


Multimodal Tools to Support Informational and Argument Writing

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Inquiry Question

In what ways might my six mini-lessons support students' efforts to write compelling arguments and engaging informational texts using multimodal tools?

Inquiry Purpose

Through the use of mini-lessons and conferring strategies (Calkins, 2014), writers will learn how digital tools can support their informational and argumentative writing to become more engaging and compelling (Elbow, 2000; Newkirk, 2013).

Writers will also come to understand that writing tells a story or argues a point to one's reader (Newkirk, 2013). Students will learn how to enhance their writing and through the modeling of techniques and tools that allow them to write more interactively, in preparation for 21st century writing skills (Romano, 2013).

- As student access digital tools and resources continues to increase, teachers should be supported in their awareness of how to use multimodal elements to support students' information and argument writing (Fletcher, 2013; Romano, 2013).
- Students learn about how to create "real world" writing to engage their readers and themselves during the writing process (Gallagher, 2011; Newkirk, 2013).
- A focus on craft (show, don't tell; telling a story through informational writing; diction; revision) do not have to be lost when technology is added into a student's writing (Fletcher, 2013; Hicks, 2013).

Research Design, Participants, & Data Collection

This study was teacher action research that was conducted over six sessions of the researcher operating in the role of literacy coach to model the teaching of mini-lessons with students in one teacher's pre-established classroom. The teacher would then replicate the six mini-lessons with a second group of students, similarly comprised in grade, gender, and ability.

The context and participants of the study were as follows: 23 six grade students, 15 of whom were male and eight (8) of whom were female; suburban public intermediate school; met over the course of six consecutive weeks for approximately 30 minutes during their 70 minute ELA class that was designated as accelerated (in relation to "regular" and "co-taught" sections).

Steps of data collection: 1) Two anonymous survey questions were administered to students via Google Survey. Survey Question #1: How did the mini-lessons that Dr. Hower shared help you choose the multi-modal/digital tools that you included into your writing? (23 responses) Survey Question #2: How did the mini-lessons that Dr. Hower shared help you revise your writing to focus on the story of your topic and to write in an engaging way? (23 responses). 2) Reflections written by the researcher at the end of each teaching session. 3) A reflection was written by the teacher at the end of the action research project, to share her thoughts about the mini-lessons and their effect on the students' writing, as well as how comfortable the teacher felt with the modeling/teaching that was done in her class. 4) Student writing artifacts.

Lesson #1

E – What is multimodal writing?

A – Ask students to break the word apart and confer with a partner about possible meaning. Write on the board. Show students two examples:

- <http://ampeelman.edu.glogster.com/titanic-informative-essay>
- <http://padlet.com/pranav/pixelpeople>

T – Have students discuss and record ideas in their writer’s notebook about things they appreciated about the two examples. Talk about the pros and cons of using multimodal/digital tools as a part of writing an informational text.

S – Have students answer the essential question with a new partner. Teacher walks around to listen for responses and shares with the whole group one that was most effective.

Lesson #2

E – How is multimodal writing created?

A – Give students a sample of a paragraph of writing and then a tool that does not match or strongly support that writing. Have them evaluate with a partner what doesn't work with the pairing.

T – Generate a list of tools that students can use to complement their writing: photos, videos, sound bites, charts, graphs, infographics, etc.

Have them write in their journal which ones may pair with what they've already written.

S – Have students share with their partner one tool they want to use and why they think it would be effective. Partner gives feedback about “effectiveness” before sharing an idea from their own writing.

Lesson #3

E – What can I learn from a professional mentor text that can help me make decisions about my own text?

A – Using computers, have students log onto <https://www.nasa.gov/> Have them explore around the page, opening links and viewing digital tools that are being used to support text.

T – Discuss how effective the tools used were. Have students write a reflection in their journal about what they “notice” about what makes a tool effective.

S – Students share with a partner, how can I apply the information I learned from today to my own writing? Have a few students share out with whole class.

Lesson #4

E – What is the story in your topic?

A – Share with students that there should be a story behind each of their writing. Without story, writing can be flat, contain too many “to be” and passive verbs, overload the reader with too much information, lack an element of surprise and point of view, and are monotonous (Newkirk, 2014).

T – Have students practice finding stories in two sets of information lists provided by Sneed B. Collard III (nonfiction author) (2013).

S – Have students look at their own work and state the “story” in their own topic to their seat partner.

Lesson #5

E – How can incorporate strong craft moves into my informational or argumentative writing?

A – Discuss author’s craft during writing. Use p. 55 of Newkirk (2014) as an example of revising “flat” writing for ease of reading.

T – Introduce students to Sneed B. Collard III (2016) “Great Writing Tips for Great Writers” – discuss. Then conduct the “Passive Verbs Exercise” (Collard, 2016).

S – Why is having strong craft moves important – share with a neighbor. Briefly share with the whole group.

Lesson #6

E – How can re-reading my piece and thinking about the questions my teacher asks lead me to revise my work?


A – Ask open ended questions with students like are recommended by Murray (Newkirk & Miller, 2009) and Calkins (2014).

T – Confer with students around their writing and the digital tools they infuse into their writing.

S – Have students share with a partner one of each type of revision they made and how that change was effective in their text.

Board Builder PowerPoint

Questions?

A close-up photograph of two hands, palms up, holding a small, rectangular piece of white paper with deckled edges. The paper is held between the fingers and thumbs of both hands. On the paper, the words "Thank You" are written in a black, elegant cursive script. The background is a solid, dark color, making the hands and the white paper stand out. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the paper.

Thank You