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I Have Something to Say
Using Art to Teach the Writing of Persuasive Essays

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (Curriculum Design)

by

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2008
The Thesis of Clifford Rachlin is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm:

Chair

University of California, San Diego
2008
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my wife, Veronica, and children, Johana and Abraham, for their support and patience with me.

To my students who helped mold this unit and mold me into a teacher of children, not just academic subjects.
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To God, I am everything I am because of you.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

I Have Something to Say

Using Art to Teach the Writing of Persuasive Essays

by

Clifford Rachlin

Master of Arts in Teaching and Learning (Curriculum Design)

University of California, San Diego, 2008

Cheryl Forbes, Chair
Claire Ramsey
Randall Souviney

Writing is a critical skill for middle school students to achieve academically. Persuasive writing is an especially important genre at the middle and high school levels and is evaluated by the California Standards Test in middle school and the California High School Exit Exam in high school. State tests show that many students perform low on writing tasks, especially English Language Learners (ELLs).

_I Have Something to Say_ is a writing curriculum was designed to meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELLs). Research on culturally relevant curriculum, factor in student motivation, student voice in writing, scaffolding, and semiotic mediation provided a base for the curriculum’s design. It was
implemented in a two eighth grade classes of early intermediate to intermediate ELLs at a border school.

*I Have Something to Say* is a curriculum which used Mexican murals to teach persuasive writing. Students read the murals as text and learn the elements of persuasive writing. They learned step-by-step and eventually used art as an organizer to write their own essays.

Evaluation of the implementation involved the coding and analysis of field notes, student reflection, interviews, and work samples. This analysis showed that student engagement with material increased during the implementation. Students’ choice of topics, sense of ownership, and originality of ideas demonstrated an increase in the sense of personal voice in writing for students. Student essays shower greater quantity of writing and higher quality in development of ideas and organization.
Chapter I

Introduction:

Not Just More Of The Same

Go to any school, especially one designated as “low-performing” by the state of California, and you will hear the term “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB). The term refers to national legislation requiring that all students be proficient in language arts and math at their respective grade-level, based on the California Standards Test (CST), by the year 2012. The legislation does not say how this will happen or how our education system will become so efficient as to advance all children, including English language learners (ELLs), and special education students, to grade level in so short a time. The goal expressed by this legislation is not based on research showing that such results are possible. It is based on the idea that the CST is an accurate measure of student achievement, without the necessary support for this claim.

While the goals of NCLB seem unrealistic, contain no explanation of how to achieve them, and are based on a test that may not accurately measure student proficiency, the consequences for not achieving these goals can be severe. In California, schools which do not achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals for two consecutive years are fined. After several years, they can be taken over by the state. Under the same legislation, these schools must reserve a portion of their funding for providing tutoring by independent contractors or transportation to schools that are achieving their AYP goals. Economic and professional consequences now exist for schools as institutions as well as for administrators and teachers as professionals.
While the goal of this thesis is not to engage in a study of educational politics, state and federal legislation provide the context for both my research and teaching. Politics are a real factor in everything that goes on in schools. My low reading-level students and English language learners are no longer just children struggling to pass their classes, but arguably economic commodities whose progress or lack of progress affects budgets. What is good for children is now balanced against compliance with state regulations for “underperforming schools” (those that don’t meet AYP goals).

One of the consequences of approach, No Child Left Behind, is the implementation of publisher-guided curriculum. Schools that are considered underperforming must choose from state-mandated curricula. Although state-approved textbooks have always been mandatory, many of the texts which are part of what are called intervention programs (programs for students two years or more below grade level) are designed to be imparted in classrooms to all students in exactly the same way, with little consideration of individual needs or differences. The text used by my school, *High Point* (2000), consists of whole-class lessons with a scripted text for the teacher. All students receive the same lesson, in the same way, at the same pace. In their workshop for teachers, trainers of the *High Point* program explain that since students are given a diagnostic assessment, each student in each class will perform at the same level. Of course, this is never the case as students do not progress at academically uniform rates or learn in the same way.

Teachers are mandated, by state law AB 466, to attend trainings in their respective state-approved program. *High Point* presented a pacing guide at their workshop for my district, in which each lesson, of a length determined by the
publisher, is to be covered in one class period. While at the High Point workshop, I asked what teachers should do when a student does not understand a concept, as there is not a section of the text which allows for further practice. The answer I received was “go back and do the same thing again.”

When Students Don’t Fit the Mold

The last thing my students needed was more of the same lessons done the same way. My students were, by school standards, underperforming. The counselor’s placed them in my class because, according to the diagnostic test provided by the textbook publisher and the CST, they read at a third to fourth grade level, although they were in eighth grade. Out of the 60 students, 94% were Hispanic and 97% were English language learners. While many of them had been in the United States for many years, they still scored at an intermediate level on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT). In the group of students I worked with for two hours each afternoon, all but four had D or F averages the previous year. In the morning group, all but seven began the year with D or F averages. Of course, their life circumstances also figured into these results. Many had changed schools three or more times. Several were receiving psychological counseling; a few had divorced parents with one on each side of the border. Based on what some of the students told me during casual conversations, at least ten had a parent or close relative in jail.

Academically, the majority had not had great success. Five had been retained; three were on “conditional promotion” (meaning that they could be sent back to seventh grade if they did not pass their first semester classes); six were awaiting psychological testing to determine if they had a learning disability.
Based on my relationship with these students and what I learned from reading files of their academic histories, I could say with confidence that a large number of my students had not felt successful in school or in their lives. Their behavior reflected their lack of confidence and their frustration with school. This particular group of students—the low-performing, intermediate English language learners—were almost notorious in our school for always having the largest number of behavior problems. In my time at our school, I had seen most teachers who teach this level either switch schools or instructional level (to a class that is at or close to grade level) after two or three years. The educational difficulties experienced by these students and their resulting behavior (either rebelliousness towards school authority or passivity and lack of effort), made this class consistently exhausting for teachers.

Not until I got to know them did I realize that if it was hard for me to teach them, it was even harder for them to enjoy and be motivated in school. As frustrated as I could be with their behavior or academic performance, I came to realize that they were even more frustrated. I thought about the enthusiasm I had seen when I taught first grade many years ago and I realized that these students had not always acted as they did now. At one point in their school experience, maybe as far back as kindergarten or first grade, I was sure that they had wanted to do well in school. I was frustrated now, but many of them had lived years of frustration.

**Searching for New Approaches**

Clearly a one-size-fits-all approach was not working for the students in my classes. While I will talk about the *High Point* curriculum more in chapter four, I need to begin the discussion of new approaches by saying that for these students, the
existing curriculum clearly was ineffective. Most of them were in the same level of
*High Point* the previous year and, based on grades or test results, had to repeat the
same book and curriculum. For them, my *High Point* class really was more of the
same.

For myself as a teacher, I found the situation frustrating at best. Moreover, I
felt I was dealing with discipline issues rather than teaching. Both colleagues and
administrators had told me in the past that I had excellent classroom control, and in the
past teachers with problems controlling their classroom had been sent to observe my
classroom management. I had, on several occasions throughout my years of teaching,
received students with problems in other classrooms and helped them to feel
successful. This year, I was spending most of my time with classroom control issues.
In six weeks, I had held more detentions and had written more disciplinary referrals to
the vice-principal than I had in my nine previous years of teaching combined. I was
not achieving lesson plan goals and felt that I was not even teaching. I felt stressed and
dejected. What was happening?

I realized that I had one of three choices: I could say that I was not an adequate
teacher for this group and throw in the towel; I could blame the students and give up
on them; or I could look for a new approach. The first solution I did not believe was
true nor did my colleagues or supervisors. The second approach would only condemn
children to educational failure. The last choice was the one productive alternative.

Upon looking at my classroom makeup, one factor stood out. Both of my
classes were predominantly male. In one class there were 23 boys and 8 girls; the
other had 26 boys and 7 girls. When I told anyone—teacher, friends, the supermarket
cashier—that my class was over two-thirds teenage boys, I received the same reaction. They rolled their eyes and told me, “poor thing.”

This situation generated the question: Why? Why were the students with low English language arts performance mostly male? Why did anyone who heard that I was teaching so many boys feel sorry for me? What was there inherent in boys that so often caused both school failure and the discipline problems that caused the “poor thing” reaction? Lastly, was there really something inherent in boys, or was there something inherent in the school system that caused their lack of success?

This final question led me to the work of Michael Gurian. Gurian, who refers to himself as a social philosopher, runs an institute which holds trainings for teachers and parents relating to differences between boys and girls. Gurian argues that schools do not emphasize the skills of boys and that they often teach contrary to the way boys’ brains are wired in his view (Gurian, 1997; Gurian & Stevens, 2006). Some schools that work with Gurian have achieved success (Gurian & Stevens, 2006), although there may be other intervening variables to explain their successes. For example, a school which used some of the strategies designed to be “compatible” with boy’s brains, showed successes not only for boys but also for girls (Gurian & Stevens, 2006). Gurian bases his theories on neurological research, but neurological research is not at the stage where it can be directly applied to educational practice (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). Still, as a teacher searching for new approaches, I found many of Gurian’s ideas intriguing. I modified some of the strategies he recommended and experienced success.
More and more I saw the possibility that Gurian’s strategies were effective for reasons different than the neurological ones he offered. For me, the most important aspect of his theories was their departure from a deficiency model to one that presented the energy and restlessness of many boys as strengths for learning. Even the title of one of his books, *The Wonder of Boys* (Gurian, 1997) presents differences as strengths. By looking at boys’ strengths, Gurian had created a curriculum which sought to teach in different ways to reach different students. The idea that my students had untapped strengths led me to search for ways that I could access and take advantage of their abilities.

*Independence Day*

While I was searching for a way to tap my students’ strengths, I had an experience that changed the way I thought about educating students. My school held a chalk art contest to celebrate Mexican Independence Day, September 16. For a border school with a 90% Mexican or Mexican-American population, this was a special celebration. Many students identified with the celebration of Mexican Independence day and had numerous experiences associated with it. On this day, their background knowledge gave them a clear advantage for producing relevant art work.

Still, the contest provided many challenges. The students had to, in teams of three or less, convert a monochrome sketch on 8x10 paper to a 48 inch by 48 inch multicolored panel on a cement floor in the center of the school. In a period of an hour and forty minutes, students had to complete the work. They worked with new media (chalk and cement), they had to change scale, and they had to add color. Our students had not been taught these skills, as we did not have any art classes.
Considering all the challenges, the teachers expected some decent pictures but what we saw was a tribute to student talent. The squares were multi-colored, highly-detailed, with very accurately drawn human faces and cultural symbols such as the Mexican flag or churches. As we looked at the squares, many of us marveled at the quality of the work. Our school, usually described with terms such as “underperforming” and “in need of improvement”, was now a showcase for artistic talent.

I realized then how we had shortchanged our students. Instead of teaching to their strengths, we were teaching to their weaknesses. Although some of the teachers talked of the need for more electives, I knew this would not happen. The guidelines for schools not meeting AYP goals required two periods of language arts and two periods of math for students determined by the CST to be below grade level. Add to that, one period each for physical education, history, and science (my school, as it is, only offers half a year of history and half a year of science to allow for the extra language arts and math) and the six period day was used up. The only students to receive art education would be those already succeeding.

At the same time, I was not thinking about an elective; I was thinking about what students already needed to learn. Could I use art to teach them language arts standards, allowing them to use their artistic ability to succeed in language arts?

**Voice and Expression**

Writing seemed a logical place to begin. Writing is a vehicle of expression. In writing, students can at least partially compensate for a lack of vocabulary knowledge with the quality of their expression. In writing, the author has control of the text.
For me, writing had always been a part of who I am. In middle school, high school, and college, writing served as a way to express myself. It was a way for me to communicate, especially since I was always shy. Sometimes, it was the paper that listened to me when no one else would.

My students’ experience with writing had been very different. According to a survey I gave them, they wrote for myspace.com or in graffiti on the walls of their bedrooms. Although these forms of writing do allow students to express themselves, there were also many forms of writing and purposes for writing to which they did not have access.

My students saw writing very differently than I did. When asked about writing in school, their answers ranged from describing it as something difficult and boring to feeling frustrated by essays that they could not do. When asked to define good writing, they responded mostly in terms of grammatical and spelling issues.

While boredom or frustration with writing may be the case for many students, my students faced a special challenge. They were writing in a second language. The language of their lives outside of school was not the one they used when they wrote. My students’ voices, in many ways, had been silenced by a system that did not value their native language. Many of my students did not know the voice that they had. They had been classified as “below grade level” and their deficiencies defined why they were in my class. However, I believed that they had something to say, something valuable.

Transforming the way low-performing students see writing is no easy task and I do not pretend to have solved all of the problems in the education of English
language learners or to have entirely met the needs of all my students in one small curriculum implementation. Instead, I designed a project which endeavored to make an impact on my students and improve both their writing skills and their motivation in class. My students were not statistics or a problem. They were young people in need of something different, not just more of the same.

The *I Have Something to Say* curriculum, implemented over a six week period, was an attempt to reach this goal. More than anything else, I desired that this curriculum not just be “more of the same.” It is a writing curriculum designed especially for my students and revised as I learned together with them. What I learned from using it with my students taught me both about their potential and how much more I needed to learn in order to truly help them. One of the central ideas in public education is that all students have abilities and are valuable as individuals. This idea is present in the term “No Child Left Behind.” However, to truly leave no child behind, we must emphasize the value of each of them and each of their stories. If we do, we will realize that each child has something important to say.
Chapter II
Assessing the Needs of English Language Learners and Struggling Readers

Francisco was considered an at-risk student and he was on the list for testing for possible learning disabilities. Although he had been in the United States for seven years he had been designated as an early intermediate English language learner. This was his second year in eighth grade. He had a history of behavior and academic problems. He was on a behavior contract, an agreement with the school regarding norms of behavior that at-risk students agreed to follow. The contract was periodically reviewed and failure to follow it could lead to expulsion.

This portrait of Francisco simplifies who he is and only identifies him in terms of deficiencies. Francisco was also a professional drummer in a family music group in Mexico. On weekends, the band played parties for $250 an hour. I had spoken to him about music before and he understood each different style (cumbia, salsa, ranchera, 50’s style rock, modern rock, etc.). Yet also, he understood many skills and behaviors necessary for school: the value of hard work, the need for practice, having content knowledge, responding to an audience, accepting responsibility, and organizing materials. In the musician aspect of his life, he showed competence far beyond that of his peers.

Francisco lived in two homes with very different messages about education. His parents were recently divorced. His mother lived in the U.S.; his father lived in Tijuana, Mexico. Francisco spent weekdays in the U.S. and weekends in Mexico. His father had

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1 Names of all the students as well as of the school have been changed to protect anonymity.
already stated in meetings that he did not believe in or even care about school education as part of his child’s future. Instead, he wanted his son to be a musician. His mother said in the same meetings that she wanted Francisco to study and pursue higher education. Francisco loved music and often showed how proud he is of his father. While Francisco at times demonstrated some academic improvement, he did not like school. His intense resentment towards his mother and her position on his future was obvious when he interacted with her.

My room was full of students like Francisco. My students came from a wealth of experiences, but many of their experiences were not utilized as part of the school curriculum. In one of my two instructional blocks, 28 out of 32 students already had work experience, even though they were only 13 years old. Almost all were bilingual in Spanish and English, with one Chinese speaker and one student who fluently spoke Chinese, Spanish, and had recently added English. I wondered how many talents and struggles were hidden behind the titles that we gave to these students.

**The Reality of My School**

Borderview Middle School is located approximately three miles from the Mexican border. Tijuana is directly visible from the baseball and soccer fields at school. Over 90% of the students are Hispanic, almost all of those Mexican-born or first generation Mexican-Americans. Over 90% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch. The majority of my students’ parents worked long hours and many of my students spent hours alone after school. Some students, whose parents worked two jobs, saw their parents only once a week.
A large number of the students had a bi-national identity. On Fridays, a large percentage of students would go to Tijuana for the weekend. Monday’s absences far exceeded those of other days especially when the Monday morning border line for cars and pedestrians was too long to cross. Many teachers believed that Mondays were also the days that had the best behavior but the least amount of learning, as students were half-asleep from late nights spent with the family and early morning border crossings.

This situation may be changing. In recent years, many teachers have observed an identity shift, with more students regarding themselves as American. The construction of a large shopping center in the area has led to more students remaining in the U.S. on weekends, since hanging out in the mall is now a popular free-time activity.

Low Test Performance

Borderview Middle School had been designated a program improvement school, based on results of the California Standards Test (CST). Less than 25% of students scored proficient or above in language arts on state tests and almost 50% scored below basic (California Department of Education, 2006a). The fact that, according to school district data, over 80% of the students were considered ELLs was also a major factor in these low scores. The seventh grade language arts test included a writing sample, and the test’s language section included many questions on both writing skills and conventions.

According to reports from the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2006b), many of the students in the high school district where the great majority of our students are enrolled struggle to pass the language arts section of the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Last year, only 56% received a passing score on the language arts section. Of ELLs, only 27% received a passing score.
The local high school to which we directly feed had even lower results. Only 43% received a passing score. ELL results were the same as results for the district as a whole, with 27% passing. Results for the ELLs throughout the state were similar. For the high school district, there was a small difference by gender: 60% of girls received a passing score and only 53% of boys. The state results did not show significant differences by gender.

The CAHSEE is based mainly on ninth and tenth grade California academic content standards, with some seventh and eighth grade standards included (California Department of Education, 2006b). As on the CST (or possibly more so) writing plays a key role in test results. Of questions on this exam (CDE released test items, 2006), 28 of 73 are based on writing. In addition, many reading questions (CDE released test items, 2006) are based on concepts often taught in writing classes such as author’s purpose, author’s main idea, and support for opinions. While not a panacea, better writing instruction is an important part of improving state assessed student competencies.

Writing and the Students

Writing is a part of education and of everyday life. California dedicates a large part of its language arts content standards to writing (California Language Arts Content Standards, 1997) and students increasingly use writing in all curricular areas throughout high school and college. One program that has been very successful in supporting the educational progress of African-American and Hispanic high school students, Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID), concentrates on writing in school because it considers lack of writing skills as one of the major stumbling blocks for many of these students to get to college (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996).
At the same time, my students saw the importance of writing very differently from state testers or AVID trainers. I surveyed one of my classes (survey size of 31) about why they write. The writing they mentioned was informal and social, generally not requiring writing complete sentences—very different from essays with structured paragraphs. Out of 31 students, 22 listed myspace.com, 11 listed letters or notes, and seven listed “graffiti in my room” as their usual modes of writing. It is worth noting that while personal journals or diary writing was an option I mentioned before the survey, not one student reported doing those kinds of writing. No student mentioned any form of academic writing. While the students do write, their style of writing and what motivates them is very different from what middle and high schools expect of them.

The Reality of My Class

My classes were two period blocks of students deemed to be four years or more below grade level based on both the California Standards tests (CST) and the diagnostic test from the *High Point* (2000) reading series. With the exception of a few students who were fluent English speakers but low readers, my students were also designated as English language learners (ELLs). This designation was made using a combination of the California English Language Development Test English Language (CELDT) proficiency test and teacher evaluations made periodically through requests from the district assessment center. Most of my students were CELDT 3 (the scale goes from 1-5) which means that they were classified at an intermediate level of English language proficiency, having mastered the basics of communication but lacking the academic language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and syntax necessary to perform as native English speakers academically. None of my students had scored proficient in writing on the CELDT test.
Based on my own analysis of the CELDT writing section, the writing tasks required by the CELDT are much simpler than those required by the California State standards.

Many of my students had received instruction in their native language at one time. Those that came from elementary schools in my district were transitioned to English after third grade. There was a district policy about the minimum level of native language ability that students needed to obtain before they could be moved into all-English classes. However, that policy was often not followed. Changes in school philosophy, pressure from some administrators to move students into English, and a lack of monitoring, made the process of transitioning anything but smooth. Some students were transitioned after one or two years, while others were suddenly moved after a teacher discovered that they had been in bilingual classes for seven or eight years. The latter students were often moved to classes high above their actual English level, based on the idea that time in the U.S.—not instruction received—equaled language ability.

Many of the students have had academic, motivational, or discipline problems. Within the two blocks, there were three students retained from last year and seven on conditional promotion (meaning that if they did not pass classes in the first term, they would return to seventh grade or be put on an eighth grade retention list). Several students were from other schools and had disciplinary problems in those schools. Several were receiving psychological counseling. In class discussions, almost all said that they wanted to go to college in the future, although most did not see this as a motivation for studying. In fact, when I described the graduate courses I was taking at the university, many students expressed alarm at “too much work.”
The group of students with whom I was working, especially the second block, was one of the most difficult groups with whom I had ever worked. While the students in this group were all supposed to be at a similar reading level, they were not. Many of the students had never been successful in school and may have learned either passive or rebellious behaviors to compensate. Some did not pass an easier class the previous year, but were placed with me because I was considered to have a good relationship with students and good classroom control. The majority reported that they did not have supervision of their homework at home and many brought with them a host of family issues (as mentioned in the introduction). Off-task behavior was a constant problem and even the students themselves admitted that their peers were somewhat “out of control.” At the same time, there was another group of students who were highly motivated and exhibited positive classroom behavior. These students sometimes expressed annoyance at the behavior of their peers.

From my experience with these students, I had seen that each one had his or her own special needs. Addressing those needs was quite a challenge, especially with a reading and writing program based on whole group instruction.

*Intervention and Stratification*

Research on ability grouping has placed doubt on the value of classes organized in the way my classes had been set up. Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, and Lintz (1996) concluded that ability groups do not increase overall achievement, but do promote inequality. McDermott (1977) found that low-group reading classes had more interruptions and a less academic classroom climate than classes of high or mixed ability. Moll (1994) studied classes for English learners and found that they centered on low-
level thinking skills which did not prepare children for the demanding cognitive tasks they would face as they moved up to higher grades.

