



Literacy Connects

A Content Literacy Newsletter from Regional Professional Development Program-Issue LVI

Understanding the NEPF Series-Standard 3



Standard 3: Students Engage in Meaning-Making through Discourse and Other Strategies

- **Indicator 1:** Teacher provides opportunities for extended, productive discourse between the teacher and student(s) and among students
- **Indicator 2:** Teacher provides opportunities for all students to create and interpret multiple representations
- **Indicator 3:** Teacher assists all students to use existing knowledge and prior experience to make connections and recognize relationships
- **Indicator 4:** Teachers structures the classroom environment to enable collaboration, participation, and a positive affective experience for all students

The core premise of Standard 3 is that students are active learners who construct understanding for themselves (Piaget, 1970). Although teachers can support learning, no one can learn for students. They must actively engage in making meaning to create their own learning. By teaching students how to engage in productive discourse, involving them in the creation and interpretation of different modes of representation, and connecting to their background knowledge, teachers can facilitate the transition from passive to active learning, all the while fostering student growth towards becoming successful, independent learners.

Extended Discourse is engaging dialogue, both oral and written, that is interactive, externalizes thinking, and focuses on creating meaning during learning. In the classroom, oral discourse can take the form of whole group, small group or paired discussion, while written discourse includes anything from argument and exposition to critical review and analysis. Oral and written discourse should focus on academic vocabulary and involve creating an argument, explaining, critiquing, and using logic and evidence to support or refute a claim. Language norms and uses are not generic, however. They change relative to the specific content and context, so it is important for students to participate in productive discourse in all content areas.

With this in mind, building a safe classroom environment that promotes collaboration is essential. Following are some suggestions for creating a chaos free collaborative environment, followed by specific cooperative learning strategies.

- Start cooperative learning activities with pairs before moving to larger groups. Collaborative pairs are easier to facilitate and will reap the same rewards as will larger groups.
- Collaborative pairs increase the accountability for learning and still provide the opportunity for students to share, grapple with, and collaboratively construct new knowledge.
- It is almost impossible for learners to think about one thing and talk about another; therefore, simply getting students talking about a concept or skill increases their cognition and ultimately their understanding of new information.
- Memory is positively impacted when students can link new learning to prior knowledge and connect personally to information. Pairing peers promotes discussion that is often more personal and more strongly linked to the students' experiences than whole group activities lead by the teacher.
- Collaborative pairs work best when used during guided practice, for review and for summarizing.



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- Depending on the purpose, it is often useful to pair students by ability levels. Pair students as follows: Low to average; average to average; average to high. Grouping low to high is peer tutoring, not collaborative pairs. Peer tutoring is best for reinforcing recently learned content, not for guided practice on new content. Never group low to low.
- Use a timer for collaborative pair activities. Tell students how much time they have before beginning, and for long activities, periodically remind them of how much time is remaining. For example, during the Think-Pair-Share, allow a minute for students to think or write and another minute or two for them to share. Providing too much time for activities can lead to a lack of focus and off-task behavior. Too little time can create frustration. Try to keep activities moving at a quick pace but be flexible. Watch your students, listen to their discussions, and adjust group time accordingly.
- A few beginning strategies for collaborative pairs are as follows:
 - Think-Pair-Share: A relevant question is posed to the class. Students are first asked to “think” or “write” about the question. They then pair with another student and discuss their answers, ideally coming to a consensus. Finally, one student from each pair shares their answer with the class.
 - To add more movement to the Think-Pair-Share, have students Stand Up-Hand Up-Pair Up. A question is posed to the class. Students stand-up, make eye contact with another student, raise their right hand, and give their new partner a high five.
 - Pairs Check: Students work in pairs to practice skills. They may work simultaneously and then check their work together, or one student may “ask” and one may “answer.” They then reverse roles.
- **Carousel Brainstorming:** Place chart paper in 4 – 6 locations around the room. Each sheet has a task for students to complete, a question to answer, quote to reflect or respond to, etc. Students are placed in groups and given markers (or you can select group recorders and give markers only to them). Each group is asked to begin at a different piece of chart paper. The teacher explains the traffic flow, showing students how they are to move around the room. A timer is set. Students begin their first task and when the timer rings, they move to the next piece of chart paper and begin the next task, adding answers or comments to the ones already recorded. Students continue to work through each station, moving each time the timer rings. Once finished, students can take a “gallery walk” and read all the responses. This activity can be used in numerous ways: to uncover or build prior knowledge, to motivate or engage, to develop ideas for writing topics or projects, to identify ways to apply content, to solve a problem, or as a review.
- **Inside-Outside Circle:** Students form two concentric circles with the same number of people in each circle. It’s easiest to have students count off by twos and direct the “ones” to stand in a circle. Once they have arranged themselves in a circle, ask them to turn around and face out. Direct the “twos” to face the “ones” creating an outer circle. One circle moves clockwise, the other moves counterclockwise. When the teacher says, “freeze”, both circles stop moving and students pair with the person standing across from them in the other circle. The teacher then directs them to



