Public Abstract

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Title:The Effects of Prompts-based Argumentation Scaffolds on Peer-led Interactive Argumentation

Studies focusing on peer-group social argumentation have suggested the close relationship between argument behaviors and socio-emotional behaviors. However, current computer-supported collaborative environments for argumentation have typically ignored the need to support the social dimension of argumentation. In this study, prompts-based argumentation scaffolds were proposed as an effective means for supporting both cognitive and social dimensions of argumentation.

The major purpose of this experimental study was to investigate the effects of prompts-based argumentation scaffolds on argument and socio-emotionally enhanced behaviors as well as argumentation performance in a peer-led interactive argumentation context using text-based asynchronous communication. The study also examined whether socio-emotionally enhanced communication would result in the improvement of students' ability to consider both sides of a controversial issue while justifying their opinion of the issue. Finally, it examined the impact of the use of socio-cognitive prompts on the peer-group's feelings of group community.

The participants in the study were thirty-two graduate students enrolled in a fall, 2008 master's level online course at a state university located in the Midwestern United States. They were assigned to one of the following three conditions: a) no prompts, b) cognitive prompts, and c) socio-cognitive prompts. Prompts in the scaffolded conditions were mainly provided in the form of note starters. When a student selected a subject from a list of predefined argument types, corresponding note starters appeared in the message box. Students in the cognitive prompts condition received task-oriented note starters, whereas students in the socio-cognitive prompts condition received a socio-emotionally enriched variant of the cognitive prompt, in which socio-emotional cues were incorporated into the task-based prompts.

The results of this experimental study indicate that prompts may be an effective means of encouraging student use of socio-emotionally enhanced strategies within a relatively short period of time. More important, a significant increase of agreeing arguments (considered as an example of concession in this study) among students in the socio-cognitive prompts condition can be considered as evidence that argumentation among these students was somewhat more co-constructive than that by students in the other two conditions. However, the socio-cognitive prompts condition did not result in better argumentation performance or stronger feelings towards group community.