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A Matrix Model of Argumentation

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a two-dimensional teaching model of argumentation that evolved over a number of years. It was originally developed out of Stephen Toulmin's model and offers a 'matrix approach' to the analysis of complex rhetorical events. The two dimensions of the matrix involve the analysis of the sub-claims used to support the ultimate claim in a rhetorical artifact and the way in which those sub-claims are organized. This paper briefly presents the background, rationale, basic elements, and structure of the model. And while there is insufficient space to provide a full, detailed example, this paper will suggest some illustrative applications.

KEY WORDS: argumentation, claims, reasoning, emotion, evidence, matrix model, pedagogy, rhetoric, teaching, Toulmin

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to present a teaching model for complex argumentation structures which may also be of some value to scholars in the field. I will not pretend that I am among these. My scholarly interest has been forensics and debate. More specifically I have been very interested in real-world persuasion and audience-friendly debate. So while my research has de facto included elements of argumentation theory, my study in the area is quite limited and very narrowly focused. For this reason I have decided to eschew the attempt to integrate this paper into the research in the field. There might be a great deal of value in this model for argumentation theorists, but I leave it to mainstream scholars to make this judgment. I merely offer this model as a very useful and successful classroom tool for those teaching courses in 'argumentation and debate.' And I want to emphasize the matrix model was never intended to replace Toulmin's model. It was developed to provide an academic supplement to it.

2. PERSPECTIVE

From at least one educational perspective there are two basic approaches to teaching argumentation analysis. One is a microscopic approach involving the dissection of small claims into component elements such as supporting evidence and reasoning. The other is a more holistic macroscopic approach involving the critical study of large rhetorical events and the myriad of supporting and conflicting claims surrounding them.

Rhetorical artifacts (verbal ones at any rate) can be broken down into 'statements' which – to varying degrees – can be categorized as either 'claims' or 'supporting materials.' It is possible to dissect almost any persuasive discourse into major claims, sub-claims (which support the main claims), sub-sub claims (and so on), and various kinds of supporting statements (evidence, stories, explanations, reasoning, etc.). Identifying where a particular claim fits in this

kind of hierarchy evokes a ‘Strategy v. Tactics’ distinction. Decisions about how to conduct a particular battle could be viewed and analyzed as part of the strategy for winning that fight, or they could be viewed as tactics in the context of the larger military campaign. The same can be true of individual claims made in rhetorical conflicts.

From one perspective we might be trying to explain how the basic psychological bits and pieces of data, emotion, other arguments, etc. are bound together to support a sub-claim. And from another perspective we might be trying to understand how that sub-claim fits into the larger set of claims which are linked together in support of a grand or ultimate claim. This duality became a source of confusion in the classroom and the Toulmin model didn’t seem to clarify things. It was in the process of finding pedagogical explanations to help students make sense of these different perspectives that the matrix model developed.

3. EVOLUTION OF THE MATRIX MODEL

The ‘matrix approach’ described in this paper developed over many years growing out of Stephen Toulmin’s model of argumentation (1958). The first time I heard Toulmin’s system discussed in a graduate classroom, I fell in love with it. But when I became a professor and tried to use it in my own argumentation and debate classes I encountered four main problems. Students had tremendous difficulty understanding the idea of a ‘warrant’ for belief; students had difficulty in differentiating and ‘data’ from ‘backing’; emotional elements which I felt were critical to argumentation and persuasion theory were completely absent from the model; and, Toulmin’s model worked best when applied to relatively small and relatively self-contained (micro) arguments and was difficult to apply to large, complex (macro) rhetorical events.

So the matrix model presented in this paper started out as explanations and elaborations to help me apply Toulmin’s model to my argumentation and debate classrooms. The first major innovation I employed was to integrate emotional elements into the model. Emotion may have been inherent in the ‘data’ and ‘backing’ of the Toulmin model, but I wanted to make this explicit. The next innovation was to try to provide a mechanism for laying out multiple, interrelating claims in context. And the final innovation was to make distinctions and provide a way to see the relationships among three perspectives: the ‘real world’, the world as asserted by the rhetor, and the psychological world in the head of the decision-making, target audience.

