

Research Student Seminars

Thursday 10 July 2008
10:00 – 11:00

SEERC Seminar Room
SEERC Bldg

“Language, Theory of Mind and Executive Functioning in Young Preschool Children”

by

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ABSTRACT

The extent to which young children can perform well on Theory of Mind (ToM) tasks is controversial. The aim of the first study was to investigate preschoolers' performance under optimal testing conditions. Participants were presented with two ToM tasks, namely the Sally-Ann task (Baron-Cohen, Leslie & Frith, 1985) and the Andreas task (Maridaki-Kassotaki et al., 2002), in which the test questions refer to how a story character with a false belief can be misled in searching for the location of a desired object. Children were tested either in a standard condition or in a condition where the test question referred explicitly to where the story character would look first for the object (Yazdi, German, Defeyter & Siegal, 2006). As the lexical terminology for 'look' in the test question might influence the children's responses (Maridaki-Kassotaki et al., 2002), half the test questions used the verb *kitazo* (look) and the other half used the verb *psahno* (search). However the order of the questions was randomised. It was found that children's performance was nearly perfect for 4- and 5-year olds and it was not affected by the type of verb. However, children performed significantly better in the 'look first' versus standard question condition in all age groups. The performance on Theory of Mind (ToM) tasks for 3 year-olds was not predicted by executive functioning (EF) measures; thus, there was no significant relation between ToM and EF measures. The second study was designed in order to seek for an explanation for the unusually good performance of Greek preschool children and to explore whether more challenging EF measures, parental educational level, as well as type of school (private or public preschool) could predict Theory of Mind performance in 3-year-old preschool children.

The seminar series is open to all members of staff and students of CITY and to public that wish to attend.