



## **Written Conversations Develop Minds for the Future** **A Guide for Virtual Conversations**

### **Expectations: Procedures Required for Effective Implementation**

In-class discussions regarding digital citizenship and accountable talk as described by Morocco, Aguilar & Bershad (2008) proved to be extremely proactive in all classrooms. Open dialogue and brainstorming online etiquette with students, prior to entering an online setting, eliminated any negative comments and/or comments that took away from discussions. We based our discussions with students on Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg's (2008) suggestions on how to set up an environment that facilitates collaboration, learning, thinking and talk. In order to have effective content area conversations, they outline the need to create a physical environment, a social environment through community building, expectations for talk, routines for talk and a metacognitive environment for talk (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008). When it came time to go into a computer lab and/or one-to-one laptop setting students honored online discussions through on task, responsible and focused behavior. Setting these expectations is also crucial, since the online discussions can be accessed from home. Teachers noticed that conversations remained positive and focused whether or not students were in a class setting or posted from home in the evening. This of course implies that teachers monitor a conversation which is something we will discuss throughout this document.

### **Strategies for Scaffolding**

We have found that when students are prepared for discussion boards/forums, that when digital citizenship expectations are clear and when assessment is clear students are successful. For instance, prior to even taking students into a discussion forum setting we take the time to use some strategies that scaffold discussions. Strategies from *Inquiring Minds Learn to Read and Write* (2009) such as, see, think & wonder, four corners, guided reading/cued think aloud, silent discussion thread, Socratic seminar, panel discussions and three-level questioning have proven themselves invaluable in that students have the opportunity to learn vital skills that assist them in discussion forums. Some of these strategies are included below.

Implementing these strategies in-class allows for time to develop effective discussion skills as a whole class. At Louis St. Laurent Junior and Senior High School, for example, students worked through silent discussion threads in class where they silently added to one another's thoughts and ideas based on specific teacher questions and essay prompts in science and English classes.

When it came time to participate in discussion forums students independently added to discussion threads without turning around to talk out loud with peers. In-class talk can become distracting to some students and take away from the conversations that are taking place online.



### Silent Discussion Thread

Before implementing this strategy it is important that you come up with about five questions that you would like your students to discuss. Eventually students may be able to come up with their own questions. When using this strategy students are organized into small groups of about five students. Each child within the group will receive a sheet of paper with a different question written up at the top. This means that each child in the group will receive a different question but all of the groups will be exploring the same five questions that you came up with earlier. (Wilhelm, Wilhelm & Boas, 2009, p. 90)

Below are the silent discussion guidelines as outlined in *Inquiring Minds Learn to Read and Write, 2009*.

### Silent Discussion Guidelines

- It is important to remember that no one in your group should talk while a silent discussion thread is taking place.
- Each member in your group will receive a sheet with one question at the top. The question could be from your teacher or another student. Each person in your group will have a different question.
- Compose a response to the question. Your teacher may time you to encourage you finish your response in one to two minutes.
- When time is called, pass your sheet to the person on your left. You will receive a new question from the person on your right.
- Read the question and response on the new sheet.
- Add something new to the response to the question. You may build on, expand, extend, or disagree with the prior response.
- Wait for your teacher's cue and pass the sheet to your left; receive a new sheet from your right. Repeat until everyone in the group has had a chance to respond to each question.
- After everyone in the group has responded wait for your teacher's cue. Your teacher may decide that your small group discuss ideas aloud at this time or that a whole class discussion take place.

(Wilhelm, Wilhelm & Boas, 2009, p. 90)



## **Making Connections:**

### **Text-to-Self**

Connect your own life experiences, knowledge and feelings with issues discussed in the media. What words, ideas, etc. speak out to you? It is not necessary to make a personal connection with each and every point that is presented to you. Naturally connect with the media so that you can think beyond what is being presented to you (Stead, 2006).

Below are **questions you can ask yourself** when **making text-to-self connections**:

“What does this remind me of in my life?”

What is this similar to in my life?

How is this different from my life?

Has something like this ever happened to me?

How does this relate to my life?

What were my feelings when I read this?”

**(Making Connections, 2004)**

---

### **Text-to-Text**

Make text-to-text connections between the author’s viewpoint in what you just read, viewed or heard and other text that you have looked at in the past. For example, if you’ve watched a video you may find that you can make a connection to a page in your textbook or an article that you’ve read before from a similar genre or on the same topic (Stead, 2006).