At first I reduced the Toulmin model to a single dimension. Human mental processing is not always linear and there was something in the two dimensional depiction of Toulmin’s model which suggested this non-linearity. But this also seemed to create a certain confusion in the minds of the students. They seemed to be searching for and reading into the visual arrangement of elements a set of meanings which went beyond the intention of the model. By making the model linear it appeared to reduce uncertainty and contribute to clarity. Laying out the elements in a linear form also led to a practical improvement in the students’ ability to analyze real world arguments.

Then one day, in answer to a student question, I found myself integrating the micro and macro argumentation analysis and an early version of the matrix model began to emerge. This grew into a simple, two dimensional model. Over time I found myself using this model in the classroom to analyze aspects of reality, elements of rhetorical appeals, and the psychological process of decision making in the minds of persuasive targets. Much later, in answer to another question, I found myself integrating all three of these perspectives into a single, integrated model. This led to the development of the matrix model in its present form.

4. THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF THE MATRIX MODEL

As suggested above, there are three basic elements which contribute to the matrix model: A micro-element, a macro-element, and a perspective element.

4.1 *The analysis of micro-arguments*

Stephen Toulmin's approach to argumentation seemed to encompass the logic of everyday thinking and the holistic nature of actual human decision making. It kicked syllogistic reasoning over on its side. The Toulmin model seemed to say 'people can draw conclusions from insufficient data and here's how they do it.' But, as mentioned above, Toulmin's model left out emotional elements and caused too much confusion among students concerning warrants, data, and backing. So I created the simplified model of reasoning based on Toulmin's elements shown in figure 1.

4.1.1 Figure 1:

$$[(I) SI] + [(R) SR] + [(V) SV] - [(CA) RA] -p-> \text{Claim}$$

- I = Information: Whatever knowledge the target audience may have about the claim prior to being exposed to the argumentative discourse.
- SI = Supporting Information: That additional information about the claim which is supplied by the discourse.
- R = Reasoning: Whatever reasoning the target audience is likely to apply to the claim prior to being exposed to the argumentative discourse.
- SR = Supporting Reasoning: That reasoning process or way of looking at the claim which is advocated in the discourse.
- V = Values: Whatever emotional values the target audience is likely to apply to the claim prior to being exposed to the argumentative discourse.
- SV = Supporting Values: Those emotional appeals or values within the discourse which are being advocated for the target audience to accept.
- CA = Counter Argument: Any arguments which the target audience is likely to have been exposed to and/or to believe which run counter to the claim.
- RA = Refuting Argument: Arguments which are presented in the discourse with the object of responding to and refuting an existing or potential counter argument.
- p-> = Probability: An assessment of the likelihood (expressed as a probability statement) the target audience will accept the claim – based upon the eight elements on the left hand side of the equation.
- Claim = The Claim Being Assessed: This refers to a statement or claim being considered in the rhetorical context of the argumentative discourse.

This model was intended, not so much to conceptualize the process of thinking, but rather to facilitate the analysis and design of argumentative discourse. This was the first version of what grew into the matrix model. Essentially, all I'd done to the Toulmin model was rearrange the elements and add emotion. In the process I'd separated out the elements which were inherent in the discourse from those which were resident in the mind of the auditor.

This model seemed most appropriate to the analysis of micro-arguments. One could take a small claim in the classroom and, working backward, imagine what the target audience already knew and how it might be approached rhetorically. Students could then estimate how probable it was the target audience would be swayed by a rhetorical appeal and how advocates might best adjust their discourse to become more persuasive to a given audience.

4.2 *The analysis of macro-arguments*

Teaching ‘argumentation and debate’ classes from a debate coaching perspective, I leaned very heavily on ‘Prima Facie Case’ model. There are a number of similar systems of thinking out there, but all of them revolve around the concept of a limited number of essential elements which serve as the criteria for a complete and acceptable argument. This is not necessarily the argument a real world audience *will* accept. But it is the argument a trained debate judge is *supposed to* accept in the context of a debate. These elements, in a ‘comparative advantages case’, are commonly referred to as the Problem, Significance, Inherency, Plan, and Advantage.