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- share or discuss with their partner. After the partners have had a chance to finish their discussion, the teacher directs the circles to move again.

This strategy can be used in numerous ways:

- As an icebreaker or team builder, giving questions about personal interests, movies, etc.
 - To help student discover prior knowledge about a particular topic before holding a large-group discussion or prior to teaching a lesson.
 - As a drill-and-practice activity
 - As a review
 - As a listening exercise. Have the inner circle speak first for a minute or two about a particular topic. The outer circle can't say anything; they just listen. Then the outer circle summarizes what their partner says. The inner circle gives feedback and they switch roles.
- **Pairs Discuss or Pairs Check:** This activity is a great follow-up to teacher-guided practice on a particular skill. Once the teacher gives an assignment, partners take turns answering a question or doing a problem while the other partner coaches and gives feedback. Once they've done that two or three times, both do the work, stopping after each two or three questions or problems and checking their answers with each other. For a variation of this activity, students can simply work in pairs to practice a skill. They work on the problem simultaneously and then check their work together, or one student may "ask" and one "answer" and then reverse roles.
 - **Pick a Card, Any Card:** This activity encourages total student engagement and accountability. You will need two sets of regular planning cards. Divide the class into teams of four and give each student on each team a card of a different suit. After assigning the teams a topic (hold a discussion, brainstorm some ideas, solve a problem, etc.), pull a card at random out of the deck. The student in each group who holds the same suit as the card you pulled reports her team's ideas or answer. Note: You can also use this strategy to assign roles. For example, hearts will be the facilitators; spades will be the recorders; diamonds will report to the class; and clubs will be in charge of materials.
 - **Numbered Heads:** Each person in the group is given a number (1, 2, 3 or 4). The teacher poses a question and the teams are given time to discuss the answer. The teacher then asks student # ____ to stand and answer the question in front of the whole class.
 - **Jigsaw:** As we all know, the best way to learn something is to teach it to others. This strategy requires students to teach other students. 1) Identify content that can be divided into relatively equal meaningful segments. 2) Identify the number of segments to be learned and place that number of students in each learning team. 3) Assign each person in the learning team a different segment of the material and give them time to study it. 4) Students then meet in expert groups



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(leave their original groups to discuss material with other students who have the same segment) to make sure they have a good grasp of their specific segment of the material and to discuss how they will teach their portion to their learning teams. 5) Students return to their learning teams and teach the material on which they are experts. 6) Ensure individual accountability by some means, possibly by using Pick a Card, Any Card or giving a quiz.

***Note:** If the Jigsaw is new to your students, start out with simple content. They will first need to learn the process before combining it with complex content. Also, after their Jigsaw experience, provide students with an opportunity to discuss how they worked as groups, what skills were needed to be successful, what worked well, and what they might do differently next time.*

- **Graffiti (Table Top Text):** This activity allows students to get out of their seats and move around the room. You might use Graffiti to have students offer solutions to problems, list what they think they know about a topic, review what they have already learned, use vocabulary in contextual sentences, or to generate or brainstorm ideas. 1) Write several topics, problems, quotes or sentences on pieces of large chart paper and post them around the room. 2) Divide the student into groups of 4-6 and assign each group to one piece of chart paper. 3) Give them time to write their thoughts, ideas, or answers on the chart paper. 4) After the time limit is up, have the students rotate clockwise to the next piece of chart paper and continue writing. This time they will also be responding to what was written by the previous groups.
- **Formations:** This strategy also incorporates movement. The object of formations is for each cooperative group to create a physical representation of a word, an object, or a process that they have learned. 1) Divide the class into appropriately sized groups, depending on what you are hoping the groups to create. 2) Give each group a slip of paper explaining what they are to represent with their formation. 3) Designate an amount of time to develop the formation. 4) Have groups present their formations to the rest of the class. 5) If the formations are incomplete or unclear, ask the class to offer suggestions that would improve the formation. Some ideas for Formations are as follows:
 - Letters or numbers: Have students form the shape of letters they're learning.
 - Spelling: Students use their bodies to spell out a term or vocabulary word.
 - Vocabulary: Student form shapes to represent the definition, antonym or synonym of a vocabulary word.
 - Geography: Students form a map of a state, country or continent.
 - Math: Students represent an equation, a math process, or geometric shape.
 - Science: Students represent the solar system or show how the earth rotates around the sun. Or they can physically depict the circulatory system or respiration.
 - Technology: Students represent technological inventions.