Below are **questions you can ask yourself** when **making text-to-text connections**:

“What does this remind me of in another book I’ve read?”

How is this text similar to other things I’ve read, viewed or heard?

How is this different from other books I’ve read?

Have I read about something like this before?”

**(Making Connections, 2004)**

---

### **Text-to-World**

Here you will need to think outside of yourself and think about the world. Connect what you have read, viewed or heard to issues, ideas, themes, etc. that stem far beyond your own personal experiences and extend to the world around you (Stead, 2006).

Below are **questions you can ask yourself** when **making text-to-world connections**:

“What does this remind me of in the real world?”

How is this text similar to things that happen in the real world?

How is this different from things that happen in the real world?

How did that part relate to the world around me?”

**(Making Connections, 2004)**

<https://sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/diane-kardash/Home/making-connections>

**Making Connections Template #1**

<b>Personal Findings</b>
<b>Text-to-Self:</b>
<b>Text-to-Text:</b>
<b>Text-to-World:</b>

**Making Connections Template #2**

<b>Personal Findings</b>	<b>Additional Findings From My Group</b>
<b>Text-to-Self:</b>	
<b>Text-to-Text:</b>	
<b>Text-to-World:</b>	

**Making Connections Template #3**

Personal Findings	Additional Findings From My Group
<b>Text-to-Text:</b>	
<b>Text-to-Self:</b>	
<b>Text-to-World:</b>	
<b>Points of comparison and contrast across the media:</b>	
<b>What I've learned about _____:</b>	
<b>What I now wonder about:</b>	

### **Guided Reading/Cued Think Aloud Strategy**

This strategy is connected to the work of Fountas and Pinnell where the term guided reading refers to, "...small group instruction for students who read the same text." (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001, p. 17) When using the following strategy however, we would like to substitute the word text for media. This strategy can then be used with students when they are viewing and interacting with a variety of information be it in the form of text, video, visual art, etc.

Typically guided reading is done in small groups but this strategy can be used with an entire class. The learning situation is guided by the teacher who acts as a mentor to the students. With guidance it is the goal that students will, in time, be able to use the strategy independently.

The following strategy is described in *Inquiring Minds Learn to Read and Write* (2009) as a strategy that can be used to aid students in making connections to information. The specific connections are divided into three categories; text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world.

Below are specific directions and explanations of the three types of connections that students are encouraged to explore.

#### **Directions:**

1. Read/view/listen to the media provided on your own. As you read/view/listen, focus on making text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections. Use the following template to record your connections. (template #1, #2 & #3)
2. Once you have read/viewed/heard the media on your own, gather with your group and list the connections from the group. (template #2 & #3)
3. **(Extension)** Within your group each member will now read/view/hear something different that is related to the main topic. Using template #3 discuss and list: (1) points of comparison and contrast across the media, (2) discuss and list new learning from the day's discussions and (3) formulate and new wonderings that have arisen based on the day's discussions. (template #3)



### Think-Pair-Square-Share

**Good For:** getting students involved in class discussions and provides an opportunity for every child to share an answer to every question. It takes the fear out of class discussion by allowing the students to think carefully about their answers and talk about them with a partner and small group before they are called on to respond.

- synthesis, summary, review, check for understanding, opinion

#### **Looks Like:**

- Ask the question.
- Have the students individually **think** about an answer for a set amount of time.
- Allow the students to **discuss** their answer with a partner for a set amount of time.
- Allow partners to **discuss** their answer with a different pair (square) for a set amount of time.
- Finally, have the students share their answers with the class.

#### **FINE-TUNING THE TECHNIQUE**

- There is no magic amount of think time and pair time. In general, depending on the complexity of the question. You want to give them just enough time to think and to spark some ideas in their partner, but not enough time to get off-task.
- Give a specific task when asking the students to pair. For example, say "Take 30 seconds to talk with your partner and come up with one answer to the question" or "Talk with your partner for a minute and see if you can come up with two solutions to the problem."
- When it comes time for the students to share their responses (in partners, in teams, or as a class), anything doesn't go. The students need to provide correct, well-reasoned, clearly explained answers. Use questioning to help students or teams flesh out their answers. Model the elements that make an answer stronger—phrasing the answer as a complete sentence, using words instead of gestures, supporting answers with evidence, and so forth.
- To vary responses during share time, vary your questions. Encourage your students to react to what others have said—to compare answers, add information, agree, disagree, or otherwise respond to the answers proposed by their classmates. Teachers call this Think-Pair-Share-Compare.
- Think-Pair-Share is a highly effective routine for questions that require students to exert their mental muscles, but not all questions merit such extended contemplation. For simpler queries, you might do better with Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down or by eliciting a quick response from one or two students and moving right on.

