How to deal with the values involved in argumentation? The treatment of argumentative texts in French textbooks (Grade 9)

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A collective research programme: « Manuels & Valeurs »
[textbooks and values]

(Nicolas Rouvière, dir.)

• textbooks = tell-tale object of a disciplinary reconfiguration
  • teaching literature = contribution to the formation of the individual and the citizen,
  • [literary issues]
- developing argumentative skills as an important objective in the 2015 Bulletin Officiel (defining the objectives of the teaching program from Cycle 2 to Cycle 4)

+ values are crucial for argumentation
➢ Elements that can support the achievement of the objective set by the 2015 official instructions;
➢ Limitations and inadequacies;
➢ Towards a framework ensuring a better grasp of argumentation, and of the role of values in argumentative texts

Hatier, Colibris / Hachette, Fleurs d’encre / Magnard, Jardin des Lettres / Belin, L’envol des Lettres / Le Robert, Passeurs de textes / Nathan, Terre des Lettres

The 6 major French Grade 9 textbooks
Analyzing argumentative texts or speeches
Proportion of argumentative texts among the study texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Non-arg.</th>
<th>Arg.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hachette</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magnard</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
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<td>Belin</td>
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<td>Hatier</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Nathan</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17</td>
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“What position does each brother defend about involvement in the war?”
(Roger Martin du Gard, Les Thibault, Hatier)
Identification of the arguments in favour of the thesis

“What arguments does George Sand put forward to justify the usefulness of autobiographical writing?” (Georges Sand, Histoire de ma vie, Belin)
Focus on the logical connectors

"What arguments does King Noble put forward to justify Renart’s condemnation? Identify the adverbs and logical connectors that structure his speech" (Le roman de Renart, Hatier)
Evaluating the arguments

"Are the Wolf's arguments admissible or does he show bad faith?"
(Le Loup et l'agneau, Jean de la Fontaine, Hatier)
Producing argumentative texts or speeches
"Research a country that is currently at war. After identifying the terms in the scene that express women's anger and revolt, write the speech that a modern-day Lysistrata might give at the United Nations" (Aristophane, Lysistrata, Belin)
Preparatory exercices

Watch Bérenger's final monologue on the Internet. Then write a literary criticism article for your class’s collaborative wall (...) You will use at least two modalisers and two evaluative terms.
Problems

• Under-representation of prototypical argumentative texts
• Too many texts where argumentation is directed at serving unjust, absurd or ridiculous causes
• Definitions of argumentation: rare and inappropriate
  - Based on the orientation towards persuasion / conviction
  - A fragile ontology
• No explicit connection between argumentation and values

→ Argumentation defined through its **double aim**:

- **Positioning**: expressing a position on a question, situating oneself in relation to other possible positions (phenomena of enunciative heterogeneity, taking charge of claims, modalisations, etc.).

- **Justification**: constructing an argumentative sequence (argumentative indicators, types of argument)
Values in argumentation

• Values as premises in an argument;
  • X must be done in the name of + value-word" such as “liberté”, “égalité”, “fraternité”.
  • Pragmatic Argument (argument from consequences) :
    measure M must be taken (conclusion)
    because measure M would have consequence C (premise 1)
    and consequence C is desirable (premise 2)
    because it actualises value V (premise 3 in support of 2)

• Values as conclusions of an argument: « one should defend value V because... »

• Values as basis for evaluating an argument : « this is a bad argument/a good argument » according to such or such principle of evaluation.
If we want to take seriously both awareness to values and the acquisition of argumentative skills as two important objectives of the teaching of French in secondary school, we need to be clear about what approach is best suited to highlight them and the way they intertwine in a specific teaching context; and this reflection should have consequences on the conception of textbooks.
Thank you for your attention