**Title:** Tracing the Scholarly Conversation

**Purpose:** This assignment or activity is intended to help students learn how to trace the scholarly conversation on a topic, using references and cited by tools to find previous and more recent works related to a specific source.

**Framework Concept**:

* **Scholarship as Conversatio**n

**Learning Outcomes:**

By the end of the activity, students should be better prepared to:

* Recognize they are often entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation and not a finished conversation
* Locate conversations taking place related to a specific topic or research question
* Identify the contribution that particular articles, books, and other scholarly pieces make to knowledge on the topic

**Instructions:**

* Provide students with a source that is a few years old (it should be old enough that other researchers will have had time to cite it in their own published works). Or, have them locate a source relevant to their topic that is a few years old.

*Tracing the Conversation Backward*

* Have students review and summarize the source. Ask students: Do you think this researcher(s) was the first to explore this topic? How would you use this source to find previous research on this topic?
* Have students review the citations for the article. Depending on the amount of time and your goals for the assignment, you could provide them with questions such as:
  + What is the oldest source that you can find listed?
  + Are there any journals that you see that are cited more than once?
  + Are there any authors that are cited more than once?
  + Which sources do you see that look as if they would be the most relevant to the specific research question?
* Have them select at least one source from the citation list. Ask them to locate that source and compare it to the original source that they found—what is the relationship between the two sources?
* If helpful, you could have students continue to trace the conversation farther back, by finding sources cited in this older source.

*Tracing the Conversation Forward*

* Return to the original article. Ask students: Do you think this was the final word on the topic? How could you use this source to find more recent sources on the topic or research question?
* Have students search for the original article using Google Scholar. Ask them to use the “Cited By” feature to identify at least one source that cites the original source. (Some databases also include a cited by feature—if it is more appropriate, you could have students use a relevant database that has this feature)
* Ask students to compare the original and more recent source. How would they describe the connections between the two sources?
* If helpful, you could have students continue to trace the conversation forward, by finding sources that cite the newer source.

Reflection

* Have students write a short reflection on what the activity taught them. Guiding questions could include:
  + What did you learn in this activity about the importance of citations (or how scholars use citations)?
  + What did you learn about the scholarly conversation on the topic?
  + How do you plan to apply what you learned to your own research practices?