**Teaching Categorization**

Whether students are writing a five-paragraph essay or a major research paper, it is important for them to master the skill of grouping their information into logical categories (eventually to become arguments/topic sentences). Below are some ideas on how to teach and/or practice this skill.

**CLASS MODELING OF CREATING CATEGORIES FOR AN ESSAY**

With a unit essay question, have students brainstorm on the board all the information that they know relating to trying to answer that question.

For example, if the question was “Taking the stance of a colonist in 1775, should the colonists have declared independence from Great Britain?” they would have a brainstorm that included lots of ideas some of which would have supported independence and others that did not.

As a class, then look at the data (info on the board) and decide which argument is more compelling. This would be a great time to have a class discussion about quality versus quantity of examples. For the sake of argument, then chose a side (for independence).

Then, as a class take each piece of information that might support that argument and label it with a category or categories. Class could create a list of possible categories first to get the processes started, but shouldn’t limit themselves to those categories. Categories: economic, political, social, freedom, self-gov’t (obviously a sub-category of political, but to demonstrate that categories can be relatively broad or narrow depending upon the information available). One way to label each piece of info is simply with a letter (key on side of board) like E for economic.

Then on paper, students can create lists of the information for each category. If there is not a lot of information (i.e. only one example), then that is probably not a good category. The lesson could then be expanded to discuss how these categories would relate to topic sentences for the thesis/argument with the information as specific examples to support the each sub-argument. For example, “Declaring independence from Great Britain would allow for significant expansion of the colonial economy.”

(Next page for second activity.)

**PAIR ACTIVITY FOR ORGANIZING NOODLETOOLS NOTE CARDS INTO CATEGORIES**

This lesson presumes that categorizing information has been introduced previously.

After doing some research for an essay or research paper, the students will print out their note cards from NoodleTools and bring them to class.

Working in pairs (students working on roughly related topics), the students should then put the note cards from one student’s project into piles of related information. The pair will then decide what word/phrase categorizes those cards. In other words, how were the cards related? The pair would then do the same thing for the second student’s cards.

An extension of this would be to have two pairs of students exchange cards (two separate sets from each pair) and have the second group sort the other group’s project cards. They can then see if the other group came up with different categories or ways of grouping the information, allowing students to see that information can be categorized in different ways and perhaps allowing them to think about other ways in which their information might be used to address their argument.