



ILLiad TN: 84969

Borrower: TWB

Journal Title: The subject is research : processes and practices

Volume: Issue:

Month/Year: Pages: 145-164 ?

Article Title: Argument as conversation: the role of inquiry in writing a researched argument

Article Author: Bishop, Wendy; Zemliansky, Pavel Stuart Greene

Lending String:

*TPN,TAG,SUR,TXU,TAI,TXJ,ASU,AKC,KKB,COX,AKD,KLG,KKQ,EXA,ICN

ILL Number: 182947777



Call #: Q180.55.M4 S87 2001

Location: Edinburg Stacks - 4th Floor AVAILABLE

Shipping Address:

ILL - Mabey Learning Resources Center
TEExpress 159/LBB
1900 W. 7th St. CB#1528
Plainview, Texas 79072
United States

We send our documents electronically using Odyssey. ILLiad libraries can enable Odyssey for receiving documents seamlessly. Non-ILLiad libraries can download Odyssey stand alone for FREE. Check it out at:
<http://www.atlas-sys.com/Odyssey.html>

EMAIL: LRC.ILL@WBU.EDU

Email: lrc.ill@wbu.edu

NOTICE: This material may be protected by US Copyright Law (*Title 17 U.S. Code*)

Argument as Conversation

The Role of Inquiry in Writing a Researched Argument

Stuart Greene writing a form of

In what way is argument part of what we do everyday?

Argument is very much a part of what we do every day: We confront a public issue, something that is open to dispute, and we take a stand and support what we think and feel with what we believe are good reasons. Seen in this way, argument is very much like a conversation. By this, I mean that making an argument entails providing good reasons to support your viewpoint, as well as counterarguments, and recognizing how and why readers might object to your ideas. The metaphor of conversation emphasizes the social nature of writing. Thus inquiry, research, and writing arguments are intimately related. If, for example, you are to understand the different ways others have approached your subject, then you will need to do your "homework." This is what Doug Brent (1996) means when he says that research consists of "the looking-up of facts in the context of other worldviews, other ways of seeing" (78).

In learning to argue within an academic setting, such as the one you probably find yourself in now, it is useful to think about writing as a form of inquiry in which you convey your understanding of the claims people make, the questions they raise, and the conflicts they address. As a form of inquiry, then, writing begins with problems, conflicts, and questions that you identify as important. The questions that your teacher raises and that you raise should be questions that are open to dispute and for which there are not prepackaged answers. Readers within an academic setting expect that you will advance a scholarly conversation and not reproduce others' ideas. Therefore, it is important to find out who else has confronted these problems, conflicts, and questions in order to take a stand within some ongoing scholarly conversation. You will want to read with an eye toward the claims writers make, claims that they are making with respect to you, in the sense that writers want you to think and feel in a certain

way. You will want to read others' work critically, seeing if the reasons writers use to support their arguments are what you would consider good reasons. And finally, you will want to consider the possible counterarguments to the claims writers make and the views that call your own ideas into question.

Like the verbal conversations you have with others, effective arguments never take place in a vacuum; they take into account previous conversations that have taken place about the subject under discussion. Seeing research as a means for advancing a conversation makes the research process more *real*, especially if you recognize that you will need to support your claims with evidence in order to persuade readers to agree with you. The concept and practice of research arises out of the specific social context of your readers' questions and skepticism.

Reading necessarily plays a prominent role in the many forms of writing that you do, but not simply as a process of gathering information. This is true whether you write personal essays, editorials, or original research based on library research. Instead, as James Crosswhite suggests in his book *The Rhetoric of Reason*, reading "means making judgments about which of the many voices one encounters can be brought together into productive conversation" (131). This is a much more meaningful way to see reading

When we sit down to write an argument intended to persuade someone to do or to believe something, we are never really the first to broach the topic about which we are writing. Thus, learning how to write a researched argument is a process of learning how to enter conversations that are already going on in written form. This idea of writing as dialogue—not only between author and reader but between the text and everything that has been said or written beforehand—is important. Writing is a process of balancing our goals with the history of similar kinds of communication, particularly others' arguments that have been made on the same subject. The conversations that have already been going on about a topic are the topic's historical context.

Perhaps the most eloquent statement of writing as conversation comes from Kenneth Burke (1941) in an oft-quoted passage:

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending on the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (110–111)

As this passage describes, every argument you make is connected to other arguments. Every time you write an argument, the way you position yourself will depend on three things: which previously stated arguments you share, which previously stated arguments you want to refute, and what new opinions and supporting information you are going to bring to the conversation. You may, for example, affirm others for raising important issues, but assert that they have not given those issues the thought or emphasis that they deserve. Or you may raise a related issue that has been ignored entirely.

writing as a process of understanding conflicts, claims, and important questions to ask.

