STEP 3

How do you start a conversation with a source?

Here is an exercise to help students have their own "conversation" with an academic article. Assume you and/or your students have found relevant information to use in a literature review and you are now stuck and don't know what to do next. Based on our experiences with our students, we developed an exercise to help them have a conversation with a document; Here U.S. census overview of their city.

The first challenge our students faced was deciding which data was most relevant to their interest in how families and communities impact youth in Newark. Most of our students had never looked at census data. Just as importantly, most lacked basic demographic knowledge about their communities and city—population, racial mix etc. We were lucky to have two classes to work on this. The first class was incredibly exciting and fun as students learned information about their city that they always wanted to know but didn't know how to find out. In the second class, we used the exercise below to move from what was interesting to what was useful for their research question.

The second big challenge was to write a paragraph or two that contained the useful census data that they had uncovered. We supplied the students with an example paragraph that other *Tools for Change* students had written and gave them a class period to write first drafts of their paragraphs. We then refined the paragraphs.

Researcher's Worksheet

Research Question:

How do young people in Newark (between the ages of 13-18) experience the impact of families and communities and how can these relationships be strengthened?

Recording the *directly* relevant information you have found about your research question is an important step in developing a conversation with other researchers.

Your name or name of research team:

_____

Your research question:

_____

_____

_____

What is the URL (web address) for your research group's article?

_____

_____

What is the date today?   (00/00/0000)

What to do:

1) Read the revised introduction to your research report twice to make sure you know what you should be focused on.

2) Take a second look at the census data that you looked at in class last time. Ask yourselves:

   "What FOUR pieces of census data would a reader need to know about Newark to understand what we are doing with our question?"

   For example: People might need to know the number of families living below the poverty line in Newark to answer our question. That data would let readers know about the economic well-being of families in the community.

3) Record your four (4) data points below. Then, work by yourself or with your research

team members to write a paragraph or two using the key data you found.   This may take

an entire class period.

Proofread it and hand it in.

Four (4) pieces of data on Newark that you would need to know to understand our question:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Now, for each data point, answer the following question in one sentence each:

- Why does a reader need to know this to understand our research question?

Point 1:

Point 2:

Point 3:

Point 4:

An example:

Here is what a paragraph, that includes four data points might look like—this was written

by high school students in North Carolina for their report:

Overview of North Carolina's Halifax and Northampton Counties

The population of Halifax County, North Carolina is 54, 006. The population of

Northampton County is 20, 463. In a state in which the population is growing, both counties lost

population in the last year: Halifax County's population decreased by 2.4% and Northampton

County's population decreased by 7.4%. Approximately one-quarter of the population of Halifax is under the age of 18; almost 20% of Northampton County's population is under 18. Both counties have far more Black's and/or African American's than the state average. Over half the population of Halifax and almost 60% (58.4%) of the population of Northampton is Black, while the state average is just 22%.

The education levels and wealth of the population of both counties are well below the state averages. Approximately three out of four adults (75%in Halifax and 72% in Northampton) have a high school diploma, but only 12% adults in Halifax and 9% of adults in Northampton have graduated from a four-year college, which is about one-third the state average. The median value of a home in Halifax is $87,500 and in Northampton it is $80,000 versus the state average of $153,500. A similar difference can be found in the relationship between median household income in Halifax, $32,000 and in Northampton, $31,433 versus $46,000 in North Carolina and the percent of persons below the poverty level. [1]

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[1] U.S. Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, Halifax County, NC, http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37083.html, visited February 27, 2014.