Instead of being labeled *ability groups*, these classes were designated *intervention classes* both at my school and in state program improvement descriptions. The idea behind intervention classes is based on the legitimate concern that students who are more than two years below grade level cannot independently read the text book and are being asked to work above their level of frustration in grade-level classes. The purpose of intervention was to give them two years of intensive instruction so they may reach grade level. Each of the state-approved intervention programs and adopted curricula such as *High Point* was designed to help children achieve this goal.

While these intervention programs looked like a positive idea, the reality was very different. Most of the students at our school were not reaching the program’s goals, according to both teachers and administration. While they had shown some minor improvement, these gains could just as easily be explained by the implementation of a two-hour reading block as part of the intervention program, compared with the one hour block students received before institution of the program. In addition, the *High Point* text itself was not motivating to teachers or students. Students and teachers found the reading selections boring.

Furthermore, there was a stigma attached to being in the program. Students could clearly identify who was at grade level and who was in the intervention program. When I gave one of the groups access to the books from the grade level program, there was an audible cheer and interest clearly improved. Many commented that they were using the same books as students in grade-level classes. One student commented, “Now we can
learn what the other kids learn.” Another student had told me earlier in the year, “I shouldn’t be in this class. I’m smart.”

While this thesis does not intend to be an argument for or against tracking, it does intend to argue that students need access to grade-level curriculum. Even if *High Point* did achieve its goals of moving children through their program in two years, the series ends with the sixth grade standards. If my students reached this level by the end of eighth grade, they would have had no exposure to grade level standards. Standards, especially at the middle school level, are specified language and cognitive skills that students need to master in order to progress in their education. By only teaching elementary level standards to middle school students, the authors of *High Point* demonstrate their belief that students cannot perform these higher order skills until they have reached grade level. In this way, low-tracked students and ELLs are denied access to the same curriculum as students designated as at or above grade level (Moll, 1994; Mehan et al, 1996).

Lack of access to grade-level curriculum does not have to be the case for ELLS or low-tracked students. For example, an eighth grade student may learn a grade-level standard with a third or fourth grade text. For ELLs, access to grade level standards while they are learning English is very important. ELLs may take between four to seven years to master the language necessary to function at grade level (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). Often, their language ability affects teacher perception, causing teachers to limit the cognitive level of activities in which the students participate (Moll & Diaz, 1987). As a result, they are denied access to instruction in the thinking skills necessary to succeed later on, when they have mastered the language (Moll, 1994).
I designed the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum with the conviction that writing is an excellent means of teaching grade level standards and thinking skills to students who are below grade level. Students can learn the fundamentals of writing and reasoning (clear thesis, supporting evidence, coherence, etc.) while using their own controlled vocabulary.

Moll and Diaz (1987) and Jimenez (2000) describe the effective use of native language in pre-writing activities to help students before they are asked to produce their ideas in English. In these studies, students’ ability to master concepts in their native language facilitated their expressing themselves effectively in English. Moll and Diaz (1987) showed that students perceived as limited in their capabilities by teachers, could perform at a higher cognitive level with the proper linguistic and academic support.

**What Do We Need?**

The idea behind intervention classes has some merit. Vygotsky (1978) argued that students learn from instruction and guidance within their zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is the distance between what a student can do independently without help and what he can do with the help of an adult or more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Students who are far below grade level in reading often have too many difficulties with text to access the grade level curriculum, even with adult help. In addition, at lower levels, students have many special reading needs related to phonetics and fluency (Zemelman, 1989). However, these needs should not obscure the needs of students for proper writing instruction. Many authors (Graves, 1989; McLane, 1990) have argued that writing instruction must emphasize the development of writing content and expressive skills. An intervention program which consists of whole group, scripted lessons, and
isolated skills at a low cognitive level does not provide adequate instruction in writing for English language learners.

Solutions provided by schools often look more at the symptoms of students’ problems rather than the causes. A look at the state list of underperforming schools shows that the majority of them are in low socioeconomic areas, with high African-American or Hispanic populations, and with large populations ELLs. The institutions of education are not responding to these students, but are perpetuating deficiency models (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Bartholomew, 1994; Mehan et al, 1996; Osborne, 1996). My day-to-day experience with my class showed the need for educational programs that capitalize on students’ strengths.

Students such as mine needed an educational approach that would build on their strengths and honor their different learning styles. Their education needed to remind them what they could do, not what they could not do. Specifically, in writing, these students needed a curriculum which allowed them to use their thinking skills and knowledge base to express and support their ideas.

In order to teach writing, a difficult task for even the best English speakers, teachers and the curricula they use need to provide a way to motivate students for whom school is often a frustrating place. These students need to see a purpose for writing and have a curriculum which builds their confidence by building on their strengths and successes. Students who are just beginning the period of identity-searching that is adolescence (Fenwick, 1987), need a voice to express themselves.

Motivating students for whom school is a frustrating place, helping them to see a purpose for writing, building their confidence, and giving a sense of voice to students
writing in a second language is quite a challenge. This curriculum is not a panacea.

However, more of the same in a different package will only perpetuate current conditions as described at my school now: student failure and teacher burnout.
Chapter III

What Research Tells Us About Helping

English Language Learners and Struggling Readers

As stated in the introduction, much of the emphasis in education is currently placed on helping students deemed not to be at grade level according to state tests such as the previously mentioned CST, CAHSEE, or CELDT. In addition, progress on these tests is closely monitored, especially in schools which are designated as low performing. Many groups, individuals, and institutions propose their own solutions to help students who score below proficient on these tests. Politicians, textbook publishers, educational institutions, community, districts, schools, and teachers all have a role and often battle for control of the educational process (Kirst, 1985).

The newest legislation, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), states a lofty goal apparent in the title: all students will succeed. Through stricter requirements for teacher preparation, the monitoring of test scores, and school choice options for parents of students at schools that do not make adequate yearly progress, NCLB legislation proposes to improve education for all students.

NCLB requires schools to improve each year in the percentage of students proficient in language arts and math. However, the classification of students as proficient or non-proficient does not tell what students need to learn and, more importantly, why they need to learn it. In order to effectively teach students with academic difficulties, we need to know why they are having problems.
This review of research addresses the difficulties faced by intermediate English language learners (ELLs). Intermediate ELLs are students who have more or less mastered communicative English, but are clearly below grade level academically in English. Educational research offers principles of effective instruction which can be used to design effective writing curriculum for ELLs. While the principles of effective instruction described in this chapter apply to many different groups of students, I will concentrate on ELLs whose native language is Spanish.

**Cognitively Challenging Curriculum**

Moll (1992) writes that one of the alarming consequences of the reduction of bilingual classes is that English-language learners in beginning and intermediate classes are being asked to work well below their cognitive level. Whatever curriculum these students receive, it should stimulate their thinking and allow them to work at their cognitive level. This approach may require scaffolding or the limited use of Spanish to allow them to clarify ideas. Legal restrictions under California law (Proposition 227) and district policies have limited the use of native language at schools. In my school, and in other schools in California, only teachers of recent immigrants at the beginning level of English proficiency may use Spanish in the classroom.

Trueba and Bartolome (1997) reviewed research demonstrating that schools continually rely on a deficit model of the ability of Latino English language learners, categorizing them as “linguistically handicapped.” Bartolome (1994) reported that many methodologies designed to help or meet the needs of Latino students lack true academic vigor and are really subtle versions of a deficit mentality. These students bring cultural
and cognitive resources to the classroom but the school turns these students into a problem (Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Vasquez, Pease-Alvarez, & Shannon, 1994). Contrary to this model, Osborne (1996) reviewed various studies that found greater success for teachers of Latino students who were academically demanding of their students. However, these studies also found that in order to have success with academically demanding curricula, teachers needed to provide scaffolding to make the curricula accessible for students.

One example of the success of ELLs when given challenging academic tasks is Moll and Diaz’s (1987) intervention in an English as a Second Language reading class in southern California. Students in the class they studied were designated as having comprehension difficulties. The researchers used questions in Spanish to ask students about their English reading assignments. The authors discovered that the students performed at a much higher level than their teacher had expected. The results demonstrated students were able to comprehend in English and respond not just to factual questions but also to questions requiring inference.

Students also improved greatly in writing in the Moll and Diaz (1987) study. Students had been writing mostly sentences as opposed to paragraphs or longer essays. While the teacher had concentrated principally on grammar and spelling in writing, the researchers worked with students on writing for expression of meaning and allowed students to write about topics they knew about. Students generated essays that were both longer and more complex than their previous writing efforts. While grammar and vocabulary errors were still very much present, these errors did not interfere with meaning. The students showed cognitive skills far higher than their English grammar,
vocabulary, and spelling skills. Limited English fluency does not prevent students from performing higher level cognitive tasks. In fact, students like the ones in the Moll and Diaz study show great academic gain when given tasks that challenge them cognitively.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

While schools and departments of education describe students as underperforming for academic reasons, many researchers see these students’ difficulties as a result of the mismatch between the student’s home culture and the majority culture (Bartolome, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996; Gay, 2000). This mismatch may occur as a result of discourse style differences (Au, 1980; Mehan, 1996), teacher perception of minority students (Banks & Banks, 1995, Ladson-Billings, 1995), or misunderstandings of expectations in the school environment (Banks & Banks, 1995; Osborne, 1996). Some researchers argue that a change in classroom pedagogy will bring limited success since the school is a mainstream institution which reproduces the power structure (Bartolome, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1995). However, other researchers cite instances of success for struggling students whose teachers or schools practice what is variously defined as culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1995; Gay, 2000). Without ignoring the argument that schools reproduce the mainstream power structure, for the purposes of this review I will look at effective, culturally relevant pedagogy for the classroom.

One problem in defining culturally relevant pedagogy is that many educational researchers utilize different definitions (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1995; Gay, 2000, Yamauchi, 2005). Three elements described by Ladson-Billings (1995) are also present in many other authors’ work. Therefore, I will use her definition.
According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy rests on three criteria: students must achieve academic success; students must develop or maintain cultural competence; and students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the social order. In all classrooms, students must develop academic skills such as literacy and numeracy. However, in classrooms with culturally relevant pedagogy, the students will learn these skills through what is most relevant to them. Ladson-Billings (1995) notes that the effective teachers of African-American students she observed taught the state-mandated standards, but in ways relevant to their students. In addition, the students in these classes had greater mastery of the standards than in classes that did not focus on making curriculum culturally relevant.

Ladson-Billings (1995) also argues that students must maintain or develop cultural competence. Culturally relevant teachers validate their students’ culture by utilizing it as a vehicle for learning and a bridge to school learning. For students whose first language is not English, use of the native language provides this same validation (Moll & Diaz, 1987; Osborne, 1995). When students’ culture is not validated, they may feel alienated or rebel against the school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Bartolome, 1994).

When Ladson-Billings (1995) writes that students must challenge the social order, she is really speaking of developing a critical consciousness. Much of classroom learning occurs as a transmission of knowledge with students as passive receptors (Tharp & Gallimore, 1991). Mehan (1979) found that classrooms tend to follow a structure in which students receive knowledge, respond to teachers’ questions, and wait for teacher confirmation of their answers (Mehan, 1979). Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that students
need to assert their own voice and identity through a critical interaction with curriculum that also questions cultural assumptions.

Even without explicitly questioning cultural assumption, students assert their identity when classroom interactions break from the traditional teacher-dominated and fact-based structure of traditional classrooms described by Mehan (1979). Johnson (1989), for example, found that English language use for English learners was richer when they were allowed to work together and act as peer teachers. She concluded that the change of role gave them personal power. This personal power gave them control over their writing process and their expression, even though they were working in a second language (Johnson, 1989).

Henry Trueba (1987), in an intervention in southern California, provided an excellent example of the effectiveness of culturally relevant pedagogy. In this study, researchers allowed students to generate writing topics of interest to them and held discussions about these topics in groups before writing. Many of the topics dealt with neighborhood issues such as crime and drugs, as well as issues in the students’ families. The discussion groups promoted critical reflection on these topics. The students in Trueba’s study showed great gains in the quality and quantity of work compared to observations and work samples before the intervention. They even spent more time on revision, motivated by their ownership of the project. This study reflects the need for students to see their own academic identity and find a place for their personal and cultural experience in school settings.

For English learners and low-performing readers, this identity development is essential, as these students often feel marginalized by the deficiency models that have
been applied to them (Bartolome, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1995; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997; Gay, 2000) Osborne, (1996) found that especially for students who may feel marginalized in one way or another, pedagogy must be culturally relevant and give them a chance for success using their cultural resources.

Dana Mitra (2006) attempted an intervention in a California high school using students as a communication bridge for a parent communication program. Since the parents were Spanish-speaking Latinos, and the majority of the teachers were white and only spoke English, Mitra used the students as translators and cultural liaisons to improve communication between the teachers and parents. While the parent program did not succeed, she found that it was highly empowering for students. The use of students as cultural experts to bridge home and school culture and the utilization of their bilingualism as an asset created a sense of voice. The students organized programs which allowed them to express critically their views of schools and society as a whole. The students’ sense of themselves as well as their identity and their motivation to participate remained high throughout the program (Mitra, 2006). Mitra’s study shows the power of curriculum which uses students’ cultural identity as an asset.

Voice

The need for development of voice and identity becomes even more apparent in writing. According to Graves (1989), voice is the individual expression of oneself in writing and the driving force of composition. However, much of education is based on a top-down transmission model (Mehan, 1979; Tharp and Gallimore, 1991). This model has become especially prevalent with back-to-basics reform movements, removing student voice from the curriculum entirely.
Cummins (1989) writes that reform efforts have eliminated critical thinking from the curriculum in favor of “the basics” and that critical thinking itself is “viewed as just another skill to be transmitted” (p. 27). Issues of “direct concern to students’ future and current lives are seldom raised in the classroom” (p.27). The situation described by Cummins has been exacerbated by NCLB and the increased emphasis on state testing. If a lack of emphasis on critical thinking and individual expression is detrimental for all students, it is even more so for low-income and minority students whose voice has already been silenced in society. These students do not hear their voices expressed within the mainstream culture (Bartolome, 1994; Banks & Banks, 1995; Trueba & Bartolome, 1997).

Classrooms in general favor students with high linguistic skills and tend to ignore other forms of intelligence (Eisner, 2004; Gardner, 2004). Students may have many ideas and concepts to express, but lack the skills to express them. This situation is even more difficult for English language learners, who by definition are learning to express themselves in English. Since the passage in California of Proposition 227 in 1998, which strictly limited the use of bilingual education, these students are forced to express themselves only in English.

Jimenez (2000) describes the language and identity issues of Latino students who feared loss of identity with language loss. He described “their fragility of sense of self” (p.988), and refers to a “gaping hole in their identities” (p.994) created by their literacy experiences. While Graves (1989) describes voice in writing as sense of self, Jimenez (2000) describes students’ feelings of loss of identity with the loss of Spanish or the lack of contexts in which it is used.
The issue of voice for these students, therefore, affects students not only in their writing, but their identity construction. For middle school students, identity issues are especially important since the middle school years are a time of identity confusion (Fenwick, 1987). Since the classrooms I studied for this intervention were composed approximately of 70% male students, I was especially interested in boys in school and their identity construction in the classroom. Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hillard (2003) found that immigrant girls outperform immigrant boys. Other research (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Doucet, 2003) found the same to be true specifically for Mexican-Americans. In both studies, researchers concluded that immigrant girls feel closer to home and derive their identity from their home culture while boys search for their identity by rebelling against the mainstream culture, especially in schools.

Reichert and Kuriloff (2004) look at the issue of boys’ self-concept. They describe boys as seeing themselves through the “looking glass” (p. 545) of school. This looking glass, they argue, is distorted and biased by reward structures and gender practices. They describe representations of male identity that benefit those who succeed within the system while creating derogatory images for those who do not. Aggressive behavior and anxiety are a result for these low performers. While some of these identity and gender issues involve larger societal factors that cannot be solved in the classroom only, they point to the alienation of non-mainstream students, especially boys.

Motivation: “Why Do We Have to Learn This?”

For students to learn, they need to be engaged by what they are learning. The students must be on-task and actively involved with the material. In many cases, teachers use classroom management and discipline techniques to maintain quiet classrooms where
students are diligently working. However, students may be behaved but not actively learning. To design curricula that increase student engagement, we need to look at what motivates students.

One of the main ways that schools motivate students is the promise of a better future. Many non-mainstream students do not see or believe in this connection, often as a result of discrimination or a cultural mismatch between home and school (Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996). Students who are far below grade level have experienced frequent school failure; and the promise of a better career or college may not seem very plausible to them. All of the students I taught during this curriculum implementation, except one, said that they wanted to go to college. However, the goal of attending college in the future did not appear to change how much work they produced. Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, (1996) reported a similar lack of motivation for students in an unsuccessful college preparatory program for minority students.

Outside of the promise of college or a better job, the principal motivators used in schools are grades, moving to the next grade level, or threat of punishment such as detention. Deci (1995), however, writes that when individuals feel externally controlled, they are less motivated. He emphasizes that motivation that comes from within the learner leads to quality and dedication, while motivation based on external controls causes the student to focus only on what the individual perceives as the outcome desired by others. At best, the student gives you a product which reaches minimum standards (Deci, 1995). At worst, it leads to mediocre work and exhausted teachers.

Extrinsic motivation, motivation based on expectations outside of the individual, has a controlling effect (Deci, 1995) by giving all the power to the one who rewards or
punishes. When students are only motivated by extrinsic reward or punishment, their work is much lower in quality (Stipek & Seal, 2001). On the contrary, when they are intrinsically motivated, their work will be far superior in quality (Deci, 1995; Stipek & Seal, 2001). Students must see a purpose for what they are doing that is significant to them (Stipek & Seal, 2001). This sense of purpose can be derived from an assignment being fun, a desire to express themselves, or an interest in learning more about topics personally relevant to them (Stipek & Seal, 2001).

In addition to an assignment being relevant to the student, the student must feel that he can do it. A sense of competency is a basic need of all people, especially children (Deci, 1995; Stipek & Seal, 2001). When students do not feel competent, they will not be motivated and will display off-task or even rebellious behaviors (Stipek, 1998).

McLane (1990) emphasizes that writing must be something the child needs and perceives as relevant to his life. Students must be given choices and be allowed to express themselves and their interests in text. At the same time, they need to feel competent in writing or they will not have motivation to perform writing tasks (Deci, 1995; Stipek, 1998; Stipek & Seal, 2001). For ELLs, who struggle with both learning English and teachers’ low perceptions of their abilities, it is particularly essential to design curricula that develop students’ sense of their own competence.

**Scaffolding and Language**

Moll (1992) documents the lack of cognitive challenge in most classes for English language learners, a reality echoed by Cummins (1989). Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies the need for a culturally relevant curriculum which both builds skills and allows students to question cultural norms. For students to be motivated to study this curriculum, they
must have a sense of competence (Deci, 1995; Stipek, 1998; Stipek & Seal, 2001).

Considering all these issues, how do we make curriculum that is both challenging and accessible for students learning English?

Moll and Diaz (1987) demonstrated that through the use of scaffolding, students could learn and interact with challenging concepts beyond what their second language levels would first indicate. Their intervention was based on the work of Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1978), while working within their zone of proximal development (ZPD), students learn from instruction and guidance from an expert (Wertsch & Stone, 1985). The expert builds on what the student knows to teach what he does not know (Bayer, 1994). The student’s strengths, rather than his weaknesses are emphasized (Bayer, 1994; Yamauchi, 2005). As students’ knowledge and skill grow, their ZPD expands and they can handle increasingly difficult material. Moll (1989) concludes that effective teachers of working-class, Latino students, “[hold] in abeyance the higher order goals of the lesson while searching… for ways to support at the highest level the students’ performance” (p.62). In the intervention (mentioned earlier) by Moll and Diaz (1987), the researchers used students Spanish language skills as a scaffold for English reading and writing skill development.

**Semiotic Mediation**

Vygotsky used the term semiotic mediation to describe the process by which thought is mediated by signs symbols, in most cases language, in order for the learner to internalize ideas and concepts (Wertsch & Stone, 1985; Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002). According to Vygotsky, language is the principal means by which learners internalize cultural knowledge (Wertsch & Stone, 1985; Moll, 1989; Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002).
Depending heavily on language to internalize cultural knowledge can cause great problems for ELLs. Often, their language level is well below their cognitive level (Moll and Diaz, 1987; Moll, 1992; Jimenez, 2000). Instruction for these learners must include scaffolds which allow their cognitive skills to continue growing in the classroom setting and also aid them in expressing themselves so as to allow the interaction that leads to learning (Tharp & Gallimore, 1989).

The incorporation of students’ native language skills in learning activities has been effective in the past to build English skills (Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll, 1989; Jimenez, 2000). However, with the passing of Proposition 227 and the reduction or elimination of bilingual programs in many school districts, Spanish as a scaffold is no longer a sanctioned option for many teachers. Teachers and curriculum designers need to find new scaffolding strategies. While Vygotsky emphasized language as the principal means by which concepts are internalized, his definition of semiotic mediation includes other symbolic systems as well (Wertsch & Stone, 1985; Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002). Non-linguistic, symbolic ways of representing knowledge can help teachers to meet the needs of ELLs. Otherwise, these students will be relegated to classes that do not challenge, teach, or motivate.

*Not Just More of the Same*

Helping students who perform below grade level in language arts access the grade level curriculum is complicated. When the students are ELLs, designing curricula can be even more challenging. While instruction driven by standardized or publisher-created assessment is meant to help us evaluate learners’ individual needs and address them, it
often fails to motivate students and provide the instruction necessary for these students to succeed academically.

