

Designing for Argumentation: Learning Outcomes from Teacher-Researcher Collaborations in Science, History and Literature

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The following is a conversation that took place in the whole class in the first iteration of Crystal's Iran unit, in 2013. It illustrates what Crystal describes as the "middle space," when she was learning to support students to do the meaning making and interpretation of texts, and students were noticing, and sometimes resisting, the shifts in her practices and expectations. Students have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

Transcript:

6:00

Al: *I feel like it's kind of confusing cuz I feel like we're just spending a lot of time on the documents, and then the documents kind of, everyone uses their time a little differently, **I feel like eventually we're all on different pages and we're all on different levels.** I'm a little confused.*

Crystal: *Is that a bad thing or a good thing?*

Al: *I mean, for some people it's a good thing, for some people it's a bad thing because they're a little confused.*

Crystal: *I hear the confusion; raise your hand if you're feeling confused.*

A good 50% of you. Alright, so let's talk about the different interpretations of the Talking to the Text. So Al, correct me, I'm going to paraphrase what you're saying.

You're feeling frustrated because the documents are not necessarily giving you "the story." Like, they're not saying "this is how it is in Iran today" like a textbook would, right? So does that make it more challenging to figure out what's going on? It does.

Lea: *But the Talking to the Text. That's what he's trying to say.*

Crystal: *Yeah, and so the Talking to the Text is where we're trying to make sense of those documents, right?*

7:28

Crystal: *I challenge you today to think about, as we're doing a little bit more Talking to the Text, how your partner and what they're sharing with you helps you get different perspective. Because, there isn't one right answer.*

Al, maybe you're feeling challenged because it's like, "My partner thinks it's this, and I think it's that, how are we supposed to know what it really is?"

And that is historical work, that is what historians do. That is why this is a much more authentic thing for us to be doing. Like, if this process is something you enjoy or that excites you, you might be a future historian in the making. Because they are trying to make sense of something that is not clear, and there are various interpretations that they have to try to reconcile looking at the historical evidence and using their own knowledge and context and comparing across other multiple sources, and so it isn't clear. And I know that that frustrates some of you because you're like, "just tell me. I just want to read it out of the textbook, just tell me how it is." But it doesn't exist. So that's what historians do, they make it

13:15

Brad: *I just thought it was a bit overwhelming that we were doing so many things differently than what we're doing for the whole year, and I was wondering why.*

Crystal: *What specifically feels different to you?*

Brad: ***Um, the whole thing about us constructing knowledge together, like we've been talking about, it seems like ... it's not like having documents shoved in our face is new to us, but I feel like before there was something, a specific lesson that we got from each document.***

Crystal: *Yeah, I was sort of telling you what it was you were supposed to figure out?*

Brad: *Yeah.*

Crystal: *Okay, but don't you think that even before this unit you were constructing knowledge? Has there been any of that in class?*

Brad: ***Yeah, I think it's more of the responsibility has been put on us.***