When explaining the prima facie case to students I was struck by the similarity to some judicial models of the elements necessary to convict a defendant. In first degree murder, for example, to demonstrate a murder actually took place, to show the defendant had a motive, that there was an opportunity, that the defendant planned the crime ahead of time, etc. And the criteria or elements for this crime would be different for the related crime of manslaughter where the element of forethought would not be included.

There seemed to be similar argumentation criteria systems existing, or potentially existing, for a number of human intellectual activities: scientific research, political agreements, lobbying efforts, advertising campaigns, and marketing. In each case, the various logical models would include a list of logical requirements or criteria for making what would be considered a valid claim.

It is such logical systems which lend themselves to the interrelationship of claims, sub-claims, and sub-sub claims. That is, each main claim in the argumentation structure might have some set of sub-claims which could be presented to help lend validity to the main claim. The criteria for the main claims would likely be imposed from without such as by a debate association, scientific community, or legal system. They could also be developed creatively and idiosyncratically from within by an individual trying to make a decision. And the individual’s decision to include sub-claims might also be imposed as an external requirement but more likely it will be an artifact of the rhetor in designing persuasive discourse to influence a particular target audience. So what you end up with is an argument expressed as an ‘outline form.’ And like a prima facie debate case, if all of the claims are considered valid, the sum total of this line of argumentation is expected to be ‘belief.’

The outline form suggests and almost demands vertical presentation. And since each claim and sub-claim in the argument lends itself to analysis, we apply the first model above to the second and create a two-dimensional structure. This was my initial version of the model. Cf. figure 2.

4.2.1 Figure 2:

[(I ₁) SI ₁] + [(R ₁) SR ₁] + [(V ₁) SV ₁] - [(CA ₁) RA ₁] -p->	Claim 1
[(I ₂) SI ₂] + [(R ₂) SR ₂] + [(V ₂) SV ₂] - [(CA ₂) RA ₂] -p->	Claim 2
[(I _{2a}) SI _{2a}] + [(R _{2a}) SR _{2a}] + [(V _{2a}) SV _{2a}] - [(CA _{2a}) RA _{2a}] -p->	Sub-Claim 2a
[(I _{2b}) SI _{2b}] + [(R _{2b}) SR _{2b}] + [(V _{2b}) SV _{2b}] - [(CA _{2b}) RA _{2b}] -p->	Sub-Claim 2b
[(I ₃) SI ₃] + [(R ₃) SR ₃] + [(V ₃) SV ₃] - [(CA ₃) RA ₃] -p->	Claim 3
etc.	---
[(I _n) SI _n] + [(R _n) SR _n] + [(V _n) SV _n] - [(CA _n) RA _n] -p->	Claim N
Grand Claim	

It is worth noting that the information used in backing up the first claim (I_1) would not necessarily be the same as that backing up the second claim (I_2). They might, of course, be the same, they might overlap, or they might be completely different. But regardless, once the entire argument was laid out, it would be possible to go back and analyze the entire body of information the target audience was expected to know and agree with by looking down the model at all of the (I_n) elements in isolation. And the same would be possible for all of the groups of elements in the model. All of the elements in parentheses taken together would represent the thinking of the target audience. And all of the supporting elements, outside of the parentheses, taken together would represent the persuasive appeal of the rhetor.

4.3 Analyzing the interface of reality, rhetoric & receiver

One of the topics which frequently came up in the classroom was the question of perspective. Were we considering an argument from the perspective of the advocate, of the opponent, or from that of the target audience? And what about reality? To what degree was an advocate constrained by reality? Didn't that depend on how much the audience knew or was likely to find out? If an advocate or an opponent contradicted reality how would this affect the audience?

I found myself using a variation of James Kinneavy's communication triangle to help organize classroom discussions on this subject (1971). The variation of the Kinneavy model I was familiar with made distinctions among the Universe, the Author, the Reader, and the Text. By analogy I made distinctions among the world, the advocate, the opponent, the target audience, and the argument. This allowed students to discuss arguments from multiple perspectives with minimal confusion. Students discussed how the same claim might be used by an advocate, countered by an opponent, be validated or contradicted by real world evidence, and processed by a target audience.

