 2010, p. 58). Students achieved the production of the 'conversational argument' through oral interactive practices.

Moreover, the familiarization of students with various sub-genres of argumentation entailed a better comprehension of their functions in a school context and produced the writing of more persuasive texts. The individual enhancement of students' argumentative capacities stressed at the same time the success of the school community to promote the construction of literacy as 'a rhetorical act' (Young & Kendall 2009, p. 342).

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PART III

Media
Discourse