We need to look for new, innovative, and research-based ways to help learners to access challenging curriculum. The curriculum needs to be culturally relevant, valuing students’ home culture and utilizing their culture as an asset. It needs to build the students’ sense of competence, so that students will feel motivated and be more engaged with the curriculum in class. Finally, it needs to provide scaffolds, working within the learners’ ZPD and providing linguistic and non-linguistic supports for the students’ learning process.
Chapter IV
Review of Writing Curricula

Writing is an essential part of learning and serves a multitude of functions. Writing can be used for a variety of communicative, inquiry-based, and reflective purposes. Students use writing across the curriculum. They are also required to produce formal essays in response to California state standards and higher education requirements.

Different people have different definitions of what constitutes writing. In both the California state content standards (California Department of Education, 1997) and in everyday use, writing is the means of expressing meaning through print. However, in many classes for English language learners, writing instruction is reduced to grammar and spelling (Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll, 1992). In looking at curricula, I evaluate different approaches to helping students express meaning with an emphasis on persuasive writing. After reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of these methods, I propose a new curricular approach for helping English language learners (ELLs) handle the linguistic and cognitive demands present in the writing of persuasive essays.

**Writer’s Workshop**

Writer’s workshop is an approach to the teaching of writing which emphasizes process over product (Smith, 2000). Students are encouraged to express themselves and work through the process of drafting, revising, and editing, with opportunities to confer with teachers and students during the process. There is emphasis on writing as a craft, the expressive power of writing, and the role of feedback during the writing process. (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1989; Smith, 2000) Writer’s workshop exists in many forms
in many classrooms and many times what is called writer’s workshop may differ from this definition. For the sake of describing writer’s workshop, I will focus on the work of Atwell (1989), Graves (1989), and Calkins (1994). Their work is among the best known in this area and there is a good amount of consistency amongst these authors when talking about the essential elements of writer’s workshop.

In writer’s workshop, writing is an exploratory process whereby an author expresses meaning. The vital force of the student’s writing is his growing sense of his own voice (Graves, 1989). Graves writes that voice is an individual expression of oneself in speech or writing. It is the message that students want others to hear, and it relies on student choice and ownership of writing. Instead of an activity just to fulfill an assignment on a subject chosen by the teacher, writing is a discovery process in which students learn to make meaning and make that meaning understandable to others (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1989).

People dedicated to following a writer’s workshop approach advocate instruction based on a reading-writing continuum with reading experiences providing a basis for writing (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1989). For ELLs, reading is especially important as it provides a model of expressive language (Krashen, 2004). Writer’s workshop places a stress on meaning, emphasizing that writing is not just about the basics of grammar, spelling, and syntax, but that writing is about the writer expressing himself. Grammar, spelling, syntax, and essay structure are not ignored, but are seen within the context of making the writing more comprehensible to others. Lastly, writer’s workshop relies on individual and group conferences in which the teacher or peers help the writer to improve his writing (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1989).
Deci (1995) argues that choice and feelings of self-efficacy are motivating for students. Centering on meaning and what the writer has to say in writer’s workshop is motivating for many students in that it fosters choice and feelings of self-efficacy. Writer’s workshop develops these feeling of self-efficacy by centering on the writer and making him feel more confident in his own ability.

Because voice is the driving force in student composing and revision (Graves, 1989), effective writing instruction must develop student voice. In writing conferences, the writer naturally develops his own voice through the experience of expressing himself to others and being listened to (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1989). The responses of classmates or the teacher show him that he does have something to say and that others are hearing it. He is in control of his own writing and of the revision process.

**Problems in Implementation of Writer’s Workshop**

Delpit (1996) argues that writing process methods used in writer’s workshop do not meet the learning needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. In addition, she argues that some students learning styles are not compatible with the open-ended structure of writer’s workshops. Cultures differ greatly in their understanding of adult-child and child-child interactions (Delpit, 1996). For students accustomed to a very structured classroom, the openness of writer’s workshop and activities such as peer revision may seem very foreign.

While writer’s workshop has many advantages and is well-grounded in research, it can be very difficult to implement. I remember reading Atwell, Calkins, and Graves during teacher training and being enthralled with their descriptions of how the workshops
functioned. When I tried to apply the workshop to my classroom, things were different. After several years of struggling to apply writer’s workshop to my classroom context, I have discovered the following difficulties.

Johnson (1989) argues an opposing view. She found that when ELL students worked with peer teachers, their interactions in their second language were richer than in whole class activities with the teacher as leader. Johnson (1989) argues that the learner’s sense of control in his language-learning process led to more authentic language use. Truly effective writer’s workshop activities need to take into account the different cultural views of authority as described by Delpit (1996) while taking advantage of the benefits of peer interaction and the student’s sense of control of his own learning process.

In my personal experience, many ELLs do not have the English skills necessary to help their peers revise their writing in the peer revision groups that are part of writer’s workshop. Many of them are struggling with their own composition and cannot express what they are trying to say or describe to others the revisions that must be made. When my students do help each other to write, their comments almost always center on punctuation and spelling. For ELLs, peer revision has to be used on a limited basis and be highly structured, with teachers slowly modeling the process.

To attain the benefits of peer interaction that writer’s need and at the same time overcome some of the difficulty in writer’s workshop faced by ELLs, some researchers argue for increased scaffolding for ELLs. Yedlin (2003) and Carrasquillo, Kuser, and Abrams (2004), advocate intensive teacher modeling in which teachers take ELLs step-by-step through the writing process, explaining their thinking process at each stage. Carrasquillo, Kuser, and Abrams (2004) found that as the students develop their skills,
effective teachers of ELLs allow the students to become increasingly independent in their writing process. ELLs need more guidance and direct instruction to handle the task of writing persuasive essays than do students who are fluent in English. Writer’s workshop can be effective for these students, but as part of a process that is much more structured than the one used by fluent English speakers.

For students such as the ones I describe here, writing in English is often not motivating. Instead, it may be a chore with many negative associations. When students are not motivated, classroom control often becomes an issue. A teacher cannot hold individual writing conferences because students left alone will be off-task and misbehave. Writing groups will not revise or will only make cursory revisions due to lack of any internal desire to improve their writing or that of others. Deci (1995) describes that individuals who are only motivated by reward or threat, grades and punishment in schools, will do the very minimum required. Writing conferences with unmotivated students will not produce the revisions and growth described by writer’s workshop advocates (Atwell, 1989; Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1989).

A final issue in the implementation of writer’s workshop involves students’ previous experience with writing in school. Many ELLs have been taught a curriculum which centers on writing conventions such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuations instead of higher level cognitive skills (Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll, 1992). They do not know what good writing is due to the lack of exposure to quality writing which is essential for their development as writers in a second language (Krashen, 2004).

In middle school, this lack of exposure is pronounced as many writing tasks are very complex. Most writing textbooks include one or more samples per genre to give
students background. However, this raises two questions for teachers. How many reading samples must a child see to have even a basic understanding of a genre? What texts can serve as models for the difficult genres middle school students encounter if these students read at the fourth grade level?

Despite these limitations, writer’s workshop can be very valuable for ELLs especially if it is structured, carefully scaffolded, and includes modeling of the writing process (Yedlin, 2003; Carasquillo, Kuser, and Abrams, 2004). In its design, it is student-centered and concentrates on writing as a means of expressing oneself. Writer’s workshop places skills instruction in context and works on developing higher-order thinking skills. Instead of throwing out writer’s workshop, as many of my colleagues have done, I believe that we need to modify it and draw on its strengths.

**California’s State-Adopted Curriculum**

In the wake of NCLB and the standards movement, textbooks are a driving force in the design of curriculum. Textbook publishers have long had great influence in what is taught (Kirst, 1985), but recent changes have increased their influence. School districts use the majority of their curriculum funds to purchase state-adopted programs. The programs usually consist of a textbook and related materials such as workbooks, teacher overheads, cassettes or CDs, and videos. To be state adopted, a textbook series is evaluated to determine if it addresses the state standards in each curricular area. Low-performing schools (schools which have not met improvement goals based on state testing) risk economic sanctions and possible state takeover. These schools are closely audited and the daily use of the textbook is one means administrators use to show that they are taking steps to improve student learning. Program improvement grants for
underperforming schools such as my own require a section describing how the textbook is used daily for instruction. Teachers may use curriculum outside of the textbook series as long as it is standards-based and they can show it as an extension of text. However, there is much pressure not to do so.

In my school, teachers use one of two texts: Holt’s *Literature and Language Arts* (2003) or Hampton Brown’s *High Point* (2000). My students have been assigned to *High Point* level B (the series has four levels which cover the kindergarten through sixth grade standards), which is written at approximately a fourth grade level. I am allowed to use Holt’s *Literature and Language Arts* (2003) as a supplement, with teacher support to make it accessible.

*High Point*

The *High Point* text contains five writing genres, or styles, but our school has decided to focus on two: response to literature and persuasion. Teachers based this choice on what students need for CST writing tests administered in seventh grade and their eventual high school writing sample. Therefore, we wanted not only to prepare the seventh graders for the CST example, but also to prepare our eighth graders for the future writing sample. The writing genre tested for each of these exams changes from year to year but is usually a response to literature or persuasion.

In the *High Point* curriculum, the essay writing activity comes at the end of each unit. Based on the concept that reading supports writing, especially for ELLs (Krashen, 2004), *High Point* includes an example of each genre in the reading section of the unit. For example, unit one of *High Point* B asks students to write a fantasy story at the end of
the unit. One of the stories the students read before doing this writing assignment is a fantasy story.

The assignment in which students learn persuasive writing presupposes that students have already read the persuasive pieces in the corresponding unit. Therefore, based on the book’s design, the writing should be an outgrowth of previous experience with this genre. Unfortunately, there is only one persuasive piece in the unit and none anywhere else in the book. It is a persuasive letter in a thematic selection about the Everglades. Although this example of persuasive writing is meant to help the students by providing an example of persuasive writing, the example is not clear to students. The letter appears out-of-place in a section that includes diagrams of dams, an expository piece on the problems of the Everglades, and a series of poems. Many students do not make the connection between the letter and the essay assignment at the end of the unit due to the difference in structure between a letter and an essay.

Furthermore, the letter is written at an elevated level. While other reading selections in *High Point* are written with controlled vocabulary and with a structure specific to what is being taught (such as problem-solution, goal-outcome, etc.), the letter is taken word for word from a Florida newspaper. The vocabulary is that of a knowledgeable adult and is inaccessible to students with limited vocabularies. When asked to find the opinion expressed by the author, most of my students could not understand the text itself and did not realize that the letter even stated an opinion.

The writing activity that appears at the end of the unit contains an example of a persuasive essay written to fellow students about ending play-fighting. It is a five-paragraph essay with an introduction, three reasons (for ending play-fighting) with
support, and a conclusion. The section provides some scaffolding on developing reasons and support through instruction and graphic organizers. However, the amount of guidance given to students is limited and the concept of what constitutes an argument and what constitutes support is not developed. Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde (2005) state that effective writing teachers allow students to plan and brainstorm in multiple ways including sketching, but *High Point* presents only a single graphic organizer to be used by all students to plan their essays.

Persuasive writing has great potential to give students a voice. By giving their own opinions (Mitra, 2006), students are allowed to express their identities. Likewise, by reflecting on their own realities (Trueba, 1987), students see their reality validated. Instead of it being a construct that acts upon them, their reality becomes something that can be transformed (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The school becomes a place of validation (Trueba, 1987; Moll & Diaz, 1987) instead of limitation. Adolescents by nature have opinions about many issues which concern them. Identity-searching and rebelliousness are integral parts of this process (Fenwick, 1987). Being able to persuade others of their opinions becomes a powerful means of motivation.

However, the student essay provided by *High Point* for the purposes of instruction is inauthentic for my students. The concept of a student writing an article to convince others not to play-fight does not fit into the way they would communicate about such topics. Some of my students’ reactions are similar to how many youth would view this assignment; they made comments such as: “Who writes an essay to convince others not to fight?” and “Kids don’t do that.” The essay does not challenge anyone’s perspective except that of a student who might want to play-fight. Instead of being an example of
how they can convince the adult world of their opinions, they are given an essay that would be more appropriate if written by an adult to try to convince them. Play-fighting is prohibited at our school (and I believe it is at most schools) and is not an issue students talk a lot about. Instead of being a student model, this essay appears to be an example of an adult trying to write like a young person.

**Holt Literature and Language Arts**

Students also have access to the adopted Holt literature series, *Literature and Language Arts* (2003). Persuasive essay is treated here in a way that is much more authentic. The professional model is an article from *Newsday* written by a parent about uniforms. Uniforms were a hot issue for students at our school. In fact, free dress coupons (tickets given by the principal which allowed them to wear whatever they want for one day) were so valued that sometimes students bought them from other students. The arguments in the sample essay are authentic, controversial, and leave room open for discussion.

The parent author raises issues that are typically discussed by students such as individuality and personal rights. Notes in the text are provided to lead students to finding opinions, support, and facts. The students are asked to evaluate her argument, giving them the opportunity to express their own opinions.

The pre-writing takes into consideration student voice and motivation. It asks the student to choose an issue, decide if it is debatable, and if he has strong opinions about it. The student is only to write about an issue important to him. The students are asked to identify their audience and to see who would be interested in their issue, implying that they have a voice that should be heard. However, for students not used to being able to
express themselves in school, this fact alone might not be enough to help them generate their opinions without guidance.

There are some problems for students using the Holt curriculum. First, the pre-writing exercise presupposes that students can identify which issues are debatable. The ability to anticipate opposing points of view is assumed to be prior knowledge, but anticipating opposing points of view is a high level intellectual skill that many adolescents (both ELLs and native speakers) do not have by eighth grade. For many ELLs, justifying their own ideas is difficult enough, without anticipating someone else’s. This is especially true for students who are not used to their opinions being listened to and valued. Without additional curricular interventions, many students would struggle with this activity.

To make learning more accessible, various graphic organizers are used. Symbolic representations can serve the same function as language (Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002) and benefit students with different learning styles (Gardner, 2004; Eisner, 2004). However, graphic organizers are not enough to make the curriculum accessible to ELLs. The sample essay and explanations are very language-rich with an advanced vocabulary. Struggling readers and ELLs would have a hard time accessing this curriculum. Students need material which is engaging, motivating, and accessible to them. Especially for low readers and ELLs, the large amount of difficult text in Holt is inaccessible and, as a consequence, overwhelming. These texts become foreign and just another task that they do not comprehend and cannot do.
Another Way

For many students like mine, art is a motivator. I have arrived at this conclusion during my years of teaching both from observing students doodling when they are off-task (often creating high quality art) and from their increased enthusiasm with assignments in which I have allowed them to use art.

Art also provides a bridge to understanding and constitutes a text-like structure that feels less overwhelming to many students. According to Hinning and Rankin-Erickson (2003) art makes text more comprehensible through the reading of images independent of text and language, and by providing clues for comprehension. Hinning and Rankin-Erickson’s description ties to Vygotsky’s (1978) description of semiotic mediation, a system of signs and symbols through which learners internalize concepts (Wertsch & Stone, 1985; Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002). While Vygotsky emphasized language, he noted, like Hinning and Rankin-Erickson that images could also serve as a form of semiotic mediation similar in function to language (Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002). What would happen if I allowed students to use art to learn persuasion, by “reading” persuasive images and using them to learn to write persuasively?

The use of art to learn persuasion would help learners who are more visual or artistic, or whose language skills do not match their visual skills (Eisner, 2004). Even for students who are not artistic, the use of the signs and symbols in carefully chosen artwork provides these students a form of semiotic mediation with which to engage in higher-order thinking skills. In the same way that Moll and Diaz (1987) used Spanish as a scaffold to build students literacy skills in English, art is a scaffold to build students’ writing skills.
In this curriculum, *I Have Something to Say*, I used Mexican murals to provide examples of persuasion and argumentation in a non-verbal form. The use of murals as texts served as a substitute for written text, giving my students the literary experiences called for by writing workshop. Likewise, using their own images to compose their writing provided a bridge to creating their own essays.

The murals provided a model for students to develop their own sense of voice. The voices of the artists presented in this curriculum—Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siquieros, and Jose Clemente Orozco—are distinct and create an expression of each one’s unique world view (Rochfort, 1998). As the students study the works of each artist, they see the author’s voice clearly modeled.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally relevant curriculum must increase students’ cultural competence and allow them to develop their critical consciousness. For most of my students, the murals are culturally relevant, both in increasing their knowledge of their own Mexican culture and building critical consciousness through questioning established norms. For non-Mexican students, the murals still provide the opportunity to investigate non-mainstream views. With the help of art in the composing process, students are not limited in their expression by their lack of knowledge of English. Instead, they can experience the vitality and sense of self experienced in the writing workshop.

Many elements of writer’s workshop were included during implementation of *I Have Something to Say*, utilizing images as a form of semiotic mediation to scaffold instruction. The curriculum focused on the elements of persuasive essays covered in Holt and *High Point*, but it did not use *High Point*. (I did use Holt as a point of reference in
order to comply with state and district regulations). The *I Have Something to Say* curriculum covered the standards that Holt and *High Point* cover, but with a very different methodology designed for English language learners.
Chapter V

*I Have Something To Say: A New Approach*

One day in the lunch room another teacher and I were having a discussion about what different classrooms are like. I had covered his honors Algebra class, a class very different from my class of below grade-level students. I was saying how I enjoyed his class, although there were a few students who liked to talk a lot. He responded, “The students in the honors classes are like that. They talk more in class than the kids in the low classes. But then again, they have more to say. The kids in low classes don’t have much to talk about.”

His words hit me hard, although I said nothing. I thought more about the curriculum I was designing for use with my students. I realized more than ever that I needed to give my students a voice. I knew that they had something to say, a lot to say, but lacked the tools to know how to say it. I thought about their motivation. How many times had they already been treated like someone with nothing to contribute? My curriculum had to address these issues. From this base came the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum for persuasive writing.

*Intended Audience*

*I Have Something to Say* addresses the needs of middle school students who are English language learners (ELLs) or struggling readers. To succeed with this program, students need to be at least early intermediate English speakers (in California, these are students with a 2 or above on the CELDT test) and at third grade level or above in
As it is written, *I Have Something to Say* provides a culturally relevant curriculum for students of Mexican origin and Mexican-American students. However, teachers could modify it to fit the cultural backgrounds of their own students.

English language learners have cognitive and academic skills that traditional English curricula may not let them demonstrate. Moll and Diaz (1987) as well as Jimenez (2000) found that students who performed low in English demonstrated much higher ability than teachers expected of them when allowed to use their native language. California law, Proposition 227, does not allow the use of native language instruction without waivers signed by parents. My district, like many others in California, greatly restricts the use of native language instruction. At the middle school level, only newcomers and beginning-level students are given Spanish language instruction or support.

*I Have Something to Say* uses art, in a way similar to the way Moll and Diaz (1987) used native language, as a form of semiotic mediation. Vygotsky’s social learning theory describes semiotic mediation as the means by which concepts are internalized. Thought is mediated through the use of signs and symbols, especially language, and reciprocally, thought helps to develop language (Wink & Putney, 2002). While Vygotsky focused on language as a form of semiotic mediation, he also recognized the role of other types of cultural symbols performing the same functions as language (Werstch & Stone, 1985; Wertsch & Tulviste, 2002).

*I Have Something to Say* applies this concept to the teaching of students at the early to intermediate stage of English language development. Students who are still acquiring academic English use images from art as they would use written text in order to
comprehend the content of the lessons and to develop academic concepts. In turn, as they talk about those concepts in groups, they develop their language (Johnson, 1989).

Struggling readers receive the same benefit. They use the artwork as readable text with which they learn complex content.

The *I Have Something to Say* curriculum addresses the California content standards for writing persuasive essays. The standards are the basis of instruction and the terms used in the standards are taught as academic vocabulary.

California content standards for eighth grade state that students will write persuasive essays with the following characteristics:

1. A well-defined thesis
2. Detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning to support arguments
3. Differentiation of facts and statistics
4. Anticipation of reader concerns and arguments (audience)

(California State Content Standards in Language Arts, Writing 2.4, 1997)

For students who would not normally have access to curricula addressing these standards due to language and reading issues, this curriculum provides the opportunity to receive instruction which teaches these standards in a way that they can comprehend. Through the use of art as text, students learn each of the elements of persuasive essays listed above. Students learn to synthesize these elements and apply them to their writing.

**Methodology**

The center of the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum is the use of art as text. For this curriculum, I chose Mexican murals. While other forms of art such as political cartoons or journalistic photos could also work for this curriculum, Mexican murals have
special advantages for the study of persuasive essays. Rochfort (1998) describes Mexican murals as literate texts which in many ways closely resemble written texts. Carlos Rojas (personal communication), curator of Baja California’s Museo de las Americas, described murals original role in Mexican culture: “Mexican murals, in fact, were originally the way of creating intellectual dialogue with a non-literate people.”

Murals provide a means that is on the surface non-linguistic but in reality uses images to achieve linguistic purposes (Rochfort, 1998). According to Rochfort (1998), the Mexican muralist movement of the 1920s and 1930s proposed to create a public discourse on national identity. In addition, muralists like Diego Rivera created their own popular vocabulary to extend beyond the literate world of the wealthy. They sought to convey a message and were meant to be read by all (Rochfort, 1998). For students with limited English vocabularies or reading abilities, these murals provide a symbolic means of accessing difficult content.

Another advantage of the use of murals for teaching students to write essays is that murals have a predictable format. They revolve around a central image with related details around it (Rochfort, 1998). The predictable structure of Mexican murals allows students to “read” the murals easily and helps them to understand the concepts of a central thesis and supporting arguments or details. Understanding these concepts is essential for writing persuasive essays.

