

THEORY OF MIND, AFFECTIVE EMPATHY, AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT:

**A CORRELATIVE STUDY OF
CHILDREN IN GRADES 4 TO 6**

by

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have posited that in order to educate the “whole child,” educators need to focus on teaching social emotional learning (SEL) in addition to teaching academics. Previous studies have found that there may be a positive relationship between SEL competencies and academic achievement. However, the literature suggests that members of the public and some educational stakeholders continue to maintain that teaching SEL may detract from academic learning. This current study is in context of the redesigned curriculum in the province of British Columbia, Canada, and the new emphasis on SEL in the curriculum. This study analyzed the relationship between two constructs of the social awareness SEL competency, theory of mind (ToM) and affective empathy, with academic achievement. Thirty-six participants (16 females and 20 males) in grades 4 to 6 from a public elementary school in British Columbia completed assessments of ToM and affective empathy. Results from these measures were compared with academic achievement, which was determined by grade point average (GPA). Forced entry multiple regression analysis revealed that neither ToM, nor affective empathy correlated with academic achievement in the total sample. In females, academic achievement positively correlated with ToM, $B = .05$, $p = .04$, as measured by *Social Ambiguous Stories* (Bosacki, 1998). In males, academic achievement positively correlated with ToM, $B = .06$, $p = .02$, as measured by the *Reading the Mind in the Eyes Test* (Baron-Cohen, Wheelright, Spong, Scahill, & Larson, 2001). Lastly, both measures of ToM were found to positively correlate with affective empathy. Implications for future research are provided.

Keywords: social emotional learning, BC curriculum, theory of mind, affective empathy, academic achievement