As I begin to integrate these elements into the larger model they seemed to naturally resolve into three basic perspectives on each claim: Reality, Rhetoric (the advocate's discourse or appeal, Receiver (the target audience). This followed the order of presentation from world, through the advocate, to the audience. I later decided to put the audience in the center. Cf. figure 3.

4.3.1 Figure 3:

Reality	I +	R +	V +	[+A - CA]	
Receiver	[(I) SI] + [(R) SR] + [(V) SV]			-[(CA) RA] }	-p-> Claim
Rhetoric	SI +	SR +	SV +	+ RA	

Note: In this sub-model the 'A' by itself in the reality line represents any arguments floating around which support the claim. These, as they receiver became aware of them, would be expected to appear in the I, R, and V factors. The 'CA' element, of course, represents the arguments which run counter to the claim and would be identified and isolated by the advocate for refutation.

I liked this arrangement because it put the assessment of the probable truth of the claim on the same central line as that of the receiver which is where it I felt it belonged. The upper and lower line influence the final assessment (-p->) but ultimately it's the receiver who makes this judgment. In this arrangement you sense that the receiver is constantly being pulled between reality as they know it and the supporting arguments about reality as presented by the advocate. Putting the receiver on the center line seemed to make this tension more explicit.

An early version of this sub-model also included an ‘opponent’ line. But the opponent line created all kinds of conceptual overlap and confusion with the counter-argument elements in the base model. And I found the arguments of an opponent worked best as background counter-argumentational (A-CA) elements (Toulmin’s rebuttal arguments). So this sub-component of the main model was eventually reduced to the three basic perspectives shown in figure 3: reality, the receiver (or target audience), and the rhetoric (or argumentative discourse by the advocate).

The Reality line asks, ‘What information is out there in the real world? What kinds of reasoning are being employed about the claim? What values are being advocated with respect to the claim? And what arguments and counter arguments are current?’

The Receiver line asks, ‘What does the target audience know? And how does the target audience put all this together in analyzing the claim, assessing the probabilities, and making a decision?’

The Rhetor line asks, ‘What supporting information, reasoning, & values are being presented? What opposing arguments are being identified and countered?’

Logos and Pathos issues are obvious in the model. ‘Ethos’ and other credibility issues worked themselves into the model in two ways. As an informational element on the Receiver line, students could ask, ‘what does the audience know about the speaker and how much do they like/trust him or her?’ On the Rhetoric line, advocates could include information, arguments, values, etc. to enhance their credibility.

These three basic sub-models eventually evolved into the full matrix model presented below.

5. THE MATRIX MODEL

It’s fairly obvious how the basic elements of three sub-models described above were knit together into the main model presented in Figure 4. So rather than fill this space with a laborious description of the model, I’d prefer to point out some of its more interesting aspects.

It might strike the reader that the matrix model is overly complex. That worried me for a while. But it worked in practice in the classroom. And while simple models have the virtue of simplicity they often lack the power and versatility to capture the complexity of the real world. The matrix model has the virtue of being capable of helping to organize and analyze extremely complex rhetorical events. It can help put a myriad of otherwise confusing elements into a pattern of relationships which facilitate understanding and analysis.

Complex rhetorical events such as political elections and intricate jury trials are so full of claims and evidence and arguments that they are often, and literally, too big for the average human mind to encompass. One obvious and commonly overused technique which humans use to make a decision about such complex events is oversimplification. A voter reduces an entire election to a few key issues. An entire trial hinges in the mind of a juror on a few key pieces of evidence or a few critical arguments. It’s natural for the human mind to seek a limited number of key elements in a difficult situation and to focus on those almost to the exclusion of everything else. This may help to explain why two otherwise intelligent human beings can hold such radically different opinions about who is the best political candidate or about whether a defendant is guilty or innocent. They have very likely chosen different sub-sets of elements on which to base their decisions.

When a politician or lawyer makes a huge, complex claim, the average individual may accept the claim without much analysis. If so, it’s likely being done more as a matter of ethos or from an emotional rather than an analytical perspective. By oversimplifying the issues to justify

belief, the receiver is rationalizing rather than being rational. But this reduces uncertainty and the psychological discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance. The matrix model of argumentation, on the other hands, helps to view arguments in something closer to their entirety.

