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Title	Putting yourself into others' shoes : role-play benefits preschoolers' social understanding
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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

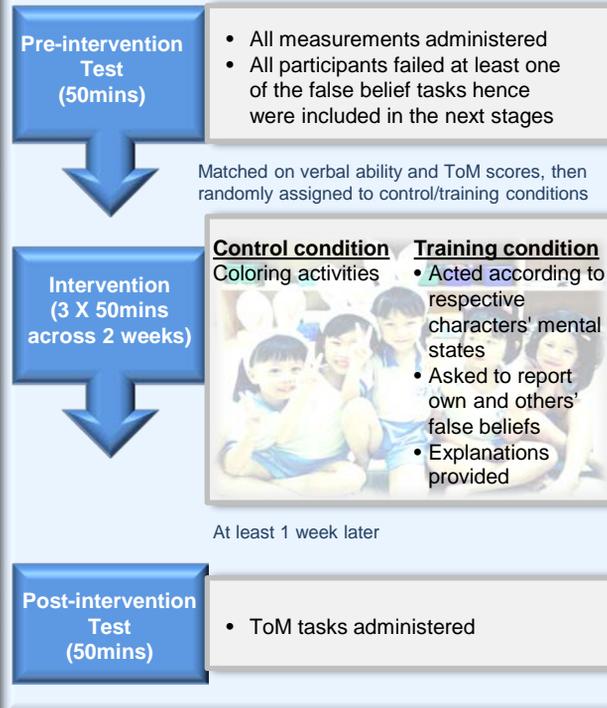
- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Fourth Edition (PPVT-IV; Dunn & Dunn, 2006)

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

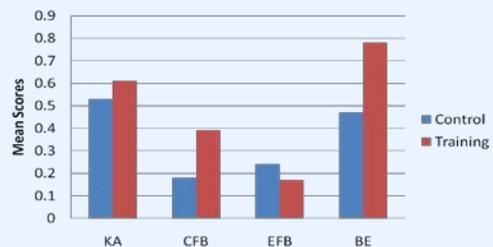


Results

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.

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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.