I Have Something to Say takes a step-by-step approach to reach mastery of the California content standards. At the very beginning of the curriculum, the students are presented with simpler tasks which involve looking at pictures and finding the thesis or supporting arguments. The answers are single sentences which students write in graphic
organizers. Later lessons build on the beginning ones, involving more difficult concepts such as anticipating reader concerns.

The elements of persuasive essays are taught both as concepts and as academic vocabulary. For example, the student learns the word *thesis* and also creates thesis sentences. Since each lesson builds on the previous one, vocabulary is recycled to reinforce learning.

As the curriculum progresses, the students perform more complicated writing assignments, moving from writing of sentences to construction of paragraphs and multi-paragraph essays. At the beginning stages, students work together in groups to learn the academic vocabulary and apply it to the writing of sentences. In the essay writing stage, students begin by working with the teacher who models the process of writing introductions and body paragraphs using student responses. The teacher models the writing by verbalizing the thought process and guides the students through the mental process of creating essays. Later, students write their own essays with pre-writing exercises that help them to verbalize their own thought processes.

There are many opportunities for students to work in collaboration. The students work together to derive meaning from the murals and analyze them as persuasive text. In collaborative groups, students articulate and refine their thought processes as well as practice academic vocabulary. At the end of the curriculum, students work independently to create their own essays, although they still have opportunities to collaborate with others during the writing process. The final project is the writing of a multi-paragraph persuasive essay with the help of a student-created persuasive poster. The students use a computer to create a poster with images and text to convey their point of view and
arguments about an issue they choose. The creation of the poster allows students to synthesize what they learned and create their own visual texts. Finally, the students use their posters as pre-writing exercises to guide the writing of their own essays.

**Goals of the I Have Something To Say Curriculum**

The *I Have Something to Say* curriculum is designed to systematically and progressively fulfill three instructional goals. First, student engagement with writing tasks increases. Second, each student develops an individual voice in writing. Finally, students write persuasive essays greater in quality and quantity.

**Goal 1: Student engagement increases**

*I Have Something to Say* is designed to build student engagement. For struggling students, the use of art is motivational for many reasons. For English language learners and struggling readers, a work of art is less intimidating than a difficult text. Secondly, a work of art has multiple interpretations, leaving room for discussion about its meaning. The fact that murals have multiple interpretations facilitates group work and reduces the probability of some students dominating or others feeling intimidated as can happen when students are given a task in which there is just one correct answer (Cohen, 1994). For many students, group work is a strong motivator as it meets both intellectual and social needs (Glasser, 1989; Cohen, 1994). If students are more motivated, they will be more engaged with the material and learn better. Group work is also more consistent with the interactive and learning style of many students from non-mainstream, non-middle class cultures (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 2005).

The fear of negative consequences has detrimental effects on motivation in students (Deci, 1995; Stipek, 1998). Writing for many students is filled with anxiety and
the fear of “getting it wrong.” Many of the students for whom this curriculum is intended have already failed writing tests and courses. Others may simply feel that they are bad writers. *I Have Something to Say* is designed to build student competence through a step-by-step approach. The earliest assignments are basic and allow students early success. Through participation in groups, students can work out their ideas with two or three students rather than in front of the whole class. By building their sense of competence, *I Have Something to Say* seeks to increase students’ engagement.

For many Mexican and Mexican-American students, the use of murals makes the curriculum culturally relevant. While I chose murals for their value as persuasive text, they are in fact part of a Mexican cultural tradition of dialogue through art. They both chronicle Mexican history and comment on issues relevant to Mexico (Rochfort, 1998). I used Rochfort’s book to provide the historical background which students needed in order to understand the content of the murals.

While the students may not know many of the subjects such as the Mexican Revolution or the presidency of Porfirio Diaz, many of the symbols used in the art are cultural symbols which have become known to them. In fact, while piloting the curriculum with a class of students, a very interesting event occurred. The students were looking at one of the murals. One of the only non-Mexicans in my two classes, a Chinese student who lived in Mexico for several years, told another student, “That Mexican lady with the corn is a symbol of the field workers. You’re Mexican. You should know that.”

Even for students who do not know these symbols, and for those who do not know Mexican history, the art motivates by allowing them to learn more of their history and culture and to discuss issues relevant to them such as poverty and injustice. Poverty
and injustice are issues that they face every day and that have direct consequences in their lives. For many Mexican-born and Mexican-American students, the acknowledgement of the value of their culture and the discussion of issues that directly affect them gives them a feeling of ownership of the curriculum. As owners of their curriculum, they become engaged in it.

**Goal 2: Each student develops an individual voice in writing**

Graves (1989) defines voice as the individual expression of oneself in speech or writing. For Graves, it is the motivating force and energy behind the writing act. It is the message that the students wish another to hear and comprehend. For students to write authentic, quality essays, they must have choice of what to write about and claim ownership of the process (Graves, 1989). Edelsky (1989) writes:

> If the children do not take the assignment and make it their own, if their purpose remains to fulfill the assignment rather than to invite or inform or entertain or some purpose reasonably tied to that particular genre if the assignment prevents the audience and purpose from being compatible— in other words, if the connections between systems are cut off, then what is happening is a simulation of writing and not writing (p.169).

Ladson-Billings (1995), in writing about culturally relevant pedagogy, argues that students must be given the opportunity to view critically what they are taught and to question established norms. This is another aspect of voice, a true expression of a student's views and culture. Moll and Diaz (1987) found in a class of reluctant writers that when students were given the opportunity to write about what they found significant for an audience that was relevant to them, they wrote more and with higher quality. As the students discovered their voices through ownership of their writing, they were motivated to express themselves and their interests in writing.
This curriculum builds student voice through exposure to art which was created as part of a dialogue on social issues (Rochfort, 1998). The three muralists studied—Siquieros, Rivera, and Orozco—were all critical observers of the status quo. While students may not understand all the issues addressed by the artists, many of the issues discussed by these artists are still relevant today. These artists each have their very own distinct voice and provide a model for students of authentic self-expression.

Moll and Diaz (1987) and Jimenez (2000) describe how English language learners face difficulties expressing themselves and their identity. For many of my students, their voice is in Spanish. It is their native and dominant language and often they do not have the words in English to express exactly what they want to say.

In the Disney movie The Little Mermaid, Ariel gives up her voice to come on land. She is unable to express herself, her thoughts and feelings, to others. Many English language learners struggle in the same way, having lost the use of their native language in school. They often express their frustration through misbehavior or lack of work. I Have Something to Say allows them to use art to express their ideas, to give them a voice. In the final project, they use images to fully express what they wish to say about the issue they have chosen. It is a chance for them, in the school setting, to be heard.

**Goal 3: Students write essays greater in quantity and quality than they could before engaging in the curriculum**

Increased engagement and an increased sense of voice will lead students to produce better essays through improved focus and motivation and by removing limits that result from their difficulties with English. As students spend more time engaged with writing tasks and receive the teacher-guidance that they need, their writing will improve.
The task of writing a persuasive essay is challenging for any student, but especially for students who are ELLs or struggling readers. The limits in these students’ English language skills make it difficult for them to produce developed, well-organized essays. Their essays tend to be short and not very clear. Many write summaries instead of persuasive essays with thesis and support.

Through the use of art as a means of communication, *I Have Something to Say* allows students to generate the language necessary to create persuasive essays. By analyzing the art as text, students learn the elements of persuasive essays. Using pictures chosen by the students together with simple sentences to create persuasive posters, students apply these elements to create their own persuasive work. Finally they use the art, their persuasive poster, and knowledge of the format of persuasive essays to expand on their ideas and create their own essays.

The works of art also serve as models of quality argumentation. Students see works that have become classics of art due to their quality of composition. As they see different works, students learn both argumentation and ways to evaluate the work of others. Using this knowledge, they are better equipped to write quality essays.

**Conclusion**

*I Have Something to Say* is a writing curriculum, designed for early intermediate to intermediate ELLs and struggling readers, that uses art as a way to teach the elements of persuasive essays. While designed for ELLs, even fluent English speakers could use it successfully. Students participate in both group work and individual tasks. The curriculum motivates students through the use of culturally relevant materials and a step-by-step approach that allows students to achieve early success from the beginning of the
implementation. Towards the end of the curriculum, students also use art to communicate their own ideas. After learning from the texts of Mexican artists, students become creators of their own texts, discovering their own distinct voice. Their sense of competence and voice increases their motivation and leads to increased engagement in the writing tasks. The final result of this learning process is the writing of essays that are improved in quantity and quality.
Chapter VI
Implementation of *I Have Something To Say*

This curriculum, *I Have Something to Say*, was implemented during a four week period in an eighth grade reading intervention class at Borderview Middle School. The reading intervention class is for students who read at approximately a fourth or fifth grade level. This level is determined by two tests. First, the California Standards Test (CST) classifies students at one of five levels in reading: advanced, proficient, basic, below basic, and far below basic. Those students who are below basic or far below basic are given a second test, the *High Point* Diagnostic Test (Hampton Brown, 2000). This test places them at their appropriate instructional level in the *High Point* program. Each instructional level has its own set of books, classified from Basics to Level C. According to the publisher, each text correlates to the student’s tested reading level. For example, the Basics Level is for students at a kindergarten-third grade reading level and Level A is for a third-fourth grade reading level. Table 1 shows the correlation between book title and student reading level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basics</th>
<th>Level A</th>
<th>Level B</th>
<th>Level C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K-3rd grade reading level</td>
<td>3rd to 4th grade reading level</td>
<td>4th to 5th grade reading level</td>
<td>5th to 6th grade reading level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Instructional level in *High Point* and reading level in language arts
I was assigned two “blocks” of High Point B, each being a two-hour language arts period with half that time dedicated to reading and half to writing. The placement test is a diagnostic test of phonics, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. Due to time constraints, we do not give the writing test. Therefore, the reading level also determines a student’s writing placement.

Students in my High Point B class should all have scored at a fourth or fifth grade level on the placement test. However, many students who scored lower than a fourth grade level were also placed with me due to scheduling and class size issues. I taught two blocks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. My morning group was more appropriately placed than the afternoon group in the High Point B program. My afternoon students struggled with the High Point program, even with the beginning lessons which are meant to review the previous level of the program, meaning that many of them performed at a third-fourth grade level in language arts. A few were even lower than that and awaiting testing for learning disabilities.

This second group also had more behavior problems than the first group. In general, students in our middle school have poorer behavior in the afternoon, but several of the students in this class had a history of discipline problems in school. Both of these classes were predominantly male, approximately 70% for each class. The afternoon class was originally 80% male, but five boys were later qualified for special education and one was moved to a behavior modification class. For this reason, I did not complete implementation of this curriculum with these students although they were present for part of the implementation and the pilot. Some of their experiences and comments are
included in the description of the implementation but I could not use them for final analysis of the effects of the implementation.

The majority of my students, over 90%, were designated English language learners by the school district language assessment center. This designation was based on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), district writing exams, and teacher evaluations from the previous year. While all but one of my students could speak English at a communicative level, the majority were at the intermediate level (CELDT level 3), meaning that they still had limited academic vocabulary and difficulties in English reading and writing skills.

The language arts block consisted of fifty minutes of instructional time for reading and fifty minutes for writing. For five weeks before this implementation, I taught only reading. This allowed me to use almost all of this block for the writing curriculum without falling behind on the district language arts pacing chart.

With the challenge of teaching eighth grade standards in writing to students at a third-fifth grade level, I designed and implemented the I Have Something to Say writing curriculum. I began with a brief pilot to test the feasibility of the curriculum. I also briefly used the High Point program so as to have a point of comparison. As the curriculum implementation progressed, I made adjustments based on the needs and progress of the students.

Piloting and Early Stages

The I Have Something to Say curriculum was designed to progress in difficulty through four stages. In the first stage, the students analyze murals and identify different persuasive elements used by the artists. For each element, they learn appropriate
academic language. In the next stage, the students write paragraphs to put the murals message into words, as they have interpreted it. In the third stage, students write essays based on murals with teacher guidance. Finally, students create their own persuasive posters, using pictures and short sentences to create a pre-write, or plan, for their own persuasive essays. Then, they use their poster to write the essay.

From the beginning of instruction, I made a key pedagogical assumption: knowing how to write within a genre required reading quality texts in that genre. For most of my students, reading persuasive text is very difficult. Instead of learning the elements of persuasion, many struggle with phonetic issues or understanding of vocabulary in the text. As stated in chapter five, the design of I Have Something to Say is based on the idea that murals could be read as text.

I tested the idea that murals could be read as text in the pilot. First, I used the curriculum as written in the High Point program. I used one of the two persuasive texts, a letter about the Florida Everglades and the need to protect them. The students had learned about the Everglades from a text that included visuals and diagrams, so they had some background knowledge. However, the students could not read the letter, identify any of the arguments in it, or even identify what the article was about. I went over the text sentence by sentence and many still did not understand. Both vocabulary and the rhetorical structure of the letter confused students. I had to constantly redirect students from off-task behavior and there were no signs of engagement, even among the highest-achieving students.

Later, I used a mural by Diego Rivera titled The Mechanization of Mexico
to do a similar activity. *High Point* B uses Rivera’s mural in unit one of the textbook, so each student had his own copy of the mural. I presented to the students a three-minute orientation about the mural and assigned them the task of finding Rivera’s opinion about the mechanization of Mexico and the arguments he uses to support his opinion in the mural. They had to take notes in a chart in which they wrote a sentence about his thesis and supporting arguments (originally, I used the word reasons instead of arguments, using this term later). Student participation in this activity proved to be very different than it was with the persuasive letter about the Everglades. They worked actively. They kept their eyes on the text, the mural, and each individual participated orally. I did not need to discipline or redirect student attention, and the students finished the task in 35 minutes. All of their papers showed notes about a central argument, or thesis, and evidence. The students, when not held down by language issues in understanding text, could generate language about complicated material. This exercise seemed to confirm the design of the curriculum.

I designed this curriculum to progress through steps to the point where students could write their own persuasive essays. I did not assume that students had any prior knowledge about murals or Mexican history. My only assumption was that students had strong opinions that they could learn to express given the correct tools. The *I Have Something to Say* curriculum used art as a form of semiotic mediation. As stated in chapter five, semiotic mediation refers to the idea that the internalization of concepts is mediated through the use of signs and symbols, especially language, and that internalized thought then helps to develop language (Wink & Putney, 2002) Through the analysis of each mural and the meaning of its images, students learned essential concepts about
opinions, argumentation, and support. They also learned academic vocabulary to accompany each concept, such as: *thesis, reasons, evidence, argument, and counter-argument*. Therefore, each concept had both image and language as a means of teaching the concept to the student. As students talked about the images in groups and wrote the artists’ thesis, supporting arguments, and counter-arguments, they were acquiring these difficult concepts through symbolic means and building their academic vocabulary. Throughout the unit, I observed students using terms such as *thesis*, *reason*, and *counter-argument* and pointing to the pictures to talk about their ideas. I also discovered that when they had trouble remembering a previously learned concept, showing them the image we used to learn the concept brought responses which indicated recall.

**Learning to Write Sentences and Paragraphs**

To begin the process of learning the elements of persuasive essays, I wrote out the California content standards for eighth grade persuasive essay writing on the board. I asked students to select key words and we created a list. I explained that we would be learning a new word each day. During the entire implementation, I emphasized the teaching of academic vocabulary. The words that I emphasized in my teaching were not only essential academic vocabulary but also key concepts for the writing of persuasive essays. With each class, I highlighted terms they would be learning at the beginning and end of class.

The first lesson revolved around the concept of thesis. I gave each group of three to four students a paper with pictures made by middle and high school students from the San Diego Museum of Art website (sdmart.org). They needed to derive the message of each of the six pictures and the reason for the artist’s opinion embedded in the picture.
Then I distributed one-sentence statements written by the artists explaining their opinions. Students analyzed and modified their ideas and produced one or two sentences about each picture and statement. In the last minutes of class they shared their responses and I reviewed the thesis concept using the pictures. I chose this lesson at the beginning because of the important role of a thesis in producing an essay.

The students worked in groups and immediately I saw engagement. A few students worked by themselves, and since it was the beginning of the unit, I allowed them to do so. Most worked in groups and their conversations centered around the pictures and expressing the artist’s thesis in words. The students were able to find the principal ideas and a reason for each idea. At the end of the class, I distributed note cards and instructed them to answer two questions: “What did you learn today?” and “What did you like, or dislike, about today’s lessons?” The filling out of these note cards (which I called exit slips because students had to turn them in before leaving class) occurred at the end of each two-hour instructional block. Reviewing my notes of their class discussions and their exit slips, I determined that they had understood the lesson.

The experiences of two students were especially positive. Horacio is a student who is usually quiet and was recommended for testing for special education. Before implementation of this curriculum, he was rarely engaged in class work and almost never turned in homework. From conferences with his mother, I learned that Horacio had twice repeated a grade and had been in trouble with the law. Almost immediately during the project, I saw his involvement. He organized his team telling them, “Come on guys. Let’s find the thesis.” Many researchers have stated the importance of building on the student’s background knowledge (Trueba, 1987; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Moll & Greenberg, 1990;
Bayer, 1994). However, I was quite surprised when I saw the importance of background knowledge applied by Horacio in viewing a picture of a person in jail that many students struggled to figure out the meaning of. “He’s in jail. I know about that,” he emphasized, and then looked at me and said, “That’s something I don’t want to do again.”

Rafael is a hard-working student who has great difficulty with reading and writing. Many times during the year, I needed to repeat explanations of concepts two or three times to him individually and even then he often did not understand. He could pass third grade level reading tests. He was often passive and quiet in the room. In this lesson, he was unusually animated. He spoke regularly, giving his ideas to the group. His interpretations of the pictures were based on the images and were insightful. His answers to my questioning indicated that he understood the concept of thesis. During history class later in the day, Rafael asked me with a smile, “Can we do that again?” It was the first time I had seen him smile when talking about school work.

My experience with the afternoon group was very different. Many were off-task and talking. Some gave illogical answers just to fill spaces. Others complained “I don’t get it,” but only looked at the pictures for a minute. Julio’s response seemed to express what many felt: “This is bad art. I could do much better.”

For the next week, I presented the students with a different mural every day. The mural was distributed as a handout, one per group of students. They needed to find the thesis and arguments. It was a process done in groups with teacher guidance as necessary. Each class ended with students sharing their answers in class discussion. I wrote student answers on the board and highlighted the concept presented. For example, if the concept presented was supporting argument, I underlined the supporting arguments and repeated
the term. There was no one correct answer for any mural, but sometimes I asked students to justify their responses with references to the images in the mural. In the discussions, I saw the students capturing the concepts of thesis and arguments.

The first mural we looked at was *Echo of a Scream* by David Alfaro Siquieros. I gave each group of students a picture copied from the Rochfort (1998) book. This mural is very gripping visually and emotionally. It shows a giant baby screaming with another baby coming out of his mouth. He is sitting on what appears to be a pile of garbage, with a cannon amongst the garbage. Smoke stacks are in the distance and black smoke covers the top of the picture. The students’ task was to fill out a graphic organizer with thesis at the top and slots for two or three supporting points. Then, they had to copy the sentences from the organizer to make a paragraph. The students worked in groups. The picture, I explained, had multiple interpretations and I would accept each group’s interpretation as long as it made sense and was accompanied by the evidence from the images in the picture. However, the group had to be in agreement about their responses.

This last condition led to some lively discussions as students negotiated. As I circled the room, I asked students in their discussions to look at the artists’ reasons for his opinion or message and see which thesis made the most sense. The majority of the students saw the mural as being about abandoned children. Interestingly, this is not the expert interpretation (Rochfort, 1998). I had groups contribute their answers and then modeled the process of making the answers into a paragraph. I had also done this exercise at home (I had an ecological interpretation) and shared my interpretation as one of many possible interpretations with the students.
The experience with this mural was especially noteworthy with my afternoon group, which had less language proficiency than the morning block. Unlike the morning students, the difficulties with this group in English were noticeable even when speaking. However, in this activity every student expressed an opinion. In each group there were conversations about the topic using the concepts of thesis and reasons. There were no discipline problems and students did not have to be reminded to work. Instead, they discussed the artwork and in several groups of students the discussion of the picture was very animated as each student tried to convince others in their group of his own interpretation. The students were able to use English in their discussions and showed the beginnings of persuasion as they gave ideas and justified them with elements of the mural.

I compared this experience with that of the first day. For this group, the quality of the art work itself was important. The art of the first day was done by high school students. This art was professional done by a recognized master. Julio, who complained the day before, told me that this was good art. Several students, on the note cards they filled out at the end of each class, indicated that they liked the art. Others wrote that they had learned about helping children. I realized how important it was to find art with clear and powerful images.

The next day, I followed the same procedure as the day before with another Siquieros mural, *Don Porfirio and His Courtesans*, giving each group of students a full page copy of the mural from the Rochfort (1998) book. I had students begin the task without much teacher direction. However, the students struggled more to find the meaning and I had to help them by redirecting their attention to the center of the mural,
an image of dictator Porfirio Diaz with wealthy citizens extending their hands for a pay out. To begin the second hour, I distributed a copy of Siquieros’ *The Strike at Cananea* to each student. I directed the students to compare the two murals and come up with a paragraph to show Siquieros’ view of the government. I taught them words like *although*, *even though*, and *while* to help them. This mini-lesson was the first time that I had taught them vocabulary apart from the terms for persuasive elements. I circulated and helped students to express their ideas in sentences. The students were able to generate paragraphs about how the government helped the rich while it let the poor die. We closed with student volunteers reading their paragraphs.

