

Fruitful Bias and the Roles of Experience, Action, Dialogue, and Visual Material in Opinion and Argument Writing

Carrie C. Snow

Independent Scholar

Teacher, Seattle Public Schools

In this essay, I reflect on over 15 years of experience in the field of special education to explore diverse ways of engaging students in opinion and argument writing. I outline, according to the Common Core standards, the progression of writing in the early years with an emphasis on opinion writing through the later elementary, middle, and high school years, when the focus shifts to argument writing. I suggest that bias is a central feature to both opinion and argument writing that can uphold students' ability to sustain interest in their writing as well as contribute to writing that is dynamic and rich. The essay highlights how three particular teaching stances — action-oriented, Socratic Seminar, and visual — can offer meaningful learning experiences for students who learn in unconventional ways, such as those with Learning Disabilities (LD).

Keywords: Writing, Common Core, Learning Disabilities, Autism, Opinion and Argument, K-12

INTRODUCTION

During a recent author visit in the public, inclusive fourth grade class with whom I work, a writer of children's books confided that she crystallized her preference for fiction-writing during childhood. The class, comprised of 28 students includes five students who receive support related to Learning Disabilities (LD), one for autism¹, and several for below-grade level reading skills. As a resource teacher, I provide push-in support for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

The author attributed her preference for fiction-writing to one simple fact: she loves *lying*. She went on to describe how as a child she would listen to or read journalistic reports, all the while imagining twists and turns that served to embellish the story. Such embellishments were the key to sustaining her interest in the story, and might have included animals abruptly punctuating an otherwise ordinary scene (her example); an intriguing character lingering on the periphery of a setting; or a mythical creature emerging from the sea. The element of surprise, the unexpected, and the extraordinary engaged her imagination as a child, and continue to appeal

1 I use identity-first language with regard to autism, taking the lead from autism self-advocates such as the community Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) and autistic scholars such as Ari Ne'eman and Melanie Yergeau. ASAN is comprised of autistic people who wish to highlight rather than hide the neurological differences that make them autistic, to celebrate the strengths they bring to a neurodiverse world, as well as to discuss the challenges they encounter in a community of support. Traditional person-first language can have the effect of divorcing the person from the (dis)ability, while identity-first language accepts and celebrates the differences that constitute "autism".

to her sensibility as a writer. Yet she advised the class that there are ways to create vibrant, engaging text in any genre of writing.

Specifically, the author shared that whether writing fiction or nonfiction, it is important to weave elements of one's own experience into the text. Integrating truthful elements into a text supports authenticity, or believability, and helps readers connect with the work. This became evident when, after a period of writing, several students shared their work with the class. While many opted to write about outings, sports events, vacations they had taken, and even video-game playing, the narratives that stood out were those that included a level of detail that engaged the listener's mind: the feeling of sand underfoot, the tingle of blazing sun on the skin; the charge of excitement of a soccer game fraught with tension; the sense of accomplishment of beating one's personal best score on a video game. Students' descriptions of singular events or small moments came alive when they attended to emotions, feelings, and sensations they attached to an experience. These qualities give textural substance to the writing, contribute to writing that is dynamic and multi-dimensional, and allow the reader to identify with the text, to imagine that he or she might likewise experience what the writer describes.

The most compelling take-away from the author's visit was that creative writing need not be the sole province of fiction writing. She was concerted in her effort to leave the students with the message that the very best non-fiction writing has elements of the authors' lived experiences. From the seedbeds of our experience, as writers we can provide detail in the forms of rich description, vibrant imagery, quotations, and interesting vocabulary. These are some of the tools, also used in fiction-writing, which students can use to make their non-fiction writing come alive and engage readers. These are also tools that make acts of writing meaningful ones.

