Abstract

This study looks into the "theory of mind" development of autistic children in Macao and tries to identify factors that influence the development of "theory of mind".

In this study, the researcher used the revised Scaling of Theory of Mind Tasks to examine the development of autistic children's "theory of mind". The autistic children included in this test are compared against children with Down's syndrome and normal children of similar chronological age and verbal intelligence using the Scaling of Theory of Mind Tasks. The researcher also used the Childhood Autism Rating Scale to investigate the relation between Autism and "theory of mind".

There are 129 children included in this study: 13 autistic children (12 boys; 1 girl), 12 children with Down's syndrome (7 boys; 5 girls) and 104 normal children (55 boys; 49 girls).

The results of this study are as follow:

1. "Theory of mind" of autistic children is significantly lower than normal children and slightly lower than Down's syndrome children.
2. The autistic children's(average chronological age is 8;6) "theory of mind" is similar to that of 3-4 year-old normal children.
3. The pattern of development of autistic children's "theory of mind" is similar to that of normal children. For instance, they all developed understanding of various desires before getting to understand different beliefs. So autistic children do develop "theory of mind", though much slower.
4. The development of "theory of mind" might have relation to factors such as to what degree the child is autistic and the child's verbal intelligence

Finally, the researcher puts forward some suggestions for teaching autistic and ideas for future research.

Key word: Macao Autistic children Scaling of Theory of Mind Tasks Theory of Mind