

MOE TRF Proposal Abstract

Title: The effects of explicit instruction on graduate teaching assistants' (GTAs) use of collaborative learning scripts and academic mindsets

Collaborative learning is widely recognized as an effective approach to engage students in peer-to-peer learning (e.g. King, 2007; O'Donnell, 2006), but merely assigning students to groups does not mean that they will work together and engage in meaningful discussions. Rather, successful student discourse requires the explicit use of collaborative scripts, usually in the form of question prompts with role assignments and structured activities, to scaffold group interactions that bring about deeper or more elaborative discussion.

A key focus of this study is to find out whether graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) will be able to engage their students in collaborative learning during their tutorial classes after attending a two-day training assistant programme. In particular, the effects of explicit instruction on GTAs' use of collaborative learning scripts, and academic mindsets will be examined in this study. GTAs in the quasi experimental condition will receive structured instruction, which includes explicit modelling on planning and implementing collaborative learning scripts and deliberate practice during micro teaching – an organized practice of teaching for learning to teach better (Metcalf, 1995). GTAs' performance in micro teaching will be compared with a video recorded historical control group, in which, the previous cohort of GTAs underwent micro teaching without explicit collaborative learning instruction on using collaborative learning scripts. To study the uptake of collaborative learning scripts, GTAs' subsequent in-class performance will be tracked and monitored to identify when and how they implement collaborative learning as well as the quality of their students' discussion. In addition, the implicit theories of intelligence - self-theory scale will be used to measure GTAs' academic mindset, namely, whether it is a growth or fixed mindset. The measure of GTAs' mindset is relevant here as GTAs are often viewed as role models for students and having a growth rather than fixed mindset will help them, as well as their students, to exert effort on learning goals – in this case, collaborative learning goals.

Findings from this study will help inform our understanding of how best to prepare GTAs to engage students in meaningful collaborative learning lessons, develop further insights into the role of collaborative learning scripts on students' discussion, and the relationship of mindset and GTAs adoption of collaborative learning scripts in their tutorial classrooms.

Reference

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