<http://www.pdesas.org/main/fileview/Think%20Pair%20Share.pdf>

## Where to Set Up Virtual Space

Doing a quick web search of “Free online forum” is a good starting place to finding an online forum host. Here are some options that others are using or you can easily find yourself online.

In our district we have in-house solutions so we have minimal experience with these tools.

- <http://www.google.com/moderator/>
  - If your students have Google accounts, you can use Google [moderator.com](http://www.google.com/moderator/)
- <http://www.freeboards.net/main.htm>
  - add supported message boards
- <http://www.proboards.com>
  - These are free, and they also have iPhone apps so students could use iPhone/iPod touch and iPad to interact with it.

## Feedback

The biggest question we encounter with teachers is, “How do I assess an online discussion?” It is not surprising that the task can seem daunting at first. Discussions can become very long and go down multiple paths. *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students* by Brookhart (2008) has provided us with clear directions on how to provide assessment for student learning in this new venue. Brookhart (2008) outlines the following to consider when assessing students which we’ve tied in online settings:

- Timing is critical and should be quick. Students are continuously writing in an online setting

so give them feedback “live” as they go. We have found that if proper steps have been taken to provide students with different discussion skills and expectations have been established then students work independently. This is classroom management at its best since the teacher can follow along on discussions providing comments and feedback as students work.

- “Good Job” is not effective. Provide students with specific comments and feedback so that they can improve their posts. Students should work towards adding to conversations through rigorous posts that are clear and thought provoking. Many of our students cannot do this on their own and rely on the teachers’ effective feedback to guide them in the right direction.

Effective and specific feedback results in students learning how to improve their work, students become more motivated to want to learn and the classroom becomes a place where specific feedback in the form of constructive criticism is accepted and valued (Brookhart, 2008).

In our experiences, online discussion feedback comes in three forms: whole class feedback, “live” direct teacher feedback, and formal rubric assessment. One teacher, Melissa stated, “after [students] posted their initial responses, we went through their responses and critiqued them in an honest open communication setting where everybody felt safe. We looked at what made responses really good and what made some of them weaker than others and how to strengthen them.” Melissa and her students discussed specifics such as how a statement that was poorly written took away from the content. Students concluded for

ASCD Annual Conference: San Francisco 2011

Daniel Espejo and Susana Gerndt

themselves the importance of punctuation and spelling for effective communication. They also considered adding more detail and examples to justify their stance.

The second form of feedback comes in play, when teachers take the time to participate directly on the forum providing feedback and questioning “live” as students work. This is where specific feedback to individual student responses occurs.

In collaboration with teachers we have developed subject specific rubrics based on the curriculum that teachers can use, share and modify with students. These rubrics are typically used for a handful of posts that the teacher chooses to assess. The rubrics are shared with students so that expectations are clear and transparent. Students are encouraged to refer to these for ongoing self-assessment.

*\*\*\*please see example rubrics at end of document\*\*\**

### **Questions & Prompts: Enriching the Virtual Conversations**

A successful online discussion is hugely dependent on the type of question or prompt that is posed to students. “When teachers plan for talk and clearly establish the purpose and expectations, students use academic language and vocabulary in authentic ways” (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008, p. 69). Teachers take the time to develop questions that require students to use higher-order thinking. Thought provoking questions that engage critical thinking as well as encourage students to talk is not easy to do on the spur of the moment (Fisher, Frey & Rothenberg, 2008).

To date, for the most part, we are working with teachers to develop strong questions and prompts across the subject areas. Through continued work though, it is our hope that students themselves will learn how to pose meaningful questions to their peers. Handing over the ownership to students in this manner will allow them to drive their own conversations. Undoubtedly students will be participating in e-mail, blogs and online discussion environments well into their futures. **Giving students the skills to not only participate in discussion forums but to also learn how to drive their discussions through effective questioning techniques will enable them to express their own perspectives and seek perspectives of others from the global community** (Morocco, Aguilar & Bershada, 2008). **Getting students to go outside of the classroom, engaging in the conversations that are happening in blogs, forums, news sites and taking part in the important conversations - they become empowered.**

According to Morocco, Aguilar and Bershada (2008), “discussion is a tool and medium for engaging in the synthesis and perspective taking that characterize a prepared adolescent. In thinking aloud with others, in a common physical or virtual space, around a common topic, students practice the critical thinking skills that will serve them well in future learning communities” (p. 17).

