Part 2: Discipline-based Writing

Chapter Five

Academic Argument in Development Studies: Resources for Access to Disciplinary Discourses

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Introduction

In the introduction to the second South African Writing Centre collection, *Writing Centres in Higher Education: Working In and Across the Disciplines,* Dison and Clarence (2017: 15) state that 'moving into the future, writing centres will need to increasingly venture beyond their four walls into other spaces – within and across disciplines'. Our chapter responds to this call by looking at a methodology for identifying constructions of academic argument within a particular discipline, Development Studies. In doing this, we suggest practical ways of helping students with the construction of argument and ways of producing dialogical text. In many cases, lecturers expect students to acquire the rhetorical knowledge and discursive resources required for participation in the disciplines with little explicit instruction. A common underlying perception here is that student writing can be 'remediated' outside the bounds of disciplinary learning, in general decontextualised academic writing courses. However, this deficit view of students has been strongly contested. 'Academic literacies' research has shown that institutional discourse and pedagogical practices often position students disadvantageously, limiting performance and constraining identities (Lillis and Scott 2007; Boughey and McKenna 2016; Paxton et al. 2008). It is thus important for writing centres to be able to make explicit the discursive and rhetorical moves involved in disciplinary writing.

We argue that the interrogation of argument is important because it is integral to the recontextualisation and reproduction of knowledge in Higher Education. Argumentation confers power on those who successfully engage in it. One possible reason for poor written argument is students' differential access to academic and disciplinary discourses and the resources through

which these discourses are realised. By means of analysis of the language used in the introductory paragraphs and thesis statements of students' essays, this chapter offers insight into the discursive resources required for argumentation. By 'thesis statement', we mean a direct response to the essay question which functions to assert a position on the essay question, using the voices of the prescribed texts as a resource. We look at three aspects of argument in the opening paragraphs: positioning in writer-reader interaction, positioning in relation to authoritative voices and positioning in relation to knowledge construction. In this way, the chapter contributes to knowledge about how students learn to produce legitimate disciplinary argument and how we might make the 'moves' of argument explicit in different fields in our teaching and in writing centre practice.

Voice and authority in argument in Higher Education

Argument is closely bound up with conceptions of the university, which is described as 'an institution whose rationale is argument' (Myerson 1995: 134). Argument is seen as essential for social criticism and for the preservation of democratic values (Andrews 2010). The process of engaging in argument is also seen as contributing to personal development and the construction of 'identity' (Clark and Ivanič 1997). Discursive resources for argument are, however, an aspect of students' 'cultural capital' and are therefore an indication of their chances of becoming economically and culturally productive citizens (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Students who are able to produce good written argument are rewarded in higher education. Yet, few lecturers can articulate what exactly they mean by 'good' writing in their own disciplines and therefore do not always make expectations about argument explicit. In this sense, academic argument is one aspect of what Lillis (1999) refers to as 'the institutional practice of mystery'.

In South Africa, many students have been offered limited opportunities to develop discursive resources for argumentation at school. Lack of experience in constructing argument may be a barrier to epistemological access in the disciplines. Effective argument requires the construction of an authoritative persona and students are required to find 'an authoritative and critical position from which to speak' (Kamler 2001: 82). It is difficult for students to write with authority, as the pedagogic context often positions them as novices. Students find it difficult to position themselves in relation to the 'jostling voices' of the discipline (Scott and Turner 2009: 159) and to integrate the voices of disciplinary authority into their own texts. From a dialogic perspective, we argue that a key move in the construction of authority in academic essays is locating the textual voice within the ongoing or past 'conversations' of the discipline.

We found Kress's view on argument helpful as, according to him, the fundamental characteristic of argument is 'to produce difference' (1989: 12). Building on this idea, we suggest that argumentation involves the integration, or accommodation, of difference, which is achieved through a process of *positioning* (cf. Archer 2016). We see argumentation as operating on three levels. On the first level, argumentation involves positioning of the writer in relation to the reader in the ongoing construction of voice in the text (Hyland 2008). On the second level, argumentation is an intertextual form of interaction between the writer and the authoritative voices from disciplinary texts. At the third, most abstract level, argumentation can be seen as positioning in relation to the interplay of 'difference' that occurs at the interface between social reality and material reality in representation. It is these three levels of argument that we analyse in the corpus of student essays.

