
The Effects Of Background Information And Debate On Persuasive Writing: A Pilot Study using the Word Generation curriculum

By Jennifer Rabold

Introduction

- About debate:
 - “Social interaction is a primary means for promoting individual reasoning” (Reznitskaya, 2001).
 - “Reasoning is fundamentally dialogical. Thinkers must hear several voices within their own heads representing different perspectives on the issue. The ability and disposition to take more than one perspective arises from participating in discussions with others who hold different perspectives” (Anderson, et al., 2001).
 - About background knowledge:
 - “Knowledge factors play a major role in the quality of the writing that students produce” (Hidi & Boscolo, 2006).
 - “The need for knowledge is especially obvious in writing – because writing has to be about something” (Shanahan, 2006).
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Research Questions

1. Does classroom debate on the topic improve the quality of students' persuasive writing?
 2. Does provision of background information on the topic improve the quality of students' persuasive writing?
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Sample

- ❑ Sheltered English Immersion population
 - ❑ 7th grade ELA class
 - ❑ 7 students: 6 boys, 1 girl
 - ❑ All students in class speak Spanish as first language
 - ❑ Residence in U.S.: range 1 year – born in the U.S.
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Procedures

- Week 1: Cyberbullying
 - Debate
 - Persuasive Essay
 - Week 2: Medical Marijuana
 - Background Information
 - Debate
 - Persuasive Essay
 - Week 3: Organ Donation
 - Background Information
 - Pre-Debate Writing
 - Debate
 - Post-Debate Persuasive Essay
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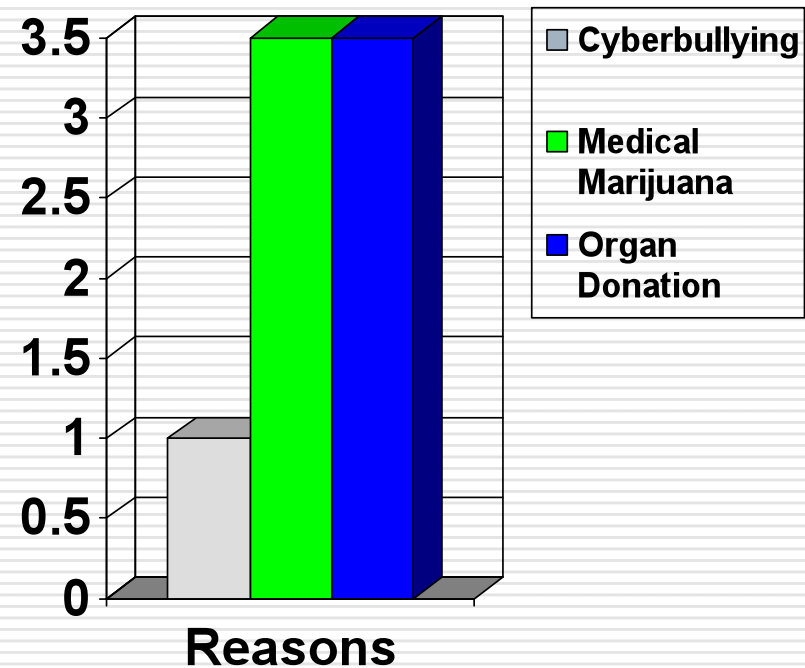
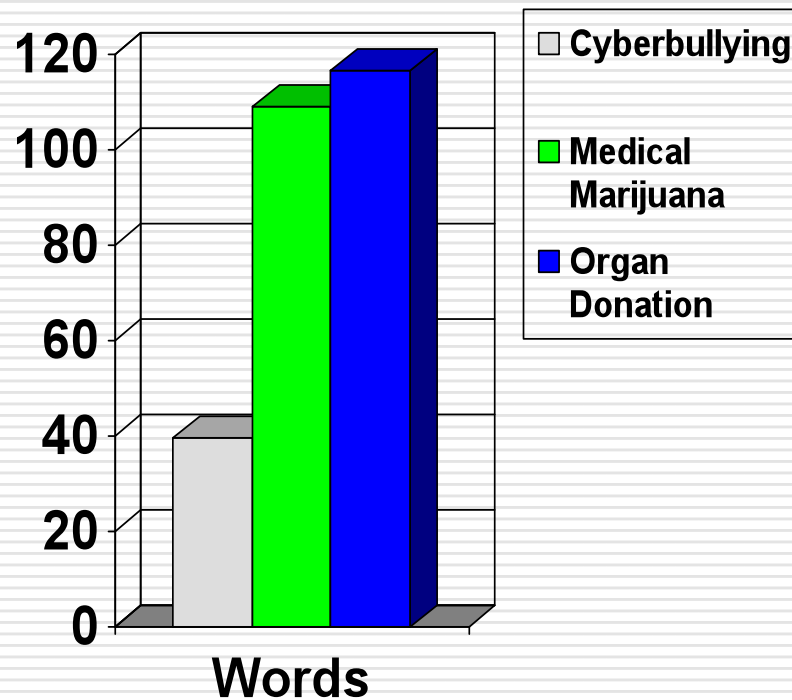
Data Sources & Analysis