I collected students’ paragraphs to assess their learning up to this point. The paragraphs showed that students were understanding the concept of thesis and supporting argument, although some expressed themselves with more complexity than others. I decided that four students needed more practice, which I felt they would be provided as the unit continued.

**Learning to Write Essays**

Seeing that students were learning the concepts of thesis statements and supporting arguments, I wanted to advance them to writing of essays. I created a collage of three murals by Diego Rivera: *Good Government*, *Night of the Poor*, and *Night of the Rich* by scanning the three murals from Rochfort (1998) and then copying and pasting them onto a single page. While they are separate murals, they revolve around a theme of a government responding to the needs of its poor peasants (in *Good Government*) or not responding to the needs of its poor peasants (in *Night of the Poor* and *Night of the Rich*). I wanted them to create a paragraph with a thesis sentence which would bring the essays
together and then use content of the pictures as supporting arguments. To me, the connection between the three images seemed very clear.

However, students struggled to understand the connection between the images and write a thesis statement. For the first time since I started the implementation, I had to direct students to get back on task and I had to issue behavior warnings to students. With the exception of the work of one group, the written assignments did not show learning. What I did notice was that almost all students were drawn to the same image in Night of the Poor, a powerful image of a poor mother holding her son with an empty hand in front of his mouth. She is trying to feed him, but she has nothing in her hand. All of the students made references to this picture.

The students’ reactions and interest in this picture again showed me the power of an image which students can relate to emotionally and culturally. A mother feeding her child is a universal image and her being unable to do so is something most of my students have either lived themselves or heard about from parents or grandparents explaining why they came to the United States. I decided to use my students’ background knowledge as a strength to re-teach the lesson.

To begin the next class, I held up the collage and asked the students why they had been unable to understand the murals. We started by talking about the one they did understand, the painting of mother and son. In previous lessons, we had talked about how the main idea of a mural is in the middle of the painting. In each of the blocks, a student answered, “There is no middle.” In the second block, Hilario confidently called out this response. It was the first time he had responded to a question all year. In fact, Hilario was
failing and frequently fooled around in class. He smiled as many students turned around to look at him with an expression of surprise on their faces.

To review mural structure and how knowing the main idea can aid in understanding the other details further, I showed them a mural by Rivera called *Man at the Crossroads*. This mural shows an expressionless working man in the middle of several changing worlds—a farm, people rebelling, modern soldiers, protestors, and a scientific laboratory. The quantity of images in the mural is visually overwhelming. I asked the students what it was about and they attempted to answer but could not. I then demonstrated how, by looking at the center of the mural, they could determine the main idea.

I used what they were learning about mural structure to teach a mini-lesson on the purpose of the introduction in an essay. I explained that the introduction of an essay serves the same purpose as the center of a mural. It tells the reader the main idea. The reader can refer back to the introduction to better understand the essay in the same way that the viewer of a mural can refer back to the central image to better understand the mural.

I then asked the students, in groups, to review the collage of pictures from the day before and write a sentence that would bring all the images together. They had trouble with *Good Government*, so I showed them Rivera’s *Bad Government* for the sake of contrast. In *Good Government*, the leaders are distributing lands while in *Bad Government* the leaders are oppressing and even whipping field workers. The comparison of the two images helped many of the students. I realized that understanding an image of a country with strong agriculture was outside of their experience. I further instructed
them to observe the other two images on the collage, which helped many to understand. Finally, students were responding and almost all groups could write a thesis about good government and use the three murals to provide support. The majority produced a paragraph about a good government with a thesis and reasons.

I decided that students needed to see the process of putting together an essay with more teacher guidance. I directed a think aloud, an activity in which the teacher models and verbalizes the thought process an author uses. Then, as a class, we wrote a first paragraph together. I asked students for their ideas and wrote them on the board. After taking about all the ideas, I asked students which ones they wanted to use. Then I took suggestions sentence-by-sentence and helped them with the phrasing of the sentences. As I guided the students in writing a first sentence for each supporting paragraph and a summary sentence for a conclusion, I verbalized the thought process I would use as a writer. I then went step-by-step through the first paragraph, asking them to identify their reasons and I wrote each reason as the start of a new paragraph. Graves (1989) recommends teacher’s modeling of writing so that students can have a mental model of the writing process. Students participated, but overall this was a teacher-directed, whole class lesson.

After the think aloud, students copied the introductory paragraph and the topic sentence of each paragraph. They had to fill in appropriate details in their own words in each paragraph, using the murals to generate ideas. Reviewing the final projects, I saw that the students were able to finish the paragraphs to produce an essay.

Reflecting upon the implementation, I realized that this part of the curriculum was rushed and maybe too big a jump from the previous lessons. I had the pressure of the
district writing assessments which were imminent and I wanted my students to be prepared. That said, the students did learn. On the district writing sample, they scored higher than two seventh grade classes at the same reading and language level and two eighth grade classes that were a grade level higher in reading. The teacher from the eighth grade class commented that the essays were much more organized and the ideas more clearly elaborated than those of her students. While I cannot say that the curriculum implementation was the only factor at work here, it certainly did contribute to students’ performance.

**Learning to Answer Counter-Arguments**

Some of my students were still writing persuasive essays as if they were summaries. I hypothesized that the problem was that they still did not understand that they were writing to persuade someone who might disagree with them. After reviewing their writing again, I concluded that teaching them about counter-arguments and how to answer them would help to progress from summarizing to argumentation.

In my experience with students who struggle linguistically, answering counter-arguments is the hardest part of the persuasive essay process. More than anything else, it is difficult for them to anticipate those arguments. This skill is so complex that it is one of the principal differences between the fifth grade and middle school persuasive essay writing standards.

In anticipating counter-arguments, a student needs to imagine a dialogue with an unknown reader who disagrees. Graves (1989) describes the importance of developing a sense of the other who will read the writer’s thoughts and ideas. Having a sense of the possible points of view the potential reader may have is especially important in
persuasive essay writing. As a writer of a persuasive essay, I have to comprehend that someone may see things differently than I do.

I began teaching this concept by participating in a role-play activity with another student. I deliberately chose a student who I knew was capable verbally. I adopted the role of a teenager girl asking permission to go out for the evening, and the student played the role of my father. I used these contrasting roles and genders to make it clear to the class that neither one of us was acting as ourselves. In other words, I wanted to demonstrate to the students that they could imagine how people very different from them could differ in opinion. I tried to convince Dad to let me go to the movies while Dad said no. I gave reasons that would not appeal to a father such as, “All my friends are going and there will be lots of older boys.” Everyone laughed at my responses and the girl sounded just like her father might as she answered. Then, the entire class had to generate a list of reasons Dad would give for saying no and decide how to convince him to let her go out. This was the only non-art activity, but it resulted in a useful and lively discussion. One student even joked about his parents with the question: “How do you answer, ‘because I said no’?”

We later went to the computer lab to examine a mural by Jose Clemente Orozco called *Modern Human Sacrifice*. I used the computer lab for this activity because it had an LCD projector, allowing me to project Orozco’s mural and point to various images within it which demonstrate arguments and counter-arguments. Orozco’s *Modern Human Sacrifice* is part of a 24 panel series of murals called *The Epic of American Civilization* which Orozco painted at Dartmouth University. I projected the mural from the Dartmouth University website (dartmouth.edu). The mural shows the tomb of the Unknown Soldier,
but he is a skeleton with his face covered by a multicolored flag, symbolizing all fighting 
nations (Rochfort, 1998). The skeleton accentuates the soldier’s mortality more than his 
heroism. While his face is not visible, the fact that he has been reduced to lifeless bones 
is clearly apparent. There is a statue of a fighting soldier in the background, but the 
Unknown Soldier appears to have died for no reason. In an earlier panel, Ancient Human 
Sacrifice, a human is having his heart pulled out by masked pagan priests. The positions 
of the victim in each case are the same. Orozco here is drawing a comparison between the 
Aztec human sacrifices to the god of war and the modern sacrifice of soldiers in war for a 
nation. I showed the students both images using a projector to clarify the connection in 
the two works of art.

I explained the meaning of the Unknown Soldier and I had students observe the 
picture. I asked them questions about each part—the flag, the statue in the back, the fact 
that the soldier is faceless, just a flag. The mural is challenging but also rich in meaning, 
because all the images in this mural are highly symbolic (Rochfort, 1998). In class 
discussion, we generated our own interpretations of what each symbol meant. I then 
explained the meaning of counter-argument and asked about Orozco’s thesis and counter- 
argument. They generated that he was anti-war. We related Orozco’s mural about war to 
the present situation in Iraq.

One student, Miguel, was especially vocal. He had already written an anti-war 
essay and, basing my opinion on his writing and comments in class, I believe that the war 
is a very important issue for him. I did not have the time to ask him, but I had the idea 
that the issue of the Iraq war had personal significance for him because whenever it was 
mentioned he had strong opinions to express.
After the students demonstrated an understanding of Orozco’s anti-war message, I asked them to identify Orozco’s counter-argument and showed a monument of a soldier in the background of the image. Students volunteered answers such as “fighting for freedom” and “these are heroes.” I asked what the counter-argument of Orozco was. Their responses showed that they understood Orozco’s emphasis on death rather than heroism with answers such as: “They are just dead” and “They die for no reason” and “They die for a flag.” When I showed them the mural of *Ancient Human Sacrifice*, one student responded, “They are being sacrificed for a flag.” I asked them to work independently, select one of the 24 panels present on the website, and write a thesis, reasons, and a counter-argument. They could write about the panel we had just discussed or choose another one. Most students began to identify thesis and counter-argument. Most chose the same piece we discussed, but a few chose other panels.

| Thesis: (Central image with a sentence) |
| Argument 1: (Part of picture with a sentence) |
| Argument 2: (Part of picture with a sentence) |
| Counter-argument: (Part of picture with a sentence) |
| Answer to counter-argument: (Part of picture with a sentence) |

Figure 1. Graphic organizer analyzing parts of a persuasive essay.
As I was leaving the computer lab (my students had already been dismissed), a fortuitous event occurred which caused me to change the way I was teaching counter-arguments and their relationship to the other elements of persuasive essays. The computer teacher saw my project and explained that I could use picture formatting, text boxes, and cut and paste features of Microsoft Word to guide students in making their own graphic representations of the elements of a persuasive essay. Instead of pointing to images to show the thesis and counter-arguments in a mural, I could copy the image, crop sections of it, and paste the sections separately. Then I could use text boxes to caption them. This process allowed me to create a clear visual image of the elements of the persuasive essay that students could create. Students could take the mural apart and re-paste sections in categories: thesis, argument, counter-argument, or answering counter-argument. The computer teacher came to class the next day and taught the students how to manipulate the images and then I showed them an example of my own. They then used this process to create a visual analysis of the elements of persuasion in Orozco’s art work.

After evaluating student work, I determined that most students really understood the elements of persuasive essay present in a mural. However, I wanted to evaluate their understanding individually and in greater depth. The last several lessons had been conducted with the whole class, so I decided to work with them in groups of eight or less while the rest worked on something else. As a group of eight, we analyzed another Orozco mural from the Dartmouth murals, *Hispano-America*, which shows Emiliano Zapata in the middle of thieves. After I presented to the students some background on Zapata and how he is a symbol of the defenders of the poor, students could see the arguments. As a group of eight, we wrote the thesis and reasons. I gave students a word
bank and a list of academic vocabulary words they could use to independently write a paragraph about this image. The students wrote for five minutes and volunteers read their paragraphs. As a group we created sentences to answer counter-arguments and voted for the best one, which the students then copied to end their individual paragraphs. One student wrote, “While some say that they defend the poor, they are really stealing from them.”

I was impressed at the complexity of sentences that some students could generate. Because the group was small, I could really monitor how much each student comprehended. I could also work personally with each one to help with any difficulties. My assessment was that the majority understood the elements of persuasive essays and that those who had trouble could still identify most of the elements. I noted which students were having trouble so I could provide them with more individual assistance when we worked on the final project.

**Final Writing Project**

Based on my assessment, I decided that the students were ready to work on the final writing project. They could choose any topic that they wished. Before they began, I showed them a PowerPoint presentation called *Take a Stand* from the San Diego Art Museum website (www.sdma.org). I intended for the presentation to stimulate thinking, but I wanted students to generate their own ideas. They could choose any pictures or parts of pictures from the internet to create a poster like the one described earlier. Many used murals we had already seen, while others searched for new pictures. They chose from a range of topics (which I will further describe and analyze in Chapter Seven). Some students worked independently while others helped peers organize their ideas, although
each student needed to create an individual poster. Since students were engaged in their work, I had the opportunity to circulate and help individuals with the various elements of their work, instead of spending most of my time on disciplinary issues. In previous writing classes before the implementation, I used a large amount of my time handling disciplinary issues and maintaining students on task. During the creation of students’ persuasive posters, there were virtually no discipline problems and all but two students were on task and engaged in the creation of their posters. Their engagement allowed me to work individually with students who were still battling to understand the elements of persuasive essays or searching for the words to express their ideas, instead of my worrying about discipline issues.

In their posters and their conversations, many students expressed ideas I had not heard from them before. Juan spent the entire week looking for images to express his opinions about immigration and the death of those who cross illegally. Laura was the most on-task I had seen her all year, making her poster about better laws to end violence against women. Usually, student questions are about whether something is right, how to do something, or topics unrelated to class. During this activity, many of the questions were about finding better resources (e.g. “Where can I find pictures about this?”) or about how to express ideas (e.g. “How do you think I could say this better?”).

The students practiced the skills they had learned and made use of my feedback. I observed many improving through the practice-feedback process. Students who had already grasped the elements of persuasive essays before this project demonstrated their knowledge through this activity.
Each of the students created a poster. Some posters were more complex than others but students’ work clearly demonstrated that they understood the elements of persuasion. To me, it became clear that almost every student felt ownership of his work, laboring to find the image or word that most expressed what he wanted to say. When students asked for my assistance, they did not ask me what to do, but instead asked for help in choosing the right words or images to express themselves. Once the posters were completed, the students were to write an essay using their poster as a guide. We reviewed the structure of a five-paragraph persuasive essay before they wrote. Again, discipline was not a problem and most finished a draft rapidly and with little teacher intervention.

*Follow-Up Lessons*

After finishing the art-based curriculum, I did two follow-up lessons to evaluate and reinforce students’ learning about essays, this time without the use of art. In both of these lessons, I used articles which expressed multiple opinions. One was an article about a skateboard park from the school’s eighth grade language arts series (Holt, 2000). The other was an article about the pros and cons of a set of two-inch Mexican figurines called Homies (Sale, 2003) that are sold in gum ball machines and are very popular in the neighborhood.

In both cases, students read and listed the different arguments and decided which ones they agreed with. This lesson took several days as each day the students concentrated on the arguments of one individual listed in the article. They listed the counter-arguments in the reading and answered them.

Finally, the students wrote essays on each topic. Most used the five-paragraph format they had learned and were able to do the essay. The results for the Homies article
were superior to those based on the skateboard park article. In class discussion of the Homies article, I noticed that they were more animated than they were with the skateboard article. The topic was an issue that reflected their reality because many students collected Homies or knew individuals with lives similar to the Homies characters mentioned in the article.

As they worked on the essays, many students used the terms they had learned from the curriculum. For a few students who did not know how to start, I showed them the murals as a way to remind them of the process of writing persuasive essays. After seeing the murals again, they were able to start writing the essays.

**Conclusion**

*I Have Something to Say* followed a step-by-step approach to teaching the elements of persuasive essays. First, students read visual texts and learned to analyze them, all the while learning the elements of persuasive essays. Then, students had the opportunity to create their own visual work as a pre-writing preparation for the writing of their own persuasive essays. Finally, students applied what they had learned to the writing of essays about topics of interest to them.

While the use of murals appeared to help the students learn to write persuasive essays, the process was neither smooth nor linear. I expected this as I worked within students’ Zone of Proximal Development, which is always changing as learning takes place. It required reviewing, returning to old concepts, and occasionally stopping a lesson or using another clearer picture. Some concepts, which the students could identify, needed to be reviewed again before they could be applied. The experience in each group
was different and this curriculum was as much a dialogue as a plan, because student

needs caused constant modification and revision.

As the tasks became more linguistically challenging, some students struggled. There was no automatic transition from murals to writing, and the students needed support in vocabulary, especially with terms like: for this reason, therefore, although, etc. While the murals helped the students with concept development, they still needed vocabulary development to verbalize these concepts and their own ideas.

This curriculum did not—nor was it intended to—cover the complete writing process. Quite notably, revision was not addressed. I did not address revision because of the limited amount of time available for the implementation of the I Have Something to Say curriculum. The goals of this curriculum were to motivate students, to help them develop their voice, and to guide them in generating drafts of persuasive essays that could serve both for the purposes of on-demand writing (a task they are asked to perform throughout middle and high school in which they have a limited time to write to a topic that they have not seen previously) or as drafts to revise later.

Their next step was to learn the essential process of revision. With increased ownership of their writing and increased knowledge of the elements of persuasive essay, my students were prepared for this step.
Chapter VII
Evaluation of the *I Have Something To Say* Curriculum

The *I Have Something to Say* curriculum had three principal goals. The first goal was to increase student engagement in writing class. The second goal was to develop the students’ voice in writing. The third goal was for students to write essays that were longer and of higher quality. To evaluate each of these goals I used my own field notes recorded right after each lesson, short student reflections called exit slips, interviews conducted after I completed the implementation of the curriculum, and student work samples.

Table 2. Summary of evaluation methods by goal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal 1: Increased student engagement</th>
<th>Field Notes</th>
<th>Exit Slips</th>
<th>Work samples</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 2: Students develop voice in their writing</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3: Students write longer, higher quality essays</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Description of Evaluation Methods*

I used field notes to document what was happening as students encountered the material. I listened for and observed key behaviors: time-on-task, time spent talking about the topic (notable by the use of lesson vocabulary or reference to the topic), eye gaze (where the students were looking), what students were writing on their papers, and
number of times that a disciplinary intervention or re-direction was needed. After taking the notes each day, I reviewed and coded them according to these same categories.

In the early lessons, the data from the coded notes indicated how well students were acquiring knowledge of persuasive elements. Their conversations in group work and interactions with me showed understanding of elements of persuasive essays such as thesis and supporting arguments. However, as time progressed and the concepts became more complicated, I found that analyzing field notes did not always give me a true picture of what they were learning. Instead, they served as a means of observing and documenting engagement with each lesson.

Field notes grounded other data by providing a general picture of what was happening and of the classroom climate during the lessons. They also served as reflective documents I could use to make revisions in the lessons based on student reactions.

As I analyzed the field notes, I looked for different signs of engagement. If students were talking about the topic, I considered them engaged. Their eye gaze also indicated engagement with the topic. For example, in one lesson I noted that in several groups, all members were looking at the artwork as they spoke about it (I gave them one copy of the mural per group). These same students wrote responses on their paper that related to the lesson, further indicating engaged behavior. In contrast to these signs of engagement, in another set of notes I recorded a student talking about his trip to Puerto Rico and another student talking about a television show. Two students were fighting over a paper and a student stopped on the way to the pencil sharpener to have a conversation. These behaviors indicated lack of engagement.
I counted the number of times that I needed to do a disciplinary intervention or tell students to get back to work. This was the most observable measure of engagement. Although students could be behaved without being truly engaged, a comparison of behavior during the intervention versus other occasions gave me an easily observable quantitative measure of students concentrating on the activity and not on other behavior.

**Exit slips**

In addition to observing students, I wanted to obtain their perceptions of what they were learning. I used a simple method called exit slips. I wrote two questions on the board for students to respond to: “What did you learn today?” and “What did you like or not like about today’s class?” Then, I gave each student a note card. The students received the cards in the last five minutes of class and had to turn the completed card in before being dismissed. I used open-ended questions to make sure that I did not limit their answers and to help the students feel that there was no right or wrong answer. I kept the questions simple to avoid any anxiety. I used the same questions every day to turn the exit slip into a routine, eliminating any confusion for the student about the tasks. This way they could concentrate on their responses instead of procedural questions. Because these slips were given to me immediately after class, they provided immediate feedback to me before anything could be forgotten or processed. In that sense, these slips were unedited feedback that gave me information about the process of their learning.

When students responded to the first question, their descriptions of what they learned indicated if they were growing in the understanding of content. For example, a student who wrote, “I learned about pictures” indicated that he believed the lesson had been focused on art. Another student who wrote, “I learned about writing summaries”
after a class on writing persuasive essays indicated that he knew that it was a writing class, but he had not comprehended the content of the lesson. Student reflection compared with field notes provided a snapshot of what learning occurred that day.

I used the second question about what they liked to get a measure of enjoyment and what might motivate them. I read through the notes several times and allowed eight coding categories to emerge including “other reasons for liking” and “did not like.” I then tallied the results of both classes for the five days for which I had the most exit slips. (While I required exit slips every day, I realized later that there were days that students left without completing them). I compared the students’ statements about what they liked or did not like with my field notes. Their written perceptions provided me with more information about their motivation each day and kept me from drawing conclusions based only on my own observations.

**Interviews**

As I looked at the field notes and exit slips, I felt that I needed a more in-depth way to understand students’ motivational and cognitive processes. Field notes allowed me to make perceptions and record what students did and said in a classroom setting. Exit slips gave me a quick snapshot of student thought at the end of a lesson. However, both methods had limitations. Field notes gave me a picture of what students were saying and their actions during class, but did not give me as much information about their thought processes. Exit slips allowed me to see students’ perceptions and thoughts, but they only provided a brief picture. In addition, each one was a short, one-shot monologue. The exit slips did not allow for follow-up questions or clarification of students’ statements.
Therefore, I chose to interview several students. I audio taped the interviews so as to have a record of students’ exact words. I chose eight students to interview, out of a total of 60, from my two classes. I chose eight for several reasons. First, I felt eight was enough to give me a representative sample. Second, I estimated eight as the number of students I could interview without losing too much class time or having problems with other teachers since I needed to either interview them during class or ask another teacher to excuse the student from his class to do the interview during my daily free period. If I interviewed many students during my class, more than eight students would have interfered with my instruction. If I removed many students from other classes, I could have had difficulties with other teachers. Finally, by interviewing only eight students, I could take the time to carefully interview each one without many problems. Finally, time constraints made transcribing and coding more than eight interviews difficult.

