

Perspective Taking and Role-Play

Middle School

Elementary Education



Intervention Overview

One way to help students be more creative is through an activity known as perspective taking, which fosters divergent thinking (Doron, 2016). Divergent thinking is the “ability to generate a wide variety of ideas and associations to a given problem” and is frequently used as a measure of creativity (Guilford, 1967 cited in Doron, 2016, p.372). Perspective taking allows students to view the world from another person’s viewpoint, develop empathy, and question their own perspectives. Perspective taking has been shown to help individuals develop useful and novel ideas (Grant & Barry, 2011). This activity will train your students in both of these skills by giving them opportunities to analyze a variety of situations and perspectives using media and personal experience. The perspective taking intervention has been shown to increase student engagement, sense of flow, and creativity (Doron, 2016). This activity can also help students recognize emotions in self and others and develop greater empathy (Upright, 2002). Examples of this activity, found in Doron (2016) and Upright (2002), can assist you in implementing this intervention in your own classrooms and schools.

Intervention Guide

Grade Level:	4th-8th
Materials:	Art supplies, video clips
Duration:	One 90 minute lesson per week, for 10 weeks. (Can be condensed to a shorter time frame)

Implementation:

1. Begin with having students analyze objects and scenes from different perspectives, either by drawing or taking pictures from an object from different sides.
2. Then, show students zoomed in pictures of familiar places around their school and neighborhood and have them guess where the photo was taken. Instruct students to play closer attention to their surroundings and new details over the next week.
3. Choose an appropriate story, movie or cartoon clip that students can use to analyze the perspectives and choices of key characters. See Upright (2002) for examples.
4. Encourage students to recognize key emotions in the characters and have them role play these emotions to have their peers guess what they are feeling.
5. Put students in small groups and give them a scenario involving one of the story's characters. Have them discuss and role play how the character would act in the given situation.
6. Finally, each group of students chooses a problem they are currently facing and reflect on how a popular character from a book, movie, or TV show would handle the situation.

Instructions adapted from Doron (2016) and Upright (2002).

Does it work?

Two sister studies used principles of perspective taking and everyday creativity to increase children's creativity and ability to reach a state of flow. As flow is a measure of engagement, a key factor in the Seligman's PERMA model, there is reason to believe that creativity can help improve wellbeing. These two studies, involving elementary and middle school children from Israel, took place over 10 weeks with one 90 minutes session each week. The first study had three stages. During the first stage, researchers "invited the [children] to become a proactive and curious observer, to rediscover his or her immediate surrounding, and to interact with the multiple points of view in day to day experience," using cameras, pictures, and TV characters (Doron, 2016, p.373). During the second stage, children focused on learning different perspective taking skills through charades and movie clips. The third stage challenged children to use their acquired skills and explore their surroundings through TV exercises, skits, and drawing real world solutions from characters. Participants reported higher levels of creativity, flow, and unique ideas than the control group (Doron, 2016).

The second study took place in two stages. The first stage, similar to the previous study's second stage, worked to develop children's abilities to decipher other's expressions, gestures, emotions, nuances, and reactions through interacting with media narratives. For specific details on the techniques and practices, read section 5.4.1 (Doron, 2017). The second stage invited children to explore their surroundings, using the perspective taking skills learned from the first section, through re-inventing TV scenes, extracting lessons from characters to use in their own lives, and participating in group discussions about character's moral actions. After every class, children were given the homework assignment of watching an hour of TV and practicing the activities from class. Children reported enjoying the assignment, higher instances of flow, and more unique ideas over time.

References:

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Upright, R. (2002). To tell a tale: The use of moral dilemmas to increase empathy in the elementary school child. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 30(1), 15-20. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1016585713774>



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