- ❑ 3 debates on Word Generation topics, transcribed.
 - ❑ 3 sets of student essays on Word Generation topics, after debate.
 - ❑ 1 set of student informal writing on Word Generation topic, before debate.
 - ❑ Quantitative analysis of student writing: number of words, number of sentences, number of reasons used to support claims, number and range of rhetorical moves.
 - ❑ Qualitative analysis of debate transcripts and student writing, using a thematic coding system.
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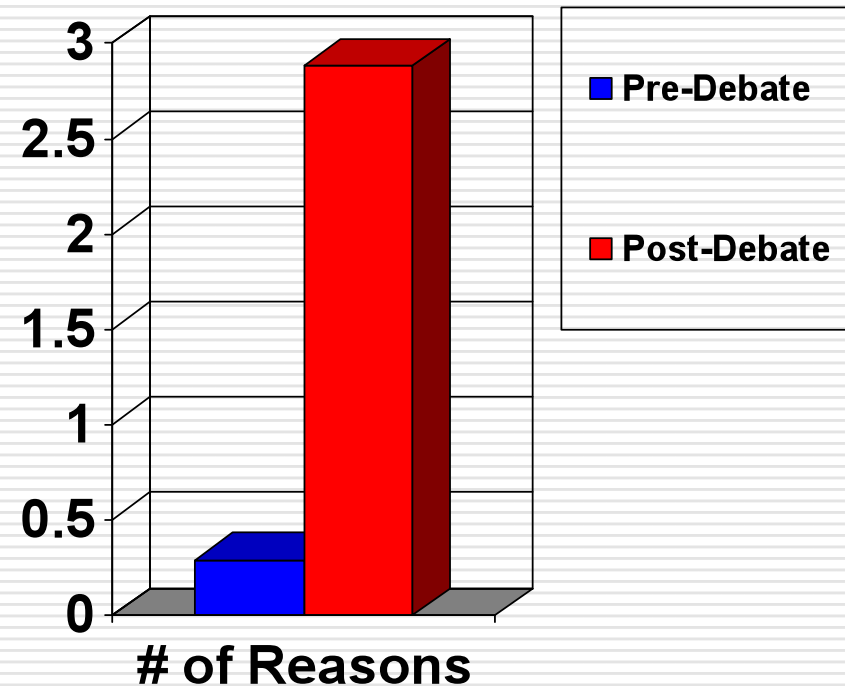
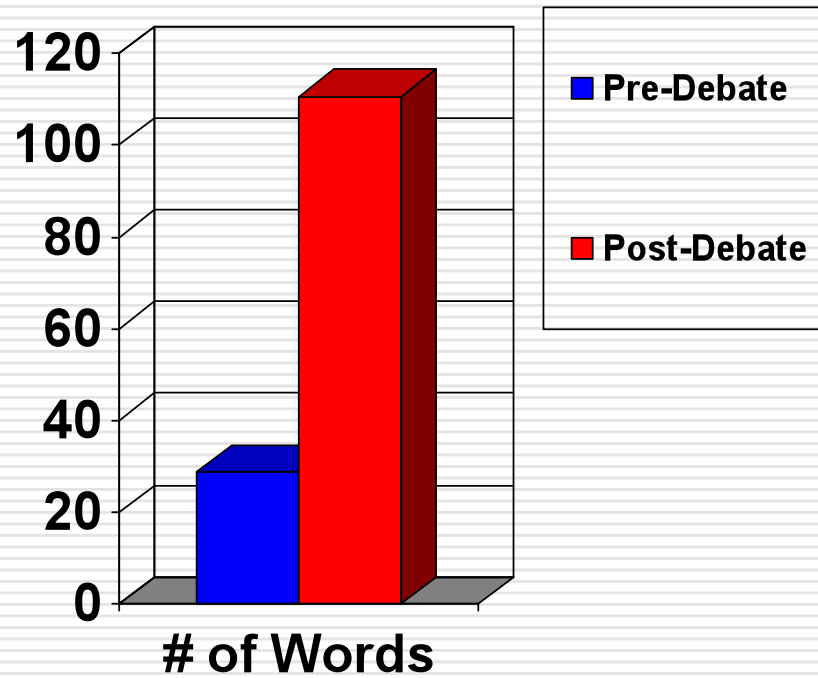
Major Findings from Study