Entering the Conversation

To develop an argument that is akin to a conversation, it is helpful to think of writing as a process of understanding conflicts, the claims others make, and the important questions to ask, not simply as the ability to tell a story that influences readers' ways of looking at the world or to find good reasons to support our own beliefs. The real work of writing a researched argument occurs when you try to figure out the answers to the following:

- What topics have people been talking about? *Identify an issue*
- What is a relevant problem? *Situation that calls for a response*
- What kinds of evidence might persuade readers? *framing a question*
- What objections might readers have?
- What is at stake in this argument? (What if things change? What if things stay the same?)

In answering these questions, you will want to read with an eye toward identifying an issue, the situation that calls for some response in writing, and framing a question.

Identify an Issue

An issue is a fundamental tension that exists between two or more conflicting points of view. For example, imagine that I believe that the best approach to educational reform is to change the curriculum in schools. Another person might suggest that we need to address reform by considering social and economic concerns. One way to argue the point is for each writer to consider the goals of education that they share, how to best reach those goals, and the reasons why their approach might be the best one to follow. One part of the issue is (a) that some people believe that educational reform should occur through changes in the curriculum; the second part is (b) that some people believe that reform should occur at the socioeconomic level. Notice that in defining different parts of an issue, the conflicting claims may not necessarily invalidate each other. In fact, one could argue that reform at the levels of curriculum and socioeconomic change may both be effective measures.

Keep in mind that issues are dynamic and arguments are always evolving. One of my students felt that a book he was reading placed too much emphasis on school-based learning and not enough on real-world experience. He framed the issue in this way: "We are not just educated by concepts and facts that we learn in school. We are educated by the people around us and the environments that we live in every day." In writing his essay, he read a great deal in order to support his claims and did so in light of a position he was writing against: "that education in school is the most important type of education."

Identify the Situation

It is important to frame an issue in the context of some specific situation. Whether curricular changes make sense depends on how people view the problem. One kind of problem that E. D. Hirsch identified in his book *Cultural Literacy* is that students do not have sufficient knowledge of history and literature to communicate well. If that is true in a particular school, perhaps the curriculum might be changed. But there might be other factors involved that call for a different emphasis. Moreover, there are often many different ways to define an issue or frame a question. For example, we might observe that at a local high school, scores on standardized tests have steadily decreased during the past five years. This trend contrasts with scores during the ten years prior to any noticeable decline. Growing out of this situation is the broad question, "What factors have influenced the decline in standardized scores at this school?" Or one could ask this in a different way: "To what extent have scores declined as a result of the curriculum?"

The same principle applies to Anna Quindlen's argument about the homeless in her commentary "No Place Like Home," which illustrates the kinds of connections an author tries to make with readers. Writing her piece as an editorial in the *New York Times*, Quindlen addresses an issue that appears to plague New Yorkers. And yet many people have come to live with the presence of homelessness in New York and other cities. This is the situation that motivates Quindlen to write her editorial: People study the problem of homelessness, yet nothing gets done. Homelessness has become a way of life, a situation that seems to say to observers that officials have declared defeat when it comes to this problem.

Frame a Good Question

A good question can help you think through what you might be interested in writing; it is specific enough to guide inquiry and meets the following criteria:

- It can be answered with the tools you have.
- It conveys a clear idea of who you are answering the question for.
- It is organized around an issue.

- It explores “how,” “why,” or “whether,” and the “extent to which.”

A good question, then, is one that can be answered given the access we have to certain kinds of information. The tools we have at hand can be people or other texts. A good question also grows out of an issue, some fundamental tension that you identify within a conversation. Through identifying what is at issue, you should begin to understand for whom it is an issue—who you are answering the question for. Audience

Framing as a Critical Strategy for Writing, Reading, and Doing Research

Thus far, I have presented a conversational model of argument, describing writing as a form of dialogue, with writers responding to the ways others have defined problems and anticipating possible counterarguments. In this section, I want to add another element that some people call framing. This is a strategy that can help you orchestrate different and conflicting voices in advancing your argument.

Framing is a metaphor for describing the lens, or perspective, from which writers present their arguments. Writers want us to see the world in one way as opposed to another, not unlike the way a photographer manipulates a camera lens to frame a picture. For example, if you were taking a picture of friends in front of the football stadium on campus, you would focus on what you would most like to remember, blurring the images of people in the background. How you set up the picture, or frame it, might entail using light and shade to make some images stand out more than others. Writers do the same with language (see also Chapter 4).

