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<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

- **Intervention (3 X 50mins across 2 weeks)**
  - Control condition: Coloring activities
  - Training condition: 
    - Acted according to respective characters' mental states
    - Asked to report own and others' false beliefs
    - Explanations provided

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

- Matched on verbal ability and ToM scores, then randomly assigned to control/training conditions

### 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, \( U = 106.00, Z = -1.85, p = .06 \).

#### 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