While it is clear that experiential learning can contribute powerfully to one's writing, for many students, traditional ways of accessing knowledge can be a hurdle when it comes to classroom-based assignments. For many of the students in the fourth grade class in which I work, coming up with ideas to write about is a seemingly straightforward process of quietly thinking for a few moments before putting pencil to paper. But how about students who tap into sources of experiential learning in different ways? Many of the students, if not all, had the instinct to talk through their ideas with neighboring students before diving in to begin writing. Some struggled to get a sentence or two down, and others sat fidgeting, wondering what to write about, or perhaps not thinking about writing at all. In this essay, I discuss teaching approaches that can provide access points for students who benefit from a dynamic interchange of ideas, modalities, and approaches in the process of doing written work. In doing so, I support the idea that teaching argument in contemporary inclusive classrooms requires a multiplicity of approaches to address the diverse needs of students.

I draw on over 15 years of experience working in the field of special education., seven of which have been as a teacher in schools. I have taught autistic youth and students with LD from grades 1-12 and in a variety of contexts, including private schools for students with disabilities and inclusive public schools. In my current position as a resource teacher in an K-5 public school, I work mainly with students in their general education classrooms, in a model sometimes referred to as "push-in". For small periods of the day, I also support students' learning goals using the "pull-

out” model, where small groups of students work in a quieter space for no more than 30 minute sessions. These years have culminated in a generous well of ideas for improving my work as a teacher. Here, I reflect on some of my observations and experiences.

The essay begins by identifying how two mainstays of the Common Core writing standards [see introduction, this issue], opinion and argument writing, build on one another in a gradual way, and share a central common quality. I then highlight three particular models that have helped engage students who learn in unconventional ways: action-oriented work, Socratic Seminar, and visual tools. I suggest that each of these can help produce substantial, relevant material for use in opinion and argument writing.

A GRADUAL CLIMB: OPINION TO ARGUMENT

In the school I currently work, we have a Young Authors Day in late spring. We formulate groupings of students from all grades (K-5) so that each group is comprised of six to eight students and ensure that each grouping represents all grade levels. Guided by a parent or teacher facilitator, each student takes a turn sharing a piece of their written work with the group. Individuals within the group, then, take turns offering feedback about the work, and the facilitator writes down these pieces of feedback for each author to take with him or her. I have noticed in these groupings that from the earliest school years, a process of building students’ awareness of mind and personal perspective begins. In kindergarten and first grades, the use of drawings and words (written or dictated) help students communicate their ideas and opinions in writing. The kindergarten and first grade members of our Young Authors groups rely heavily on drawings to relay their stories. While the older elementary students often illustrate their work as well, those in the youngest grades seem to rely equally on drawing and writing to convey their ideas.

In the remaining elementary years, a command for written expression is gradually strengthened, with the middle elementary years marked by attention to complete sentences, supporting details that flesh out students’ reasoning, and clear statements of why or why not she or he prefers one idea to another. The upper elementary years focus on deepening the level of sophistication with which students write their opinion pieces: they work to integrate multiple perspectives in their written work, demonstrate factual knowing, organize their writing with a logical structure, and provide conclusions. In these late elementary years, students’ writing begins to bear strong resemblance to the argument pieces they will focus on in their near future. While I have noticed that as students approach the middle elementary years they rely less on drawing as a supplement to their writing, it is still the case that drawing can catalyze rich written work, even in the later elementary years. Norris, Mokhtari, and Reichard (1998) share how third graders who used drawing as a pre-writing activity wrote pieces that featured more ideas, sentences, and details than their counterparts who did not engage in a pre-writing draw.

