Academic Note

“Don’t Be a Box Teacher: Teaching Your Students to Analyze the Arrows of Graphic Organizers”

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Having students analyze written material independently is perhaps one of the hardest techniques to teach as well as the most difficult for students to grasp. However, students’ grasping this strategy of learning is invaluable. In all content areas, our students need to be able to disseminate material to gain full understanding of the content presented. On the other side of the coin, we want our students, as writers, to be able to produce a piece of work containing all analytical components. So, as teachers, how do we address both concerns?

I presented the idea of using a scaffolding teaching strategy to first be used by the teacher to the students, then as the teacher with the students, followed by students working independently. I formally labeled the presentation “The Five W’s and H: How to Teach Analysis.” In this, I broke down all six components, and gave explicit examples of each. Then, all elements were applied to different content areas. For each component, I applied the who, what, where, when, why, and how to writing.

For writing/communication, the *who* would be the audience. To whom are you writing? The *what* would address the form of writing, such as a letter, article, or narrative. The *when* and *where* would be applied to the setting. The purpose would answer the *why* component. Then, *how* are you going to gather your support to develop your idea? It is important that students are able to find, understand, and analyze all components. They must be able to do this independently before they will be able to perform as a successful writer.

How do we get our students to compile the answers to these who, what, when, where, why, and how questions? Many teachers use graphic organizers. This is a great practice for students to organize and evaluate content material or their own writing. With graphic organizers, students diligently fill out the appropriate boxes provided, no analysis need be involved. So how do we make our students analyze these interrelated concepts? We teach them *how* to get from box to box. It is the how and why that takes students to a deeper level of understanding.

When students become familiar with the language of analysis, they will begin to analyze independently. And isn’t this our purpose…to give our students the tools to take them to the next level. We want our students to have the capability to peel back layers of content to bite into the enduring concepts of how and why.