For instance, in writing about education in the United States, E. D. Hirsch uses the term *cultural literacy* as a way to understand a problem, in this case the decline of literacy. To say that there is a decline, Hirsch has to establish the criteria against which to measure whether some people are literate and some are not. Hirsch uses *cultural literacy* as a lens through which to discriminate between those who fulfill his criteria for literacy and those who do not. He defines *cultural literacy* as possessing certain kinds of information. Not all educators agree. Some oppose equating literacy and information, describing literacy as an *event* or as a *practice* to argue that literacy is not confined to acquiring bits of information; instead, the notion of literacy as an *event* or *practice* says something about how people use what they know to accomplish the work of a community. As you can see, any perspective or lens can limit readers' range of vision: readers will see some things and not others.

In my work as a writer, I have identified four reasons to use framing as a strategy for developing an argument. First, framing encourages you to name your position, distinguishing the way you think about the world from the ways others do. Naming also makes what you say memorable through key terms and

theories. Readers may not remember every detail of Hirsch's argument, but they recall the principle—cultural literacy—around which he organizes his details. Second, framing forces you to offer both a definition and description of the principle around which your argument develops. For example, Hirsch defines *cultural literacy* as "the possession of basic information needed to thrive in the modern world." By defining your argument, you give readers something substantive to respond to. Third, framing specifies your argument, enabling others to respond to your argument and to generate counterarguments that you will want to engage in the spirit of conversation. Fourth, framing helps you organize your thoughts, and readers', in the same way that a title for an essay, a song, or a painting does.

To extend this argument, I would like you to think about framing as a strategy of critical inquiry when you read. By critical inquiry, I mean that reading entails understanding the framing strategies that writers use and using framing concepts in order to shed light on our own ideas or the ideas of others. Here I distinguish reading as inquiry from reading as a search for information. For example, you might consider your experiences as readers and writers through the lens of Hirsch's conception of cultural literacy. You might recognize that schooling for you was really about accumulating information and that such an approach to education served you well. It is also possible that it has not. Whatever you decide, you may begin to reflect upon your experiences in new ways in developing an argument about what the purpose of education might be.

Alternatively, you might think about your educational experiences through a very different conceptual frame in reading the following excerpt from Richard Rodriguez's memoir, *Hunger for Memory*. In this book, Rodriguez explains the conflicts he experienced as a nonnative speaker of English who desperately sought to enter mainstream culture, even if this meant sacrificing his identity as the son of Mexican immigrants. Notice how Rodriguez recalls his experience as a student through the framing concept of "scholarship boy" that he reads in Richard Hoggart's 1957 book, *The Uses of Literacy*. Using this notion of "scholarship boy" enables him to revisit his experience from a new perspective.

As you read this passage, consider what the notion of "scholarship boy" helps Rodriguez to understand about his life as a student. In turn, what does such a concept help you understand about your own experience as a student?

Motivated to reflect upon his life as a student, Rodriguez comes across Richard Hoggart's book and a description of "the scholarship boy."

For weeks I read, speed-read, books by modern educational theorists, only to find infrequent and slight mention of students like me. . . . Then one day, leafing through Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, I found, in his description of the scholarship boy, myself. For the first time I realized that there were other students

His initial response is to identify with Hoggart's description. Notice that Rodriguez says he used what he read to "frame the meaning of my academic success."

The scholarship boy moves between school and home, between moments of spontaneity and reflectiveness.

Rodriguez uses Hoggart's words and idea to advance his own understanding of the problem he identifies in his life: that he was unable to find solace at home and within his working-class roots.

like me, and so I was able to frame the meaning of my academic success, its consequent price—the loss.

Hoggart's description is distinguished, at least initially, by deep understanding. What he grasps very well is that the scholarship boy must move between environments, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed. With his family, the boy has the intense pleasure of intimacy, the family's consolation in feeling public alienation. Lavish emotions texture home life. *Then*, at school, the instruction bids him to trust lonely reason primarily. Immediate needs set the pace of his parents' lives. From his mother and father the boy learns to trust spontaneity and non-rational ways of knowing. *Then*, at school, there is mental calm. Teachers emphasize the value of a reflectiveness that opens a space between thinking and immediate action.

Years of schooling must pass before the boy will be able to sketch the cultural differences in his day as abstractly as this. But he senses those differences early. Perhaps as early as the night he brings home an assignment from school and finds the house too noisy for study.

