

## Talking to Learn: Encouraging Classroom Discussions

### All teachers want their students to:

- Engage in thoughtful learning conversations
- Listen respectfully to each other
- Develop confidence in expressing themselves orally
- Use 'talk to learn' across the curriculum

The old pattern of 'teacher ask a question, student answer, teacher evaluate' is often not the best way to invite students to participate in discussions. Encourage interns to be creative in thinking of alternatives to the 'recitation' pattern of discussion.

Have your intern try the following ideas:

### Whole group discussion

- Teacher should be a moderator of the discussion, not the main participant
- Teacher asks an open-ended question (application or evaluation from Bloom's taxonomy) then students *think*, discuss *in pairs*, and *share* in the whole group
- Question round the room – after reading a novel chapter (for example), students come prepared with questions from any three of Bloom's taxonomy levels (*knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation*), and take turns to ask their questions of a fellow student, who then asks a question in return

### Partner work

- Students can answer teacher questions in partners
- Generate their own questions and join up with another pair to answer them
- Review and summarize information

### Small group work

- Encourages students to explore ideas – exploratory rather than formal talk
- Enables high participation
- Can be used for quick activities as well as longer projects
- Most Saskatchewan curriculum guides have lots of ideas for small group work

## What to look for in all discussions .....

- Discussion topics are related to Saskatchewan curricula
- Topics are important rather than trivial
- Topics are of interest to the class
- Students listen to each other – questions and responses are connected, any criticism is directed at ideas, not people
- High participation with equity across gender and cultures
- Questions from teacher and students are not “tell me what I already know” (literal level questions), but demand thinking (evidence, reasoned opinion, creativity)
- The intern is able to moderate the discussions
  - Has a clear purpose for the discussion and communicates this to the students
  - Models clear and respectful communication (good eye contact, minimal use of slang, rich vocabulary use)
  - Makes it clear that talk is a valuable learning tool
  - Is aware of all students and their communication needs
  - Encourages all students to participate
  - Keeps the discussion on track by using guiding questions when necessary
  - Does not evaluate student answers, but responds with own wonderings, responses and ideas