1.3.1 Figure 4:

Reality	$I_1 + R_1 +$	$V_1 +$	$+A_1$	$-CA_1$	
Receiver	$[(I_1) SI_1] +$	$[(R_1) SR_1] +$	$[(V_1) SV_1] +$	$[-CA_1 + RA_1]$	} -p-> Claim 1
Rhetoric	$SI_1 +$	$SR_1 +$	$SV_1 +$	$S [-CA_1 + RA_1]$	
Reality	$I_2 +$	$R_2 +$	$V_2 +$	$+A_2 -CA_2$	
Receiver	$[(I_2) SI_2] +$	$[(R_2) SR_2] +$	$[(V_2) SV_2] +$	$[-CA_2 + RA_2]$	} -p-> Claim 2
Rhetoric	$SI_2 +$	$SR_2 +$	$SV_2 +$	$S [-CA_2 + RA_2]$	
Reality	$I_{2a} +$	$R_{2a} +$	$V_{2a} +$	$+A_{2a} -CA_{2a}$	
Receiver	$[(I_{2a}) SI_{2a}] + [(R_{2a}) SR_{2a}] +$	$[(V_{2a}) SV_{2a}] +$	$[-CA_{2a} + RA_{2a}]$		} -p-> Claim 2a
Rhetoric	$SI_{2a} +$	$SR_{2a} +$	$SV_{2a} +$	$S [-CA_{2a} + RA_{2a}]$	
Reality	$I_{2b} +$	$R_{2b} +$	$V_{2b} +$	$+A_{2b} -CA_{2b}$	
Receiver	$[(I_{2b}) SI_{2b}] + [(R_{2b}) SR_{2b}] +$	$[(V_{2b}) SV_{2b}] +$	$[-CA_{2b} + RA_{2b}]$		} -p-> Claim 2b
Rhetoric	$SI_{2b} +$	$SR_{2b} +$	$SV_{2b} +$	$S [-CA_{2b} + RA_{2b}]$	
Reality	$I_3 +$	$R_3 +$	$V_3 +$	$+A_3 -CA_3$	
Receiver	$[(I_3) SI_3] +$	$[(R_3) SR_3] +$	$[(V_3) SV_3] +$	$[-CA_3 + RA_3]$	} -p-> Claim 3
Rhetoric	$SI_3 +$	$SR_3 +$	$SV_3 +$	$S [-CA_3 + RA_3]$	
		etc.	---		
Reality	$I_n +$	$R_n +$	$V_n +$	$+A_n -CA_n$	
Receiver	$[(I_n) SI_n] +$	$[(R_n) SR_n] +$	$[(V_n) SV_n] +$	$[-CA_n + RA_n]$	} -p-> Claim n
Rhetoric	$SI_n +$	$SR_n +$	$SV_n +$	RA_n	

Grand Claim

Unlike the lay public, rhetorical scholars and serious advocates cannot allow themselves the luxury of oversimplification. Scholars will not really understand complex events based on a single simple model. And advocates will not achieve a high degree of success if they work exclusively from simplified models of reality. This is not to say that simple models are bad. Being able to reduce and explain a wide variety of complex phenomena by reference to a simple, basic formula is a great advantage. But a simplified model will, of necessity, paint a picture of reality in broad strokes rather than in specific detail. The fundamental laws of gravitation can be written in a few lines. But practitioners of physics – bridge builders, rocket designers, ballistics engineers, high-wire performers, etc. – each require their own sets of tools, techniques, and formulas to complete their work successfully.

The matrix model provides a system to allow the information, arguments, values, and rhetoric of a complex rhetorical event to be laid out visually in what might be considered ‘psychological order.’ Working backwards from the ultimate claim of a rhetor, a scholar could construct or reconstruct the main claims of the logical argument and put them in relationship to one another along the vertical axis of the model. Having identified the individual claims and sub-claims the scholar could then analyze each claim against reality, the receiver’s mind, and the rhetoric of the advocate for its probable truth and persuasiveness value. In the classroom,

examining rhetorical events with this model facilitates the asking of interesting questions. It permits the easy identification of conflicting and contradictory arguments. It helps to identify gaps in supporting materials. It can be used to illustrate other rhetorical and psychological theories. It puts a myriad of complex issues in perspective. And it helps students to develop rhetorical sensitivity.