## English Discussion Forum Participation Rubric

Criteria/Level	Excellent	Proficient	Satisfactory	Limited	Insufficient
<b>Supports Ideas With Evidence of Peers and Readings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Refers to others' opinions as well as readings in discussion</li> <li>-Reveals a solid understanding of the topic as evidenced by thoughtful responses and questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Refers mostly to readings and topic as opposed to incorporating the ideas of peers</li> <li>-Reveals an adequate understanding of the topic as evidenced by posts indicating superficial knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Refers to readings that are not entirely centered on topic</li> <li>-Reveals a restricted understanding of the topic limited to information that could be derived from prior posts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Message was unrelated to discussion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No score is awarded because there is insufficient evidence of student performance based on the requirements of the assessment task</li> </ul>
<b>Critically Thinks About the Discussion Topic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Interprets readings in accurate and insightful ways</li> <li>-Provides a creative synthesis of information</li> <li>- Uses information thoughtfully, in a ways that are relevant and accurate</li> <li>-Postings show analysis of literary evidence, recognizes the validity of the original conclusions and offers alternatives based on concrete evidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Accurately interprets readings and concisely synthesizes it with the question</li> <li>-Uses main points of information from readings</li> <li>-May repeat the ideas of others, but attempts to offer new insight</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Makes errors in interpreting readings and/or ineffectively synthesizes the information with the question</li> <li>- Includes some facts as well as opinion</li> <li>-Repeats the ideas of others...offers no original feedback...says, "Yes...I agree..."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Misinterprets the readings or fails to synthesize them with the question</li> <li>-Relies on own opinion</li> <li>-Forms limited conclusions based on limited examination of information</li> <li>-Comments offer no evidence that you understand what has been posted</li> </ul>	
<b>Participates in Discussion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provides comments, new information and poses questions</li> <li>-Interacts with a variety of participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provides comments, some new information and asks some questions</li> <li>- Interacts with a few selected participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sporadically provides comments and some new information</li> <li>-Interacts with only one or two participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provides minimal comments and information to other participants</li> </ul>	
<b>Communicates Clearly (Organization &amp; Conventions)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the response is effectively focused and developed</li> <li>-writing is essentially free of errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the response is clearly focused and developed</li> <li>-writing contains only minor errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the response is functionally focused and developed</li> <li>-writing contains errors that do not detract from overall clarity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-the response lacks focus</li> <li>-writing contains frequent errors that detract from overall clarity</li> </ul>	

## Rubric for Social Studies Current Affairs

<u>Criteria\Level</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Proficient</u>	<u>Satisfactory</u>	<u>Limited</u>	<u>Insufficient</u>
<b>Understands Relevance of the Issue and Multiple Perspectives</b>	-understanding of the relevance of the issue is insightful -explores various perspectives in a deliberate way	-understanding of the relevance of the issue is thoughtful -explores various perspectives in a purposeful way	-understanding of the relevance of the issue is logical -explores various perspectives in a straightforward way	-understanding of the relevance of the issue is incomplete -explores various perspectives in a superficial and unclear way	-No score is awarded because there is insufficient evidence of student performance based on the requirements of the assessment task
<b>Makes Personal Judgments</b>	-choice of position OR planned solution is perceptive -arguments OR ideas presented are convincing -demonstrates an astute awareness of the consequences of the position OR solution advocated	-choice of position OR planned solution is sound -arguments OR ideas presented are considered -demonstrates a sensible awareness of the consequences of the position OR solution advocated	-choice of position OR planned solution is appropriate -arguments OR ideas presented are predictable -demonstrates and adequate awareness of the consequences of the position OR solution advocated	-choice of position or proposed solution is vague and/or simplistic -arguments OR ideas presented are inaccurate -demonstrates a questionable awareness of the consequences of the position OR solution advocated	
<b>Supports With Evidence</b>	-selects evidence pertinent to the issue -evidence is precise and free of factual errors	-selects evidence significant to the issue -evidence is specific and contains few factual errors	-selects evidence applicable to the issue -evidence is general and may contain occasional factual errors	-selected evidence, if present, is inefficient -evidence is scant and may contain numerous factual errors	
<b>Communicates Clearly</b>	-the response is effectively focused and developed -writing is essentially free of errors	-the response is clearly focused and developed -writing contains only minor errors	-the response is functionally focused and developed -writing contains errors that do not detract from overall clarity	-the response lacks focus -writing contains frequent errors that detract from overall clarity	
<b>Participates in Discussion</b>	-Provides comments, new information and poses questions -Interacts with a variety of participants	-Provides comments, some new information and asks some questions - Interacts with a few selected participants	-Sporadically provides comments and some new information -Interacts with only one or two participants	-Provides minimal comments and information to other participants	

