

Student Immediacy: The Key to Collaborative Learning Dynamics?

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Abstract: Supportive verbal immediacy moves have been proven to play a role in successful student outcomes between teachers and students. This preliminary research analyzed Collaborative Reasoning (CR) discussions to see what role verbal immediacy plays in student to student interaction. Thus far in the exploration of Verbal Immediacy, the presence of the supportive immediacy yielded a more dynamic and egalitarian discussion, allowing more equal participation, and dialog that promotes interpersonal growth and rapport.

Introduction and theoretical framework

Collaborative Reasoning (CR) discussions, a peer-led small group discussion pedagogy, which engages students in controversial or complex scientific, moral, and policy issues has shown to help students develop and transfer reasoning and social skills (Sun et al., 2015). Moreover, as reported by Lin et al. (2018) and Reznitskaya et al. (2009), CR provides a context for egalitarian discussion as a social norm to promote “positive behavior” as the teacher acts as a guide rather than dictating what students must say or do. Despite the promising results produced by CR, there is still a need to understand the interactive processes *during* these discussions that leads to positive outcomes. Studies have shown that effective teacher immediacy is a key component to a productive learning process (Barron, 2003; Woods & Baker 2004) and contributes to more successful student discussions (Mazer & Stowe, 2016; Howe et al., 2019). However, less is known about how student immediacy functions in collaborative discussions, and how such immediacy evolves over time.

An immediacy move is any interactive move that an individual makes in order to build rapport with other individuals (Lin et al., 2018; Woods & Baker, 2004). More specifically, verbal immediacy refers to “the extent to which selected communicative behaviors enhance physical or psychological closeness in interpersonal communication” (Woods & Baker, 2004, p. 4). The quality of learning in peer groups is closely associated with the nature of collaboration and interactions that learners engage in while working on academic tasks (Kumpulainen & Kaartinen, 2003). Similarly, Forsyth (2018) reported that group dynamic, “the influential interpersonal process that occurs in and between groups overtime” determines how members engage one another, the action the group takes and what the group achieves (p. 18). Hence, analyzing immediacy, in the context of collaborative discussion, may help teachers understand the elements within discussion that impact student learning. This study explored the role of verbal immediacy during CR discussions over time. The main questions that we aimed to address include: 1) How do supporting verbal immediacy moves or opposing verbal immediacy moves evolve over the course of CR discussions? 2) What role do these moves play in collaborative learning dynamics?

Methods

This study examined four CR discussions for six different groups of students, under the tutelage of three different teachers. Each group of students comprised of five to six fourth grade public school students from a northwestern state. We used verbatim transcripts of these discussions. To examine the communicative properties of these dialogues, we implemented the Communicative Situation structure of Hennessey (2016) and Hymes (1996). First, we split the discussion transcripts into three main components of Communicative Situation (CS), Communicative Events (CE), and Communicative Acts (CA). CS is indicated by the main question of each discussion; CE is represented by chunks of the discussion that are made up of CA that relate directly to each other. Using the work by Lin et al. (2018) and we examined three main forms of verbal immediacy: cognitive, social, and emotional immediacy (CI, SI, EI). Cognitive immediacy refers to dialogic moves that build on others’ ideas, ask authentic questions, elicits information help, links ideas, and restructures understanding. Supportive SI are dialogic moves that promote equal participation and maintain social order. Thirdly, supportive EI refers to dialogic moves that support positive affect, closeness, and emotional understanding. More specifically, we divided them into “supportive immediacy” (+) and “opposing immediacy” (-) moves based on whether the moves resulted group engagement.

Findings and discussion

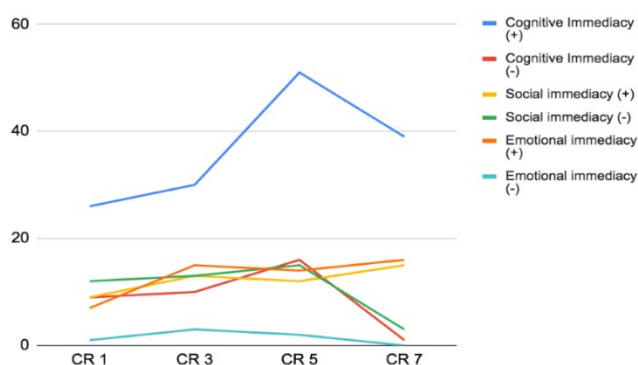


Figure 1. Verbal Immediacy Moves in each CR discussion.

The preliminary findings of this ongoing study come from Group A of Anthony's classroom. Figure 1 shows an upward trend in the slope from CR 1, 3, and 5 in supportive immediacy moves, particularly for cognitive immediacy (CI). Additionally, the number of turns that took place over the course of the CR discussions increased from CR 1 to CR5. While CR 7 demonstrates a decreased slope for supportive CI, there is slight increase in the supportive SI and EI. There was a subtle decrease in the overall opposing SI moves as seen in Figure 1, where the trend of the slope was overall negative, and the slope of the supportive SI was positive. Finally, there were subtle differences in EI and -EI. Looking at Figure 1, we saw a small increase in supporting EI and a small decrease in opposing EI.

As proposed by Forsyth (2018), the group dynamic can be seen through how members engage one another, the action the group takes and what the group achieves. Looking beyond the slope of the graph, initially students used supportive CI by building ideas from the text. By the seventh discussion the types of CI moves included building off opposing ideas and asking authentic questions. To note, the downward trend could be due to length in CR 7, as it was a shorter discussion than CR3 and CR 5. Considering member engagement, in CR 1 students seem to have trouble with turn-taking. However, by the seventh discussion students are more apt to speak on their own and share their opinion. Additionally, students improved from simply saying someone's name to get them to talk, to more genuinely asking peers to participate. This reflects how positive actions promoted a more egalitarian discussion by offering the floor. This exploratory study therefore demonstrated that further analysis of discussions may shed light on how immediacy contributes to the quality of CR discussions and student group dynamics.

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