Methodology for analysing argument in multiple-source essays

One of the most important aspects of disciplinary teaching is the design and assessment of written assignments. The essay is described as the 'genre par excellence for assessment in the academy' (Andrews 2010: 158) as it facilitates judgement of the extent of a student's understanding. The essay genre ensures differential performance according to students' mastery of essayist literacy and, in the process, can facilitate the reproduction of inequality in society. Despite its ubiquity as a form of assessment, the academic essay is a complex, multifaceted and still misunderstood genre. The typical essay genre in the social sciences is that 'written from sources', which requires students to write about 'knowledge-focussed reading' (Bazerman 2004: 60). The multiple-source essay is a hybrid genre, involving writing to both *explore* ideas and also to *demonstrate* understanding. Students are expected to show independent thought, but also to acknowledge the extent to which their thoughts are based on the ideas of others. They are required to engage in 'complex negotiation between individuality and authority, message and code, their own words and the words of others' (Bazerman 2004: 60). A symptom of this contradiction is students who make excessive use of unacknowledged quotation from sources. An understanding of the impact on students' writing practices of these paradoxes suggests that a less moralistic approach to plagiarism may be required. The negative discourses around plagiarism tend to perpetuate hierarchical and impenetrable spaces in higher education (cf. Moxley and Archer 2019). This is where writing centre interventions can be very helpful, in explaining tacit conventions to students, thus empowering them in the system.

The site of study was a third-year Development Studies course at a large metropolitan university that focussed on development theory and policy. It was designed to scaffold students' engagement with social and economic government policy and how it relates to development. The issues explored included globalisation, the developmental state and the impact of the Child Support Grant. All the students who attended the first lectures in the semester were invited to be research participants. Thirty of the approximately ninety students registered for the course agreed. The data referred to here are the two essays that these students wrote as part of their coursework. The larger study, only part of which is reported on here, did not involve a writing-focussed intervention on the part of either the lecturers or the researcher: in other words, the students received no explicit essay writing instruction. A total of 49 essays were analysed in the larger study, as eight were removed due to extensive plagiarism (see Lamberti 2013). For our analysis, we focussed primarily on thesis statements from a selection of these essays, as thesis statements can be considered the core of the argument in an essay. Since any text is conceptualised as a response to existing texts, the overarching argument or thesis statement emerges from the interaction with the disciplinary 'content'. Therefore, the existence of an identifiable thesis statement is evidence that the writer has engaged with the voices of the discipline and with the debates that they address, to produce a substantive textual response.

The *placement* of the thesis statement in the essay is another aspect we focused on in our analysis. The students were not given any guidance on thesis statements or where in the essay they should be placed. At the essay analysis stage, bearing in mind that in disciplinary argument 'persuasion and inquiry enter into a complicated dialectic' (Crosswhite 1996: 258), we paid attention to the discourses of inquiry and persuasion. We found that when the thesis statement is placed in the concluding stage, a discourse of inquiry is generally indicated, whereas foregrounding the thesis in the introduction of the essay tends to orient to a discourse of persuasion. The inscription of objectivity is a strong indicator of an inquiry orientation. Objectivity is achieved through the use of passive forms and nominalisations; the use of impersonal constructions to effect the effacement of self; the metaphorical use of the lexis of observation, conveyed in words such as 'see', 'show' and 'demonstrate'. An inquiry orientation is also indicated through a high proportion of 'transition markers' associated with logical relationships (Hyland 2005: 50). In contrast, the use of metaphors of voice and dialogue indicate a persuasion orientation. The discourse of persuasion foregrounds the contestability of knowledge claims, whereas the discourse of inquiry allows the writer to present claims as if they are 'truth'. As shown here, we see the placement of the thesis statement as an indicator of the dominant discourse used for knowledge construction and as an important

aspect of the argumentation.

All of the essay topics involved evaluation and required students to construct a thesis statement centring on an argument of value. Academic convention requires that impartiality and criticality be inscribed in the text (Andrews 2010). Criticality is realised in the way in which 'difference' is managed – through engaging with perspectives and positions that differ from those advocated in the text. The student writer has to integrate, not only different voices, but also voices which may conflict with each other. In our analysis, we look at the ways in which conflicting positions on an issue are integrated using strategies or 'moves' (Swales 2004), which typically include concession and counter-argument.

