

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL CONVERSATIONS

For his article, "Instructional conversations: Promoting comprehension through discussion," published in the January 1993 issue of *The Reading Teacher*, Claude Goldenberg observed many classroom discussions and conversations. In those classrooms, where active learning takes place, Goldenberg observed the following 10 elements:

1. *Thematic focus.* The conversations are focused. The teacher and/or students determine a specific theme or purpose for the discussion.
2. *Use of background knowledge.* Throughout the conversations, students support ideas and make meaning based on their prior knowledge.
3. *Direct teaching.* When necessary, the teacher provides direct instruction of a skill or process and models how to do it.
4. *Expansion of ideas.* The teacher or other students encourage the speaker to expand on their thoughts (e.g. "tell me more about that....").
5. *Support for ideas.* The teacher or other students promote the use of text, pictures, and reasoning to support an argument or position (e.g. "How do you know...." "Show us where it says....")
6. *Authentic questions.* Much of the discussion centers on questions and answers for which there might be more than one correct answer.
7. *Responsivity to student contributions.* While maintaining the initial focus of the conversation, the teacher is still responsive to student statements and the opportunities they provide (the "teachable moment!").
8. *Student interaction.* The conversation passes from student to student with the teacher only encouraging elaboration, support, and focus.
9. *A challenging, but nonthreatening, atmosphere.* The teacher is more the collaborator than the evaluator and creates an atmosphere that challenges students and allows them to negotiate and construct the meaning of the text.
10. *General participation, including self-selected turns.* The teacher encourages all to participate, but does not determine speaking turns.

Look for and encourage these elements in your own classroom conversations.

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