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## Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®)

# Environment D: Active Learning

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**Why It Matters:** Studies, as well as espoused psychological principles, strongly indicate that students learn best when they participate, have ownership in the learning, and see the relevance of what is being studied. When learners are inherently engaged or actively participating, they are more likely to refrain from “risk-involving behaviors in the learning environment” (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, and Kindermann, 2008).

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### What to Understand

- **Active learning** generally means that students are highly involved and take part in activities and discussions, typically with their peers, during the learning process.
- Active learning is different from passive learning- where students listen, watch and occasionally raise their hands to respond to their teachers’ questions.
- Commonly implemented instructional strategies, such as problem-based, cooperative and collaborative learning, promote active learning (Prince, 2004).
- Discussions in which students predominate occur when the classroom culture has high expectations and is respectful, supportive, and learner-centric.
- The content/topics and flow of the discussion are driven by students (Byrd, 2008).

### What Learners Do

- Ask questions, work on projects and activities.
- Act as facilitators of the discussion and take ownership of the content and topics.
- Make statements that indicate an understanding of the relevance for what is being learned; communicate or demonstrate “this is important because...”
- Seek assistance from and ask questions to their peers; share their understanding of the activity with peers.
- Work in his or her assigned role in a group (time keeper, communicator, etc.) to complete the activity or project.
- Communicate with other students about the activity, ask each other questions, and share responsibility for the completion of the task.

### What Observers Do

- Observe the number of students participating in the discussion or activity.
- Listen for learners taking the lead in discussions.
- Listen for questions that students ask each other during the discussions.
- Listen for students exchanging ideas or accepting others’ opinions or perspectives.
- Determine if students are leading an exchange or discussion about a topic that is relevant to them.
- Take note of students commenting or asking questions that indicate they know why the content, activity or project is important to understand and complete.