I tried to have a sampling of students, students who had shown improvement in the quality of their essays and those who did not, students who had shown interest and those who had shown less interest, as well as limited English speakers and one native English speaker. I chose six boys and two girls, consistent with the approximately 3:1 boy to girl ratio in my classes. I conducted the interviews approximately one month after the completion of the curriculum implementation. I did this so that I could use some of my preliminary data analysis to generate questions. In addition, the one month lapse between the completion of implementation and the interviews allowed me to see what students remembered. Although I did risk their forgetting information that might be valuable, their recall of information allowed me to see what had been truly important to them. Students remember what most impacts them.
These interviews also allowed me to probe student learning, allowing students to verbalize what they had learned during the unit. They also gave me some insight into the mental processes of the students and possible motivational factors for them during the curriculum implementation. I had drawn my own conclusions, but interviews allowed me to receive the students’ description of why they did what they did, and how they did or did not learn.

These interviews served as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with the students. Although I started with a set of interview questions, I allowed the interview to remain relatively open-ended. I adjusted questions to clarify students’ thoughts and experiences. I made sure not to ask leading questions as follow-ups, but only questions which would clarify student responses. The interviews were dialogues that relied on interaction, but the questions served as a framework to allow a relative degree of uniformity in the issues discussed with each student.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview questions:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What do you remember most about the persuasive writing unit?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What did you like the most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What didn’t you like?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How was this different from other ways you have learned to write?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Did it help you? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How have you done in the past in writing classes? How have you felt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Would you recommend this for next year’s students? Why or why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Interview Questions

As I conducted the interviews, I discovered certain limitations. Students differ in their ability to talk about what they know or like. In some interviews, I felt that the
interview showed as much about the student’s ability to express himself as it did about his thought process. I allowed the students to use English or Spanish, but some students still struggled to explain their ideas. For some students, it was difficult to talk about the learning process. One student, Samuel, described this curriculum for learning writing as more difficult, and indicated that learning to write in the past was easy. At the end, he said that this curriculum was easier than ways he had learned in the past. Samuel had bad writing grades in the past and in my class for the first half of the year. His perception of earlier writing classes as easy, therefore, may have been different from his reality. I believe that he meant to say that this implementation was more work, but in the interview I could not confirm whether he had difficulty verbalizing his ideas or if he had conflicting thoughts about the curriculum.

I interviewed another student who had expressed that he wanted to do more activities with art like the ones in which we had engaged. However, in his interview he could not answer most of the questions but instead was silent and looked confused. I asked questions in both English and Spanish but I had to end the interview because he could not answer. After this unsuccessful interview, I selected another student to interview instead, in order to complete the data set.

In addition to the problems students had in expressing themselves, there were other potential limitations present in the interview process. The interviews were conducted a month after the end of the curriculum. For some students, this was a long time lapse and they forgot many details about the curriculum intervention. While I deliberately used open-ended questions, for some students the questions may have been too broad for them to know how to answer. For this reason, I used the questions as a
guide but altered questions to fit the interview. Finally, since I was not only the interviewer but also the students’ teacher, students’ perceptions of what I wanted them to say and their desire to please or not please the teacher could have entered into the interview process.

Despite these limitations, I was able to conduct eight interviews that lasted between five and fifteen minutes each. The students answered the questions, some immediately and some with follow-up questions. The first two students, during the interview, spoke about how their feelings towards learning writing with the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum changed during the implementation. They described how, at first, they found the curriculum harder than writing classes from previous years, but then it became easier as they resolved confusions about how to do the task of art interpretation and how that task applied to their writing. Based on their comments, I modified the interview and asked students if there were activities that were easier or harder and about what they did when they had difficulties.

To analyze the interviews, I listened to the interviews and looked for any similarities. I compared what students said in their interviews with conclusions I had already made based other evidence, looking for either confirmations or contradictions. I listened for any responses that would tell me about goals being achieved or not being achieved. Finally, I recorded any comments I found especially interesting or that served to sum up what other individuals had said.
Work samples

If field notes and exit slips helped to evaluate the effect of this curriculum on the process students use in writing persuasive essays, analysis of work samples measured the product. Work samples varied in length and complexity. At the beginning of the curriculum implementation, work samples were short (three sentences to one paragraph) assignments based on the artwork. For example, students would look at a piece of art and write the artists’ central idea as a thesis sentence and the reasons he gave pictorially as two or three supporting arguments. As the implementation progressed, assignments were longer and more complex, such as five-paragraph essays. Some were on-demand assignments, writing tasks in which students must write within a given period of time to a prompt that they had not seen previously. A writing prompt is a situation or question to which students respond, for example, “Write an essay to persuade me to give you a class party the last day of school.” Others were more teacher-guided, such as an assignment in which I gave students artwork and an introductory paragraph and they had to finish the essay. My goal was to see how students responded in each writing situation. I evaluated the first assignments by assigning points for the presence of basic elements. The larger assignments I graded on a rubric (see appendix 2) based on the eighth grade standards, but simplified to make evaluation easier and clearer. I did not evaluate the use of conventions such as mechanics, grammar, or spelling. While these are important aspects of writing, the I Have Something to Say curriculum was designed to develop the content of student writing through the teaching of the elements of persuasive essays. Therefore, to evaluate the curriculum effectiveness, I designed the rubric to evaluate students’
knowledge of the elements of persuasive essays and the application of this knowledge to their writing.

**Summary and Discussion of Findings**

I evaluated the effectiveness of *I Have Something to Say* according to three goals I had for students during the curriculum implementation: an increase in student engagement, development of students’ voice in writing, and improvement in written essays in both quantity produced and quality of writing. I used field notes, exit slips, interviews with students, and work samples to evaluate if these goals were achieved. Using research about motivation, voice, culturally relevant curriculum, and scaffolding, I will discuss what each finding about the curriculum’s effectiveness tells me about the student learning process during the implementation.

**Finding 1: Student engagement improved during the curriculum intervention**

Analysis of data showed that student engagement was higher during the curriculum implementation than at other times. I compared field notes during the implementation with notes I took after the implementation during language arts instruction. During regular instruction (I use the term “regular” here to indicate instruction that was not part of the curriculum implementation), students were frequently off-task, from five to fourteen times during a one half hour period. Off-task behavior included writing notes, fighting for pencils, staring at the floor, laughing, talking about other topics, and walking around the room to visit other students. During some of these classes, as many as five students had to be warned about possible consequences for their behavior.
By contrast, during the implementation, the maximum number of off-task incidents recorded was three. I issued a maximum of two disciplinary warnings in any two hour block, and during many lessons I did not need to give any warnings. For the first four classes, I recorded only one instance of off-task behavior for each class and I did not have to give any disciplinary warnings. The same held true for student behavior during the week of the final project in which they created their persuasive essay posters.

Students during the implementation exhibited several engaged behaviors according to my coding categories. In contrast to the off-task behaviors already described during regular class, these students worked on the task. In their conversations with one another (as recorded in my field notes), they referred to the task at hand, by saying things like: “Okay, guys, what do you think the thesis is?” or “Here is one of the reasons.” They also talked about the content of the art work by saying “Look, the baby is screaming because he is abandoned.” and “He is giving his money to the rich.”

The students’ eye gaze (the direction in which their eyes were looking) during the group activities also showed engagement. In their groups, the students looked at the artwork they were studying as they discussed it. In three or four of the groups in each class, students turned their chairs towards the artwork and leaned forward to see it. Students pointed at parts of the mural as they spoke about it. Their conversations corresponded to what they were pointing at. They made comments such as, “Look, the sky is dark. That’s because he is sad.”

Exit slips also indicated engagement. Students’ responses to the first question about what they learned generally fell into two categories: comments on persuasive writing using terms from class or comments about the artwork. For each set of exit slips,
80-90% of the students gave responses from these two categories. I interpreted these responses as a sign of engagement, because they indicated that they had maintained enough attention to learn the information. I did not collect exit slips from instruction outside of the intervention, so I cannot compare student responses on the exit slips during the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum implementation to responses during other curricular units of study. However, the exit slips served to confirm conclusions made from the analysis of my field notes.

Lastly, work samples indicated engagement. During the shorter curriculum implementation activities of the first week, all groups finished the work in the allotted time. During classes not using materials from the curriculum intervention, one of my groups averaged 50% completion in the allotted time and the other 40%. For the activities in the curriculum that involved writing longer essays, 90% of students finished the assignment or finished it for homework, without warnings or consequences. This percentage of students completing the assignments during the implementation of the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum compares with an average of 35%-70% students completing assignments that were not part of the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum, even when there were consequences for not finishing the assignment.

The data from field notes concerning student behavior, student responses on exit slips, and the improvement in work completion during curriculum implementation indicate improvements in student engagement. I used the various data sources to derive possible attributions for the improvement in engagement, and in doing so, better understand student behavior. Looking at the notes of group work, I found that the structure of the activities created intersubjectivity within each group. Tharp and
Gallimore (1988) describe intersubjectivity among individuals performing tasks in a group as, “the signs and symbols developed through language, the development of common understandings of the purposes and meanings of the activity, the joint engagement in cognitive strategies and problem solving” (p.89). In the art interpretation activities of the first week, the students shared a single text, the picture. The fact that the picture was on a single page helped in the process of developing intersubjectivity. During other lessons observed outside of the intervention, students struggled as they looked through all the text, with members of a group on different pages or in different paragraphs to find the answers. Here, the signs and symbols were all on the page, as evidenced by students’ eye gaze, by the movement of their chairs to see better, and by their pointing to the picture to explain to others their conclusions. Through discussions of one work, they arrived at a common understanding based on a task which they shared.

Another factor in student engagement was a growing sense of competence. Student interviews indicated that this factor was at work. Of the eight students interviewed, six indicated that they thought the method of learning to write in the I Have Something to Say was easier than what other approaches to writing instruction they had received in other classes during previous years. One student responded, “I wanted to improve my grades… and here I felt that I could.” All could explain how to do the various tasks. The two students who thought that the I Have Something to Say curriculum was more difficult at first than other curriculum approaches that they had been exposed to, said that later in the implementation it became easier for them. One student, Yesenia, made a telling observation: “It was more difficult, but I knew where to look to figure out
the answer.” She was expressing a clear sense of her competence for this task. Five out of the eight students said that they improved at the tasks as the curriculum progressed.

The completed work samples also indicate the students’ feelings of competence. Because students feel that they can do the assignments, they spend more time on them and finish them. I believe that this also accounts for more students doing their homework when it relates to essays. Interestingly, two months after the intervention, students still turned in persuasive essay homework assignments at a much higher percentage than other assignments. While they sometimes complained about “another essay,” their completion of these assignments showed that they felt they could complete them.

Along with a sense of competency, enjoyment and relevance were important factors in student engagement. Exit slips showed that students enjoyed the activity for a variety of reasons. Figure 3 shows their responses to the question, “What did you like, or not like, about the activity?” These responses were taken over a ten-day period at the beginning of the unit. Later on when the unit involved more independent work on the computer, I did not collect exit slips as I felt they would each be responding to their own project. The five dates in this figure represent different activities over a two-week period. The graph shows that the reasons students gave for liking an activity changed as the unit progressed.
At the beginning of the curriculum implementation, an activity being “fun” or “interesting” was a principal reason for liking an activity. The percentage of students who described “learning an academic skill” as a reason for liking an activity grew substantially, peaking on March 1. Students did not use the term “learning an academic skill.” Instead, I used this term as the descriptor of a coding category for responses such as: “I learned about thesis and reasons” and “I learned how to organize an essay.”

Student responses varied by activity and showed a variety of reasons for liking the lesson. Only about 5-10% said they disliked the lesson. For three of the five days the topic of the art was important to a significant percentage of students, between 13%-20%. When I looked at the three days that they found the topic of the art most significant, I discovered that on these days the artwork studies dealt with social justice and poverty issues. These issues grabbed their attention and were significant to them. I believe that as
students at the border, many born in a poor nation, these issues resonate culturally with them. Many of them touched on similar topics for their final projects of the unit.

Art itself, not necessarily the content of it for a specific mural, was a motivator on some days but not on others. On three of the five days, 15% or more of the students mentioned art as what they enjoyed. Curiously, on days that students mentioned enjoying the art, they did not mention the issues treated in artwork. On the days that they talked about the issues treated in the artwork, they did not mention art. One of two explanations is possible here. The first is that they focused either on the artwork as pictures or on the topics of the artwork. However, I do not believe this is the case or even that it is possible to separate the form of art from its subject matter. The other more plausible explanation is that when they said that they liked the art, they were including the issues raised by the art as interesting to them. Combining the two responses, the exit slips show that between 17%-31% of the students mentioned culturally relevant artwork as what interested them.

As mentioned earlier, the most interesting result of the analysis of the exit slips was the growing interest of students in learning academic skills such as how to write a thesis sentence, how to write an introduction, or how to organize their essays. At the beginning of the unit, 15% of the students wrote that they enjoyed acquiring new academic skills such as these. That percentage rose steadily to 45% on March 1st. On March 3rd it dropped to 30%, but this result is still double the results of the first day.

Before the interviews, I hypothesized that the increase in motivation to learn academic skills came from a growing sense of competence brought about by success in classroom activities. As students grasped advanced concepts through the use of art as a form of semiotic mediation with which to learn writing skills, their motivation increased.
Interviews with the students confirmed my hypothesis. In their interviews, the students either stated that they found this way of learning easier or, as one student described, “sometimes hard, but I just kept looking at the picture until I found the answer.” The students felt that they could accomplish the activity, so they were motivated to do so. An interview with Julio, a student who had struggled in past years in language arts classes, shows how the use of art as text increased his sense of competency in writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>Do you think it helped you to do it this way?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julio:</td>
<td>I think it did because it did because it, it gets like less confusing and just, it’s easier to help you out when (undistinguishable word) isn’t working.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher:</td>
<td>Compare it to other ways you have learned how to write.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julio:</td>
<td>Other ways would be just like you just copy or write or you just read a little information about something and you just write it down. When you do that, you can just forget that out of memory. But the way that you taught us how to learn from pictures it already sticks to our head.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Interview with Julio.

Students’ growing sense of their improved competence, the creation of intersubjectivity, and student description of the enjoyment or relevance of the activities were observable factors in the increase in student engagement. The presence of these factors made *I Have Something to Say* motivating for my students.

**Finding 2: Through the use of Mexican murals to aid writing instruction, students developed their voice as writers**

In Chapter Five, I used Grave’s (1989) definition of voice as an individual expression of oneself in speech or writing. He also describes voice as the vital force of writing. It is the message that students want others to hear, and it relies on student choice and ownership of writing. Ladson-Billings (1995) adds that culturally relevant pedagogy,
to be truly effective, must allow students to challenge established norms. For students (especially students from non-mainstream cultures) to have a voice, they must be allowed to do this. Their questioning and commenting on established or mainstream principles also demonstrates a sense of their own personal voice. While they may question or comment on established principles in conversations in home or with their friends, they must also have the opportunity to do so in their writing at school.

The final project was the creation of a persuasive poster and an essay to accompany it. Each student could choose the topic to write about and demonstrate his unique voice as an author. Only three students could not think of a topic. Some changed their topics during the process of the project. The variety of topics indicated individual choice. In all, I counted 19 different topics. This diversity of choices of topic is an indicator of genuine interest, as it shows that they did not copy from each other. The most popular topic was the issue of immigration and undocumented workers. Twelve of the sixty students chose this topic.

The students’ choices, in many cases, indicated a personal connection. Most of those who chose to write about immigration were themselves born in Mexico. One student, who wrote about domestic violence, is a girl who is usually quiet and does not express her opinions often. Her father is not listed on her school emergency card and she alternates living between two different relatives. While I do not know if she had lived with domestic violence in her own home, she showed great interest in her topic and spent a great deal of time looking at each picture before choosing it. She did not want to talk about her topic with me, but her sentences and pictures showed her expressing strong views.
What was especially interesting to me is that most of the topics chosen were not issues that we have talked about in school this year or that would have been part of last year’s curriculum. They were everyday issues which, in many cases, affect the students directly or indirectly. One student wrote about how bosses should treat their workers better, even though the workers are uneducated. This is an issue that affects many students whose parents work in jobs in which they are low paid and have little authority. Some students, while they were citizens or legal immigrants, felt affected by the issue of illegal immigration because they identify with the Mexican immigrants. “We are all Mexican” one student told me.

Some topics concerned school issues that affected students. Hilario, a student who was often in trouble, wrote about why detention should be made illegal. He used a picture of a bird in a cage to describe detention as jail.

While I had expected some students to select topics that did not have challenging content (such as uniforms, school rules), most did not consider the difficulty of the material in selecting their essay. In most cases, they had to search hard for pictures and work hard to develop their reasons, going through many drafts. I suggested an easier assignment to Alicia (a student who wrote about the treatment of workers)—one with less information to research—as she worked on the second revision of her poster. She told me no, she wanted to continue on this topic.

Only two students out of the 60 in my two classes appeared to not show any interest or ownership. One was later removed from my class and is under treatment for attention-deficit disorder. The other student was often off-task, consistent with his behavior all year. Surprisingly, his exit slips expressed interest in learning and his final
project was well-written. My experience with him demonstrated to me that on-task behavior and engagement are not the same. While my field notes show he was often off-task, his work samples showed that he did engage in the work and demonstrated his own unique voice.

All year, I had battled with getting my students to revise the content of their essays using criteria such as clarity, organization, and quality of expression. Before the implementation of this curriculum, when revising, students focused on grammar and spelling. Graves (1989) writes that voice is what motivates students to revise. For the first time, I saw students revising their work, especially as they created their posters. I noted at least 15 students making changes to clarify their ideas and find the right words to express the meaning they wished to convey with each picture. At the beginning of this implementation, students repeatedly asked me, “Is this right?” While they still asked this question occasionally, during the implementation students more frequently asked me questions about content such as, “Does this make sense?” and “Do you like this picture?” Even more importantly, I observed them talking to each other about ways to say what they mean.

Another indication of voice was students’ original perspectives in their writing. For example, while media reports of undocumented Mexicans focus on labor issues and proposals for immigration reform, students wrote about the human side, about individuals being killed. While one could argue that they were repeating perspectives they see on Spanish-language TV, I believe that the use of art and choice of topic allowed them to learn how to more clearly express their views. Students’ opinions about immigration opposed mainstream opinions, indicating they were developing their own sense of voice.
The students’ varied choice of topic, interest in content and revision, and original perspectives demonstrated that the students were developing a sense of voice. They had something to say, and this project allowed them to say it. They used pictures, often very emotionally compelling ones, in place of verbal expression in a language they may not yet have mastered.

_Geraldo, Juan, and Laura: Three Examples of Student Voice_

The students’ essays and posters tell their stories from their point of view. The stories of Geraldo, Juan, and Laura help us to further understand the student voices that emerged during the _I Have Something to Say_ curriculum and the power of writing to help all students discover that voice. I chose these three students for several reasons. The writing of all three represents an original perspective expressed in writing. Geraldo and Laura are both students who had low grades in language arts in the period before the curriculum implementation. Their essays as part of the _I Have Something to Say_ unit represented a great improvement over past years. I also chose these two students because they represent contrasting backgrounds. Geraldo was born and raised in Mexico, lived there through sixth grade and is still learning English. He was a good student in Mexico but had performed poorly in the United States. Laura is one of two fluent English speakers in class. She had consistently had low grades and test scores in school. I chose Juan as an example of a student who was performing well in class but who sometimes struggled to express himself in English. Juan was new to school in the United States this year. Juan showed great changes in his writing during the curriculum implementation. As the unit progressed, the views he expressed in his writing changed from mainstream to non-mainstream.
Geraldo told a very personal story of immigration. Geraldo was a recent immigrant who received A grades in Mexico but had much lower grades in the U.S. At mid-year he was at risk of repeating the eighth grade. His worst grades were in English. He was very capable but expressed that he did not feel a desire to do well in school in English. He told me one day that he did not want to move to the U.S. The decision to move was his parents’ decision and he was not happy about it. He wanted to live in Mexico where he was raised.

During this curriculum implementation, he was continually on task. When creating the final project (see Appendix A) he was constantly at work. He chose his pictures carefully and made personal statements about immigrants doing all the hard work, suffering, and even dying as they try to cross the border. His view of immigration tells a very personal story, though I do not know if it is his or if he just identifies with illegal immigrants. He writes of immigrants who come here to work but die in the process. In his words, “Nobody cares.”

Juan was similar to Geraldo in that he was a recent immigrant. However, he was an excellent student who always completed his assignments. His struggles with English showed all the signs of a motivated student. At the beginning of the unit he wrote an essay about the need for more troops in Iraq. His essay at the end of the unit was very different. He told the immigration story in a way similar to Geraldo. He wanted the Border Patrol to leave immigrants alone because they were dying when they cross. He began writing an essay that followed mainstream views and finished with an essay that questioned the power structure with a very personal voice. The study of muralists who
questioned authority served as an example to Juan of individuals questioning mainstream views with their own opinions. A quiet student, Juan showed me that he had a lot to say.

Laura was the student who most surprised me. Laura alternated living with her sister or her grandmother. At one point when we needed to have a meeting with her guardian, we had to make several calls to even know who her guardian was. She had received D’s and F’s throughout middle school. She was frequently absent, and when she was in-class she did not complete her work. She rarely did homework.