Beginning in sixth grade, Common Core writing requirements shift from opinion to argument construction, in preparation for college, where argument is the core focus of writing (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). The Common Core standards represent learning expectations for K-12 students, are widely considered

rigorous and ambitious, and are written with the idea that teachers will act as the interpreters of the learning goals (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). In terms of argument writing, students are expected to use logic, organization, relevant source references, text evidence, appropriate clauses to connect ideas to one another, and conclusions that outcrop from their arguments (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015, retrieved at <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/6/>). As the years march on, students are expected to continually practice and hone these skills and gradually reach higher levels of presenting arguments. In eighth grade, for example, students are expected to integrate source references that are both credible and accurate, and are to distinguish their position from opposing positions. By tenth grade, students must aim to present both their arguments as well as relevant counterarguments, explain each clearly and objectively, give evidence using accurate and credible sources, and describe the strengths and weaknesses of each position. Also by tenth grade, one's audience becomes a point of emphasis in the process of writing argument. By twelfth grade, the requirements shift in a nuanced way, and the emphasis moves to creating arguments that show precision, thorough understanding of one's position, counter-positions, and the pros and cons of each, cohesion between parts, logical organizational flow, and more variegated syntax (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2015, retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/>). Given the depth of sophistication with which high school students are expected to write, it seems clear that a sense of connection to the subject or topic being argued will position students to feel motivated to do the work, and to sustain the stamina it takes to complete it. Although the standards indicate that students must present all sides of an argument objectively and support their claims with evidence-based sources, their work nonetheless benefits from a sense of fruitful bias, or a compelling predilection rooted in a strong emotional tie, a sense of conviction, deep intellectual connection, or curiosity.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF BIAS

At the heart of strong opinion and argument writing is the personal perspective of the writer. Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) posit that personal engagement with a topic and engaging as a conscientious member of society are deeply interrelated. They ask,

Think of any cause that matters to you. Is it global warming? The growing gap between the rich and the poor? Or violence in video games? Whatever the cause, you probably believe the world would be a better place if people who care about that cause had the courage and the literacy skills to make their views heard. If young people grow up learning to participate in logical, evidence-based arguments, this will mean that they are given a voice. Our democracy is dependent on an educated, concerned citizenry, exercising the right to be heard (p. 136-137).

While the role of personal perspective is clearer in the early years, where the focus on writing is about locating and communicating one's preferences on paper, and discerning those preferences from facts, it retains its importance throughout schooling. In the later years, students engage the process of learning to weave per-

sonal perspective with factual information. They learn to argue a perspective using credible, accurate sources, sound reasoning, and formal language conventions with a particular audience in mind. Each of these foci — opinion in the early years and argument in the later years — derives from and is strengthened by a sense of personal bias. Bias is a force that drives interesting opinion and compelling argument writing. Opinion has a clear connection to bias. A student may reason, “I like the ocean better than the mountains because I can body surf in the waves, and because I don’t really like mosquitoes or hiking”. But with argument, bias is tempered, as students learn to bolster their points of view with facts and credible evidence, and produce polished pieces of work that adhere to the conventions of formal written language. Bias in argument writing is more nuanced and less transparent than in opinion writing. It might, for example, give a student the impetus to argue for same-sex marriage because her own two parents are men. Her experience being raised by parents of the same sex would spur her interest in developing a strong argument for the issue. Or, bias in argument writing could manifest in a student researching the benefits of doing tactile projects such as painting and metalwork as part of general education curricular requirements because he is curious, if not knowledgeable, about the topic. His research could lead him to write a thoughtful argument on a topic that he may not have known a lot about to begin with, but learned about along the way. Bias is a feature central to both opinion and argument writing that allows students the freedom to investigate ideas that spark their interests and integrate experiences, prior knowledge, and abilities to construct strong written work.

