

TEACHING YOUNG LEARNERS WITH THE C3 FRAMEWORK

So We Want Kindergarteners to Argue? Developing Argumentation Skills in the Kindergarten Classroom

Patricia Krizan

What exactly are argumentation skills?

How do the Toolkit inquiries help to develop these skills?

What does this look like in a kindergarten classroom?

Argumentation, both oral and written, has long been recognized as a necessary skill¹ and has even been dubbed “an essential instrument for a free society.”² Mastering this skill allows us to thoughtfully consider evidence, weigh

various options, and reach sound decisions. But, despite its recognized importance, too often argumentation is overlooked or minimized in the social studies curriculum where speaking and writing have been predominantly expository in nature as students compile or summarize information.³ Argument discourse calls upon students to make claims, provide reasoning and relevant textual evidence, and address counterclaims. Although argument is often thought to be the purview of secondary educators, skills associated with argumentation can be introduced

Editorial Introduction for Inaugural Column *Teaching Young Learners with the C3 Framework*

Welcome to the *Teaching Young Learners with the C3 Framework* column, a new feature in *Social Studies and the Young Learner*. Our mission is simple—to promote the ideas and practices of inquiry-based teaching and learning in younger grades. The *C3 Framework* fosters the notion of inquiry for all, that elementary and secondary students alike benefit from opportunities to engage deeply with social studies content and with one another.

The *Teaching Young Learners with the C3 Framework* column will include a wide range of articles and authors. Many will present classroom-based inquiries ready to download and teach. We hope many articles will highlight student and teacher experiences with inquiry in the elementary classroom. Others will offer insights into the various elements of an inquiry—compelling questions, formative performance tasks, sources, and taking informed action activities. And still others will highlight the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning with inquiry. The authors will vary as well—classroom teachers, school administrators, curriculum specialists, and university professors.

We expect you will find much of value in this issue’s column and those that follow. We also encourage you to consider authoring a column as many voices make a powerful song. If you have even the germ of an idea, let us know and we will look forward to working with you to bring it to print.

—Column Editors: Emma Thacker, Kathy Swan, John Lee, & S.G. Grant

and nurtured in primary school. These skills include formulating an opinion, stating a claim, articulating reasoning, and citing evidence, as well as understanding other perspectives and evaluating arguments of others.

In this article, I examine how the *New York State Social Studies Resource Toolkit (Toolkit)*⁴ supports argument discourse in social studies and then explore a primary teacher's curricular and instructional decisions regarding the development of children's argumentation skills. My study provides insights into how teachers can involve some of our youngest students in authentic, inquiry-based social studies learning that fosters argument discourse. While some may believe that primary students are too young for argumentation, we will see how one kindergarten teacher used the *Toolkit* inquiries to accomplish this lofty but attainable goal.

Social Studies Standards and *Toolkit* Inquiries Focus on Argument

In an effort to highlight the importance of and encourage instruction in argument discourse, recently adopted standards in both English Language Arts (ELA) and social studies include argumentation and argument writing expectations. The publication of *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards*⁵ incorporates the *K–12 Common Core State Standards for ELA/Literacy for History/Social Studies, Science & Technical Subjects (CCSS)*⁶ and explicitly cross references common language and expectations for student learning. The Inquiry Arc, a key feature of the *C3 Framework*, focuses social studies teaching and learning on four dimensions which contribute to the development of argumentation skills: (1) developing questions and planning inquiries, (2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools, (3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and (4) communicating conclusions and taking informed actions. The recently released *Toolkit* provides inquiry-based curriculum materials to develop not only social studies concepts but proficiency in argumentation as well.⁷

The structure of each K–12 *Toolkit* inquiry is the Inquiry Design Model (IDM),⁸ which offers students opportunities to engage with and practice the skills prioritized in the Inquiry Arc.⁹ The IDM consists of eight components, beginning with a compelling question that is intended to spur further investigation and ending with the summative performance task where students construct an argument that answers the compelling question “using specific claims and relevant evidence.”¹⁰ The *Toolkit* inquiries scaffold argumentation for students, and the K–2 compelling questions problematize the traditional expanding environment topics of self, family, and community. Each compelling question requires students to state a claim, whether distinguishing needs and wants, evaluating a rule,

or identifying responsible behaviors. The supporting questions and formative performance tasks scaffold students' thinking and call upon young learners to investigate, analyze evidence, take a stand, and provide reasoning as teachers encourage the development of these argumentation skills. The child-friendly featured sources included in each inquiry, whether an image bank, text, picture book, or video, provide evidence to support a student's stance on the compelling question, and thus, foster the process of argumentation. The IDM affords spaces for students to reason through various perspectives as they learn to substantiate their claims with textual evidence.

