

2.5 ANALYSIS AS THE BASIS FOR BUILDING AN ARGUMENT

Learning Objectives

- ❖ Note that authors use analysis for purposes beyond providing support.
- ❖ Observe how authors use analysis as the vehicle to weigh the pros and cons of a situation.
- ❖ Observe how authors place opposing views side by side as they build their argument.

Taking a position; adopting a perspective

The reason for providing analysis to accompany a statement or a concept often goes beyond clarifying and/or supporting a statement or fleshing out a concept. Sometimes authors may also build an argument in order to reinforce a position they wish to adopt or a perspective they wish to advance. In order to do that, they would show up weaknesses in some aspect(s) of the analysis in order to strengthen the weight of other(s).

In the first of the two examples that follow, the author is seeking to advance a view of learning that, in his view, is different from, and more appropriate than, the one that is commonly held by teachers.

Extract 2.17

Viewing learning as dependent on curriculum

When teachers speak of learning, they tend to emphasize whatever is taught in schools deliberately, including both the official curriculum and the various behaviours and routines that make classrooms run smoothly. In practice, defining learning in this way often means that teachers equate learning with major forms of academic achievement – especially language and mathematics – and to a lesser extent musical skill, physical coordination, or social sensitivity (Gardner 1999, 2006). The imbalance occurs not because the goals of public education make teachers responsible for certain content and activities (like books and reading) and the skills which these activities require (like answering teachers' questions and writing essays). It does happen not (thankfully!) because teachers are biased, insensitive or unaware that students often learn a lot outside of school.

A side effect of thinking of learning as related only to curriculum or academics is that classroom social interactions and behaviours become issues for teachers – become things that they need to

manage. In particular, having dozens of students in one room makes it more likely that I as a teacher, think of 'learning' as something that either takes concentration (to avoid being distracted by others) or that benefits from collaboration (to take advantage of their presence). In the small space of the classroom, no other viewpoint about social interaction makes sense. Yet in the wider world outside of school, learning often does happen incidentally, "accidentally" and without conscious interference or input from others: I "learn" without a friend's personality is like, for example, without either of us deliberately trying to make this happen. As teachers, we sometimes see incidental learning in classrooms as well, and often welcome it; but our responsibility for curriculum goals more often focuses our efforts on what students can learn through conscious, deliberate effort. In a classroom, unlike in many other human settings, it is always necessary to ask whether classmates are helping or hindering individual students' learning.

In this excerpt, the authors' main concern is to caution against the tendency to view learning as taking place primarily in the classroom context, or to use their own words "as related only to curriculum or academics". According to them, when learning is viewed in that way, it makes it appear that teachers carry a major responsibility for deciding on the content and related skills of public education.

Another aspect of this view of learning is that it gives the impression that the individual needs to be in interaction with other individuals in order to learn. The authors set about to downplay that view with the claim "Yet in the wider world outside of the school, learning often does happen incidentally, "accidentally" and without conscious interference or input from others ...". Then they close the paragraph by raising some doubt about the effect of classroom learning, when they say, "In a classroom ... it is always necessary to ask whether classmates are helping or hindering individual students' learning".

One important feature of the analysis used for this purpose is the use of **juxtaposition** when the author places opposing ideas close to one another in order to elevate one at the expense of the other. In this case, incidental learning is being shown as being the more valid way of viewing learning rather than classroom learning.



Figure 2.15 – Authors build an argument by having two (or more) views compete; usually one emerges as the ‘winner’.

Extract 2.18 below also deals with the topic of learning. The author is seeking to determine whether the approach to the teaching of adults should be different from the teaching of young people and children. The analysis is therefore aimed at making a case for one or the other position.

Extract 2.18

Is there any justification for discussing adult education at all or are we just talking about education in general and 'good' (i.e. effective) education in particular?

In many ways this is the most crucial question facing teachers of adults. We have to decide whether we believe that teaching adults is different from teaching children or younger persons or not; whether the same strategies by which we were taught as young people, and which we may already be using in other settings, are appropriate for the groups of adults now under our supervision. It is not just a question as to whether the adult student participant – the mother, the worker on the farm or in the factory, shop or office, the trainee or manager, the churchgoer, the local resident, the interested member of the public, the keen sportsman or –woman – whether they all expect all education to be the same, whether they expect or wish to be taught at school or college. The question is rather how we as teachers of adults see our student participants.

Those who teach adults are divided in their approach to this question. Many – indeed, I think an increasing number – argue that there is only one activity, 'education', and that adult education is essentially the same as teaching younger persons. The education of adults is for them merely one branch of the whole field. But others point out that within this field of education, we already draw distinctions; we distinguish between the various branches in one way or another. The education of primary children, of secondary pupils and of students in further, advanced or higher education all call upon different teaching-learning processes.

Even though the lead-in is in the form of a question, if you look at it closely, it is not a genuine question. This type of question is typically referred to as a **rhetorical question**: the author is not expecting a response; rather he has phrased it in this way to get you the reader thinking about the issue of whether there is a need to make a distinction between the education of adults and the education of persons of a younger age. The paragraph beginning 'In many ways', expands on that initial idea.

The last paragraph of this excerpt breaks down this controversial idea into its two dimensions: on the one hand there is the assertion that 'adult education is essentially the same as teaching younger persons' and on the other, that we already recognize different branches requiring different teaching-learning processes.

Of course, this is only the beginning. As the discussion continues in the rest of the chapter, the author goes back and forth between these two aspects of the issue. No doubt eventually, he would come to a conclusion one way or the other. The point to be noted is the way he **juxtaposes** the two parts of the debate in order to get the reader to weigh the pros and cons of each.

Key Takeaways

- ❖ Authors frequently move beyond analysis to support a concept or a statement and use it as the basis for building an argument.
- ❖ Through argument, they are able to take a position or adopt a perspective.
- ❖ In building their argument, authors juxtapose ideas to show up their respective strengths/weaknesses.