

SY - (15813) - PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDING OF FEEDING RELATIONSHIPS

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Short Abstract

This study explores preschool children's understandings of food webs throughout a one-week summer STEAM camp addressing feeding relationships. Previous research has identified how children are better able to reason up a food chain in terms of a prey population impacting a predator population compared to reasoning down a food chain in terms of a predator population impacting a prey population. These relationships were explored with a sample of preschool children aged three through five. Data sources included pre- and post- assessments and field notes of whole group instruction, dramatic puppet play, and dioramic toy play. In terms of results, children showed modest pre to post gains but did not differ in terms of their abilities to reason up and down food chains. The qualitative analysis identified several food chain reasoning challenges including anthropomorphism, consideration of prey as "enemies," and consideration of prey and predators as "friends." Implications for instruction and future research are included.