

Research Summary:

History – Social Science (HSS) Domain in the DRDP-K (2015) and KIDS (2015) Kindergarten Assessment Instruments

The History – Social Science (HSS) domain focuses on learning about the expectations of social situations, how to participate within a group, the relationship between people and the environment in which they live, and past and future events. The knowledge or skill areas in this domain include sense of time, sense of place, ecology, conflict negotiation, and responsible conduct.

HSS 1: Sense of Time

This measure addresses how a child increasingly communicates or demonstrates awareness about past and future events and relates them to present activity. The research literature for this measure emphasizes the development of autobiographical memory and understanding of the distinction of past-, present-, and future-based events. In the early preschool years, the child communicates about or acts out events that just happened and also asks about familiar activities that will happen soon (Atance, 2008). “Young children’s memory of events is not the continuous timeline that it is for adults; instead, it consists of recollections of particular events that are isolated ‘islands in time’ that may not be well connected to other past events (Friedman, 2005)” (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 30). In the later preschool years, the child relates past events to one another or to the present and thinks about plans for the near future. After the preschool years, children construct simple mental timelines in which they place events that have occurred in the past and those that will take place in the future. They also use “time markers (such as ‘last fall’ or ‘next Wednesday’) to help them recall certain past events, [understand] time sequences (e.g., a beach trip probably occurred during the summer), and comprehend the typical order of recurring events (e.g., Thanksgiving always comes before Christmas)” (California Department of Education, 2010, p. 31). Initially, this mental timeline is collapsed, so that children can distinguish the relative sequence of events in the recent past, and can also distinguish the relative sequence in which events will occur in the relatively near future (Friedman, 1992, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2005). With increasing age, this mental timeline expands to become more adult-like, such that older children can identify when events in the distant past occurred relative to each other, and likewise with events in the more distant future. But this expanded mental timeline is not achieved until several years after the preschool-early primary school developmental period.

HSS 2: Sense of Place

This measure reflects how a child demonstrates increasing awareness of the characteristics of physical environments and connections among their attributes, including the people and activities in them. In the early stages of the continuum, the child uses knowledge of familiar locations to recognize changes in those settings or in the people associated with them (e.g., a new adult in the classroom). By the later preschool years the child communicates about the relative distances between familiar locations, including details about those locations such as familiar landmarks, activities (e.g., soccer fields), and routes. By kindergarten, the child compares unfamiliar locations (e.g., other communities) with familiar ones, identifying the characteristics or people associated with them. As children’s awareness of the wider world grows, there is accompanying development of the ability to use maps as representations of familiar locations and of the home community (Liben, 2002, 2006; National Research Council, 2006). By the latest level of the continuum, children use the topographic features of maps to identify the location of objects in a terrain, but they can be easily confused by arbitrary map symbols

and the challenges of scaling real distances to map distances (Liben, Kastens, & Stevenson, 2002; Myers & Liben, 2008). Adult assistance, and children's own experiences of drawing maps of familiar locations, contribute to their abilities to understand how maps and globes can represent their world.

HSS 3: Ecology

This measure highlights how a child develops an awareness of and concern for the natural world and human influences on it. In the early preschool years, the child demonstrates simple understanding that people tend to the basic needs of plants and animals (e.g., watering and feeding). In the later preschool years, the child demonstrates concern about caring for the natural world in ways that the child directly experiences (e.g., recycling, planting a garden). While young children are fascinated by their direct experience with nature and learning about natural phenomena outside of direct experience, children at the latest level of the continuum build on this learning as they acquire greater understanding of what plants and animals need to survive and grow, and the characteristics of the environments to which they are adapted (Kahn, 1997, 2002; Kahn & Friedman, 1995; Kellert, 2002). Children's general fascination with the natural world grows deeper with their appreciation, for example, of the needs of animals and plants for food, water, air, light, shelter, and space, and the impact of human activity on these specific requirements. They also draw connections between what they need to live and what animals also require for their survival and development.

HSS 4: Conflict Negotiation

This measure highlights how a child shows increasing understanding of the needs of other children and increasingly considers alternatives and negotiates constructively in conflict situations. The research literature on the development of conflict resolution emphasizes children's increasing capacities for conflict resolution, beginning with familiar adults and friends (Laursen, Hartup, & Koplas, 1996; Shantz & Hartup, 1992). In the early preschool years, the child uses words or gestures to express desires in some conflict situations, but easily becomes distressed and requires adult assistance to communicate constructively and resolve conflict. By the end of the preschool years, young children use simple strategies of conflict negotiation, such as bargaining, compromise, and turn-taking. The major advance of the next stage is the capacity to anticipate conflict before it occurs and enact proactive strategies to avoid conflict before it occurs, based on an appreciation of the needs of both partners. This is especially true with friends because of the child's commitment to maintaining the friendship (Dunn, 2004; Nelson & Aboud, 1985). To be sure, proactive management of conflict is limited at the later levels of the continuum, as reflected in the frequency with which conflict, even with friends, emerges. Nevertheless, the growth of skills in role-taking (Selman, 1980) and in executive function skills (Best & Miller, 2010) enable children of this age to perceive when a conflict is likely to emerge before it does, and take steps to avoid it when they care about maintaining the relationship.

HSS 5: Responsible Conduct as a Group Member

One of the important advances in children's motivation to act responsibly and morally is their growing appreciation for the implications of responsible conduct for human welfare (Malti & Ongley, 2014; Thompson, 2012). This advance is based in developing theory of mind during the preschool years, which gives children insight into the feelings, desires, intentions, goals, and needs of other people. Theory of mind, in turn, provides sensitivity to how others' actions affect one's desires and goals, which contributes to a basic sense of equity or "fairness" (Thompson, 2015). Subsequently, children begin to

appreciate that the purpose of many rules is to support people's welfare, and begin to comply, and monitor others' compliance, on the basis of the extent to which others' needs and welfare are supported as a result. This is a significant advance over the motivation for earlier compliance, which was focused on rules and adult approval and not on the broader human values underlying them. In addition, developing executive function skills enable young children to better regulate their own behavior according to group expectations as well as monitoring the compliance of others (Best & Miller, 2010).

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History – Social Science (HSS)

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