

Alvermann, D., Young, J., Weaver, D., Hinchman, K., Moore, D., Phelps, S., Thras, E., Zalewski, P. (1996). Middle and high school students' perceptions of how they experience text-based discussions: A multicase study. *Reading Research Quarterly, 31*, 244-267.

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Summary: The study examined classroom discussions about the texts read and students' interpretations and insights on those classroom discussions. Five classrooms from diverse cultural placements were chosen with data gathered over the course of a school year from focal group interviews, student work, field notes, and videotaped classroom events. Middle school and high school students share their interpretations regarding classroom talk about content area readings.

Assumptions:

- Knowledge is socially constructed.
- Language and knowledge are intertwined.

Results:

- Students recognized important conditions that foster classroom discussion. They include: 1) working in small groups, 2) knowing and liking the members of a group, 3) participation by all members of the group, and 4) the group's commitment to staying on topic.
- The subject matter and topics assigned by the teacher affected students' participation in the discussion.
- The students recognized the value of classroom discussion in their understanding of the readings. Students illustrated that discussions fostered their abilities to listen to each other, articulate and argue their opinions, and understand new vocabulary.

Conclusions:

- Students valued the use of discussions to understand what they had read and to explore ideas prompted by the readings.
- Students agreed that they held each other accountable for participating in the discussions.
- Discussions allowed the students to social construct meaning, engage in idea exploration, take responsibility for understandings, and negotiate the creation and maintenance of relationships in group discussions.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Plan for students to engage in small peer-group discussions of texts.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Support teachers' use of small group student discussion of texts.

- Provide professional development opportunities that foster the effective use of small group discussion.