He has to be more and more alone, if he is going to 'get on.' He will have, probably unconsciously, to oppose the ethos of the hearth, the intense gregariousness of the working-class family group. . . . The boy has to cut himself off mentally, so as to do his homework, as well as he can. (47)

In this excerpt, the idea of framing highlights the fact that other people's texts can serve as tools for helping you say more about your own ideas. If you were writing an essay using Hoggart's term *scholarship boy* as a lens through which to say something about education, you might ask how Hoggart's term illuminates new aspects of another writer's examples or your own—as opposed to asking, "How well does Hoggart's term *scholarship boy* apply to my experience?" (to which you could answer, "Not very well"). Further, you might ask, "To what extent does Hirsch's concept throw a more positive light on what Rodriguez and Hoggart describe?" or "Do my experiences challenge, extend, or complicate such a term as *scholarship boy*?"

Now that you have a sense of how framing works, let's look at an excerpt from a researched argument a first-year composition student wrote, titled

“Learning ‘American’ in Spanish.” The full text of this essay can be found at the end of this essay. The assignment to which she responded asked her to do the following:

Draw on your life experiences in developing an argument about education and what it has meant to you in your life. In writing your essay, use two of the four authors (Freire, Hirsch, Ladson-Billings, Pratt) included in this unit to frame your argument or any of the reading you may have done on your own. What key terms, phrases, or ideas from these texts help you teach your readers what you want them to learn from your experiences? How do your experiences extend or complicate your critical frames?

In the past, in responding to this assignment, some people have offered an overview of almost their entire lives, some have focused on a pivotal experience, and others have used descriptions of people who have influenced them. The important thing is that you use those experiences to argue a position: for example, that even the most well-meaning attempts to support students can actually hinder learning. This means going beyond narrating a simple list of experiences, or simply asserting an opinion. Instead you must use—and analyze—your experiences, determining which will most effectively convince your audience that your argument has a solid basis.

As you read the excerpt from this student’s essay, ask yourself how the writer uses two framing concepts—“transculturation” and “contact zone”—from Mary Louise Pratt’s article “Arts of the Contact Zone.” What do these ideas help the writer bring into focus? What experience do these frames help her to name, define, and describe?

The writer has not yet named her framing concept; but notice that the concrete details she gathers here set readers up to expect that she will juxtapose the culture of Guayabal and the Dominican Republic with that of the United States.

Exactly one week after graduating from high school, with thirteen years of American education behind me, I boarded a plane and headed for a Caribbean island. I had fifteen days to spend on an island surrounded with crystal blue waters, white sandy shores, and luxurious ocean resorts. With beaches to play on by day and casinos to play in during the night, I was told that this country was an exciting new tourist destination. My days in the Dominican Republic, however, were not filled with snorkeling lessons and my nights were not spent at the blackjack table. Instead of visiting the ritzy East Coast, I traveled inland to a mountain community with no running water and no electricity. The bus ride to this town, called Guayabal, was long, hot, and uncomfortable. The mountain roads were not paved and the bus had no air-conditioning. Surprisingly, the four-hour ride flew by. I had plenty to think about as

my mind raced with thoughts of the next two weeks. I wondered if my host family would be welcoming, if the teenagers would be friendly, and if my work would be hard. I mentally prepared myself for life without the everyday luxuries of a flushing toilet, a hot shower, and a comfortable bed. Because Guayabal was without such basic commodities, I did not expect to see many reminders of home. I thought I was going to leave behind my American ways and immerse myself into another culture. These thoughts filled my head as the bus climbed the rocky hill toward Guayabal. When I finally got off the bus and stepped into the town square, I realized that I had thought wrong: There was no escaping the influence of the American culture.

The writer names her experience as an example of Pratt's conception of a "contact zone." Further, the writer expands on Pratt's quote by relating it to her own observations. And finally, she uses this frame as a way to organize the narrative (as opposed to ordering her narrative chronologically).

In a way, Guayabal was an example of what author Mary Louise Pratt refers to as a contact zone. Pratt defines a contact zone as "a place where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (76). In Guayabal, American culture and American consumerism were clashing with the Hispanic and Caribbean culture of the Dominican Republic. The clash came from the Dominicans' desire to be American in every sense, and especially to be consumers of American products. This is nearly impossible for Dominicans to achieve due to their extreme poverty. Their poverty provided the "asymmetrical relation of power" found in contact zones, because it impeded not only the Dominican's ability to be consumers, but also their ability to learn, to work, and to live healthily. The effects of their poverty could be seen in the eyes of the seven-year-old boy who couldn't concentrate in school because all he had to eat the day before was an underripe mango. It could be seen in the brown, leathery hands of the tired old man who was still picking coffee beans at age seventy.

