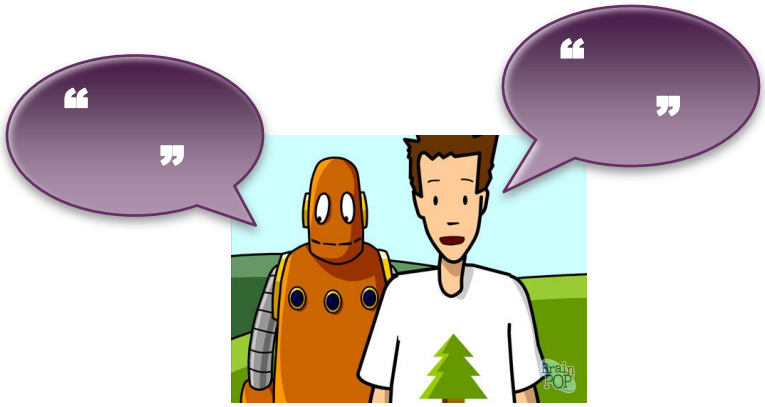
Classroom Discourse

What is classroom discourse?

- The term ***classroom discourse*** refers to the language that teachers and students use to communicate with each other in the classroom. Talking, or conversation, is the medium through which most teaching takes place, so the study of classroom discourse is the study of the process of face-to-face classroom teaching.



Why is classroom discourse important?

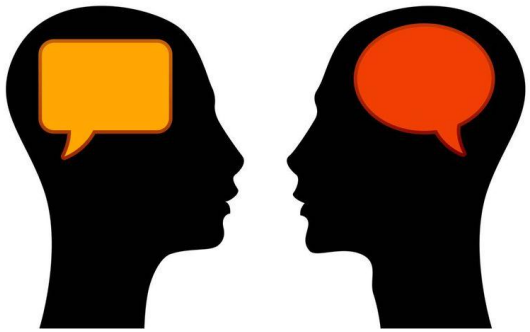
- Promotes:
  - Shared meaning and understanding
  - Classroom relationships: teacher/student, student/student
  - Students treating each other as equal partners in learning
  - 21st century skills: communication, collaboration, discussion
  - Developing of technical language and allows students to practice proper vocabulary
  - Exposing student misconception and error that the teacher can redirect
  - Direct access to ideas, relationships among ideas, strategies, and facts

Discourse as a differentiation strategy

- Encourage all students to participate at their own comfort level
- Students can be paired based on strengths and weaknesses to help guide each other in discussion
- Questions can be formed on multiple levels of difficulty to allow all students to participate comfortably

How can I guide my students?

- **Teacher as a facilitator not a director**
  - Prompt students to use "talk moves" in every day discussion and participation
    - Talk moves:
      - Repeat/rephrase a comment or question
      - Agree/disagree supported by a reason
      - Add onto another student's thought
      - Wait time between comments or questions
    - Respond to students with questions, not validation
  - Intentionally set students up for discourse opportunity
    - Think, pair, share
    - Turn and talk
    - Pick an opposing point
  - Acknowledge and encourage class participation
  - Decide when to provide information, clarify, model or lead



How can I guide my students? cont.

Post discourse rules and talk moves in class as a reminder…

Talk moves sound clip:

How can I guide my students? cont.

- How can I successfully redirect student conversation?
  - Discussions often go off on tangents. Try re-stating what someone said earlier that may have been ignored.
  - Ask for interpretations and criticism of the original topic. Ask someone in the group to re-focus the discussion. Here's an example of a redirect by the teacher:

- Student X states a comment about the issue with references to content.

- Student Y states a related comment about a similar situation she saw on TV, but it slightly non-related.

- Student Z shares a personal story that goes off topic and distracts learning.

- Students X and Y have appropriate responses that promote student learning and need no redirecting. Student Z will need the teacher to step in and use "talk moves" to guide the student back on track.

Video of classroom discourse

- Proper classroom discourse during a 5th grade small-group discussion:

Example of classroom discourse

- "The following example is from a whole-class discussion in a fifth-grade science class illustrates the nature of this typical participation structure. The teacher was reviewing what the students learned earlier in the day during a science activity on light.
  - *Teacher.* What's transparent? Something is transparent. What does that mean? We did that this morning, didn't we? What does transparent mean?
  - *Valerie.* Ah, it doesn't … It goes through.
  - *Teacher.* Can you explain that a little more? What goes through?
  - *Valerie.* Well it goes through like, um … You can, like, you shine a torch on and you can see.
  - *Teacher.* What goes through?
  - *Valerie.* The light.
  - *Teacher.* The light. Light can pass through something if it's transparent. What's the next one? Translucent. What does it mean? Jordan?
  - *Jordan.* Um, just some light can get through.
  - *Teacher.* Absolutely. Some light can get through. Can you look around the room and see an example of something that might be translucent? Well, you all can tell me something in here that's translucent because you discovered something this morning that would let some light through. What was it?
  - *Clarice.* Paper.
  - *Teacher.* Right. Some paper is translucent. It will allow some light to pass through it. Think of something else that's translucent.
  - *Morgan.* Oh, um, the curtains over there, you can see right through them.
  - *Teacher.* OK. Yes that's interesting. They do let some light through don't they. Another example? Think about light bulbs. Do you think some light bulbs would be translucent?
  - *Students.* Yes.
  - *Teacher.* They would allow some light through?
  - *Student.* No. Transparent.
  - *Teacher.* You think they're transparent. They let all the light through. I'm not too sure about that one either. So we might investigate that one.

Example of classroom discourse cont.

- The previous example contains two episodes, each initiated by a question *("What does transparent mean?" and "Translucent.What does it mean?").*
  - Within each episode the teacher directed the discussion by commenting on student answers and asking further questions.
  - Each question set off a question-answer-comment cycle.
- The example also illustrates how teachers use questions and student answers to progressively engage the students' minds, and to evaluate what the students know and can do.
  - Underlying this exchange are the implicit rules and expectations that determine what, and how, teachers and students communicate.'' – (Answers)

Further resources

- *Answers.com*. Answers. Web. 10 May 2012. <http://www.answers.com/topic/discourse-classroom-discourse>.
- Albani-Ethier, Monique. "Prezi." *Prezi.com*. Web. 10 May 2012. <http://prezi.com/mvhvvwbs9i5b/classroom-discourse/?auth_key=fe9c9bd38cf85201122fb14dbbc12f09d8970196>.
- Classroom Discussions: using math talk to help students learn, grades 1-6, Suzanne H.Chapin - Mary Catherine. O'Connor - Nancy Canavan Anderson - Math Solutions Publications - 2003