During this implementation, she was very different. She participated with others and at times took a leadership role in her group. Her attendance improved and she turned in assignments. Her essay (see Appendix A) tells a poignant story about domestic violence and calls for protections for women. She worked alone and silently on it, frequently asking me for help in writing her sentences on her poster and asking my opinion about what she wrote. Her longest essay before this essay was a six-sentence paragraph. This essay is a carefully crafted essay about domestic violence. The quality of the writing far surpasses any other assignment she had done in my class, demonstrating her motivation to give voice to her ideas. I do not know whether she had experienced domestic violence first hand, but her effort and the specific examples in the essay makes me believe that this topic had great importance for Laura. Through the use of a curriculum which allowed her to hear the voice of others, the muralists, she began to discover her own voice.
Factors in the Development of Voice

There are many factors in the development of a student’s sense of voice. Choice, modeling, validation of students’ opinions, and scaffolding were all influential in the development of voice during the implementation of *I Have Something to Say*.

Graves (1989) emphasizes the importance of a student’s choice of topic and sense of ownership of the writing. In this curriculum, students were given choice of topic and had ownership of their writing. While I gave them instruction in structure and required that the elements of persuasive essays be used, I allowed them to choose their topics and write their own ideas. I made comments as they designed their posters or wrote their essays to help them elaborate on their ideas, but they were allowed to express their own opinions as long as they supported them with evidence and details.

Another important factor was modeling. The muralists they studied had strong opinions and their art work clearly expressed the artist’s personal voice. The murals served as examples of individuals expressing their own authentic idea in a very particular way. This experience allowed students to see that they can and should develop their own voice in their writing. The experience of talking about these murals in groups allowed students to hear each others’ voices and validate each other’s interpretations by listening to each other. One student, Octavio, commented that what he most liked was hearing everyone’s ideas.

Mehan (1979) comments that classrooms often follow a teacher-controlled structure with only one possible answer. First, the teacher explains the material to be learned. Then, the teacher asks a question to which he knows the answer. Finally, the teacher confirms if the answer is right or wrong. This structure places all the power in the
hands of the teacher who is seen as having a monopoly on the truth (Mehan, 1979; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, and Lintz, 1996). The fact that murals have multiple interpretations for students to explore gives their opinions merit and validates their thinking process. In my field notes, I noticed at the beginning that students’ consistently asked me, “Is this right, Teacher?” Later in the unit, this question disappeared.

A student may have a sense of voice but not have the means to express it. Without the necessary linguistic tools, the student cannot present his thoughts in a way understood by others. The use of art in the pre-writing stages of essays served as a scaffold that allowed students to express their ideas in images and then use those images to explain themselves in words.

Octavio’s comments during his interview, as shown in Figure 5, are an example of how the curriculum helped him to discover his voice and that of others. His comments also describe how images allowed him to understand others’ thoughts and express his own thoughts through images as a substitute for language.

| Teacher: What do you think of what we did with pictures to learn how to write persuasive essays?  
Octavio: It was cool ‘cause you get to see different ways of thinking of not just yours. You visualize everything. Like in the pictures that we did, there were different things that everyone saw… Like in the picture of the crying baby, like that big head, represented every single child in the world.  
Teacher: Compare it to other ways you have learned how to write.  
Octavio: Like I have my ideas in my mind and I can say them all in my mind but to get them on paper it was hard. But with the drawings, with the drawings and everything I got ‘em easier on the paper. |

Figure 5. Interview with Octavio.
Finding 3: Students wrote longer, higher quality essays

This third goal is, in many ways, a consequence of the other two. If students are more engaged, they will produce more work and the work will be of higher quality. If they feel they have a voice, they will take ownership. This third goal centered on the quantity and quality of the work students produced. Students needed to be engaged with and take ownership of their writing. However, greater engagement or student ownership of writing would not, in and of itself, necessarily lead to better qualities of persuasive essays. If students have not learned the elements of persuasive essay writing, their essays will not be effective.

While the evaluation of the goals of increased engagement and increased student voice focused on process, the evaluation of student essays focused on product. If this curriculum did not produce improvement in the quality of student essays, it would not be considered successful by stakeholders like the principal and school district. Without their approval, other teachers and I would not be allowed to use it in the future to teach writing. For many teachers, administrators, and parents, product is the only result that matters. Students will be responsible for writing these essays throughout their school careers and for passing writing tests in high school. To be considered effective, this curriculum had to help students to write better essays.

When evaluating this goal I saw one very strong limitation. I had only taught students to compose rough drafts. I had instructed them on revision earlier in the year and some revision occurred in the final project posters, but they had not had a lot of instruction in revision. With that limitation in mind, I still felt I could compare their essays to earlier work to determine if learning and improvement had occurred.
Two work samples were available to evaluate student writing before the curriculum implementation. One was a homework essay about why we should celebrate Martin Luther King Day. All of my students know about Martin Luther King from past years in school and we also reviewed details of his life and the history of the holiday in class. The second was an essay in which students could choose any picture from a magazine and write a persuasive essay based on the picture. This assignment was unrelated to the assignments during the curriculum using Mexican murals. I compared these to later samples of student work such as the final project from the curriculum as well as follow-up assignments given one to two months after the implementation.

Comparison of quantity was easy through counting paragraphs or sentences. This measure might tell a little about their learning, but the quality would tell much more of a story. I chose seven focus students in order to evaluate improvement in the quality of student writing. I chose them at random from among the essays turned in. Four students who had been interviewed were chosen, so that findings for these students could be compared with their interview answers.

Unquestionably, the quantity of writing increased. The initial essays were one paragraph, ranging from two to seven sentences. Admittedly, I had not told the students that I wanted longer essays, but had left the assignment open-ended. However, their short writing indicates their perception of what constitutes a complete essay, their lack of knowledge of how to construct a longer essay, and/or difficulties with vocabulary in English. Their final essays were four to five paragraphs, about a page long.

The quality of the essays is a much truer measure of improvement in student writing. If the quality of the essays improved, this would show that students had learned
to express and organize their ideas and, therefore, they were not only writing more but writing better.

The comparison of the quality of their essays showed an overall improvement. Their essays at the end of the curriculum intervention included clear statements of a thesis, reasons for their positions, and the use of introductory paragraphs in all samples. To varying degrees, students provided details in their body paragraphs. For some, it was only one detail while others showed more development. Even in the essays done two months after the unit finished, these elements were present. The addressing of reader concerns, or counter-arguments varied among students, but many students’ final essays did take counter-arguments into account.

I created a rubric based on the standards (Appendix B), to evaluate student essays. The rubric evaluated the use of persuasive elements in student writing. The average scores for the essays written before students received the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum was 1.8. The average score for the essays written at the end of the curriculum was 3.2. Students improved an average of 1.4 points on a four-point scale.

**Conclusion**

During the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum students showed increases in their engagement, used authentic voice in their writing, and wrote longer essays. Evaluation of student writing with a rubric based on the California language arts standards for writing demonstrated increases in essay quality. These findings were based on the results of coded teacher field notes and student exit slips, as well as interviews with students and work samples.
Field notes during the curriculum intervention were compared with field notes after the implementation to provide evidence of increased engagement. Exit slips were also utilized to demonstrate engagement, but not for comparison purposes. Student interviews provided a final source of data.

Data revealed three observable factors at work in increasing engagement. First, group members developed knowledge by observing and discussing the same work of art on a single piece of paper during instruction, creating intersubjectivity for group members. Second, the use of art as a visual guide helped students to feel a greater sense of competence. Third, students enjoyed viewing art with content relevant to them. Culturally relevant curriculum validates students and makes them feel more a part of the learning process (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1998). This leads to greater engagement with the material being studied.

Student voice emerged in the course of their writing. Student choice of topics showed autonomy and personal interest. Their interest in revision or writing about challenging topics showed a sense of ownership of the curriculum. Finally, they showed originality in their ideas, often challenging mainstream perspectives.

Both the quantity and quality of student essays improved. The essays were compared as a whole for quantity and those essays written at the end of this curriculum implementation were longer than the essays writing before the implementation. Samples of essays written before and after curriculum implementation were compared. Essays were coded with a persuasive essay rubric based on the California state content standards for language arts. The sample essays showed improvement in essay quality. The essays in the sample as a whole contained key elements such as thesis statement, supporting
arguments, and the use of an introduction. Student essays differed in their level of supporting detail, logic of their arguments, and addressing of reader concerns.

Examination of work samples suggests that, through experience with this curriculum, these learners had the ability to write and take ownership of their writing. They truly did have something to say.
Chapter VIII

Conclusion

As I look back at the process that went into the creation and development of this curriculum, I marvel at how it evolved. Initially, as I thought of what I wanted to explore as a topic, I faced a difficult situation. I had a classroom in which behavior was a major issue and a large number of students who were unmotivated. The classes were mostly male and many students’ energy was directed anywhere except school.

I felt a need to integrate whatever I was learning with my instinct to survive. I say survive because I felt that if the stress and exhaustion that my classroom caused me continued all year, I would be tempted to quit. I came upon an educational philosopher named Michael Gurian.

Gurian had a new approach. He argued that boys’ behavior and academic performance was a product of neurological differences between boys and girls and that schools were “girl-centered” in their teaching methods and expectations (Gurian, 1997; Gurian & Stevens, 2006). For Gurian, schools expected students to sit passively and use mostly verbal styles. In contrast, Gurian claimed that boys needed learning activities that included movement such as manipulation of objects and rotations in groups. They needed to use varied learning strategies. They could not sit passively and silently all day. (I would argue that girls also need many different activities to accommodate varied learning styles, and that no student, boy or girl, should sit quietly and passively all day.) Gurian’s conclusions gave me hope and critical issues to think about. My students, Gurian’s theories implied, acted in ways that fit the way their brains functioned. The school’s
expectations and teaching strategies, Gurian argued, were ill-fitted to serve boys (Gurian, 1997; Gurian & Stevens, 2006).

I tried some of Gurian’s ideas. I used activities in which students did plot diagrams using note cards and pasting them on construction paper. I had students move to different groups every 20 minutes. I saw improvement in student performance. I thought I had made an important discovery. This hope was dashed when I learned that brain research in education was still in its early phases and that correlations between these studies and the educational practices was not a valid application of this research (Bransford et al, 1999).

While I decided against using Gurian’s research in the way that I had hoped, I soon realized that there was something to his theories. His strategies and theories had helped me to improve my instruction, but not for the reasons Gurian gave. Gurian did not see students like mine as problems. He instead looked for ways to accentuate their intellectual and cultural assets. I reflected on both my practice and the state-mandated curriculum and realized that something was missing. As I discovered what was missing, I saw the need for a new approach.

**Looking at the Students with New Eyes**

As I looked at the students with new eyes and compared their needs to the curriculum, I realized that the curriculum I had would not work for them. It was a whole-class curriculum intended to be delivered to students, and what it sought from them were right and wrong answers. The lessons were all taught in the same way with little student input. The curriculum used a deficit model: students were taught in the areas they were deficient and their strengths were ignored. My students had not been successful in the
educational system, and they saw the curriculum as being more of the same. For those who had used the exact same textbook he year before, it was literally more of the same.

The curriculum dictated by the district for these students addressed standards, in this case fourth grade standards, but the standards were not what my students cared about. In presentations, the publisher showed that the skills deemed necessary by the state were covered, but coverage of skills does not move teenagers, especially those that have not been successful. As I learned more about their lives, I saw how many of them had deep problems at home because of issues that they could not control. School was just another place they had no control over. They also had strengths and sources of joy in their lives—friends, music, in some cases jobs—but these strengths and interests were not part of the curriculum. I began to realize that they should be.

I realized that I could not change all the factors in the students’ lives or even transform the educational system. Instead, I asked a question: What is the one thing I could do in my classroom to help my students? I had already taken the first step, by choosing to see my students as individuals with assets and limitations, as adolescents who wanted to do things well and who wanted to find a positive identity for themselves. My second step was to look at research.

**Researchers and Teacher Research**

Teachers at my school do not talk often about educational research. Publishers present their “research-based” approaches, and then several years later devise a completely different program using contrasting research. Many teachers see research as something that occurs in a controlled, laboratory-like situation that has nothing to do with a classroom. “Our reality is very different,” many teachers argue.
I actually began this master’s program to learn what research can tell me about effective teaching and learning, but I had not realized how direct the connection would be. When desperate to find a way to help my students, I found that theoretical constructs came to the rescue. The process of looking through research allowed me to consider all the variables that would contribute to designing curriculum for my students. I could draw on work conducted over time and replicated in different scenarios to find a base for improving school for my students.

At the same time, I realized that I have expertise to bring to the interpretation of that research. I work with students every day and have taught for ten years. I have taught over 600 students according to my last estimate, and I am intimately familiar with what goes on in a classroom and with the lives of youth. Using research in this way, I realized that I could create my own contribution to the world of educational research and knowledge.

I now see the teacher-researcher role as a reciprocal one. From research I receive grounding in educational theory and do not make decisions based on impressions or hunches. At the same time, I can contribute to the world of educational knowledge in the way that a non-teacher cannot. An outside researcher has the advantage of studying many classrooms, making his findings more generalizable than what I as a teacher can study in one classroom. I have an in-depth perspective on what happens in the classroom, allowing me to provide a specific setting to test validity. In addition, as a teacher I can influence other teachers to accept the role of research in their classroom practice from the vantage point of a colleague with the same daily struggles and victories in the classroom.
**Changes in My Practice**

I believe that the process I used in designing curriculum has made me much more reflective in my practice. In fact, my principal complimented me on being a reflective teacher. I find that I more carefully think through all my educational decisions. The process used for this curriculum design project is one I now incorporate, on a smaller scale, throughout my teaching.

I have also learned to see my students differently. In September, I wanted to help them but I could only see the problems that made teaching and learning seem impossible. Now, I see the challenges that need to be faced and overcome in order to help students. The students that drove me crazy I now realize I will truly miss. Studying my students, especially “my boys” as I called them, has led me to understand them and grow to genuinely appreciate them.

I believe the students can truly feel and respond to this appreciation. I noticed a change in them as well as myself. What was a very difficult situation turned into a positive one. I saw my students’ qualities and as I did, other qualities emerged. As our relationship developed, students were more willing to accept challenges and to let me teach them.

**Questions for Future Exploration**

My students still do not write at grade level. They began the year at a third to fourth grade level in language arts and needed to make four years progress in one year to reach grade level. I did not expect this level of improvement. However, I saw remarkable gains for many students.
During the implementation of *I Have Something to Say*, I felt that vocabulary development and revision needed more investigation. Vocabulary is a central issue for my students. They can use art as semiotic mediation, but they eventually will need the complex, rich vocabularies necessary to truly produce grade level work. A second issue is revision. In many ways, revision is even more critical to quality writing than producing a first draft.

A final question nags at me. I had started by asking, “What is the one thing I can do in my classroom to help my students?” The truth is that my students have many needs beyond what one curriculum implementation could give them. My vice principal has approached me to ask for suggestions in creating a program for some of the students like the ones I had this year. They need so much beyond what just one project or one teacher can provide. However, as a teacher, I know that I can influence others to really look at this question.

As I reviewed the year, I realize that from the start of this project’s implementation to its finish two students were arrested, two expelled, and one required to repeat the year but in a special program for students at risk of expulsion. However, this question really hit home the other day with one incident. One of the students whose improvement was especially noticeable during this intervention was arrested. Another one of my students was involved. I had seen so much progress from both of them. Yet, it was not enough. Their decision was not my fault nor did I think I could have prevented it by myself. But they still make me question what else we can all do, especially since I still believe in them.
And there is a lot more we can do. While one month of instruction was not enough to address so many problems, the *I Have Something to Say* curriculum demonstrated that students who are not performing in school can be motivated to perform and surprise us with their ability. By emphasizing student qualities instead of deficiencies, and listening for their voice, we as educators can help them become better students. Curriculum initiatives which motivate students by developing their sense of competence, developing student voice in the classroom, valuing their culture, and making the difficult accessible can bring changes for students. *I Have Something to Say* and my students taught me that.
Appendix A

Student Work Samples

1. Geraldo’s persuasive poster
2. Juan’s first essay attempt
3. Juan’s persuasive essay after curriculum implementation
4. Laura’s persuasive essay
People die trying to cross the border to the United States, but they don't have many, so they have to live in the streets.

Immigrants suffer as no one can imagine, dead lives with them when things are hard, no one helps them, so they could die.

We need to stop immigrants being sent back to Mexico, or other countries, because they come here to work.

Otherwise Americans say that there are going to send every immigrant back to their country, but they don't realize what they suffer.
Juan’s 1st Essay

We need more army to protect us. We should enter to the army to step forward for our country. We will have more army to protect our country. It will be no robbery and our streets will be more secure.
Juan’s 2nd Essay

We should let immigrants cross the border to let them work country and have a better life. People are crossing the border to try to work in the fields but border patrol doesn’t let them. People are dying on the road of getting a better life. Although the Border Patrol doesn’t want immigrants in their country, we should let them pass and try to let them work in the United States.

Every person in the world wants a better life, so what the immigrants want is to cross and when they cross the border find a job and bring more money to their families. However, when they try to cross the border the Border Patrol catches them, they get returned to country. Most immigrants that try to cross the border are not bad people or drug dealers; they are hard workers and they only want a better life.

Some people that only want to cross the border for a better life are dying when they cross the border and they only want to get a better life for their children. Some boys and girls are waiting for dad or mom to get to their house in the United States and then they have some news from police. They don’t have any more mom or dad. So, they don’t have anyone to protect them or play with.

Although the country doesn’t want immigrants in this country, we should let them work in the fields or in other things, Mexicans are hard workers and they are very intelligent persons.

My conclusion is that we should let immigrants cross the border because the only thing they want is a better life for them and their children. If we try to let them work in our country, we could learn some things of their country and they could learn of our country. We should not treat them like trash.
Laura’s Essay

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is a serious problem that many women face in their daily lives. Men should stop hurting their women because they are not objects, they are human beings. Many men start hitting their girlfriends or wives because they get mad or they think that they are doing something wrong. Sometimes guys think it’s right to hit a woman but they are wrong. Guys think just because they are their girlfriends or wives they can hit them anytime they want but they can’t because they have no reason to.

Most of the people start getting hurt because guys just don’t like them anymore or because they are getting tired of each other, if they are tired of each other then they need to separate. Why are they gonna be with someone that hits them or even yells at them they should just separate and not even talk to each other. Women sometimes are just scared to separate but they shouldn’t be scared of telling them the truth. At the age 15 to 24 guys are already hitting girls just because they are doing something bad or because they don’t like what they are doing.

Hitting women is illegal so when a guy hits a girl you have to call the police so he can get arrested. Some women that are pregnant get hit to like 22% to 35% get hit and end up in their hospital. Women get killed by their husband, sometimes it’s bad when kids are seeing their parents get in an argument kids get all that in their head and they start doing bad in school, or they can’t concentrate. Many children always get paranoid getting home some don’t even want to get home that’s how bad they see their fathers beating their mother.
I think men should stop violence against women's because women get a physically injured; my other reason is that women violence is a crime and can lead to killing. My last reason is that domestic violence doesn't only affect the husband and wife it affects children to that is why sometimes kids want to runaway because they see that their dad is beating the mom. Also they shouldn't hit the women in front of their kids because they get scared and paranoid and they can't even concentrate in their work thinking about that all day. Those are all my reason why I think a guy shouldn't hit a woman...
Appendix B
Rubric for Evaluating Persuasive Essay

Thesis statement:

4 __ The position statement provides a clear, strong statement of the author's position on the topic.

3 __ The position statement provides a clear statement of the author's position on the topic.

2 __ A position statement is present, but does not make the author's position clear.

1 __ There is no position statement.

Arguments:

4 __ Includes 3 or more pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement. The writer anticipates the reader's concerns, biases or arguments and has provided at least 1 counter-argument.

3 __ Includes 3 or more pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.

2 __ Includes 2 pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences) that support the position statement.

1 __ Includes 1 or fewer pieces of evidence (facts, statistics, examples, real-life experiences).
Evidence and Examples:

4__ All of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author's position.

3__ Most of the evidence and examples are specific, relevant and explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author's position.

2__ At least one of the pieces of evidence and examples is relevant and has an explanation that shows how that piece of evidence supports the author's position.

1__ Evidence and examples are not relevant or are not explained.

Audience:

4__ Demonstrates a clear understanding of the potential reader and uses appropriate arguments. Anticipates reader's questions and provides thorough answers appropriate for that audience.

3__ Demonstrates a general understanding of the potential reader and uses vocabulary and arguments appropriate for that audience.

2__ Demonstrates some understanding of the potential reader and uses arguments appropriate for that audience.

1__ It is not clear who the author is writing for.

Introductory Paragraph:

4__ The introductory paragraph names the topic of the essay and outlines the main points to be discussed.

3__ The introductory paragraph names the topic of the essay.
2__ The introductory paragraph outlines some or all of the main points to be discussed but does not name the topic.

1__ The introductory paragraph does not name the topic and does not preview what will be discussed.

Closing Paragraph:

4__ The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader solidly understanding the writer's position. Effective restatement of the position statement begins the closing paragraph.

3__ The conclusion is recognizable. The author's position is restated within the first two sentences of the closing paragraph.

2__ The conclusion is recognizable but the author's position is not restated clearly.

1__ There is no conclusion. The paper just ends.
Dear Teacher,

_I Have Something to Say_ is a curriculum which was written for middle school English language learners and struggling readers. It could also be used with high school students and fluent English speakers, adjusting difficulty of the tasks and the time allowed for each activity. The guiding premise of this curriculum is that all students, regardless of reading proficiency or stage of English language development, have cognitive abilities and a voice to be discovered and developed. The curriculum uses visual images to develop knowledge of the elements of persuasive writing and language skills.