To better understand teachers' instructional decision-making and how they facilitate the development of argumentation skills with young learners, I recruited veteran kindergarten teacher Olivia Martin to offer insight on the implementation of one of the *Toolkit* inquiries. At the time of my study, Olivia had taught kindergarten for 26 years at Treetops School, a low-needs public primary school in a suburban district located approximately 30 miles from a major metropolitan area in New York State, and the district was in its second year of implementation of the *Toolkit* inquiries.¹¹ The Kindergarten inquiries include the following topics and compelling questions:

- Identity—Is Everyone Unique?
- Holidays—What Makes Holidays Special?
- Wants and Needs—Can We Get Everything We Need and Want?
- Maps and Globes—Which Is Better, a Map or a Globe?
- Civic Ideals—Why Do I Have to be Responsible?
- Rules—Are All Rules Good Rules?

During the course of the school year, Olivia used all or parts of these social studies resources with her class of twenty students, the majority of whom were English language learners.

Kindergarteners Participate in Argument Discourse

Although developing argumentation skills with primary students may appear daunting, Olivia employed a dialogic approach to scaffold instruction and attain this goal. Scholars contend that dialogue is a key factor in mediating students' construction of knowledge in general¹² and, specifically, in supporting students' acquisition of argumentation skills.¹³ Olivia recognized the importance

of dialogue in advancing students' argumentation skills and emphasized that students need encouragement to support their oral responses: "They have to feel comfortable that they are able to do this, so that's a big thing. They know they have a voice." Although she did not use the term *argument* initially, the idea of taking a position and articulating reasons began early on. Olivia introduced argumentation by focusing on *opinions*. As she explained to her kindergarteners, "This is opinion when you tell us how you feel or what you think about something." The following vignette illuminates the processes by which her young learners began to acquire argumentation abilities.

In September, Olivia implemented the *Toolkit* Rules inquiry since it aligned with a typical start-to-the-school-year activity—establishing classroom rules. This inquiry poses the compelling question, "Are all rules good rules?" which provides opportunities for students to understand, analyze, and evaluate rules while considering multiple perspectives. Students first explored the supporting questions, "Who makes the rules?" and "What does it mean to follow the rules?" using the inquiry image bank. They completed the formative performance tasks by discuss-

ing real world rules and rule makers (lifeguard, parent, police officer, and school principal) as well as by drawing rules being followed and not followed. At the same time, Olivia read fiction and nonfiction books involving rules, which often depicted reasons for particular regulations or practices and consequences when the rules are or are not followed.¹⁴ As student understanding of rules deepened, Olivia constructed a graphic organizer (Figure 1) with the class: "How can we build a classroom community?" "What do we need to do?" and "How should we behave?" They come up with the rules, and I make a chart. The rules become their rules, and ownership goes back to them." Based upon student suggestions of what they shouldn't do, the teacher discussed with the class the positive behaviors to be exhibited, which then became the classroom rules (see Figure 2).

Olivia then posed Supporting Question 3, "Can the rules ever change?" and applied it to classroom procedures, thereby giving students an opportunity to evaluate and revise: "Remember, these are *your* rules that you told me what you wanted—you talked about the rules you thought were important in here...So, we can change them, if you feel that they are not working; we can always change rules. That's always an option." Olivia indicated that many of the complaints in a kindergarten classroom center on taking turns. What may have appeared equitable in September may be met with objections and choruses of "it's not fair!" a month later. After a few weeks of school, her students began to grow frustrated with the *weekly* selection of the class meteorologist as they realized that some would not have the opportunity to announce the weather until December or January, a much-too-long wait for such a coveted position! Olivia convened a class meeting; student dialogue was at the heart of this activity: "Do you think that would be a better rule? What do you think?," and let them talk it out." Based upon student input, the morning calendar activity was modified so