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- **All Hands on Deck:** This strategy promotes participation by all students, focuses students on a topic to be studied, and helps uncover students' prior knowledge about the topic to be studied. 1) Post chart paper that lists subtopics of the topic to be studied around the room, and give examples of ideas that might be included on each chart. For example, if a high school social studies class was studying the topic of the social conditions of the 1960's, subtopics might include popular music, television shows, recreational activities, famous slogans of the time, celebrities, famous historical or cultural events, etc. 2) Give each team of four students a stack of index cards with the same subtopics written on the posted chart paper. 3) Students divide the index cards equally among the members of the team. 4) Give students a designated amount of time (1-3 minutes) to brainstorm ideas about the subtopics, with the expectation that each student will contribute at least one idea per card. 5) When the time elapses, have the students pass their cards to the team member to their left and repeat Step 4. Continue circulating the cards until all team members have written on each card. 6) A designated reporter on each team reads one contribution for the selected chart on the wall in round-robin fashion while the teacher or a student records the ideas. When one chart is completed, move to the next.
 - Variation: Provide teams with pieces of paper with the subtopics printed on the top, and give each student a stack of sticky notes. Students write their ideas on the sticky notes and post them on the paper. Large-group sharing can be done by posting the sticky notes on the chart paper and conducting a gallery walk of the charts.
 - Note: To encourage individual accountability, provide student with different color writing implements or sticky notes.
- **I Have-Who Has:** This is a great drill-and-practice activity or one you can use for review. Students can stand in a circle or stand or sit at their desks. The teacher gives each student a 3" by 5" card. On one side of the card is a term; on the other side is a definition of a term that appears on another card in the circle or group. Place a green dot on the definition side of one card. The student with the green dot starts by saying, "Who has...?" and reads his/her definition. The student who has the card with that term that matches the definition says, "I have..." and reads his/her term. That student then continues, "Who has...?" and reads his/her definition. This continues until all the definitions have been matched to the terms.
- **Inquiring Minds:** This activity helps students focus on a class reading assignment, learn important questioning skills, and engage in higher level thinking. Have students work in teams of three or four and assign or allow them to choose their roles: The Reader, The Inquiring Mind, The Answerer and The Friend (if you need another role-The Friends helps the Answerer). 1) The Reader reads a selection of the assigned text. 2) The Inquiring Mind writes down the question on an index card, using a question starter and passes it to the Answerer. 3) The Answerer reads the question aloud and answers it. If he/she cannot answer the question, he may "phone a Friend" if there is a fourth



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member of the group. 4) Once the team agrees that the answer is correct, the Answerer writes it down on the index card. 5) The roles shift to the left and the process repeats until the reading assignment is complete.

Note: To encourage teams to use higher-level questions, require each team to attain a certain number of points and assign values to the different level of questions. Give students question starters that reflect either the 6 levels of Bloom's Taxonomy or DOK levels to help them think at higher, more critical levels:

- Knowledge -5 points
- Comprehension -10 points
- Application – 15 points
- Analysis – 20 points
- Synthesis – 25 points
- Evaluation – 30 points

- **Team Tournaments**

1. Prepare cards with short answers, definitions, or concepts written on each.
2. Assign students to groups of 3-5
3. One student is the Player, another is the Challenger, and another is the Checker. These roles rotate with each turn.
4. The Player draws a card and shows the other team members. Each member writes their own answer to the question (1 minute).
5. Once the minute is up, the Player answers the question, while the Checker looks in his/her notes or text for the correct answer.
6. The Player answers the question, and if the Challenger disagrees, he/she challenges the Player.
7. If the Player is correct, he/she gets a point.
8. If the Challenger is correct, he/she get a point.
9. If both are wrong (the Checker lets them know), the card goes to the end of the deck and the roles switch.