1. Students write longer essays and provide more reasons to support their claims when provided more background information on the topic.
 2. Students write longer essays and provide more reasons to support their claims after participating in a debate, as compared with before the debate.
 3. Students employ a higher number and wider range of rhetorical moves when provided more background information on the topic.
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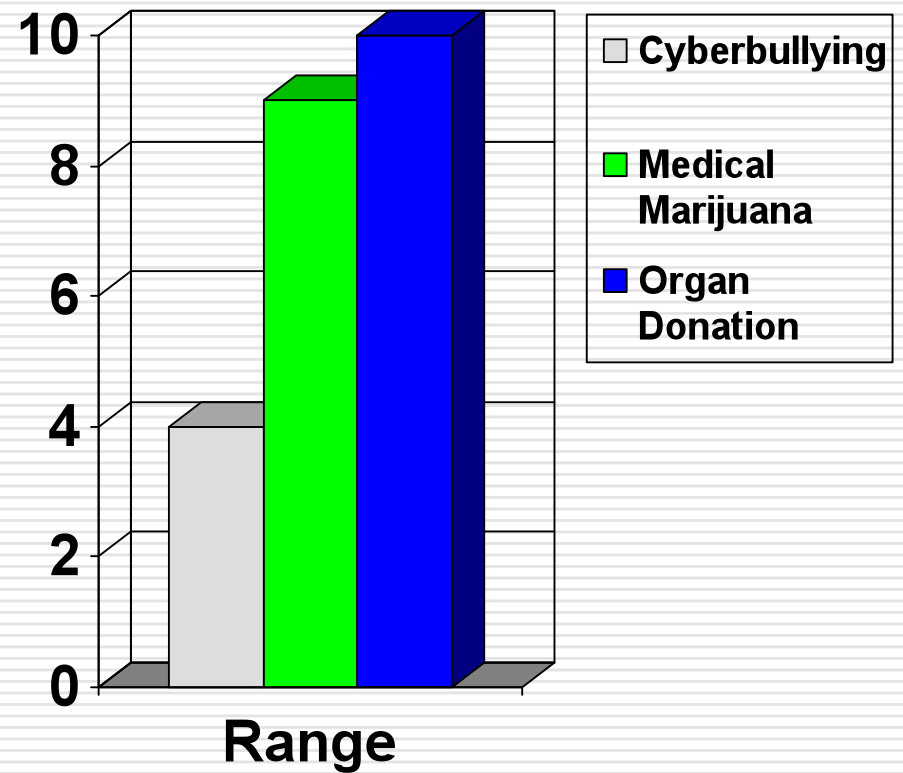
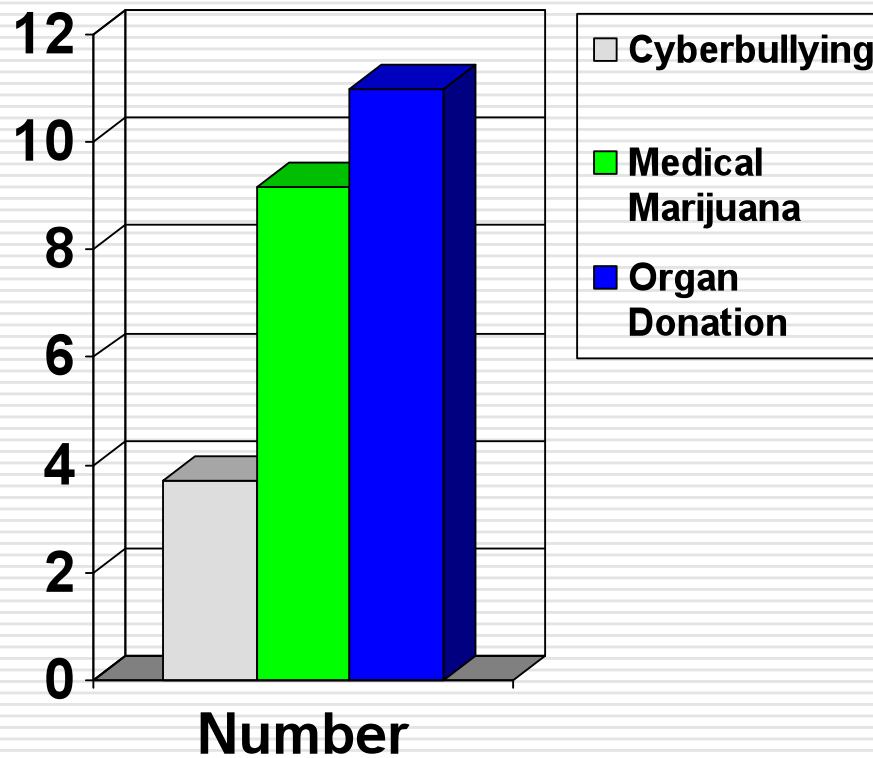
Students write longer essays and provide more reasons to support their claims when provided more background information on the topic.



