

Social Thinking/Perspective Taking/Theory of Mind

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Synonyms

- Perspective Taking
- Theory of Mind
- Mindreading/Mindblindness
- Mentalization
- Attribution of Intentions
- Understanding or Prediction of Mental States
- Social Thinking

Definitions

- “the ability to think about beliefs, desires, knowledge, and intentions.” (Apperly, 2011)
- “the ability to intuitively track what others know and think during personal interactions.” (Garcia Winner, 2007)
- Perspective taking: “understanding the point of view of another person; the ability to consider the contents of other people’s minds.” (Garcia Winner, 2007)
- Theory of mind: “ understanding of your own and other people’s thoughts, emotions, physical and language-based motives, intentions, personality, and belief systems.” (Garcia Winner, 2007)

Understanding of Mental States (Doherty, 2009)

- Beliefs and desires: “If I want a cookie, and I believe reaching inside the cookie jar will get me a cookie, then I will reach inside the cookie jar— all things being equal.” —emerges at around 4-5 years old
 - Behavior is reasonably predictable if you know what someone desires and what they believe.
 - If you see someone doing something, especially something strange, their actions can be explained by inferring particular beliefs and desires.
 - If you can cause someone to believe something that is false, then they may behave to your advantage.

Understanding of Mental States (Doherty, 2009)

- Appearance and reality—a distinction between how things are, and how they appear to be
- Knowledge: for something to be knowledge, it must be—a belief, true and justified by experience
- Belief-based emotions: a higher-order theory of mind task in which an individual reasons about how two mental states (e.g., emotion) within the same person interact (i.e., surprise, fear)

Constituents of Perspective Taking (Malle, 2005)

Aim	Information Used	Process Employed	Result
Thoughts Emotions Perceptual Point of View Motives Goals Intentions	Target <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face and body • Vocal cues • Words and Actions Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical features • Social features Observer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior experience • Cognitive and Emotional States • Knowledge about Social Categories 	Mimicry Associative features Projection Logical Inference Simulation Imagination	Cognitive <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy • Attribution • Self-other merging Emotional <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sympathy • Distress • Emotional match Motivational <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness • Valuing other Behavioral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping • Less aggression

Mindreading Strategies (Malle, 2005)

- Behaviors in context
- Emotional displays
- Perceiver's own mental states
- Stereotypes

Related Skills

- Eye contact
- Joint Attention
- Prediction—emotions
- Understanding abstract vocabulary
- Inferring intentions of others
- Executive Functions

Impacts of Difficulties with Perspective Taking (Garcia Winner, 2007)

- Difficulty determining the needs, intentions and motives of others
- Difficulty gauging how to respond to others' needs
- Difficulty recognizing and accounting for other persons' expectations about how that student should participate or behave
- Difficulty completing obligatory tasks not of their own choosing
- Limited knowledge of what it means to participate in a relationship (formal or informal)

Spectrum of Perspective Taking Deficits (Winner, 2005)

Severely Impaired Perspective Taker	Emerging Perspective Taker	Impaired Interactive Perspective Taker
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to take the perspective of others • Very limited development of spoken language • No understanding of abstract language • Very limited attention span • Very limited understanding of the conceptual world • At times limited to almost no acknowledgement of others in their presence • Sensory challenges • Difficulty with transitions • Limited abstract thinking and problem solving • Limited social motivation to engage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to efficiently take the perspective of others • Learning disabilities • Language disabilities • Lack of abstract language understanding • Lack of organizational skills • Difficulty with reading comprehension • Lack of writing skills • Lack of problem solving skills • Distractibility • Sensory challenges • Transition challenges • Lack of critical thinking skills • Behavioral problems • Quirkiness • Behavioral disability labels • Difficulties with social interaction initiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluid verbal language skills • May struggle with complex interpretation of social academics • Organizational skills are often lacking • Weakness in developing friendships and working as part of a group in the classroom • Have difficulty simultaneously reading the social cues of the face, body, voice, spoken language, and environmental context • Mental health challenges • Excessive competitiveness • May not be in touch with their own and others' emotions • May not initiate language to problem-solve or seek assistance from others • Sensory issues • Disability labels

How Do Students Need to Use Perspective Taking Skills in Your Class

- Math
- Science
- Language Arts
- Social Studies
- Drama
- Art
- Music

How Does Perspective Taking Influence Transition Skills

- Employment
- Daily living/community participation
- Leisure/recreating skills
- Self-Awareness
- Decision making