Rationale for Evaluating Sources and Harris Move ‘Authorizing’

This teacher demonstration began with an interest in social issues and teaching students two significant parts to argument writing. First, the importance of evaluating sources and determining if those sources are credible or not credible and second, teaching the Harris Move of ‘Authorizing’ from a source. These two parts fit into the overall whole of writing argumentation and developing a strong and credible piece for the purpose of supporting a claim. By helping a student writer become proficient at examining a source and determining it’s credibility and by teaching them how to Authorize their piece, students will develop not only stronger writing skills, but hopefully, be able to determine throughout their life, how to support a position, claim if you will, and locate credible sources to support that claim. Another interest and hope is that by developing these two writing skills, students will feel empowered to join written conversations as well as oral conversations. In *Why Won’t You Just Tell Us the Answer?*, B. A. Lesh sums up this idea best,

Empowering students to dissect (historical) sources with a cognitive tool leads to greater levels of literacy and promotes a consistency of approach. (19)

While selecting sources for a text set, it was important to keep in mind several things. The most important being accessibility for the student, the sources that I would use to introduce need to be at a level that they could read and understand. Another consideration is to have sources that are balanced and show both sides of the issue to be argued. Because this demonstration includes Authorizing, sources need to have examples of Authorizing for the students to apply in their writing. B. A. Lesh says, “All sources are not created equal. They are not equal in readability, student accessibility, interest level, or their linkage to enough background information to enable students or teachers to determine subtext and context.” (56) He suggests use no more than four to six sources, read sources ahead of time and make sure that you explain vocabulary that is unfamiliar to them. Use balanced sources and vary them to include short videos, visuals, material objects, photos, artwork, even cartoons. You might need to edit or develop an excerpted piece, if the source is in cursive, a typed copy for students who have difficulty reading such writing allows them to access the source provided. (57)

One other point to make, this teacher demonstration provides for the use of Sentence Starters or as Graff and Birkenstein call them, Templates. They state, “Our templates prompt students to make moves in their writing that they might not otherwise make or even know they should make. The templates are particularly helpful for students who are unsure about what to say or who have trouble finding enough to say, often because they consider their own beliefs so self-evident that they need not be argued for”. (xxi) It is also of their belief that the templates can bring out aspects of students’ thoughts that, as they themselves remark, they didn’t even realize were there.(xxi) With my own experience, after students feel comfortable using these templates, they will begin on their own feeling confident enough to not always refer to them. Since most professional writers depend on some sort of format to write, I do not feel as if my students are “copying” or not learning how to write and argue effectively. After all, if professionals can, then so can our students!

**Works Cited**

Graff, Gerald, and Cathy Birkenstein. *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. Third ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2014. Print.

Lesh, Bruce A. *"Why Won't You Just Tell Us the Answer?": Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7-12*. Portland, Me.: Stenhouse, 2011. Print.