For students who prefer ways of engaging with curricular material that veers from conventional approaches, the reality that bias plays an important role in constructing opinion and argument pieces is crucial. For many of these students, motivation to write spurs from the freedom to tap ideas, interests, and prior knowledge. Over the decade and a half that I have worked in the field of special education, I have encountered several instructional modifications and strategies that honor the propensities of autistic students or those with LD. Many of these youth appreciate the opportunity to learn in a hands-on, concrete, or a “direct-impact” kind of way. For all youth, in order to be worthwhile and meaningful, curricular work must have a connection to one’s own life, one’s interests, and one’s inclinations. For some, a freedom to address curricular topics in tangential ways can bear meaning and relevance. Many of the autistic students with whom I have worked have demonstrated the ability to respond in ways that turn the topic of conversation on its head, prompting the class to rethink assumptions. Such responses demand pause in the conversation, yet simultaneously add rich and creative side notes. Many have a habit of responding to a topic in a manner that appears, at first glance and in comparison to peers’ responses, to be related yet indirect. To a question of how one might compare and contrast weather patterns during summer and winter, such a student might offer, “Well, the general lack of rain during the summer in the Pacific Northwest does actually designate the area as a Mediterranean climate”. Such detail is accurate and interesting, yet does not directly respond to the question posed. The response can, however, segue into a discussion of how weather patterns in diverse regions of the world and at different times of the year create local seasonal contrast. Such seemingly tangential remarks can work to deepen the level of conversation, if those facilitating the discussion can help the

class meaningfully weave direct and indirect responses into the central topic. Those who respond directly to the topic can serve as models for how to address ideas in efficient, clear ways. Those who are more tangential in their approach model qualities of curiosity, detail, and depth of knowing. Each approach is valuable, and each contributes to the varied tapestry of a classroom community. Each approach demonstrates qualities that are crucial to writing strong pieces of opinion and argument.

Many of the students with whom I have worked address curricular topics with gusto, as long as it's within the context of a personal interest. One middle school student used to talk about math in highly specific ways, and particularly in ways that were relevant to his interest in cars. To prompt this student to discuss math concepts was akin to pulling teeth. Yet the detailed and spirited way in which he discussed the horse power of varying makes and models of cars as contrasted with their fuel efficiency (or lack thereof) was both compelling and mathematical. For another student with LD, great bursts of creative expression occur when he talks about the work he does outside of the classroom: working on a food truck with his father in a different part of the country. The excitement and potency of the topic are palpable: as he shares his story, his eyes widen, his voice quickens, and he springs from his seat. Another student needs frequent tactile feedback — fidget tools — to sustain her engagement during seatwork. For another, using interesting voice inflections or accents when he reads assigned work provides the extra source of stimulation he needs in order to stave off the boredom that comes from doing routine work. Whether tangent or concrete, students' preferred participatory styles can play a key role in their construction of written work.

A CALL TO ACTION

While it is commonly assumed that fiction is *the* genre for creative writing, the interruption of that notion is demonstrated by the children's author described at the opening of this essay, as well as argued by many contemporary creativity scholars, many of whom equate creativity with a drive to address real-world problems (e.g. Sawyer, 2010; Wagner, 2012). This interruption bears important implications for students learning to develop argument pieces, because it allows for a sense of playfulness in the process of writing, even though the ultimate objective is to demonstrate one's ability to convince through sound reasoning and rational thought.

Several years ago, my upper elementary classroom of autistic youth (ages ranging from 10-12) and I decided to follow our noses on a curricular tangent that was both playful and rooted in a unit of study. Spurred by a confluence of factors, namely our unit study on environmental sustainability; a noted lack of recycling bins in our school; one student's interest in collecting cans to be recycled (at home); and a need to integrate movement breaks into our weekly routine, we decided to begin a recycling program in our school. First, the students set up recycling bins to place around the school; then, they made signs for those bins, clearly demarcating those that were solely to be used for aluminum products. The students next traveled to the different classrooms to talk to the younger grades (my students were the oldest in the school) about recycling, and especially about where to put used and empty aluminum cans throughout the school. Shortly thereafter, we perused the neighborhood to see where we might find a recycling center. About three city blocks from our school

and across the street, we located a grocery store that took aluminum cans for recycling. We chose one day a week to collect the cans and take them on the walk down to the recycling center, and the six block round-trip walk provided a way to break up our day, get out of our seats, move our bodies, and get some fresh air. In exchange for cans, the store gave the students money, which we then deposited into a jar we kept in our classroom. For several weeks, we continued our recycling program, though each week typically yielded only a few coins' worth of profit. Over time though, the coins added up, and we celebrated our work by having a pizza party.

