Talk 6: Developing and promoting student discussion capacity in the classroom

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The art of conversing competently in scientific language that translates content into every-day context is an important graduate skill. Within our undergraduate programs there are a number of courses that implement modifications to the concept of Interteach (Saville & Zinn, 2005). The process requires students to prepare thoughts on discussion questions that integrate their scientific course knowledge with real world scenarios. The answers to these questions require synthesis and deduction. During class time students engage in a series of one-on-one discussions with randomised peers. This process achieves numerous positive communication outcomes. It ensures students remain accountable for their learning in order to participate effectively (individual conversations prevent the ‘opt-out’ student from hiding in group dialogues) and students are able to implement the ‘learning by peer teaching’ philosophy. This process engages students in communication skill development in a safe and non-judgmental environment under essentially formative conditions.

Sarah-Jane Gregory is an Associate Lecturer with 15 years of experience in tertiary science education. Her research encompasses a variety of elements associated with academic learning outcomes and student experiences for 2nd year science students, particularly those associated with transition through this program year. Her research findings have been presented at both National and International level both through conferences and publications. She is involved with a number of teaching and learning networks including VIBEnet, CUBEnet, SaMnet and BUNSE. Sarah-Jane is also the 2nd Year experience co-ordinator for the School of Biomolecular and Physical Sciences at Griffith University and is also involved in a number of different Learning and Teaching committees and communities within the institution where she holds leadership roles. Her work has been recognised with both faculty and institutional level Learning and Teaching awards both individually and as a team member.