

He said/She said: Teaching the Use of Secondary Sources

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1. What Students Struggle With

Conceptual Challenges of Using Secondary Sources

- Finding an appropriate source
- Understanding the argument of that source
- Explaining the source without generalizing

Mechanical Challenges of Using Secondary Sources

- Knowing when to summarize, when to quote
- Incorporating quotations into sentences
- Appropriate citation

2. Ways of Teaching these Skills

- In-class Exercises
 - Group Close Reading
 - Small Group Worksheets
 - Individual Worksheets
- Paper Conferences
- Paper Comments

3. What We Did, Round I

Liz: My exercise integrated group close reading and individual worksheets. We began with group discussion that compared an academic argument with a narrative essay. Class discussion focused on how the two essays were formally and tonally divergent, but made similar arguments. Then students completed worksheets in which they summarized the articles, chose quotations from the articles that illustrated the main argument, and put them in conversation with each other.

Ben: My exercise didn't involve group close reading the first time. Students were asked to find outside sources on their own to support their preliminary arguments. They filled out a worksheet that asked them to identify the basic arguments of the articles. Then they were asked to report their findings to their peers as part of the brainstorming process.

4. What Went Wrong

Liz's students didn't realize the worksheet was a writing exercise

- Group close reading meant students understood the argument, but were focused on that, and didn't write good sentences.

Ben's students didn't realize the worksheet was a reading exercise

- Students often didn't understand the argument of their articles, but assumed they did, after writing about them.

5. What Went Right

- Students learned to identify the structures of arguments and methodologies of articles.
- Students learned to consider the style of arguments.
- Students learned to choose quotations carefully in order to best illustrate an article's main point.

6. What We Did, Round II

Liz: My second exercise was explicitly identified as a writing exercise, and was done in groups. Students read a selection of short articles before class, and then discussed them in small groups. Each group of four students was assigned one article and filled out a worksheet as a group prior to giving a brief class presentation on that article.

Ben: My second exercise didn't involve a worksheet. Students read an article before class, and then we discussed it as a seminar. Having chosen and read the article in advance allowed me to explain it to them, rather than asking them to explain their articles to me.

7. What We Learned

The Importance of Titles

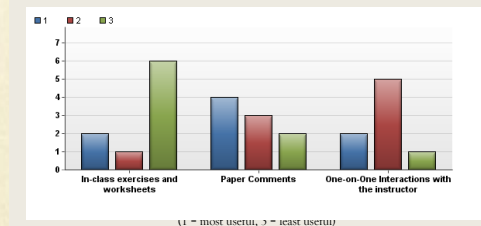
- Specifying that an exercise was a "writing exercise" produced better writing.
- Specifying that it was also an exercise in reading comprehension produced better reading.

The Importance of Group Close Reading

- Discussing an article together ensures that students are all on the same page, and that they aren't misinterpreting an argument.

8. How They Responded

Students in Liz's class were asked to rank which teaching method taught them the most about how to use secondary sources. This graph includes data from 11 responses to an online survey.



9. What We'll Do Next Time

Be Explicit about Pedagogical Goals

- Make sure students know the purpose of each exercise, as this allows them to concentrate their efforts on that objective.

Use Worksheets alongside Other Methods

- The survey reveals that worksheets and classroom exercises are useful, but shouldn't be the sole method of instruction.
- Traditional methods such as paper comments and conferences remain valuable and effective.