It was a routine we came to love. It was our own, very much connected to a slurry of needs and interests unique to our class constitution, and it reinforced and taught several important qualities such as:

- the satisfaction of spurring change in an organization
- the meaningfulness of doing work that bodes well for the planet
- the sense of wellbeing encountered through physical movement
- the value of following one's interests and instincts when engaging work
- the connection between doing work and seeing profit
- the significance of sharing ideas with other classes
- the reassurance of weekly routine
- the development of positive relationships with community members
- the understanding of oneself as an active, contributing member within one's community

At the time, we had been engaging in writing around the topic of environmental sustainability, yet the writing was focused more on a related project the students were working on, which was designing and building models of a playground/recreational space to replace an existing, massive landfill in a nearby borough. However, in retrospect, I see a missed opportunity to have used the recycling program as a platform for writing. In the future, I would consider the benefit of using the experiential knowledge students gained on a consistent, week-by-week basis, to inform their written work. Such work would be fortified by direct, relevant, up-to-the-moment impressions of doing environmental stewardship. To kick-start the program, I would prompt the students to write a) what they think of when they think about recycling; b) whether or not they think that taking in a bag of cans each week will have an impact on the environment, and why; and c) whether or not they think the program is a good idea, a valuable weekly undertaking, and why. Upon reaching the middle point of the program (say, week 3 in a 6-week program), students could revisit the initial prompt responses (a, b, c) and share how their impressions might have changed since beginning the project.

In addition to the prompts, I would ask students to write weekly in recycling journals throughout the duration of the program. During week 3 or 4, students could then choose one piece of journal writing, take several entries to shape into one cohesive piece, and/or cull ideas from the initial prompt writing to construct into an opinion or argument piece. To support this work, I would teach students elements essential to writing sound opinion and argument pieces based on our learning about the impact of our work on the environment as well as ourselves.

A CALL TO SPEAK

For each class in which I have taught, the different constitutions of personalities have guided the curricular turns that we have pursued. Nearly thirteen years ago, I worked in a middle and high school that specialized in teaching students with LD. For many of the students, writing was a struggle. However one aspect of the students in this school that will remain etched in my memory was how very social and talkative they were. Because of their confidence as speakers, I often used the Socratic Seminar approach to teaching, an approach that I hoped would honor these students' luminous ideas and articulate spoken expression. The process would begin with a focused topic, such as viruses, and I would ask students the day before the dialogue to complete a homework assignment about the topic. If the unit of study was just beginning, I would ask students to compile a few questions they had about the topic, questions that could provide a springboard for our discussion the following day. In this way, students were able to take time at home to think through the topic and address areas that may have caused confusion, inspired curiosity, or otherwise spurred interest. The following day, we would begin our dialogue with an open, central, guiding question, such as, "Who can begin by telling us what they know about viruses?" Students would share their responses, often coming to the whiteboard to illustrate their ideas and describe how the illustration connected to their thought. As a class, rather than raising hands when we had a contribution to offer, we would wait until the speaker was finished and then find a way to either add to her or his comment or address another angle from which to understand the topic. In this way, ideas would unfold organically, and in a setting that felt low-pressure and fluid, even the quieter students would typically participate by contributing something to the conversation. I vividly remember how spirited these conversations were, how alive the students were in the midst of these discussions, and how they always found a way to enfold life experiences from outside of the classroom. This was a particularly interesting feature because the school represented a culturally diverse group.