The writer provides concrete evidence to support her point.

The moment I got off the bus I noticed the clash between the American culture, the Dominican culture, and the community's poverty. It was apparent in the Dominicans' fragmented representation of American pop culture. Everywhere I looked in Guayabal I saw

The writer offers an illustration of what she experienced, clarifying how this experience is similar to what Pratt describes. Note that Pratt's verb *clash*, used in the definition of *contact zone*, reappears here as part of the author's observation.

The author adds another layer to her description, introducing Pratt's framing concept of "transculturation." Here again she quotes Pratt in order to bring into focus her own context here.

The writer offers another example of transculturation.

little glimpses of America. I saw Coca-Cola ads painted on raggedy fences. I saw knockoff Tommy Hilfiger shirts. I heard little boys say, "I wanna be like Mike" in their best English, while playing basketball. I listened to merengue house, the American version of the traditional Dominican merengue music. In each instance the Dominicans had adopted an aspect of American culture, but with an added Dominican twist. Pratt calls this transculturation. This term is used to "describe processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (80). She claims that transculturation is an identifying feature of contact zones. In the contact zone of Guayabal, the marginal group, made up of impoverished Dominicans, selected aspects of the dominant American culture, and invented a unique expression of a culture combining both Dominican and American styles. My most vivid memory of this transculturalization was on a hot afternoon when I heard some children yelling, "Helado! Helado!" or "Ice cream! Ice cream!" I looked outside just in time to see a man ride by on a bicycle, ringing a hand bell and balancing a cooler full of ice cream in the front bicycle basket. The Dominican children eagerly chased after him, just as American children chase after the ice-cream truck.

Although you will notice that the writer does not challenge the framing terms she uses in this paper, it is clear that rather than simply reproducing Pratt's ideas and using her as the Voice of Authority, she incorporates Pratt's understandings to enable her to say more about her own experiences and ideas. Moreover, she uses this frame to advance an argument in order to affect her readers' views of culture. In turn, when she mentions others' ideas, she does so in the service of what she wants to say.

Conclusion: Writing Researched Arguments

I want to conclude this chapter by making a distinction between two different views of research. On the one hand, research is often taught as a process of collecting information for its own sake. On the other hand, research can also be conceived as the discovery and purposeful use of information. The emphasis here is upon *use* and the ways you can shape information in ways that enable you to enter conversations. To do so, you need to demonstrate to readers that you understand the conversation: what others have said in the past, what the context is, and what you anticipate is the direction this conversation might take. Keep in mind, however, that contexts are neither found nor located. Rather, context, derived from the Latin *contexere*, denotes a process of weaving together. Thus your attempt to understand context is an active process of making connections among the different and conflicting views people present within a conversation. Your version of the context will vary from others' interpretations.

Your attempts to understand a given conversation may prompt you to do research, as will your attempts to define what is at issue. Your reading and inquiry can help you construct a question that is rooted in some issue that is open to dispute. In turn, you need to ask yourself what is at stake for you and your reader other than the fact that you might be interested in educational reform, homelessness, affirmative action, or any other subject. Finally, your research can provide a means for framing an argument in order to move a conversation along and to say something new.

If you see inquiry as a means of entering conversations, then you will understand research as a social process. It need not be the tedious task of collecting information for its own sake. Rather, research has the potential to change readers' worldviews and your own.

Works Cited

- Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky. 1996. *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*. New York: Bedford Books.
- Brent, Doug. 1996. "Rogerian Rhetoric: Ethical Growth Through Alternative Forms of Argumentation." In *Argument Revisited; Argument Redefined: Negotiating Meaning in a Composition Classroom*, 73–96. Edited by Barbara Emmel, Paula Resch, and Deborah Tenney. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Burke, Kenneth. 1941. *The Philosophy of Literary Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Crosswhite, James. 1996. *The Rhetoric of Reason: Writing and the Attractions of Argument*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Freire, Paulo. 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Hirsch, E. D. 1987. *Cultural Literacy*. New York: Vintage Books.

- Ladson-Billings, Gloria. 1994. *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Quindlen, Anna. 1993. "No Place Like Home." In *Thinking Out Loud: On the Personal, the Public, and the Private*, 42–44. New York: Random House.
- Rodriguez, Richard. 1983. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. New York: Bantam Books.