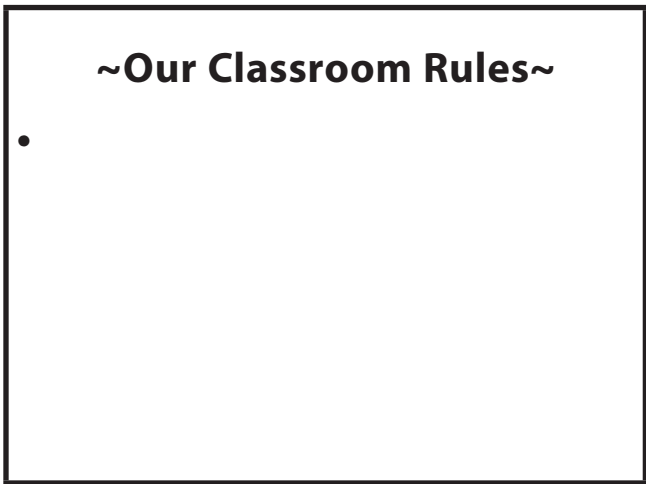


Figure 1.

Student Suggestions	Our Classroom Rules
No hitting, no punching, no pushing	Keep our hands to ourselves
Don't yell	Talk in our indoor voices
Don't talk when the teacher is talking (or another kid either)	Raise your hand to talk Listen when others are speaking
No budging	Wait until it's your turn
No grabbing a toy or book	Ask to share or for a turn
Don't say mean things	Say nice and kind things only
No running in school	Walk in the classroom and halls Run in the gym or on the playground only

Figure 2.



Mrs. Claire Cumberbatch leading her students in the Pledge of Allegiance. Cumberbatch was the leader of the Bedford-Stuyvesant group protesting school segregation. (Dick DeMarsico/Library of Congress)

that children took turns being the meteorologist on a daily, rather than weekly, basis. Encouraging student agency, Olivia reminded the class, “If we see it’s not working, we change our rules. Rules are made to be changed according to your needs.”

So too, students became disenchanted with the lining up procedure in which they were called by rows to the front of the class. Again, Olivia opened the topic for discussion, allowing students to voice their dissatisfaction with the current process: “I’m always last!” “Conner keeps trying to budge!” “We never get to be next to other friends.” The class then brainstormed possible solutions: “The tallest can go first then the next one and the next one.” “No, it should be the littlest!” “If it’s your birthday, you should be first.” Olivia offered other possibilities—by hair color, by birth date, or in alphabetical order. The class discussed the various options and then voted. Results deemed that children would be called alphabetically by their first names. One student immediately amended the

new procedure and proposed that sometimes they would be called starting with *A* and at other times “backwards—starting with *Z* so the *As* don’t always go first.” The class concurred, and Olivia altered the lining up process accordingly. Olivia chuckled as she related the discussion, knowing full well that some of the same problems regarding position would surface with the alphabetical solution, but she would provide an opportunity for the class to revisit the situation and rethink possible options. The teacher emphasized reasoning as students identified what was and was not working, provided their rationales for change, and suggested a new rule.

Olivia continued to use this approach during the year when students expressed complaints with other routines (“I didn’t get a turn!” “I never get a chance to go on the SMARTBoard!”). Again, she “let them talk it out” and propose a solution: “Yeah, that may be a better idea. We could try that; we could have a better system to make life better and work smoother, and we



An exhibit at the Levine Museum of the New South showing segregated drinking fountains. (David Wilson/Flickr/CC-BY-2.0)

can change what we do.' And, they have to buy into that. They have to have ownership of rules." Olivia created space for discussion and encouraged student problem-solving. Olivia then expanded the concept of changing rules to include a larger context: "In the United States, too, with grown-ups. If the rules don't work, we can change them and that's why we have people work for us in the government to change the rules to make them acceptable to everyone." Lessons involved civic mindedness and prepared these young citizens to consider laws of the larger community.