- **Boggle**

1. After a lecture, reading, or end of a unit, give students two minutes to review their notes.
2. Give them 2 minutes to "fact storm" by retrieving and writing down as many ideas and details as they can remember (this is without notes).
3. Have students meet with a review team of 3-4 other students. Students share their lists and add any information they did not have on their lists.



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4. Students leave their teams to Boggle (compare their list against their opponent's list) with other students. Students can Boggle in pairs or trios, earning points for any idea they have on their list that their Boggle competitor doesn't have.
 5. Students return to their review teams and compute their team score by adding all their Boggle scores together. The team with the most points wins.
- **Skits:** After a passive learning activity, have the students act out the information, system, process or skill they just learned. They play inanimate objects or abstract concepts as well as people, animals, and others. With a little creativity, almost any information, skill or process can be acted out.
 - **Draw It!:** Students select a card with a word and draw pictures until their teammates guess what's on the card. Steps: Blank paper or 3X5 cards for each team
 1. Teacher or students create cards with a word or number on one side, relating to the curriculum
 2. If students create the cards, they trade with another team.
 3. Cards are stacked, shuffled, and placed face-down in the center of the table.
 4. Student one picks the top card and reads it silently. On the opposite side of the card or on paper the student draws a picture(s) to communicate the content.
 5. Teammates guess the content. Student continues elaborating his drawing until a teammate guesses correctly.
 6. The process is repeated until everyone has a change or all the cards are used.
 7. This can be played whole class with the class divided in two teams. Each team has one guess. If they get it wrong, the guess goes to the other team. If the team is correct, they draw another card.
 - **Jot Thoughts:** This game works well to access prior knowledge or to review concepts already learned. Teammates cover the table with ideas they generate using Think Pad Brainstorming.
 1. Teacher names a topic and sets a time limit.
 2. Going clockwise, one student at a time, students announce one idea to the group and then write it on a post-it. The next student does the same with another detail, idea, or fact about that topic. Students are to write as many ideas they can in allotted time, one idea per slip of paper.
 3. Students attempt to "cover the table" with their post-its
 4. The group to have generated the most ideas in the allotted time wins.



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Variation: Students determine categories for the ideas they have generated and classify them according to their own classification system. Groups share ideas and classifications of ideas.

- **Team Interview:** Students are interviewed, each in turn, by their teammates.
 1. Teacher assigns a topic and sets time limit.
 2. On each team, one student stands ready to be interviewed by teammates.
 3. Teammates interview student asking critical questions about the topic for designated amount of time.
 4. Students take turns being interviewed.

- **Commercial Breaks:** This activity is great for review.
 1. Each student team (or pair) is assigned or chooses a review topic
 2. After 10 minutes of prep time and rehearsal, they act out a commercial for the material that they have been learning.
 3. Give them 30 seconds to be funny, bizarre, cute, sappy or exciting—whatever it takes to “sell” the “product” of knowledge and get everyone else to remember it.

- **Add-ons**
 1. Invite one person to come up to the front of the room and act out or pose as some idea or concept that they have learned from the lesson.
 2. Have another student come up and join the impromptu living sculpture until they form one giant human representation of what they’ve been learning.

- **Snowball Fight:** This activity can be used as an introduction at the beginning or the year, as a review, or any time you want student to get up and pair up.
 1. Divide the class in half.
 2. As an introduction activity, have the class write 3 interesting things about themselves on a piece of paper.
 3. They then wad up their paper and throw it across the room (the snowball fight part).
 4. Each student picks up a paper ball and finds the person who wrote it.
 5. The students interview each other based on the details written on the paper.
 6. They then introduce each other to the class.
 7. **Variations:** This activity can be used for anything. One half of the class can write vocabulary words, the other half writes the definitions. Students then match the word with the appropriate definition.



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Socratic Seminar

Adapted from ReadWriteThink.org

This strategy guide explains Socratic seminars and offers practical methods for applying the approach in your classroom to help students investigate multiple perspectives in a text.

Socratic seminars are named for their embodiment of Socrates' belief in the power of asking questions, prize inquiry over information and discussion over debate. Socratic seminars acknowledge the highly social nature of learning and align with the work of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Friere.

“The Socratic seminar is a formal discussion, based on a text, in which the leader asks open-ended questions. Within the context of the discussion, students listen closely to the comments of others, thinking critically for themselves, and articulate their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others. They learn to work cooperatively and to question intelligently and civilly.” (89)

Israel, Elfie. “Examining Multiple Perspectives in Literature.” In *Inquiry and the Literary Text: Constructing Discussions in the English Classroom*. James Holden and John S. Schmit, eds. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002.