Acknowledgment

I wish to thank Robert Kachur and April Lidinsky for helping me think through the notions of argument as conversation and framing.

Annotated Student Paper

Learning “American” in Spanish

Jennifer Farrell

The writer has not yet named her framing concept; but notice that the concrete details she gathers here set readers up to expect that she will juxtapose the culture of Guayabal and the Dominican Republic with that of the United States.

Exactly one week after graduating from high school, with thirteen years of American education behind me, I boarded a plane and headed for a Caribbean island. I had fifteen days to spend on an island surrounded with crystal blue waters, white sandy shores, and luxurious ocean resorts. With beaches to play on by day and casinos to play in during the night, I was told that this country was an exciting new tourist destination. My days in the Dominican Republic, however, were not filled with snorkeling lessons and my nights were not spent at the blackjack table. Instead of visiting the ritzy East Coast, I traveled inland to a mountain community with no running water and no electricity. The bus ride to this town, called Guayabal, was long, hot, and uncomfortable. The mountain roads were not paved and the bus had no air-conditioning. Surprisingly, the four-hour ride flew by. I had plenty to think about as my mind raced with thoughts of the next two weeks. I wondered if my host family would be welcoming, if the teenagers would be friendly, and if my work would be hard. I mentally prepared myself for life without the everyday luxuries of a flushing toilet, a hot shower, and a comfortable bed. Because Guayabal was without such basic commodities, I did not expect to see many reminders

of home. I thought I was going to leave behind my American ways and immerse myself into another culture. These thoughts filled my head as the bus climbed the rocky hill toward Guayabal. When I finally got off the bus and stepped into the town square, I realized that I had thought wrong: There was no escaping the influence of the American culture.

The writer names her experience as an example of Pratt's conception of a "contact zone." Further, the writer defines what she means, quoting Pratt. And finally, she uses this frame as a way to organize the narrative (as opposed to ordering her narrative chronologically).

In a way, Guayabal was an example of what author Mary Louise Pratt refers to as a contact zone. Pratt defines a contact zone as "a place where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (76). In Guayabal, American culture and American consumerism were clashing with the Hispanic and Caribbean culture of the Dominican Republic. The clash came from the Dominicans' desire to be American in every sense, and especially to be consumers of American products. This is nearly impossible for Dominicans to achieve due to their extreme poverty. Their poverty provided the "asymmetrical relation of power" found in contact zones, because it impeded not only the Dominican's ability to be consumers, but also their ability to learn, to work, and to live healthily. The effects of their poverty could be seen in the eyes of the seven-year-old boy who couldn't concentrate in school because all he had to eat the day before was an underripe mango. It could be seen in the brown, leathery hands of the tired old man who was still picking coffee beans at age seventy.

The writer provides concrete evidence to support her point.

The moment I got off the bus I noticed the clash between the American culture, the Dominican culture, and the community's poverty. It was apparent in the Dominicans' fragmented representation of American pop culture. Everywhere I looked in Guayabal I saw little glimpses of America. I saw Coca-Cola ads painted on raggedy fences. I saw knockoff Tommy Hilfiger shirts. I heard little boys say, "I wanna be like Mike" in their best English, while playing basketball. I listened to merengue house, the American

The writer offers an illustration of what she experienced, clarifying how this experience is

similar to what Pratt describes. Note that Pratt's verb *clash*, used in the definition of *contact zone*, reappears here as part of the author's observation.

The author adds another layer to her description, introducing Pratt's framing concept of "transculturation." Here again she quotes Pratt in order to bring into focus her own context.

The writer offers another example of transculturation.

version of the traditional Dominican merengue music. In each instance the Dominicans had adopted an aspect of American culture, but with an added Dominican twist. Pratt calls this transculturation. This term is used to "describe processes whereby members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture" (80). She claims that transculturation is an identifying feature of contact zones. In the contact zone of Guayabal, the marginal group, made up of impoverished Dominicans, selected aspects of the dominant American culture, and invented a unique expression of a culture combining both Dominican and American styles. My most vivid memory of this transculturalization was on a hot afternoon when I heard some children yelling, "Helado! Helado!" or "Ice cream! Ice cream!" I looked outside just in time to see a man ride by on a bicycle, ringing a hand bell and balancing a cooler full of ice cream in the front bicycle basket. The Dominican children eagerly chased after him, just as American children chase after the ice-cream truck.