Later in the school year, Olivia revisited the compelling question, "Are all rules good rules?," and introduced historical sources from the Civil Rights era in conjunction with Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Olivia supplemented the inquiry with the book, *Happy Birthday, Dr. King*, as well as segregation visuals (such as the photograph on this page) and laws. She informed students: "There were rules back then too that were real rules for real people to follow, and they found that they didn't work at all. And the whole country was angry with one another, so he [Dr. King] worked for peace and tried to change, and he did change some of the rules." Next, kindergarteners examined and discussed pictures of children in school:

They see *white, colored*, and say, "How come? Why?" There were rules that only white kids could drink, and it said that on the water fountain. And only kids of color can drink over here....It grabs them right away. In their verbiage, "It's not fair! Why

can't they? Why would there be such a rule like that?," and "Playing on a playground and you can't play with who you want to? What?"

Olivia noted that the inquiry and civil rights component resonated with kindergarteners: "So that one [inquiry] was a great one for changing rules and why we need to change rules....They're interested, they really are. This is right on with them—they get it and it's at their level."

Meeting the Challenges

Although Olivia possessed well-designed curriculum materials and age-appropriate pedagogical strategies, she noted challenges. Students, even at this young age, were overly concerned with producing the "correct" answer. Olivia reassured her kindergarteners, "It's okay, there's no right or wrong—it doesn't mean you were the winner or loser." Also, children often mirrored the stance of their teacher or classmates. Olivia related instances of pupils aligning themselves to whatever position was being discussed at the moment: "Some students just go with the flow, and if the teacher says it, that's it!" Another challenge mentioned was students' difficulty in articulating reasons. Olivia shared that kindergarteners can make a claim, but when probed, "Can you tell me why you think it's this?" Some go, "Hmm, I don't know." Others, she noted, may provide reasons that were tangential or disconnected from the claim.

Olivia indicated that continued dialogue, brainstorming, and creating class t-charts with reasons supported her students' development of argument skills. She passionately expressed: "You have to get them there. So you change the scenario, change the vocabulary, change the words...feel

Children's Literature

- Candell, Arianna. *Mind Your Manners: In School*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 2005.
- Cook, Julia. *A Bad Case of Tattle Tongue*. Chattanooga, TN: National Center for Youth Issues, 2006.
- dePaola, Tomie. *Strega Nona*. New York: Aladdin Books, 1975.
- Henkes, Kevin. *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1996.
- Jones, Kathryn D. *Happy Birthday Dr. King!* New York: Aladdin Books, 1994.
- Lionni, Leo. *It's Mine!* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1986.
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- Williams, Rozanne. *Cat and Dog at School*. California: Creative Teaching Press, 1996.

them out so [they] can't just say, okay, you didn't get it and then move on. You have to probe deeper." Despite these challenges, Olivia confirmed growth in students' cognitive and argument abilities as reflected in their improved capacity to state a claim and offer reasons that were well-aligned to the claim by the end of the school year.

Argumentation and Young Learners

As the vignette illustrates, kindergarteners are quite capable of participating in meaningful argument discourse. Olivia recognized the importance of dialogue to support student learning: Through discussion and cooperative learning tasks, students appropriated argumentation skills as they articulated claims, practiced reasoning skills, and evaluated information with their peers. These conversations reinforced argumentative reasoning and promoted higher level thinking as children learned to express their ideas and consider classmates' responses.¹⁵ While inquiry instructions advise teachers that "class discussion or a combination of drawing and writing" is an appropriate response for the summative argument at the primary level, the Treetops first- and second-grade curricula require that children produce written responses. Research emphasizes the importance of dialogue in supporting argument writing,¹⁶ and Olivia's primary colleagues noted students' improved ability to make a claim and supply reasons while learning to write arguments. Kindergarten lessons in argumentation carried forth into first and second grades and laid a firm foundation for argument writing tasks.

