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# Narrative Understanding and Theory of Mind in Preschoolers

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Poster Presentation P36

**NARRATIVE UNDERSTANDING AND THEORY  
OF MIND IN PRESCHOOLERS**

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Social cognitive development is a phenomenon psychologists have studied for many years. Recent studies have focused on children's understanding of a theory of mind, that is, understanding what it means to say that someone thinks, believes, or knows something. In other words, a theory of mind represents an understanding of epistemic mental states that humans use to describe, predict, and explain behavior (Baron-Cohen, 1996).

The present study examined the relation between a developing theory of mind, emotion regulation, and language ability, by specifically examining changes in children's understanding of the feelings, thoughts, and actions of storybook characters. Children (n=15; aged 34 to 57 months) were given pre-tests and a post-test involving false belief tasks, deception tasks, the ability to understand facial expressions of emotion, and language comprehension, in order to detect differences in individual scores before and after children were read 14 different stories rich in mental state situations. These readings occurred over a 4-5 week period at the child's day care center or nursery school. The storybook sessions were taped in order to examine trends and patterns in the children's developing theory of mind. These data were collected as part of a larger study examining the impact of cumulative experiences with mental-state rich narratives on false belief understanding where preliminary analyses indicated that overall, scores improved from pre-test to post-test (n=38). In the present study, "correct" responses to questions elicited from the children during the storybook readings were assessed for three types of questions: Appearance/reality, the definitions and description of mental state phenomena, and explanations of mental-state related behaviors. Number of correct responses to these three question types will be examined with respect to children's performance on the language and theory of mind measures.