Despite their penchant for American products and American ways, in many aspects the people of Guayabal were deeply Dominican. From the front steps of my host family's tiny house I watched many lively games of dominos, a favorite Dominican pastime. I noticed that El Presidente, the domestic beer, was the drink of choice in the town's one discotheque. I watched as artisans crafted wooden furniture and wove brightly colored cushions that could complement only a Dominican decor. Although they attempted to look like and dress like Americans, my Dominican friends continued to think as Dominicans. I remember how my friends Miguel and Henri could not understand why I insisted on jogging up to the next town every morning. Exercising was a foreign concept to a people whose daily lives were filled with manual labor. I explained to them that I jogged to stay in shape and to keep thin. In

return, Miguel explained to me that Dominican men liked a woman to be shaped *como una guitarra*, or like a guitar. The American ideal of a tall, thin woman had not influenced their idea of beauty. In a similar way, I noticed that the Dominicans continued to be friendly and laid back. The doors to every house were open and visitors were welcomed at all times. The typical American day, busy, rushed, and stressful, had not been integrated into their daily lives. Dominican afternoons consisted of sitting on the steps of houses with neighbors and watching passersby.

In returning to the framing concept of the contact zone, the writer utilizes Pratt's thinking to help her analyze her own experience and to understand more fully the predicament of the people she both met and observed.

Pratt notes that in many contact zones, "[the] subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, [but] they do determine to varying extents what gets absorbed into their own culture and what it gets used for" (80). This is true for Guayabal, in that the Dominicans have almost no opportunities to influence the American culture. One may argue that a typical American has no control over "what emanates from the dominant culture" either, but as consumers, viewers, and voters, we have an indirect influence. The Dominicans, on the other hand, are not consumers, as they have no money to spend. They are not viewers, as they have nothing to watch. They are not included in any demographic grouping and they are not the targets of focus groups. They do not get to choose what movie they see in the theater. They do not choose what American station the radio will be able to pick up. Just as Pratt notes, the Dominicans, caught in the contact zone of Guayabal, can choose only from the fragments of Americanism thrown to them, what part to assimilate into their own culture. For example, when a shipment of donated American clothes come in, the Dominicans can choose between used Nike and used Adidas sneakers. Most would probably choose the Nikes because they know from listening to Bull's games that Michael Jordan, their favorite basketball player, wears Nikes. However, what the radio failed to tell them about was the recent accusations

The writer's argument strays here. What terms from Pratt's essay might help the author bring the point about

capitalist commodities back into the frame of her argument?

The author tries out another framing term from bell hooks to help her bring race into focus within the larger frame of her essay. The author tries to conflate the social experiences of two different groups. What terms from Pratt and hooks might help her critique this impulse? The writer implicitly refers both to Pratt and hooks as she makes another point about American culture.

that Nike uses child labor in Asia to make its shoes. Would the Dominicans be so quick to choose Nikes if they knew how young, impoverished children like their own were being taken advantage of to make the shoes? Even if the Dominicans did know about the allegations and even if they did choose another pair of sneakers, would it make a difference at Nike? Probably not, because Nike already got its \$100 for the shoes. The Dominicans have no purchasing power and hence no consumer voices at Nike. As you can see, the Dominican's poverty precludes them from having any meaningful exchange of culture.

According to author bell hooks,* African American communities face similar difficulties in maintaining their cultural heritage among the overbearing American pop culture. In her book *Talking Back*, hooks writes about the difficulties in growing up as "a Southern black girl." She explains that "Young [American] black people are encouraged by the dominant culture . . . to believe that assimilation is the only possible way to survive, to succeed" (52). The same applies to Dominicans; however, while black Americans lose their cultural identity due to racism, Dominicans lose their cultural identity due to their poverty. The population of Guayabal is 99.9% black and the .01% of non-blacks are Peace Corps volunteers or church missionaries. The people of Guayabal have experienced very little, if any of the racism that African Americans have experienced, and they certainly have not experienced any racism from the Americans they associate with. Most of what Dominicans know about America comes from the media, which in Guayabal is mostly radio and film. The impoverished Dominicans see beautiful, happy Americans wearing designer clothes and consuming American products. They do not know much about the racism and injustice that African Americans experience in everyday life, so they associate greedy American ways with success, happiness, and health. Similarly, African Americans feel pressure to assimilate into white

*In composition studies the name of author, bell hooks, is not capitalized.

The framing concept of contact zone throws into relief the learning that the writer acquired through her experience of teaching in a summer school and what she wants readers to understand about her experience.

The writer implicitly refers to one of the "perils" of Pratt's notion of contact zones, and then reinterprets the same evidence using Pratt's insights about the dynamics of the contact zone.