Analysis of the thesis statements was done by the first author. The analysis examined the use of linguistic resources for dialogic contraction and expansion, concession or counter moves, evaluation and graduation (Martin and White 2005), the use of frame markers to signal the thesis itself and whether the thesis statement appeared at the beginning (front-loaded) or towards the end of the essay (back-loaded). This analysis is available in a table as an appendix in the thesis on which this chapter draws (see Lamberti 2013). In the sections that follow, using only the identified thesis statements, we illustrate three aspects of argument in student essays: positioning in writer-reader interaction, positioning in relation to authoritative voices and positioning in relation to knowledge construction. We discuss issues of voice, identity and authority in the introductory moves and the thesis statement, both of which are important for successful argumentation.

Writer-reader positioning

It is in the interest of the student to ensure that the reader-assessor can follow the argument. 'Frame markers' (Hyland 2005: 51) prime the reader, facilitating the recognition of different moves and stages in the succeeding text and, therefore, comprehension of the argument. Analysis of the introductions across the data set showed that the writers make extensive use of frame markers. The most used are formulations for announcing goals and for previewing the stages of the argument that follow. Others refer to strategies the writer used for arriving at an 'answer' to the essay question. These are used in even the weakest essays, where students use formulaic frame markers as a resource to support their writing. This is exemplified below in an extract from a weaker introduction to an essay on the Child Support Grant.

> In this essay I will discuss the Child Support Grant (CSG) on its own, then I will assess whether it is an adequate tool for poverty alleviation. I will compare it to the Foster Care Grant (FCG) and then I will consider whether it encourages greater economic activity.

Here, common instructional verbs used in the formulation of the essay question (such as discuss, assess, compare and consider) are combined with phrases from the lecturer's formulation of the specific task in the learning guide to indicate the aims, strategy and sequence in the essay.

In the majority of the essays (49 of the 57), a response to the essay task is represented in an identifiable thesis statement. Analysis showed that the thesis statement generally consists of two identifiably separate parts: a frame marker, followed by an overall claim or position. Frame markers function to point to the writer's overall thesis. The most common pattern observed was the use of impersonal constructions, such as: 'It is/was/has/can be ... that ...'. These constructions were combined most often with 'mental process' verbs (Halliday 1985: 106–112), such as 'conclude', 'find', 'establish', 'infer', 'determine', 'deduce' and 'prove'. These verbs, being associated with reasoning and legal process, explicitly signal that an evaluative or judgemental statement follows. Another common pattern observed was the combination of an impersonal formulation with metadiscourse for representing claims as self-evident observable 'reality', as exemplified in: 'It is therefore clear that ...' and 'It is evident that ...'. The most common verb forms that were used are 'show' and 'demonstrate', which were used in combination with third-person subjects: 'The above-mentioned ... show that ...'; 'The literature has shown that ...'; and 'The essay has also shown that ...'. This interactive metadiscourse is a necessary resource for writer-reader interaction.

Analysis of the introductions showed that, typically, contextualising moves are used that provide background information on the essay topic. Unlike frame-marking moves, which position writers as novices lacking in disciplinary authority, the contextualising move offers student writers an opportunity to affiliate themselves with the community represented by the reader-assessor and allows for the construction of an authoritative textual voice. An introduction which constructs an appropriate textual voice is discussed below.

> A current debate in development is one that is concerned with the role that the state should play in the development process, with the "left" and the "right" views as the competitors in this debate. Those on the left side of the debate support the state as being an important and beneficial actor in the development process, while those on the right see the state as a despot, which should therefore be kept as far away as

> possible from the development process (Rapley 2002: 1). The focus of this essay will be on the left side of this debate, as it is here where the notion of the developmental state has won a lot of approval.

In this example, most of the paragraph functions to contextualise and justify the subject content of the essay. The use of lexico-grammatical discursive resources enables multiple functions to be performed simultaneously in one move. In the first move, the writer shows awareness that the concept of the 'developmental state' is a specific concern in the development field. By referring to 'current debate', the textual voice draws the reader's attention and highlights the contested nature of the discussion that follows (government intervention in national economic and social development). The reference to development debate as the subject of the opening sentence and the indication of the different positions on the issue, contribute to the construction of an authoritative voice. The use of formal lexis from Development Studies, such as 'state' and 'actor', shows familiarity with field-specific academic terminology. The scare quotes for the terms 'left' and 'right' signal that they are contestable terms with different meanings in different discourses and shows awareness of the need for distancing of the textual voice when using the terms. Citing Rapley as support for the claims made indicates familiarity with an appropriate expert text and deference to disciplinary authority. The reader's interest is held by the use of lexical resources pointing to 'difference' and the resulting discursive tension: the repetition of the word 'debate', the metaphorical use of the word 'competitors' and the use of the terms 'left' and 'right' in balanced constructions. The second broad move is an indication of the left-leaning orientation of the essay: 'The focus of this essay will be on the left side of this debate, as it is here where the notion of the developmental state has won a lot of approval.' The use of the transition marker 'as' to introduce a reason for a left-leaning position acknowledges the convention of providing explicit reasons for claims that are made. This move shows that the student is familiar with and intends to fulfil the expectations of the discourse community represented by the reader-assessor.

