The Role of Physical Context, Verbal Skills, Non-parental Care, Social Support, and Type of Parental Discipline in the Development of ToM Capacity in Five-Year-Old Children

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to analyze the influence of family context on the performance of 5-year-old children \( (N = 70) \) in theory of mind (ToM) tasks. The children’s performances were assessed during individual sessions held at school. Children’s verbal skills were assessed using the Peabody picture vocabulary test (PPVT). Interviews were also conducted with parents in the family home in order to gather socio demographic data and to assess diverse variables of the family context. In addition to confirming the important role played by children’s verbal skills in ToM, the results also supported a potential influence of family context in ToM development through variables, such as quality of non-parental care or level of social contact and support. The educational implications of these results are discussed in relation to family intervention.

Keywords: family context; verbal ability; theory of mind; cognitive development