Collaborative Online Learning

Online Discourse gives us the unique opportunity to watch the progress of our work unfold. Time and distance provide the chance to step back, reflect, and respond. The written, visual, and audio records that remain allow us to review our experiences with enough detail so that we can enjoy them and improve.

Not all discussions are alike. Through research and practice, the WEB Project has come to identify and build upon three types of discourse: Design Conversations, Dialog, and Information Exchange.

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In-person conversations provide verbal and physical cues to let us known that our audience is in attendance. To keep a mental reminder that there are people on the giving and receiving ends, we have developed a process called --

Request, Respond, Reply, and Reflect

A person or group **Requests** a conversation with the collaborative network.

Those interested in the conversation **Respond** with specifics that address the topic or piece of work at hand.

The original person **Replies** with more information, additional requests, or a Reflective statement about the dialog/design conversation.

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Design conversations focus on creating something new, a piece of music, artwork, a survey instrument, the plans for a multimedia production.... Collaborative discussion gives the creator a chance to gain multiple insights while the shared focus on a single piece of work broadens learning for the entire group. When conflicting viewpoints are represented, it also provides an opportunity to make informed decisions based on personal intent, the result of which sometimes leads to an otherwise unimagined idea or improvement.

There are times you walk away from a piece that you’ve made and you feel good about it, and there are times you don’t. That’s when you can go online for help.”

Cabot high school student
Online Dialog can be helpful to use when you are planning an event, analyzing data, etc., or discussing something for a specific goal that uses protocols to maintain a focus on the task at hand. There are also times when you may wish to have a conversation, in a free-flow manner, about ideas that have no time limits or formalized purpose. Knowing the purpose of conversation in advance determines whether to use a protocol or free-flow method. Each carries groundrules or steps that facilitate online discussion.
There are times when online discussion is based on an information exchange, the need to know about primary source information of a current or historical nature. Such an exchange provides the opportunity to share a local collection of skills, resources, or knowledge with others who do not have the opportunity to experience this first-hand. The WEB Project has facilitated many exchanges, some of which are now websites.

Design
Dialog
Information

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identify the relationship between school level goals and collaborative learning activities