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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Putting yourself into others' shoes: role-play benefits preschoolers' social understanding</th>
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Theory of Mind (ToM) is the ability to ascribe mental states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions to oneself and others (Premack & Woodruff, 1978). It is closely related to preschoolers’ behavioral control (e.g., Carlson, Moses, & Breton, 2002; Frye, Zelazo, & Palfai, 1995), academic competence (Blair and Razza, 2007), and social competence (Tan-Niam, Wood, & O’Malley, 2000). Past research has shown that Singaporean preschoolers had a slower ToM development as compared to Chinese, Korean, and North American children (Qu et. al, 2009; Qu et al., 2010, Shen & Qu, 2010). A training program to improve false belief understanding amongst Singaporean preschoolers is thus necessary. Although role-play has been positively associated with ToM development (e.g., Jenkins & Astington, 2000), none of the previous ToM training studies have employed role-play as a training methodology. This study examined the effectiveness of a role-play intervention program in improving preschoolers’ ToM ability.

Hypothesis: Preschoolers who underwent the role-play intervention will show more advanced ToM development as compared to similar-aged preschoolers who did not undergo the intervention.

Method

Participants
35 preschoolers (Range= 48-71 months, M age = 60.79 months, SD = 6.40)

Measurement
Verbal ability
• Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-IV; Dunn & Dunn, 2006)

Theory of Mind (Wellman & Liu, 2004)
• Knowledge-access task (KA)
• Content false belief task (CFB)
• Explicit false belief task (EFB)
• Belief-emotion task (BE)

Procedure

Pre-intervention Test (50mins)
• All measurements administered
• All participants failed at least one of the false belief tasks hence were included in the next stages

Control condition
Coloring activities

Training condition
• Acted according to respective characters’ mental states
• Asked to report own and others’ false beliefs
• Explanations provided

Intervention (3 X 50mins across 2 weeks)

At least 1 week later

Post-intervention Test (50mins)
• ToM tasks administered

Results

Pre-intervention scores
• No significant differences between conditions in verbal ability and ToM understanding

Post-intervention ToM scores

• A moderately significant difference between conditions on the belief-emotion task was observed, U = 106.00, Z = -1.85, p = .06.

Pre- vs. Post intervention ToM scores

• Significant improvement in content false belief task was observed in the training condition, Z = -2.45, p = .01, but not in the control condition.
• Verbal ability was significantly correlated with improvement on the belief-emotion task, r = .43, p = .01.

Discussion and Conclusion

Role-play can improve the development of ToM in preschoolers and language is essential for the understanding of mental states. Future research may investigate whether role-play alone improves preschoolers’ ToM ability.

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Selected References