I thus offer this matrix model primarily as a classroom teaching tool. But I also offer it in the hope that it might be developed into a valuable tool for scholars and practitioners.

6. A SUGGESTIVE EXAMPLE

It is obviously impossible to squeeze a detailed model and analysis of a large rhetorical event into a very short essay. So by way of an example, and consistent with the theme of this presentation, I will instead describe the classroom use I have made of the matrix model.

The pedagogical goal of this model is to provide students with both a better understanding of argumentation and a practical tool to use in designing and deconstructing arguments. So let me start by saying the matrix model is a work in progress and has been constantly evolving as I've used it. Almost every time I present it I learn something which causes me to tinker with the model. The version presented above and the classroom description below is based on a recent, and quite successful, teaching experience.

Grounding: Before introducing the matrix model to students, the three sub-elements of the model were presented within the context of the course in three different lectures. The students were first exposed to the Toulmin model and my variation of it (1.1). Some examples were provided and workshopped. In another lecture, they learned about the prima facie case and reference was made to legal and other criteria models of argumentation (1.2). And in a third lecture, we discussed the psychology of persuasion and the various perspectives of analysis (1.3). The Kinneavy model was introduced and used to organize this discussion. Then, in a set of four consecutive lectures, the matrix model was presented and developed.

Day 1: Picking a topic. On the first day the problem of understanding complex argumentation events in context was introduced. We looked for a good example to use for this extended discussion. We did this by getting a show of hands about the students' prior opinions concerning some common controversial questions: abortion, capital punishment, gun control, illegal immigration, the reimportation of drugs, the right to die, etc. What I was looking for was a fairly even three-way split among class members concerning their prior opinions: pro, con, undecided. It didn't take long to identify a topic which provided such a split. We spent the rest of *Day 1* doing an a priori analysis of the topic. Class members were given the research assignment of cruising the internet to identify good web sites with information and arguments on the topic. Each student was to Email the rest of the class members and me a copy of the three most interesting/important web sites they found along with a brief (one-two sentence) description of what each web site contained. This facilitated future research for all the class members.

Day 2: Introducing the matrix model. Day 2 was spent introducing the matrix model and doing some preliminary integration of information based on the students' a priori opinions and the limited internet research they had done. We workshopped the ultimate claims which might be promoted by various advocates on either side of the controversial issue. Everyone on the pro side of the issue, for example, would not be in agreement about what should be done about it. We spent the rest of the class doing an initial job of looking at the matrix model and trying to identify the specific content of various elements based on the ultimate claims being advocated. We limited our analysis to the perspective of the advocates and intentionally did not examine the

problem from the perspective of the Receivers (target audience). The homework assignment for this day was slightly different for the three sub-groups identified on Day 1 in class. The pro and con advocate groups were asked to develop an analysis of what they thought the undecided audience would know and feel about the issue. I.e., they were to try to identify important I, R, V, A, and CA elements in the model and describe what the undecided audience knew in general about the subject, how they reasoned about it, what values they applied, and what arguments and counter arguments they were likely to be aware of. The undecided students tried to identify exactly the same information but as a self-report rather than as a third-party problem. Instead of doing research to figure out what the undecided citizen was likely to know, they questioned themselves and tried to set down what they actually knew.

Day 3: Analyzing arguments. The first order of business was to compare what the advocates thought the undecided citizens would know with the self-reports of what our undecided class members actually knew. There were a few surprises, but not many. This was undoubtedly due in part because of the ‘contamination’ created by the internet research and classroom discussion. A couple of the students in the ‘undecided’ group were no longer undecided. And one of the con group had moved into the undecided camp. Next time around, I’m going pick the topic for this exercise the day before *Day 1* and assign everyone the self-report questionnaire of identify their own I, R, V, A, and CA elements based on the Figure 1 model presented earlier in the course. Then we can begin the *Day 3* analysis with assessments of the relatively unadulterated self-reports of the undecided group.