While our work did not entail argument writing, it is evident how this method of teaching could facilitate fertile ideas worth pursuing in written form. With a foundation paved through Socratic Seminar, the middle and high school students could pursue subtopics of viruses, seamlessly transitioning to written argument work. With an interdisciplinary goal of fusing science with writing, the students could choose a focus within the topic of viruses, such as looking at the pros and cons of immunization at an early age. Teachers could support students in developing their written work by continued oral discussion throughout the writing process, varying participation structures so that discussions are either class-wide, small group, or one-on-one conferences. Students could additionally use peer feedback and editing to strengthen their writing. The ongoing dialogue around the written work would build on students' inherent strengths as articulate speakers, and support their development as writers.

In another class a couple of years later, with my upper elementary autistic students, I used a student-centered dialogic approach as well. For these students, writing was hit-or-miss, with some of the students being motivated, prolific writers, and others who froze when it was time to write. For this mix, who found confidence in routine, one of the most worthwhile and engaging activities we pursued as a class was

a weekly current event project. We began each week by sending students home with a report organizing tool to help them present the title, news source, main ideas of the event in sentence form, and then in summary, paragraph form. To this report form, they would attach the actual news article, and they were encouraged, though not required, to append an accompanying photo or illustration. By the end of the week, the students would bring in their reports, and in the afternoon we would do a whole-class sharing of current events. As students shared their event with the class, I would ask for others who might have a similar or related event topic to share, helping to build connections between students' ideas. Though it wasn't always possible to bridge events, students always found interest in one another's work, and would often follow up with questions and comments. Following this culminating activity, I collected the work and displayed it on a bulletin board designated for the week's current events. Though straightforward, this undertaking provided students a variety of learning opportunities and supports such as:

- a sense of structure
- the opportunity to choose a topic of interest
- the chance to keep apprised of real-world happenings
- time to thoughtfully complete the project, in stages if one so desired
- a seamless bridge between reading, writing, and presenting ideas visually and orally
- building connection with classmates
- practice socializing in a way that honors others' work along with one's own
- building pride in one's work

While the focus of the current event reporting was primarily twofold, to 1) help students develop writing in a structured way that also allowed them a chance to engage their interests (freedom with structure), and 2) support students' oral communication and socialization skills through relevant, real-world event sharing, the project can also be extended to address opinion writing. For instance, an organic way to do so would be to add another paragraph field to the bottom of the report organizer wherein students could write their opinions on an issue that arose within the event they reported. Alternatively, there could be another assignment where students develop an opinion piece using multiple paragraphs. With either, it would be crucial to build in class time a couple of days a week to work on the project, where they could get extra support if needed.

FOR THE VISIONARIES

One important approach in working with students who may have difficulties with writing is the integration of visual components into curricular material. While there is clear value in leaving the classroom to visit places such as art museums, so too is there value in showing slides and photos of paintings, sculptures, photo-journalism, as well as YouTube and other video sources right in the classroom. Using visual elements as a complementary learning modality can support the engagement of students who may feel pulled to respond to visual stimuli. Often, students who are artistically-inclined, aesthetically-inclined, or otherwise benefit from visualization (such as those who can navigate their way around communities by locating known

landmarks) find it easier to ask questions, respond to inquiries, and contribute to conversations when they have something visual to refer to. Using visuals in curricular work can give an access point to these types of learners, who may also find it easier to touch on prior knowledge when given visual stimuli. Ideas that develop in the process of looking at visual material can be translated to written form.