As important as writer-reader interaction is, the integrating of authoritative voices into students' texts is a major determinant of whether the argumentation is judged to be legitimate and convincing. In the next section, analysis of students' thesis statements offers a nuanced picture of how students incorporate authoritative voices to position themselves in the knowledge domain.

Positioning in relation to authoritative voices

The challenge for novice writers is to establish an authorial presence while simultaneously incorporating some of the voices of the knowledge domain. The use of disciplinary sources is essential for legitimate argumentation. In the introduction below, limited engagement with both the voices of the sources and the task formulation is evident.

> Globalisation is essential as it aids the third world in different ways to develop. Although there are challenges that can still be addressed with globalisation such as culture and religions being compromised it is vital to understand that the benefits are more rewarding such as reduction of poverty and equality.

The first short clause, 'Globalisation is essential', appears to be a response to the question posed in the task and therefore seems to be the first part of a thesis statement. The assertion is an evaluative claim which, not being formulated in terms of positioning in relation to an authoritative source, is what Martin and White (2005: 98–100) refer to as a 'bare assertion' or monoglossic text. The use of the evaluative word, 'essential', constitutes an unauthorised expression of 'stance' (Hyland 2008: 7–8), which cannot be linked to the ideas of any of the authoritative prescribed sources. The claim that follows in support of the evaluation is vague: 'it aids the third world in different ways to develop'. It shows that the writer has not engaged with one of the key source readings, in which it is argued that, on the contrary, globalisation does not necessarily help the developing world. In the sentence that follows, resources for concession are used ('although' and 'still'). However, the formulations that follow are also monoglossic. The attitude marker used for the construction of stance in 'It is vital to understand that' is followed by an awkwardly expressed claim that the benefits outweigh the 'challenges', which are evaluated as 'more rewarding'. Since the claims made in the thesis statement cannot be substantiated with reference to the source readings, the dominant pattern is monoglossic. The result is that the textual voice is not positioned in relation to the authoritative voices and the argument fails at the level of intertextual positioning.

The discussion above shows that thesis statements that do not incorporate legitimate authoritative voices can be unconvincing. In the more successful essays, the existence of other voices is acknowledged in explicit references to conflicting perspectives and debate.

The extract below comes from the final paragraph of a three-paragraph conclusion.

> There are contrasting views as to whether globalisation is beneficial to the third world or not. Globalisation has brought benefits to developing countries, but it has not succeeded in bringing about a massive decline in poverty or inequality. Therefore, even though globalisation has the potential to improve the lives of those in the third world, thus far it has not succeeded in doing so as there are still a number of challenges to overcome in order to achieve this.

The thesis statement begins with a reassertion of the claim made in the introduction about the contestation that surrounds the impact of globalisation. While functioning at the level of writer-reader interaction to reintroduce the essay question, the opening sentence also opens up dialogue or inscribes 'dialogical expansion'. The clause that follows ('Globalisation has brought benefits to developing countries') functions as a concession, which is quickly undercut in the claim that follows the 'but'. It signals that a counter-argument move follows. Negation, signalled in the use of 'not', allows the writer to deny that globalisation is beneficial in any substantial sense. Thus, the use of 'but', a linguistic resource for the 'disclaim: counter' move, functions here as more than a 'transition marker' in the argument. The transition marker, 'Therefore', in the following clause, signals that a conclusion has been reached only after a process of reasoned consideration of conflicting views. This is followed by the phrase, 'even though', which is another resource for effecting a 'disclaim: counter' move that inscribes concession: the writer concedes that processes of globalisation are not necessarily negative. Again, however, the concession is undercut by a denial move that is effected by negation, 'thus far it has *not* succeeded' (italics added).