Based on our new understanding of what the undecided citizen was likely to know we started to discuss the various arguments, counter arguments, and ultimate claims which were being advocated in the real world. How would the undecided audience member respond to each of these? Based on prior knowledge and the internet research some big-name advocates and advocating organizations were identified and their positions dissected from the perspective of how the undecided audience would view their arguments. This was a fun day. There were lots of opinions and you could almost see the mental flash bulbs of new understanding going off all around the room. The homework assignment for this day was to identify a particular undecided audience, pick a position (if the student didn’t already have one), and design an advocacy campaign to persuade that audience. It wasn’t necessary to actually write out the persuasive discourse. Just describe the campaign and then identify the major claims you wanted to make and the evidence and arguments you planned to use in supporting them.

Day 4: Designing arguments. This was a day spent workshopping and critiquing advocacy campaigns with the aid of the matrix model. We started with a volunteer who presented her version of a persuasive campaign and a list of the most critical claims she was going to make. The class discussed her goals, her plan of action, her claims, and her supporting materials. They raised questions, offered suggestions, and made a group assessment of the probability of success with an undecided audience. We then switched to a volunteer who was advocating the other side of the issue and repeated the process. There were two more volunteers, one on each side of the issue, and we ran out of time. This exercise convinced me that the matrix model was helping because of the continual reference students made to the model and because of the relatively high quality of the questions, observations, and criticisms they offered.

You may have noticed in this description an intentional lack of specifics about the topic we discussed and how the analysis proceeded. When I started writing this section I included some of that information, but I found it was taking up far too much space. Upon reflection I felt the specifics of the discussion were not really significant or even relevant. How this model

impacted the learning experience is important to our discussion; the substantive conclusions reached by this particular class are not. It is not the destination but the journey which is meaningful when using the matrix model in the classroom. And the main value of this model may be in how it facilitates this journey.

7. POTENTIAL USES OF THE MATRIX MODEL

Having stressed that the main purpose of the matrix model is as a classroom aid, I'd like to use this final section to discuss ways in which this model might be applied beyond the description above. These applications fall into the categories of pedagogy, analysis, creativity, and rhetoric.

Pedagogical: In addition to the obvious undergraduate classroom use of the matrix model, there might also be considerable value at the graduate level. I could easily see this model being used as the central tool in a seminar, a master's thesis, or even a doctoral dissertation. Beyond that it's possible that this model could be used reflectively to examine the process of pedagogy within the context of an educational system. If we considered teachers as advocates, could an extended matrix model analysis help to make them more effective?

Analytical: Most of the rhetorical criticism studies I've read involved analyses of very limited rhetorical events – a speech, a protest march, the publication of a book. And while these limited events were generally discussed in the context of broad social, political, and rhetorical events these larger events were seldom systematically analyzed as rhetorical artifacts in and of themselves. The matrix model might serve as a tool to help in the analysis and understanding of these larger movements.

Heuristic: Classroom experience suggests that performing an analysis with the matrix model generates a large number of unexpected, interesting, and potentially valuable questions. These classroom discussions sometime have the feel of brainstorming sessions. The use of this model by scholars might lead to the asking of some very interesting questions. The model clearly suggests the kinds of questions which ought to be included when doing audience analysis and designing questionnaires. And audience analysis as a practical matter has, in my experience, been one of the most problematic areas of public speaking. We tell our speakers and debaters to analyze their audience. Well and good. But beyond simple demographics what should they want to know? The matrix model helps them to identify critical issues to research.

Rhetorical: By making a distinction between the analytical and rhetorical uses of this model, I meant to separate scholars from practitioners. By practitioners I include speech writers, political campaign directors, Madison Avenue executives, lawyers, political consultants, lobbyists, public relations agents, etc. There are host of public and private advocates who routinely practice persuasion in the context of large rhetorical contexts. The matrix model might be developed into a very practical tool to help such advocates in the research, planning, presentation, monitoring, and evaluation of their rhetoric.

Regardless of any other potential applications, the matrix model has proven itself in my classrooms and is hereby offered for your consideration and critical assessment.

REFERENCES

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