Strategy in Practice

- Choosing a text: Socratic seminars work best with authentic texts that invite authentic inquiry—an ambiguous and appealing short story, a pair of contrasting primary documents in social studies, or an article on a controversial approach to an ongoing scientific problem.
- Preparing the students: While students should read carefully and prepare well for every class session, it is usually best to tell students ahead of time when they will be expected to participate in a Socratic seminar. Because seminars ask students to keep focusing back on the text, you may distribute sticky notes for students to use to annotate the text as they read.
- Preparing the questions: Though students may eventually be given responsibility for running the entire session, the teacher usually fills the role of discussion leader as students learn about seminars and questioning. Generate as many open-ended questions as possible, aiming for questions whose value lies in their exploration, not their answer. Elfie Israel recommends starting and ending with questions that relate more directly to students' lives so the entire conversation is rooted in the context of their real experiences.
- Establishing student expectations: Because student inquiry and thinking are central to the philosophy of Socratic seminars, it is an authentic move to include students integrally in the establishment of norms for the seminar. Begin by asking students to differentiate between behaviors that characterize debate (persuasion, prepared rebuttals, clear sides) and those that



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characterize discussion (inquiry, responses that grow from the thoughts of others, communal spirit). Ask students to hold themselves accountable for the norms they agree upon.

- Establishing your role: Though you may assume leadership through determining which open-ended questions students will explore (at first), the teacher should not see him or herself as a significant participant in the pursuit of those questions. You may find it useful to limit your intrusions to helpful reminders about procedures (e.g. “Maybe this is a good time to turn our attention back the text?” “Do we feel ready to explore a different aspect of the text?”). Resist the urge to correct or redirect, relying instead on other students to respectfully challenge their peers’ interpretations or offer alternative views.
- Assessing effectiveness: Socratic seminars require assessment that respects the central nature of student-centered inquiry to their success. The most global measure of success is reflection, both on the part of the teacher and students, on the degree to which text-centered student talk dominated the time and work of the session. Reflective writing asking students to describe their participation and set their own goals for future seminars can be effective as well. Understand that, like the seminars themselves, the process of gaining capacity for inquiring into text is more important than “getting it right” at any particular point.

Click on the link below to take you to grade specific lesson plans using Socratic Seminars.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/socratic-seminars-30600.html>

Argument Chunk

Argument follows a standard pattern both when writing and speaking. Teach your student to use this pattern during classroom discussions and when writing arguments.

#1 The Claim is the thesis statement/topic sentence. It states the argument and gives an indication of the organization of the paragraph/essay.

#2 Evidence is the quote, the computation, the data, the statistics, and/or the findings. Evidence backs up the argument made in the claim.

#3 Commentary (explanation) is the original thought that explains why the evidence supports the claim. It doesn’t just translate the evidence to the layman; it brings in a new layer to the information that bring the argument home. This is the hardest part for students because it is the original thought, the thinking, behind their claim and the evidence they chose to support that claim. Students should aim for two sentences of explanation for each piece of evidence.



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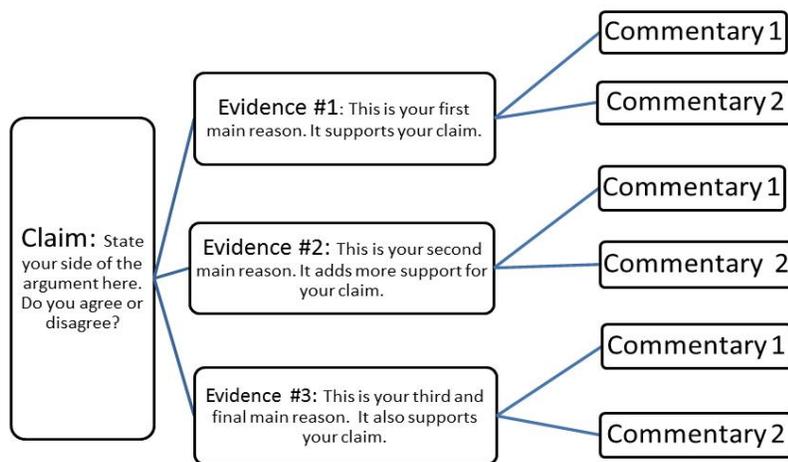
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Persuasive and Argument Maps

These maps show students how to organize their claim, evidence and commentary for an essay. The maps are based on the argument chunk explained above.

Persuasive Map





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Argument Map