A number of clear patterns emerged across all the thesis statements. As argued above, in the essays that exemplified strong argumentation, heteroglossic engagement was evident, whereas the thesis statements of the weakest essays tended to be primarily monoglossic formulations. The pattern that appears most successful is the use of a frame marker that not only draws the reader's attention to the thesis statement, but also contributes to the construction of authority in the textual voice. In strong argumentation, this is followed by the assertion of a position on the issue that includes at least two of three dialogically contractive moves described by Martin and White (2005). The first of these moves is a concession that is realised by means of lexical resources described as 'proclaim: concur'. The second is a denial move, effected by means of 'disclaim: deny' resources. The two moves allow the writer to position the textual voice in relation to specific claims of the authoritative sources. The third move is the introduction of a counter-argument that requires the use of the lexical resources labelled 'disclaim: counter'. This move allows the writer to oppose

the claims of some of the authoritative sources. Only a minority of the research participants used these resources at the most crucial stage of the argumentation, while most did not use them at all. This suggests that, even by the end of their years as undergraduates, some of the students had not learned how to use discursive resources that support legitimate argumentation and consequently did not yet have access to key resources for effective participation in disciplinary debate.

Positioning in relation to knowledge construction: Enquiry and persuasion

Academic argumentation draws on both inquiry-oriented and persuasion-oriented discourses for knowledge construction. Since Development Studies is a hybrid knowledge domain, a combination of these discourses can be expected. Analysis showed that the majority of students write as if there is an observable unquestionable 'reality' that can be known and that is represented in a body of texts that 'contain' incontestable facts. This is exemplified in the following idiosyncratic formulation, in which contingent *argument* is collapsed into the certain world of *fact*: 'This essay is comprise of an argument over the fact that ...'. The most commonly used discursive resources of the discourse of inquiry are instructional verbs. Analysis showed that two categories of these 'task' words are favoured: words associated with the physical manipulation and scrutiny of scientific processes, such as 'examine', 'investigate' and 'explore' and 'mental process' (Halliday 1985: 106–112) words, such as 'determine', 'compare', 'establish', 'consider', 'analyse', 'deduce', 'infer' and 'conceive'. Metaphorical expressions relating to vision are a favoured resource in the frame markers introducing the thesis, such as: 'When looking at the above discussion it is clear that ...' and 'From the information given in the essay; it is evident to see that ...'. These resources from the discourse of inquiry embody the 'visual space of reason' (Crosswhite 1996: 235) and realise a 'discourse of transparency' (Turner 2011: 81). The lexical resources discussed above are typically used in combination with grammatical resources for suggesting objectivity and impersonality.

While in a small proportion of the essays the discourses of inquiry and persuasion are used in careful combination, in most their inconsistent and inappropriate use is evidence that students are insufficiently aware of the discourses drawn on. In the introduction below the content of the text and the unreflective mixing of the discourses of persuasion and inquiry result in an inconsistent textual voice and, consequently, the first stage of the argumentation is rhetorically weak.

> The central argument of this paper is on the analyses of the success of South Africa's development efforts, policies and programmes. It is the author's intention to define the term 'developmental state', its historical phenomenon and characteristics. In effect, the author will compare current development efforts with the articles that have been researched for this essay in order to form and substantiate an opinion on the state and its development efforts in South Africa ... This essay will elucidate on the several definitions of developmental states. Following this, the essay will look at different aspects of South Africa between the years of 1994–2007. Thirdly, the role of the government will be explored and following that the essay will examine certain challenges that the government faces. Following that this essay will make tentative suggestions and conclude with a possible solution.

The use of the frame marker, 'The central argument of this paper', at the start of the opening sentence promises a confident response to the task using the discourse of persuasion. The expectations set up by this frame marker are, however, not realised in the text that follows, which shows that the formulation merely introduces the topic and in a way that is dependent on the exact wording used in the learning guide. The move that follows is a statement of the writer's strategy, which is also dependent on the formulation of the task in the guide. The promise to 'make tentative suggestions' and to 'conclude with a solution', indicates that the writer is planning to use a problem-solution textual structure, which would result in recommendations or policy argumentation. However, policy argument is a type of argument that does not match the specification of the task, which requires evaluation of the positions of the authoritative sources. Furthermore, the 'instructional verbs' are typically used in the discourse of inquiry – 'define', 'compare', 'elucidate on', 'look at', 'will be explored' and 'will examine' – and conflict with the promise of the opening sentence that an argument will be constructed in the text.