While some activities in this curriculum may seem difficult, they were piloted and revised with a group of eighth grade students with third to fifth grade reading levels. The majority of these students were English language learners at the early intermediate to intermediate level. These students were able to access the curriculum and learn from it. In some sections, I have included student examples to make the curriculum more comprehensible.

I recommend that you make only one copy of the pictures per group so that the students share the same page in group work. Place each picture in a folder so that students can refer back to past art work to review what they have already learned.

_I Have Something to Say_ is not a boxed curriculum to be taught as is. Teachers need to adapt it to their class and the curriculum requires interaction between teacher and student and groups of peers. I used the curriculum with a class that is over 90% Mexican,
but teachers might want to adapt it with art from different cultural groups to fit the make-up of their classes. At the same time, Mexican murals are useful as a persuasive text for all students to use. The majority of the lessons were used during a two-hour language arts block, but the time allotted depends both on student needs and the school schedule.

By using this curriculum, I believe that you will draw on your students’ strengths and help them to access high-order thinking skills and grade-level curriculum regardless of English language or reading proficiency. Good luck and enjoy.

Cliff Rachlin

Creator of *I Have Something to Say*
### Summary of the *I Have Something to Say* Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Student activities</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Understanding persuasion, writing a thesis statement, finding reasons to support the thesis.</td>
<td>Students write thesis statements to describe pieces of art by high school students and arguments to support that thesis.</td>
<td>Two hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Author’s thesis and supporting arguments.</td>
<td>Students interpret David Alfaro Siquieros’ <em>Echo of a Scream</em>. They identify the artist’s thesis and arguments to support that thesis. Students write a persuasive paragraph based on the artwork.</td>
<td>Two hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Author’s thesis and supporting arguments.</td>
<td>Students view two details of a mural by Siquieros and identify the artist’s thesis and arguments to support that thesis. Students write a persuasive paragraph based on the artwork.</td>
<td>Two hours</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Generating a thesis to organize arguments. Using information from different sources to create an argument.</td>
<td>Students view three different murals by Diego Rivera and generate a thesis statement to describe the central theme of the three murals. Students create a persuasive paragraph with information from each mural.</td>
<td>Two hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Writing a five paragraph essay.</td>
<td>Students use the artwork from the previous day to write a five-paragraph essay. Teacher models the process for students and then they write the essay.</td>
<td>Four hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding and answering counter-arguments.</td>
<td>Teacher works with the class to find arguments and counter-arguments in a mural from Jose Clemente Orozco’s <em>Epic of American Civilization</em>. Students use the computer to create posters showing these elements.</td>
<td>Six hours</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Students create a persuasive poster.</td>
<td>Students use the computer and internet to create a poster arguing an opinion of their choice with art and words.</td>
<td>Ten hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Students write a persuasive essay.</td>
<td>Students use their posters to write their essays.</td>
<td>Four hours and homework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basic Pattern of Instruction

Each day, present the concept and the academic word or words. Relate that day’s vocabulary to earlier vocabulary. For example, on the first day of implementation the academic word is “thesis.” On following days, review “thesis” and add “argument,” “counter-argument,” “evidence,” etc.

After the teacher briefly presents the day’s concept, each group of three or four students receives a copy of a mural or a detail (section) from a mural. They are given a graphic organizer to copy, either already printed or written on the board. In the group, students write the elements of the picture that correspond to the concept. For example, if the term is “thesis,” then students write the artist’s principal opinion, what he wants you to believe. If it is “argument,” they write the reasons that the artist gives in the mural for his point of view. They discuss this and come to a consensus.

Finally, the teacher has the groups share out and writes their responses on the board. Various points of view are accepted, but they must be supported by the information in the picture. The teacher also gives the expert analysis from the Rochfort (1998) book for the students to learn from in the same format.

As the lessons progress, students will write paragraphs and eventually full essays. These activities will include group work, writing modeled by the teacher, and individual work. Pacing is based on student progress and grasp of the concepts and review is essential on a regular basis.

To evaluate students, I used their work but I also used exit slips. The exit slips are the responses to two questions: “What did you learn about writing from today’s lesson?” and “What did you like/not like about today’s lesson?” The questions are the same each
day to make this final activity faster, a maximum of five minutes. The students write their responses on note cards and hand them to the teacher on the way out.

**Choice of artwork:**

I chose Mexican murals for two reasons. One is that they are works that present a clear opinion with a form of visual argumentation. A second reason is that they were very appropriate culturally for my students. I would recommend them for any cultural group and this curriculum does not assume any prior knowledge.

For different students or different curricular goals, other artwork could be used within the same design. In a previous year, I did a smaller scale version of this curriculum with photos about war, from multiple perspectives. English teachers who also teach history might consider the use of political cartoons.
Lesson 1: Standards, Vocabulary, and Understanding Persuasion

Introduction: Understanding persuasive writing


**Standard:** Write the standard for persuasive writing on the board (I used the one for 8th grade, but other grades have similar ones). If the grade does not have standards for persuasive essay, a list of competencies generated by the teacher or the school can be used as a standard. Explain to the students that this is the standard for good persuasive essay writing and that we will be learning the terms one or two per day and helping them know how to apply them to composing, writing, and evaluating writing.

**California Content Standards, 8th grade, Writing**

2.4 Write persuasive compositions:

a. Include a well-defined thesis (i.e., one that makes a clear and knowledgeable judgment).

b. Present detailed evidence, examples, and reasoning to support arguments, differentiating between facts and opinion.

c. Provide details, reasons, and examples, arranging them effectively by anticipating and answering reader concerns and counter-arguments.

**Unit opener:** Teacher defines the word “persuade.” Ask the students to quick-write about when they need to persuade someone else and how they do it. Share out answers and brainstorm situations relevant to the students’ lives: for example, when they want permission to go to the movies, when they want to convince a teacher to have a class party, etc. Immediately proceed to the first student activity that follows.
Materials:

1. Copy of four wood block prints by high school students from a teacher website for a high school in Phoenix, Arizona (http://mati.eas.asu.edu:8421/ChicanArte/stud.prints.html), one per group of three students (Handout 1, page 139).

2. Copy of four, one-sentence summaries by the artists of the message of their picture, one per group of three students (Handout 2, page 140). The summaries are not in the same order as the prints.

3. Graphic Organizer 1, handed out or on the board.

Graphic Organizer 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist’s reason:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My second reason:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the sentence by the artist says:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learning what a thesis (opinion) is:

1. Students are given handout 1. They are asked to state what opinion is expressed in the art and the reason justifying it as expressed in the artwork. They work on this task in groups.

2. Then they are given the student artists’ one sentence explanation of each picture (handout 2) also from the website, and are asked to match the written opinion (thesis) with the picture. They copy this on their graphic organizer and may use it to change
their thesis sentence or reasons. However, explain that they do not have to write the same sentences as the artist. Finally, students add a second reason, or argument, for each opinion expressed the picture, using their own ideas. See example.

Graphic Organizer (example)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis: (Based on art) You should not smoke.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Artist’s reason: It can kill you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My second reason: Second-hand smoke is dangerous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What the sentence by the artist says: “Teach children to stop smoking because smoking can kill you.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"People should not have the power and authority to end people's lives. Ban the death penalty."

John

"If all the immigrants are taken out of the country, we will not have anybody to pick crops."

Jose

"Some people are looking for a way to escape reality but using drugs will only make their problems worse."

Latoya

Smoking causes so many diseases and can lead to an early death. We need to teach people not to start smoking."

Dayna
Lesson 2: More on Thesis and Reasons

Artwork: David Alfaro Siquieros, *Echo of a Scream*. (This mural can be found on the New York Museum of Modern Art website, http://www.moma.org)


Vocabulary: thesis, reasons

Directions:


   (In later lessons, the word “argument” is substituted for “reason.”) This artwork is
particularly rich for student discussions because it has multiple interpretations. The teacher can point out elements of the picture in order to assist, without giving them the answers. When students are stuck, redirect them to look at the picture.

Graphic Organizer 2 (blank)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graphic Organizer 2 (example)

| Thesis: We need to put an end to the wars that are killing defenseless children. |
| Reason: These children are left orphaned and all alone. |
| Reason: Their homes and villages are destroyed. |

(Note: This is only an example. Students will probably come up with very different answers. One very popular interpretation of the artwork in my class had to do with street children. For an extension, the teacher could also talk about current events.)

2. Students copy their three sentences to create a short paragraph. Here, if they do not know about indenting paragraphs, you can teach this convention.

Example:

We need to put an end to the wars that are killing defenseless children. These children are left orphaned and all alone. Their homes and villages are destroyed.
3. Closure: Student volunteers read their paragraphs. Teacher can create a paragraph to use as an example.

Lesson 3: More on Thesis and Reasons

Artwork: David Alfaro Siquiers, *La Revolucion Contra la Dictadura Porfiriana: El Dictador Porfirio Diaz* and *La Revolucion Contra la Dictadura Porfiriana: Huelga de los Mineros en Cananea 1906*. (These murals can be found at http://encontrarte.aporrea.org/expo/e6.html) These are two details from the same mural and should be printed on the same one-page student handout. Students must be given some background about Diaz (Rochfort, 1998) and helped to analyze the message in the art by the teacher in their groups. Note: Both pictures are treated as part of one piece of art, since they are details of the same mural.

Background on Porfirio Diaz: Diaz was dictator of Mexico from 1876-1911. He is considered by many its most oppressive ruler, using the military to squash all opposition. He also stole from the nation, taking a large part of the tax dollars for himself and rewarding his wealthy friends. The Mexican revolution of 1911 was a direct result of rebellion against his rule.
**Activity:** Students fill out a graphic organizer, identical to the one in lesson two, asking for thesis and arguments. Groups need to look closely at pictures to do this.

**Tips:** The imagery is strong enough that students can find the thesis and supporting arguments for these pictures, although at first this task looks challenging. Have them
work in groups so as to generate ideas among themselves and practice explaining their
thinking to each other. If they are stuck, ask them to look at the clothes in each picture,
the soldier, the hand in front of Diaz. The Porfirio Diaz picture should be the central
image, and the other images (such as the soldier, the miners carrying the dead man, the
rich man asking for money) should be related by students to the image of Diaz. Ask them
to come up with a general statement for the thesis that includes the other reasons.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thesis</th>
<th>Porfirio Diaz was a dishonest, horrible dictator who mistreated the people.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reason (that the artist gives to demonstrate that his thesis is true)</td>
<td>He gave money only to the rich who helped him. (Picture 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>He used soldiers to control the people. (Picture 1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason</td>
<td>He killed innocent, poor farmers. (Picture 2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students finish by writing a paragraph and the lesson closes with student volunteers
sharing their paragraphs with the whole class.

Example:

Porfirio Diaz was a dishonest, horrible dictator who mistreated the people. He
gave money only to the rich who helped him. He used soldiers to control the people. He
killed innocent, poor farmers.


Background for teachers: Mural structure

The majority of Mexican murals have a similar physical structure. There is a central image to which all other images in the same mural relate. The key to understanding the mural is in comprehending the relationship between the central image and other images in the mural. In terms of argumentation, the central image contains the thesis and the other images provide supporting arguments or factual (usually historical) evidence to support these arguments (Rochfort, 1998).
Diagram of mural structure (Table reflects spatial layout of elements in the mural):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting arguments/evidence</th>
<th>Thesis (Principal image/message)</th>
<th>Supporting arguments/evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Materials**: Mural by Rivera as a handout, one per group. Graphic organizer or handout shown here:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arguments or evidence:</th>
<th>Thesis: Principal Message</th>
<th>Arguments or evidence:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Activity**:

1. Review thesis sentences. Explain that “argument” is another word for “reason,” which was used as a term earlier. Present the word “evidence” as facts that prove the arguments.

2. Students fill out the graphic organizer. They must come to a consensus as a group. After about 50 minutes, each group shares their answers with the class and the teacher writes the answers on the board. The teacher discusses the answers and asks students to identify where in the mural they found the thesis, arguments, or evidence recorded in their graphic organizer.

To close the lesson, take 5-10 minutes to explain that murals have structure to make them easier to understand, and essays have structure as well. Give students the basic structure of an introduction: a thesis statement, arguments to support the statement, and a closing sentence that sums up the thesis.
Lesson 5: Generating a Thesis

Materials: Collage of three images by Diego Rivera: Good Government, Night of the Rich, and Night of the Poor. (Good Government can be found at http://encontrarte.aporrea.org/expo/e6.html, Night of the Rich and Night of the Poor can be found at http://www.museumsyndicate.com) The teacher should print or copy all three images on a one-page handout, with Good Government on top and the other two images below. Give out one handout per group of three or four students.

Activity:

1. Ask students in groups to write what is happening in each picture. As you circulate to help them, ask them to look carefully at each picture. Relate your questions to the picture’s titles: What is good about this government? (Possible responses: Everyone has work. People are working together.) What does the artist say about the poor? (Possible responses: They have nothing. Mothers cannot feed their children.) What does the artist say about the rich? (Possible responses: They ignore the poor. If they don’t help the poor the poor may rebel against them.)

2. After the students have had time to work, share answers as a class. If a group of students cannot generate a thesis or supporting arguments, let those students choose a thesis statement and supporting arguments from the responses of their peers written on the board so that they can do the next activity.

3. Explain to the students that this set of images has no middle, because it is a collage of murals from separate pictures. However, they want to come up with a sentence that describes all three. Tell them that their thesis statement must mention good
government and the poor. Let the groups have five minutes to come up with a sentence. Then take each group’s suggestion and vote on a favorite sentence.

4. Finally, ask the students to copy the sentence. They then add one sentence derived from their interpretation of each picture.

**Example:**
Good government helps all citizens. In a good government, all citizens have work. Families can make enough money to buy food and feed their children. In a good government, the rich do not have more power than the poor.
Lesson 6: Writing the Essay

Materials: Art from yesterday. Paragraph from yesterday.

Activity:

1. Review yesterday’s paragraph. Write it on the board and have students read it.

2. Explain that students will be using that paragraph to write an essay. They will now use details or examples, like in the murals, to explain their ideas.

3. Explain that their second, third, and fourth sentences are called arguments, the reasons for their opinion. Tell them to mark the second sentence A, the third B, and the fourth C.

Example:

Good government helps all citizens. (A) In a good government, all citizens have work. (B) Families can make enough money to buy food and feed their children. (C) In a good government, the rich do not have more power than the poor.

4. They are to copy the first paragraph or use the one they copied from the day before.

Then for each successive paragraph, they will copy the sentence (A, B, or C) and use details from the mural to explain their answer. See example: (Note: The sentences written outside of the parentheses in this example are teacher provided; those inside parentheses are examples from one student’s work. This is the section that the students write, using the pictures to generate ideas. Student answers will vary.)

Example:

Good government helps all citizens. In a good government, all citizens have work. Families can make enough money to buy food and feed their children. In a good government, the rich do not have more power than the poor.

In a good government, all citizens have work. (People have the opportunity to make money and be proud. There are many different kinds of jobs such as farming or factory work. They are treated fairly).
Families can make enough money to buy food and feed their children. (Many mothers don’t have enough money to buy food to feed their children. They need work so that they can help their families. Children are dying because their parents do not have good jobs).

In a good government, the rich do not have more power than the poor. Everyone is treated equally. (If the poor are not treated fairly, the country may have violence. People do not want to be violent, but they become frustrated when some people have everything while their children are dying.)

5. Walk around and help students. Even if they have not finished, leave 15 minutes to write a conclusion. Explain that a conclusion summarizes the main ideas and ends with a call to action. Have students volunteer answers for the conclusion and then write it as a class.

Example:
A good government helps people. Everyone has enough food. People can work together. It is important that people, especially children, have enough to eat. Let’s create a government that helps everyone!
Lesson 7: Looking at Counter-Arguments

Materials: No special materials are necessary for this lesson. This is the only lesson that does not use art.

Introduction: Choose a student for a role-play. Then choose a situation such as a teenager asking a parent for permission to go to the movies. Let the student be Mom or Dad and you be the student. Give reasons for your permission that make no sense for a parent such as, “I’ll be the only girl and there will be lots of older boys” or “My homework is boring and I want to have fun.” Then, the student answers you.

Activity:
1. The students in groups come up with reasons why their parent(s) would not let them go out. Then, ask them to write what they could say to convince their parents. For example, if the parent would say “You have lots of homework.” You could answer, “But I have two days to do it” or “I always do my homework and deserve a reward.”
2. Put the word “counter-argument” on the board. Explain that a counter-argument is the reason that your reader (audience) might disagree with you. “You have lots of homework,” is your parent’s counter-argument. When you say, “I always do my homework and deserve a reward,” you are answering a counter-argument.
3. Explain that in writing persuasive essays, you need to understand and answer counter-arguments. You can use the words “although,” “even though,” and “while” to do so.

Examples:
Although I have a lot of homework, I have three days to do it.
Even though you say that I have a lot of homework, I always do my work and deserve a reward.

While homework is important, I also need time for fun.

4. Now, students will write about an introductory paragraph to an essay about an issue such as uniforms or the school’s right to search their backpacks. They will list the school’s reasons for these rules. Then they will answer with sentences using “although,” “even though,” or “while.” Students may need examples to help them get started:

**Examples:**
Although schools want to check our backpack for weapons, this violates our privacy.

Even though some people say that uniforms reduce gang activity, having to wear a uniform punishes responsible students who are not gang members.

5. Student volunteers share sentences with the whole class in the last 10 minutes.

**Extension:** Students write a 5-paragraph essay using what they have learned in the previous classes. They must answer at least one counter-argument. Possible topics for thesis sentence: Students should (or should not) have to wear a uniform. Schools should not (or should) be allowed to search backpacks. Students should (or should not) have weekend homework.
Lesson 8: Graphic representation of counter-arguments and introductory paragraphs

**Artwork**: Jose Clemente Orozco, *Modern Human Sacrifice* and *Ancient Human Sacrifice*. (From the *Epic of American Civilization* at Dartmouth University, [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/Orozco/allpanels.html](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/Orozco/allpanels.html))

**Materials**: Computer with internet access. Projector of images (suggested because of the ability to project the image large enough to see clearly and use the computer to cut and paste parts of the images). If the teacher does not have access to this technology, the teacher can photocopy the images and demonstrate the activity by cutting and pasting them onto construction paper.

**Vocabulary**: counter-argument, answering counter-argument

**Activity**:

1. This activity is very much teacher-directed. Because of the difficulty of understanding the concept of counter-arguments and answering them, this lesson is designed for the teacher to instruct students step-by-step and frequently check for understanding. The teacher shows *Modern Human Sacrifice* and provides background about the Unknown Soldier as a monument to heroes. Ask students how this picture looks different than a monument to a hero. (His face is covered by a multi-colored flag, representing many nations. He is a skeleton without a face.) Then the teacher shows *Ancient Human Sacrifice* (another panel from the same website) and helps students to compare the two murals. What is Oorzco
saying about war? (That it is human sacrifice.) How is the Unknown Soldier in this picture different from a hero? (He has no face. He is a skeleton.)

2. Orozco presents war as sacrificing the young to a flag. However, in the background of the mural he includes an image that represents a counter-argument to his anti-war views. There is a small monument in the back of the picture presenting soldiers as heroes who defend their country. How would Orozco answer that? (They are just dead. They are sacrifices to a flag. They are faceless, that is, they have no identity.)

**Putting it all together: Part 2 of lesson** (may be done on a different day)

Students create a persuasive poster.

Teacher works with class to create a persuasive poster. The teacher projects *Modern Human Sacrifice* and takes students’ suggestions for a sentence that reflects Orozco’s thesis. The teacher does the same with arguments. Finally, he does the same with a counter-argument and the answer to it. Then, he copies and crops sections of the mural (using the drawing toolbar in Microsoft Word) and pastes them next to each sentence. Finally, he labels each element using text boxes (see example on page 157). Students do the same (they may need to be taught to format pictures or create text boxes). Students can use the teacher model as a guide, but should use their own words as much as possible. After they have had a few minutes to get started, the teacher hides the example and works with individual students.

If the teacher does not know how to do the above activity using a computer, he can use an overhead of the mural and cut it up as a demonstration for the students.
Students can use printed copies of Orozco’s murals and cut and paste them onto construction paper to create their poster.
Example of persuasive poster

**THESIS**
War is killing too many people.

**ARGUMENT**
War is like human sacrifice.
People die for a flag.

**COUNTER-ARGUMENT**
Although some people say that soldiers are heroes,

**ANSWERING COUNTER-ARGUMENT**
I believe that they are dying for no good reason.
Lesson 9: Students create persuasive posters and write essays

Materials: Computers with access to internet. (Means of projecting a power point presentation: optional.)

Activity:

This lesson may take several days. Students are instructed to choose a topic important to them and create a persuasive poster just like in the last lesson which states their opinion about the topic and supports the topic with arguments. They must include a counter-argument that a reader might have and then answer this counter-argument.

Creating the poster:

1. Teacher leads a discussion about possible topics for a persuasive essay.
2. Students choose a topic and work to create a persuasive poster like in lesson 7. They cut and paste images from the internet and include captions.
3. The teacher works with students to revise for content: How do the pictures and captions help to persuade the reader of your point of view? Did you include the counter-argument? Did you answer it?

Writing the essay:

1. Students copy their sentences to make their introductory paragraph.
2. They then write a paragraph for each reason given. They need to add ideas that are not in their poster.
3. They write a conclusion.
Extension:

1. This activity may be done several times.

2. Students write essays without the images, using what they have learned.
References (Cited in Appendix C)

**Artwork:**


**Books:**

References Cited