Studies also indicate that the teacher is of primary importance in mediating concepts and skills through the design of the learning experience—by selecting and scaffolding appropriate curriculum materials and instructional strategies, to promote children's cognitive development.¹⁷ As we have seen, Olivia adeptly used the *Toolkit* inquiries as well as supplemental graphic organizers, visuals, and texts to foster argument discourse. Although she initially expressed apprehension regarding children's abilities to fully participate in inquiry tasks, Olivia was pleased with her kindergarteners' development of argumentation skills, and since implementing the *Toolkit*, has become more intentional about incorporating argument discourse across the curriculum, specifically in ELA and science. Ultimately, her young learners were successful in their efforts to articulate their arguments by stating a claim, supporting the claim with evidence, and recognizing other perspectives—certainly not the skills one typically ascribes to a social studies learning experience in kindergarten! ■

Notes

1. R. Andrews, *Narrative and Argument* (Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press, 1989); R. Andrews, *Teaching and Learning Argument* (New York: Cassell Education, 1995); D. Kuhn, *The Skills of Argument* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991); D. Kuhn, "Thinking as Argument," *Harvard Educational Review* 62, no. 2 (1992): 155–178.

2. T. M. McCann, "Argumentative Writing Knowledge and Ability at Three Grade Levels," *Research in the Teaching of English* 23, no. 1 (1989): 63.
3. G. Graff, *Clueless in Academe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); L. Levstik, "What Happens in Social Studies Classrooms? Research on K–12 Social Studies Practice," in *Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education*, eds. L. S. Levstik and C. A. Tyson (New York: Routledge, 2008), 50–62.
4. New York State Education Department, *New York State K–12 Social Studies Resource Toolkit* (2015).
5. National Council for the Social Studies, *The College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies, 2013).
6. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), http://corestandards.org/assets/CCSS1_ELA%20Standards.pdf.
7. The *Toolkit* is comprised of six curriculum inquiries (one annotated and five abridged) for Grades K–11. The inquiries for Grade 12 are presented in two sets—six for Economics and six for Participation in Government. The *Toolkit* inquiries are available at <https://c3teachers.org/new-york-hub/>.
8. S. G. Grant, J. Lee, and K. Swan, *Inquiry Design Model—Blueprint* (C3 Teachers, 2014), *Inquiry-Design-Model-Template.docx* (live.com).
9. The IDM template can be accessed at <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiry-design-model/>.
10. S. G. Grant, J. Lee, and K. Swan, *Inquiry Design Model—At a Glance* (C3 Teachers, 2014), 1, <http://www.c3teachers.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Inquiry-Design-Model-glance.pdf>.
11. This kindergarten example is part of a larger study on inquiry and argumentation in K–2 classrooms. P. I. Krizan, "K–2 Social Studies: Vygotsky, Inquiry, and Argumentation," doctoral dissertation, Binghamton University, 2018 (ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, publication no. 13421534).
12. L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); L. S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986); J. V. Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).
13. M. Goldstein, A. Crowell, and D. Kuhn, "What Constitutes Skilled Argumentation and How Does It Develop?" *Informal Logic* 29, no. 4 (2009): 379–395; A. Reznitskaya, R. Anderson, and L. Kuo, "Teaching and Learning Argumentation," *The Elementary School Journal* 107, no. 5 (2007): 449–472; C. R. Wolfe, "Argumentation Across the Curriculum," *Written Communication* 28, no. 2 (2011): 193–219.
14. Selections included *A Bad Case of Tattle Tongue* by Julia Cook, *Cat and Dog at School* by Rozanne Williams, *It's Mine!* by Leo Lionni, *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* by Kevin Henkes, *Mind Your Manners: In School* by Arianna Candell, *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill, and *Strega Nona* by Tomie dePaola.
15. D. Kuhn, Thinking Together and Alone. *Educational Researcher* 44, no. 1 (2015): 46–53; N. Mercer, R. Wegerif, and L. Dawes, "Children's Talk and the Development of Reasoning in the Classroom," *British Educational Research Journal* 25, no. 1 (1999): 95–111; Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind*.
16. Graff, *Clueless in Academe*; D. Kuhn and A. Crowell, "Dialogic Argumentation as a Vehicle for Developing Young Adolescents' Thinking," *Psychological Science* 22, no. 4 (2011): 545–552.
17. K. C. Barton, "Oh, That's a Tricky Piece!": Children, Mediated Action, and the Tools of Historical Time," *The Elementary School Journal* 103, no. 2 (2002): 161–185; A. Kozulin, "Introduction to Vygotsky's 'The Dynamics of the Schoolchild's Mental Development in Relation to Teaching and Learning,'" *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology* 10, no. 2 (2011): 195–197.

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