All of the essay topics involved *evaluation* and required students to construct a thesis statement centring on an argument of value. 'Graduation' resources (Martin and White 2005: 154) were crucial for adjusting value claims in the thesis statement. For instance, 'globalisation does *to an extent* benefit the third world countries however in terms of security globalisation seems to benefit the developed countries more' (italics added). Analysis shows that in relatively successful thesis statements, the evaluative term used in the task formulation is used in combination with 'graduation resources' to indicate the writer's position. Weaker essays, on the other hand, tend to use evaluative lexis other than the terms used in the task formulation. In these cases, the use

of inappropriate evaluative terms is combined with a tendency to use intensifying lexical forms, which inscribe epistemic certainty, resulting in claims that are unjustifiable generalisations. In the examples that follow, the use of words such as 'all' and phrases such as 'a lot of' undermine the credibility of the textual voice: globalisation is described as 'good for people in all countries', as 'creating a better life for all' and as bringing 'a lot of positive change'.

One of the most striking findings in the data set was the dominant pattern with regard to the placing of the thesis statement. The low percentage of essays that have a thesis statement in the essay introduction runs contrary to the preference in academic writing pedagogy (Coffin et al. 2003). The strongly marked preference for a delayed thesis in the essays suggests that the essay task is seen as a process of discursive *inquiry* which leads to the discovery of knowledge, rather than the creation of a text that is designed to *persuade* the reader of a position on an issue. The overall rhetorical structure of almost all the essays in the data set suggests that there is a pronounced inquiry orientation to argumentation. There is thus a mismatch between the inquiry discourses favoured in students' essays and the more persuasive discourses used in expert and educational texts in Development Studies.

Final comments

By analysing the language used in essay introductions and thesis statements of a corpus of students' texts, the chapter offers insights into the discursive resources required for argumentation. In this way, it contributes to knowledge about how students learn to produce disciplinary argument, which can feed into Writing Centre and teaching practice in very practical ways. We began by defining argumentation as discursive positioning in relation to 'difference'. In examining how textual voice in student texts is positioned in relation to the authoritative voices in expert texts, we focussed our analysis on the thesis statement. We chose the thesis statement for this micro-analysis, as so much of our work in the writing centre is centred around helping students with focus and argument as distilled into a thesis statement. Here, writing centres help both with the mechanical aspects (what are the components of a thesis statement) and the 'emancipatory' elements (how best to encapsulate argument as knowledge-making in a thesis statement). The act of constructing a thesis or overall argument shows that the writer is able to engage appropriately with the discipline by producing a response that can be seen as an extension or development of knowledge, however slight or incremental the contribution. Generally, student texts are reformulations rather than new

contributions to knowledge; however, they play an important role in the inculcation of disciplinary discourse. While we acknowledge the limitations of having focussed only on selected parts of students' texts, analysis of the use of discursive resources for constructing these thesis statements has proven to be illuminating. It is clear from our analysis that an effective thesis statement is a direct response to the essay question; it functions to assert a position on the essay question, using the voices of the prescribed texts as a resource. We have shown how the lexical resources for effecting concession and counter-argument are key resources for the inscription of the writer's position in relation to authoritative sources. These findings will be invaluable in training consultants in the writing centre in the structure of disciplinary argument and how to impart that to students, through one-on-one consultations or workshops or more structured disciplinary interventions. In addition, our analysis has shown that the greater the emphasis on the discursive construction of knowledge, the closer a text is to a persuasion orientation. Since the use of self-reference in the pronoun 'I' draws attention to the subjectivity of the writer and underlines the impossibility of being objective, the use of personal constructions and first-person pronouns position the writer in a context where persuasion is acknowledged as a significant dimension of the argumentation. Again, this awareness of how persuasion works in argument is one that is invaluable in tutor training in writing pedagogy.

Producing strong argument is important for success in Higher Education, particularly in a context like South Africa with such diversity and inequality. It is clear that the 'traditional academic pedagogy of osmosis' (Turner 2011: 37) does not serve the interests of all students. South Africa's history of educational inequity has resulted in a high proportion of students who are under-prepared for higher education, as suggested by the disturbing statistics on student throughput (DHET 2019). Academic writing is a high stakes activity, as it is a key assessment component in Higher Education. We have shown that written argument is an important area for writing-focussed research as it is where language, knowledge and thinking merge. Writing centre practitioners can make explicit to students the resources for argument highlighted here. They can guide students' thoughts and writing processes by questioning and clarifying so that students feel confident to enter the disciplinary debates.

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