

Introduction

The ability to understand thoughts and emotions in ourselves and others or Theory of Mind (ToM), is a valuable skill to develop throughout the lifespan.

Literature Review

- Previous studies have found positive associations between ToM understanding and academic and social competencies among younger children (Miller, 2012), yet there remains limited research on ToM and social and academic competencies in emerging adolescents.
- Current research reports a definite link between social and emotional competence and academic competence (Ansary et al., 2017; Goble et al., 2017)
- ToM skills may play a particularly important role in emerging adolescents' ability to interact socially with their peers, as well as achieve academic competence (Hughes & Devine, 2016)
- Research suggests gendered differences among ToM and social and academic competencies among older children and early adolescents (Bosacki & Astington, 1998; Devine & Hughes, 2013)

Current Study

- Are there any relations between emerging adolescents' ToM and their teachers' ratings of their social and academic competencies?
- Do gendered developmental relations exist between ToM and social and academic competencies in emerging adolescents?

Method

Participants

- 146 Grade 8 students (97 females, 49 males; $M_{age} = 13.5$ years, $SD = 5.436$)
- 12 teachers (9 female, 3 male)
- 13 schools in Ontario, Canada

Measures

- Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test (RME)*
- Two advanced Theory of Mind (ToM) stories[†]
 - Will's Birthday
 - Ice Cream Truck
- Two Teacher Rating Scales*
 - Children's Social Behavior Scale – Teacher Form CSBS-T
 - Children's Emotional Competence Scale – Teacher Form CSCS-T

*Self-reported pencil and paper task.

[†] Administered by researcher.

Procedure

- Data taken from Year 1 of five-year longitudinal study on ToM development in emerging adolescence.

Contact Us: Dr. Sandra Bosacki (sbosacki@brocku.ca), Dr. Victoria Talwar (victoria.talwar@mcgill.ca),
Valentina Sitnik (vs13nt@brocku.ca)

Results

To obtain a total ToM score, a sum score was calculated from the total scores of the ToM stories and the RMET total score.

- RMET total score: $M = 29.48$, $SD = 5.06$
- Girls scored marginally higher than boys on ToM:
 - girls** – $M = 30.21$, $SD = 5.28$
 - boys** – $M = 27.62$, $SD = 3.95$
 - $T = p = .051$

Analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Significant ($p < .05$) gender difference in teachers' ratings of:

- Physical aggression (boys > girls, $F = 3.62$, $p = .012$)
- Prosocial behaviours (girls > boys, $F = 13.30$, $p = .000$)
- Girls received higher total behavioural conduct ($F = 21.20$, $p = .000$)
- Girls received higher academic ratings ($F = 12.60$, $p = .000$)

No gender differences were found among emerging adolescents' ToM scores or teachers' ratings of children's relational aggression.

A significant positive correlation was found between children's total ToM scores and teachers' ratings of students' academic competencies only ($r = .435^{**}$, $p = .000$).

Implications

- Our findings suggest that gender may influence the relations among young adolescents' ToM and teacher ratings of academic and social competencies within the school context.
- Females received significantly higher teacher ratings than boys in all competencies except that of physical aggression.
- Boys scored significantly higher than girls in physical aggression.

Implications and Future Directions

- *Theoretical* – our study highlights the complex gendered connections between participants' ToM and teachers' perceptions of students' academic and social competencies.
- *Practical* – our study provides empirical groundwork for educational programs aimed to question gender-role stereotypes regarding academic and social competencies and to foster metacognitive skills and emotional well-being among youth.

Limitations

- *Sampling* – participants gleaned from diverse school, demographic, and geographical contexts. However, all students are in Ontario and education is under provincial jurisdiction.
- Further exploration is needed in gendered perceptions of teachers' ratings of students' academic and social competencies, as females received significantly higher teacher ratings than boys in all competencies.

Visit us: <https://brocku.ca/theory-of-mind-lab>