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PROTOCOLS IN THE CLASSROOM: Text-based protocols in middle school classes promote authentic discussions and support CCSS

By Mary Funaoka, Critical Friends Group® Coach in California, mfunaoka@ocde.us

With the onset of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the shift to “text-based evidence,” I looked to the NSRF® for protocols aimed to support learning via written text and oral communication. After introducing NSRF® text-based protocols into middle school classrooms in the Los Angeles Unified School District as a literacy coach, I witnessed profound results: deep, authentic classroom discussions. The marriage of CCSS and NSRF text-based protocols has been uncomplicated, deep, and powerful. As I pondered the possibilities of promoting text-based discussions through structured protocols in secondary classrooms across all content areas, it was love at first sight.

NSRF protocols support the CCSS Literacy Capacities flawlessly. Students are able to construct their own ideas, think from multiple perspectives, examine text closely, and engage discerningly about academic content. These critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity skills come to life with the structure of a protocol. In workshops I presented throughout California over the past two years, participants have engaged in three protocols to experience the magic authentically. [Block Party](#), [Text Rendering](#), and [Four A’s](#) have been powerful examples for making text come to life.

Block Party is used to deconstruct complex texts and effectively differentiate grouping structures when discussing texts. In the Text Rendering Protocol, I typically add an additional round – develop a 20-word summary. This validates all the sentence, phrase, and word contributions from each group member and forces the group to synthesize their ideas in a succinct statement. Word choice is key. Additionally, I’ve adapted the Four A’s to different content areas to bring a sense of relevance to other content areas (see next page).

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In middle school history classes with an average of 36 students, I demonstrated how Text Rendering could succeed with a non-fiction secondary source. The challenge of getting students to engage in academic discourse respectfully and productively was overcome with the simple structure of the protocol. The structure serves as a reminder for how the Gradual Release of Responsibility can work seamlessly to promote independency whereby students internalize the language of authentic academic discussions. While there is still much work to be accomplished in this marriage, it is clear that promoting classroom discussions through the use of text-based protocols is a promising recipe for a honeymoon in the 21st century classroom. 

Variations on the Four A's Text Protocol for different subjects, suggested by Mary Funaoka, CFG Coach in California

The 4 Cs of Mathematics

Clarify **Construct** **Calculate** **Communicate**

What terms in the problem need to be clarified?

How would you construct or set up the problem?

Calculate or solve the problem.

Explain or justify your answer

The 6 Cs of Art/Art History

Content

Describe in detail what you see.

Citation

Who is the author/creator? When was this created?

Context

What was going on in the world, the country, the region, or the locality when this was created?

Communication

What does the artwork depict and who is the intended audience for the piece?

Connections

Link the artwork to other works that you already know or have learned about.

Conclusions

How does the artwork contribute to our understanding of _____?

THE 4 CS OF SCIENCE

CLARIFY

What words or ideas would you like to have clarified?

CONTENT

Summarize the content you have just read.

CONNECT

How does this content connect (or add to) what you have already learned about _____?

CONCLUDE

Does this new information change your thinking about _____? If so, how?

The 6 Cs of History/Social Science

Content

Describe in detail what you see.

Citation

Who is the author/creator? When was this created?

Context

What was going on in the world, the country, the region, or the locality when this was created?

Communication

What does the document say and who is the intended audience for the piece?

Connections

Link the primary source to other things that you already know or have learned about.

Conclusions

How does the primary source contribute to our understanding of _____?