---

## Science-Discussion Forum Rubric 1

**4**

**3**

**2**

**1**

	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b><u>Communicate Ideas</u></b>	Uses symbols, graphics, and language in an <b>effective</b> manner that <b>captivates</b> the audience.	Uses symbols or graphics and language in a <b>clear</b> manner that <b>engages</b> the audience.	Uses <b>basic</b> graphics and language to communicate <b>some</b> major ideas	Uses graphics and language in a <b>vague</b> manner with <b>minimal</b> audience appeal
<b><u>Asks Questions</u></b>	Asks <b>insightful</b> questions about ideas, problems or issues.	Asks <b>logical</b> questions about ideas, problems or issues.	Asks <b>predictable</b> questions about ideas, problems or issues.	Questions are <b>unrelated to</b> ideas, problems or issues.
<b><u>Shows interest in related issues and questions</u></b>	Displays <b>compelling</b> interest in related issues and questions.	Displays <b>convincing</b> interest in related issues and questions.	Displays <b>plausible</b> interest in related issues and questions.	Displays <b>little or no</b> interest in related issues and questions.



## Science-Discussion Forum Rubric 2

**4**

**3**

**2**

**1**

<u>Identifies new questions and problems</u>	Provides an <b>astute</b> identification of new questions and problems.	Provides a <b>thoughtful</b> identification of new questions and problems.	Provides an <b>appropriate</b> identification of new questions and problems.	Provides <b>trivial</b> identification of new questions and problems.
<u>Shows interest in related issues and questions</u>	Displays <b>compelling</b> interest in related issues and questions.	Displays <b>convincing</b> interest in related issues and questions.	Displays <b>plausible</b> interest in related issues and questions.	Displays <b>little or no</b> interest in related issues and questions.
<u>Demonstrates sensitivity to human and environmental needs</u>	Responses demonstrate <b>insightful</b> sensitivity to human and environmental needs.	Responses demonstrate <b>thoughtful</b> sensitivity to human and environmental needs	Responses demonstrate <b>believable</b> sensitivity to human and environmental needs	Responses demonstrate <b>minimal</b> sensitivity to human and environmental needs
<u>Gathers and Records Data</u>	Gathers and records <b>significant</b> and <b>pertinent</b> information from a variety of sources	Gathers and records <b>meaningful</b> and <b>relevant</b> information from a variety of sources	Gathers and records <b>appropriate</b> and <b>generally applicable</b> information from a variety of sources	Gathers and records <b>vague</b> and <b>trivial</b> information from few sources

## References

Brookhart, S. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Rothenberg, C. (2008). *Content-area conversations*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Fountas, I., & Pinnell, G. (2001). *Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6*. London: Heinemann.

Gardner, H. (2006). *Five minds for the future*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Ivey, G., & Fisher, D. (2006). *Creating literacy-rich schools for adolescents*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Kardash, D. (n.d.). *Making connections: Text to self, text to text, text to world*. Retrieved

September 15, 2010, from <https://sites.google.com/a/alaska.edu/diane-kardash/Home/making-connections>.

Morocco, C.C., Aguilar, C.M.M & Bershad, C.J. (2008). *Supported literacy for adolescents: Transforming teaching and content learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Success for All Foundation. (2008). Think-pair-share. Retrieved January 17, 2011, from <http://www.pdesas.org/main/fileview/Think%20Pair%20Share.pdf>.

Stead, T., & K., N. (2006). *Reality Checks*. York: Stenhouse Publishers.

Wilhelm, J. D., Wilhelm, P. J. & Boas, E. (2009). *Inquiring minds learn to read and write*. Markham, Ont.: Rubicon Publishing Inc.

ASCD Annual Conference: San Francisco 2011

Daniel Espejo and Susana Gerndt