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Instructional conversations beget instructional conversations

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Abstract

Calls for changes in teaching are as old as public education. Currently, we are in the midst of another cycle of attempted reforms, this one based upon the view that learning should be an active and constructive process. Reformers face, however, two formidable challenges: (1) conceptualizing appropriate instructional practices and (2) assisting teachers to develop the skills needed to implement them. Working with a small group of teachers, our work has sought to address both challenges. First, we have attempted to conceptualize and articulate a mode of instruction (â€œinstructional conversationâ€) that emphasizes active student involvement in goal- and meaning-oriented discussions. Second, in carrying out this work, we have found that the principles underlying instructional conversations might also point to fruitful strategies for helping teachers master the professional knowledge and skills required to conduct this type of instruction. â€œInstructional conversation,â€ in other words, might constitute a valid *means* of staff development as well as one of its *goals*. To demonstrate the potential of instructional

conversations as vehicle for staff development, this paper uses Conversational Analysis (CA) to analyze segments of two meetings between a consultant and a small group of teachers learning to conceptualize and implement instructional conversations in their classrooms.



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