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Predicting school achievement from early theory of mind: differential effects on achievement
tests and teacher ratings.

Summary: This study investigates long term consequences of early theory-of-mind abilities on different
measures of school achievement. A group of 86 children (50% girls) completed theory-of-mind tasks and
standardized tests on working memory, language, and nonverbal abilities at the age of 4 years. In Grade 1 and
Grade 2, they were presented with a test on reading and two tests on mathematical competencies (arithmetic
skills and numeracy). Moreover, teachers rated children’s competencies with regard to literacy, mathematics,
attention, and social-emotional aspects. The results showed that with the exception of numeracy there were
no or only weak predictive relations between theory-of-mind understanding in preschool and performance on
achievement tests in school after controlling for socioeconomic status, gender, nonverbal abilities, working
memory, and language abilities. However, in first grade, theory of mind turned out to be a significant
predictor of teachers’ ratings of children’s reading and mathematical competencies even if the other child
variables were controlled for.

Classification: C30 C40
Keywords: theory of mind; school achievement; longitudinal study; teacher ratings; achievement tests
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