America because they see it as a way to survive in communities where whites have an advantage. Both groups feel pressured to abandon their culture and to adopt white American ways.

While American products and consumerism threaten the Dominican culture, it is not one of the town's top worries. Much higher on the list of concerns is the education of its youth. Community leaders spend much time improving the area's public schools. I, too, spent much more of my time in Guayabal working in schools than I spent thinking about culture. However, in retrospect, I learned a great deal about culture through the new contact zones I found in the classroom. I traveled to the Dominican Republic with twenty-three other American students to help Dominican teenagers run a summer school for children who had never been to school. It was supposed to be a joint project with Americans helping Dominicans help other Dominicans. In the end the effort was successful, but not before we had to work through some awkward situations. The classroom I was assigned to had four teachers: myself; John, an American; Miguel, my aforementioned friend; and Fleury's, another Dominican teenager. It was our job to teach the children the basics of reading Spanish. It was the most challenging and exhausting work I had ever done. For five days I stood in front of a class of fifteen children, trying to teach them *la letra A* and *el numero dos*. This proved to be a difficult task because I don't speak very much Spanish. Plus, most of these children had never received any formal education in a classroom, and many came to school unclothed and hungry. As John and I struggled to find the words to adequately explain the day's activities and lessons, the classroom quickly turned to chaos. The children did not understand why they had to sit quietly in rows. Valencia, one of my star students, was throwing puzzle pieces across the room. Albierto was hoarding eight cans of Play-Doh in the corner. John and I scrambled to regain control, while Miguel and Fleury's played Legos with a couple

The writer refers more explicitly to Pratt's analysis of power in contact zones, and interprets the misunderstandings she observed as resulting from the contact zone. She echoes the juxtaposition between two cultures alluded to in the opening paragraph, this time clearly reinterpreting her experience and reiterating her argument.

The writer uses repetition ("I learned") to stylistically emphasize her argument.

students off to the side. They were being cliquish and unfriendly. I couldn't understand why they were not helping to teach the activities and why they were not their usual selves.

Then I took a closer look at what Fleurys and Miguel were doing. They were not playing Legos with two children, they were playing Legos with themselves and the two children were watching. I suddenly realized why Miguel and Fleurys were not being helpful. Miguel, who attends dental school in the capital, and Fleurys, a top student at the high school, both intelligent people, were just as fascinated with the school supplies as the children were. Both the children and Miguel and Fleurys had never seen Legos before. Both had never played with Play-Doh, and both did not know what to do with the puzzle. So as not to embarrass Miguel and Fleurys, John and I decided to join in the fun. We, too, played with all the toys. As the day went on, I realized the classroom was becoming more orderly and friendlier. As Miguel and Fleurys became acquainted with the teaching aids, they regained confidence and were able to teach the students. Initially the power of the classroom was distributed poorly. John and I knew what the lesson was and we knew how to use the teaching aids, but we could not speak Spanish. Miguel and Fleurys could speak Spanish, but they were embarrassed because they did not know how to use the games. The students, who did not know how to behave in a classroom, could not understand why they were being told to sit quietly. These asymmetrical distributions of power resulted in a contact zone. However, after a little communication and mutual understanding, we as a group were able to make great strides in learning, as the class learned to read and we teachers learned to communicate.

Before traveling to Guayabal, I wanted to assimilate into the Dominican culture so I could learn and truly understand what it meant to be Dominican. Instead, by living and working with the Dominicans, I learned the opposite. I found out what it meant to be an American. I quickly

She closes with a single sentence that contains and reflects the framing focus of her essay. She expects to find one thing in Guayabal, but the critical frame helps her to articulate how and why she discovers something else.

learned, from these island people, what I had not realized in thirteen years of American education. The Dominicans, who so desperately wanted to be American, were in fact my best teachers of American culture. I learned the far-reaching effects of American advertising techniques and the power of American big business through the Coca-Cola and Pepsi ads. I learned that trends in fashion transcend both economic and linguistic barriers through the popularity of Calvin Klein and Timberland among the poor Dominicans. I learned how cold and unfriendly some American practices can be, through the kind examples set by the Dominicans. I realized, through the contrast between the Dominican and American cultures, the influence of American culture, the value of communication, and the need for a people to have a unique identity. I will never know how much the children of Guayabal remember from the lessons I taught them, but I know I will remember the lessons I learned. I feel I learned much more from the contact zone found in their community than the Dominicans learned from me. Looking back, I find it ironic that I arrived in Guayabal as a teacher of Spanish and left as a student of Americana.