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Direct Evidence for the Influence of Collaborative Small Group Discussion on Social Perspective Taking
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ABSTRACT
We examined whether participating in collaborative small group discussions led to growth of students’ social knowledge and social perspective taking. The data included 72 transcripts of video-recorded discussions from 24 small groups of fifth-grade students in two Midwestern public schools. Students’ social perspective taking was assessed before and after six weeks of discussions using an essay task. Poisson regressions with Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) showed that the amount of social knowledge constructed during discussion predicted changes in individuals’ social perspective taking. Specifically, societal knowledge was shown to be more predictive of students’ social perspective taking than psychological or moral knowledge. The findings shed lights on the social constructivist mechanism of dialogic inquiry in enhancing one’s social perspective taking.

BACKGROUND
• SPT is key to shaping students into concerned citizens (Mulvey, 2016).
• Research showing the link between social knowledge and SPT is scant (Reznitskaya & Gregory, 2013).
• Reasoning can be developed through active social interactions within the context of dialogic inquiry (e.g., Kuhn & Udell, 2003; Murphy et al., 2009).
• Differential effects of category in influencing children’s SPT is assumed according to social domain theorists (Turiel, 1983; Smetana, 2006).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
Social Constructivism
Effective learning occurs when students learn to become a community partners who learn from, and with each other through positive and meaningful interactions (Vygotsky, 1999).

Theories of Moral Development
Moral development theories (Piaget, 1932; Kohlberg, 1973; Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) suggest that children’s social knowledge develops as they become able to distinguish morality from social conventions and can mentally coordinate these different perspectives (Lourenço, 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Q1. What types of social knowledge do students generate the most during CSR discussions?
Q2. Do students who generate more justified social knowledge during CSR discussions demonstrate more advanced perspective taking in their essays?
Q3. Are there certain types of social knowledge (moral, societal, psychological) that students generate during small group discussions more predictive of their social perspective taking in writing?

STORY USED FOR CSR: Multi-faceted texts involving controversies issues

CSR

CSR

Dialogic Discussion: CSR

Collaborative Social Reasoning

Lin et al., 2019

- Mutual respect
- Open discussion
- Perspective taking
- Deliberative Argumentation

RESEARCH DESIGN & PROCEDURE

Before

CSR

Discussions

Essay (T1)

After

Essay (T2)

(6 weeks)

STUDY POPULATIONS
• 129 fifth-grade students (52% female, 33.3% White, 23.3% Black, 21.7% Hispanic, 2.3% Asians, 19.4% Mixed and others),
• 6 teachers (5 content teachers and 1 ESL teacher; all female, 1-22 years of experience with mean=6.67).
• 2 schools (School A: 76% low SES, ~50% White; School B: 56% low SES, ~38% White)

DATA CODING

Social Knowledge
Societal knowledge (Cohen’s K = .87)
e.g., Shirley shouldn’t punch Aki because it is against the school policy
Psychological knowledge (Cohen’s K = .86)
e.g., I think it’s okay for the dad to buy the car because it makes him happy
Moral knowledge (Cohen’s K = .72)
e.g., Dovey needs to tell on her brother because killing people is wrong

Social Perspective Taking (SPT)

(number of justifed perspectives x 2) – (number of unjustified perspectives)
Justified perspectives is defined as explanations or interpretations of others’ (e.g., classmates or story characters) internal states, beliefs, or arguments.

RESULTS

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CONCLUSIONS
• Collaborative Social Reasoning discussion is an effective approach to nurture students’ social knowledge development and social perspective taking.
• Social knowledge construction with peers is a key mechanism of change in CSR.
• With the positive support of CSR, students were more attuned to societal knowledge (knowledge related to societal conventions or rules) than psychological knowledge (personal concerns), which is considered more developmentally challenging for typical students at the fifth-grade level.

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