Attention to visual details can also build students' ability to write with a greater sense of presence. For example, teachers who use audio description, a tool to help low-vision and blind students access works of visual art, often find that in the process of describing visual material, the describer (often another student) must focus on select aspects of the material (Kleege & Wallin, 2015). While historically audio description was conceived as a way to convey visual information in an objective, neutral manner, recently scholars have acknowledged the reality that audio descriptors, being human, cannot be entirely neutral. Each describer must make choices about which elements of the visual material to focus his or her description. Because the describer must make these choices, the audio description process encourages a sense of focus on details of visual work and, note Kleege and Wallin (2015), "can be a dynamic tool for facilitating student engagement and analysis" (p. 1). Attaching the Universal Design (UD) principle to the use of audio description, the authors also share how the tool is useful even when used by students who do not have visual impairments. They note, "Such work can help all students think critically about the visual media they encounter daily both inside and beyond the classroom" (p. 1). UD is a concept and practice that is focused around flexible planning with a focus on utility and access for the largest range of users possible (Hamraie, 2013). While a spiraling ramp in front of a museum may be of upmost utility to a wheelchair user, so too does it provide an alternate route for entering a building, especially helpful when there are vast numbers of people entering the building. It could likewise benefit large families, with children finding the spiral fun to ascend, and easier than stairs for caretakers to navigate with baby strollers. Like physical spaces, curricula and learning experiences benefit from a UD approach. Educators, like architects, can think through ways to offer modalities and structures that appeal to and benefit all students. A quiet space for retreat within a classroom benefits a student who experiences sensory overload easily, yet it also benefits students who need a moment or two to cool down after an argument on the playground.

As a catalyst for developing written work, visual tools can spur thinking in visually-inclined learners, which can fortify their opinions and arguments. Complementarily, verbal description of visuals can aid students' ability to focus on details of an otherwise dizzying cornucopia of visual stimuli. Each of these qualities — encountering ideas, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs via visual material and developing a deeper focus through describing visual material — can enrich written work by allowing students to tap into their experiential knowledge and describe it with texture and precision.

OPINION, ARGUMENT, AND A CONSIDERED LIFE

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned as an educator is that while there will always be some sort of mandate that guides our work (Common Core or otherwise), the *life* and the *pulse* of teaching and learning is inevitably found in the

give and take of ideas; the listening to others' as they speak their truths; the following of one's and one's students' instincts. The relationships that are built upon this give and take are crucial to meaningful learning, student engagement, and job satisfaction for us teachers. Since each class constitution is different, as teachers we benefit from a steadfast sense of willingness to observe, reflect, and revise as we go. Do our students learn best with music and drama? Collecting and recycling? Asking questions to clarify uncertainty? Making illustrations? Telling stories? Going off on tangents? Once we find out, we can make space for students to engage these forms to spur, enhance, and improve their writing.

For many students, and arguably all, there is clear benefit to using multiple modalities in the process of writing to help initiate and sustain the development of opinion and argument pieces. Resting upon the idea that experiential details and fruitful bias give opinion and argument writing substance and spirit, it becomes an important task that teachers provide diverse modalities with which to elicit such qualities in all students, and especially those who struggle to initiate writing.

Beyond the school years, students will benefit from the ability to locate those elements in life that move them to action. The ability to articulate opinions and arguments can lay the foundation for a life that is considered, thoughtful, and purposeful. Students who learn to follow their noses, develop their intuition, and attend to their hunches will be rewarded with the joy that comes from delving deeply into one's interests. In the process of learning one's own mind, students also discover that giving oneself the space to explore topics of interest can lead to an expansion of knowledge, and a bridging of old knowledge with new.

REFERENCES

- Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C. (2012). *Pathways to the common core: Accelerating achievement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- English Language Arts Standards: Writing (2015) *In Common Core Standards Initiative online*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/11-12/>
- Hamraie, A. (2013). Designing collective access: A feminist disability theory on Universal Design. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 33(4). Available at <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3871/3411>
- Kleege, G., & Wallin, S. (2015). Audio description as a pedagogical tool. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 35(2). Available at <http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/4622/3945>.
- Norris, E., Mokhtari, K., & Reichard, C. (1998). Children's use of drawing as a pre-writing strategy. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 21(1), 69-74.
- Sawyer, R. K. (2010). Learning for creativity. In R. A. Beghetto & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Nurturing creativity in the classroom* (pp. 172-190). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Wagner, T. (2012). *Creating innovators: The making of young people who will change the world*. New York, NY: Scribner.