Students write longer essays and provide more reasons to support their claims after participating in a debate, as compared with before the debate.



Students employ a wider range of rhetorical moves and language when provided more background information on the topic.



Rhetorical Moves

- Taking a position
 - Supporting a position
 - Qualifying a position
 - Organizing a position
 - Special appeals
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Taking a position

- No rhetorical introduction
 - “Marijuana is bad for some people because...”
 - “The student need school to be a supportive, safe place and a place for learning.”
 - “I think...”
 - “I think that police are supposed to deal with cyberbullying.”
 - “For me...”
 - “For me it doesn’t matter that the one getting a transplant is a criminal because...”
 - “In my opinion...”
 - “In my opinion, marijuana should be legal for people that have cancer and they lose their appetite.”
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Supporting a position

- Reasons/Data/Evidence
 - Links to background information
 - Links to prior knowledge
 - Warrants
 - Language introducing reasons
 - “That’s why...”
 - “Because...”
 - “So...”
 - “For example...”
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Supporting a position

- Links to background information
 - “Marijuana is sometimes good, for example, when someone is really sick or you have cancer you lose your appetite.”
 - “I think it should be legalized for medical purposes is less toxic than the drugs physicians have.”
- Links to prior knowledge
 - “Teenagers smoke marijuana for fun because it’s illegal, but if the marijuana is legal the teenagers may stop smoking marijuana because it’s legal so it’s not fun any more.” (warrant)
 - “Marijuana is bad to smoke because it makes you cough a lot. People stink when they smoke marijuana. People get high when they do crazy stuff that we don’t like. I hate to smell the smoke from marijuana because it makes me cough.”

Qualifying a position/ Considering counterargument

- “If... (then)...”
 - “And **if** people work and (**then**) they need an organ they should give it to them if they are good persons.”
 - “but”
 - “I will give my organs to a person who needed like kids or big and yongs person if they needed **but** I will no like a person who smoke to have my organs...”
 - “maybe”
 - “I think police should take care about cyberbullying because **maybe** it would be less crime...”
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Qualifying a position/ Considering counterargument con't

- "it depends"
 - "If they smok drugs or sigarets they shouldn't have the organs transplantations but **it depense** on the person."
 - "sometimes"
 - "**Sometimes** the victims are so scared that they don't want to go to school."
 - "also"
 - "Mariguana can be good or bad and elegal **it depends** how you use it.... Mariguana can **also** be bad..."
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Organizing a Position

- “My last reason...”
 - “My last reason is because it makes teens use it less when they marijuana as a medical product.”
 - “Another reason...”
 - “Another reason is because they to reach some goals they have.”
 - “First of all...”
 - “First of all I will give to children because it will be really sad if you see a child die.”
 - “Also...”
 - “I also think it should be a crime...”
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Special Appeals

- General principles
 - Emotional appeals (vivid language, sensory details, exaggeration, anecdotes, references to objects of emotion, honorific or pejorative words, rhetorical questions)
 - Hypothetical situations
 - Invitation of discussion participant(s) to imagine self in situation
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Special Appeals con't

- Appeals to general principles
 - “It doesn’t mater if you are american or not american. Everybody should get the same rights like americans.”
 - Appeals to emotion
 - “I think that’s stupid cyberbullying because who would kill themselfe over a mean comment.”
 - “I think they should diside by age, because the children are the future.”
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Special Appeals con't

- Hypothetical situations
 - “If in the future I smoke I will not give my organ because I now they are damage but I now that I’m no going to smoke.”
 - “If somebody needs it and they are smoking and a friend who doesn’t need it can ask the friend to give him some, and then the person who don’t need it will be smoking...”
 - “If I were a doctor I would decide to give the organs depending on their age.”
 - Invitation of discussion participant(s) to imagine self in situation (more common in debates)
 - “Put yourself into it, what happen if you really need a transplant and doctors do not want to give it to you because they think you are a criminal...”
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Implications

- ❑ Provide additional background information in Word Generation materials or links to online sources before students write the persuasive essay.
 - ❑ Retain the debate feature of Word Generation, as skills practiced in oral argument can transfer to written argument.
 - ❑ Students may benefit from explicit instruction in argumentation skills.
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Selected References

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