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Title	Putting yourself into others' shoes : role-play benefits preschoolers' social understanding
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Citation	Shen, P. (2011, March). Putting yourself into others' shoes: role-play benefits preschoolers' social understanding. Presented at Discover URECA @ NTU poster exhibition and competition, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
Date	2011
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/8995">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/8995</a>
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## Putting Yourself into Others' Shoes: Role-play Benefits Preschoolers' Social Understanding

### Introduction

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

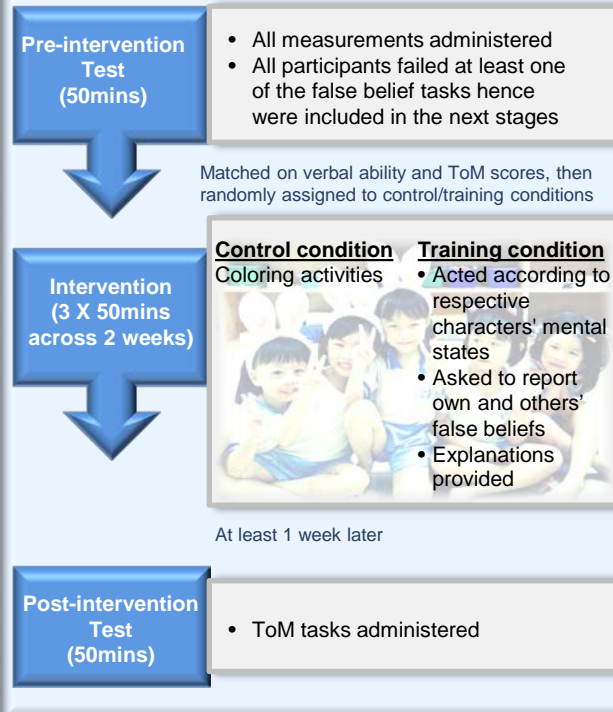
- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-IV; Dunn & Dunn, 2006)

##### 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

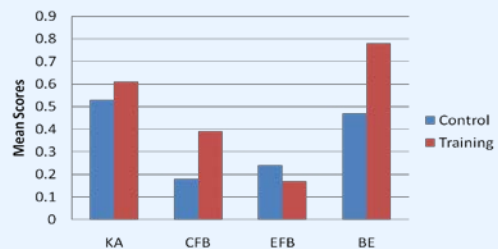


### Results

#### 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.

### Acknowledgement

This project is funded by a grant from the MCYS Family Research Fund. We would like to express our gratitude to the daycare centre, children, and parents participated in this study. We would also like to thank the research assistants, Evangeline Wai and Yee Yingjia for their diligence and hard work.

### Selected References

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- Premack, D., & Woodruff, G. (1978). Does the chimpanzee have a theory of mind? *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 1, 515-526.