

Exploring model co-construction and group norms by the patterns of social interaction

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The social interaction in small groups is a valuable tool to facilitate students to co-construct knowledge. However, many research reported on the difficulties in social interaction in the classroom. This study aims to identify the influence of a unique group atmosphere on peer interaction and model construction in small groups. We categorized the patterns of social interaction according to the zone of interaction and the task engagement, and identified group norms and model established in each group. Ten groups of 4 students in 8th grade participated in an analogy based inquiry for blood flow in the heart. Students' behaviors and dialogues during group activities were videotaped and recorded. The results show four patterns of social interaction: on task/collective zone, on task/multiple zone, on task/individual zone, on+off task/multiple zone. Group norms allowed us to identify membership, etiquette, and justification. Positive membership and etiquette created a friendly atmosphere for group interaction and reasoning. On the other hand, negative or nonresponsive membership and etiquette not only deterred collaboration and interaction between peers, but also impeded task fulfillment and model co-construction in groups. Especially, there was very little justification for their claims even in groups that showed the on task/collective zone.