



Exploring the Influence of Canadian Teachers' Theory of Mind Ability on Their Bullying Beliefs

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Purpose

- Teachers' bullying beliefs may influence how they respond to bullying situations within the school; whether or not they intervene.
- Teachers rate physical bullying as the most severe form of bullying and requiring of intervention (Bauman & Del Rio, 2006).
- Teachers rate verbal, relational, and cyber bullying are less severe, and do not always require intervention (Boulton et al., 2014).
- Researchers have explored bullies', victims', and bully-victims' theory of mind (ToM) abilities (Barlinska et al., 2013), but teachers' ToM as it relates to bullying intervention remains unexplored.

Research Questions

- Do teachers' beliefs regarding the seriousness, their empathetic response, and likelihood of intervention in bullying situations vary by the type of bullying (i.e., physical, relational, verbal, and cyber bullying)?
- Do teachers' beliefs vary based on their ToM ability?

Theoretical Framework

- Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; 1976)
 - Development is influenced by interconnected and reciprocal micro- and macro-systems
 - The student is influenced by the teacher, who may be influenced by the administration, which is then influenced by policies and culture, and vice-versa

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Methods

- As part of a larger Master's Thesis research project, 59 Canadian elementary teachers (Female $n = 50$; 22-54 years old; $M = 37.22$ years old, $SD = 9.25$) completed an online survey. Teachers were recruited through school boards and online forums. Teachers had 0-28 years of experience ($M = 10.50$, $SD = 7.83$).

Reading the Mind in the Eyes Task - Revised (RMET; Baron-Cohen et al., 2001)



- Measures an individual's ability to read the emotions of others through their eyes
- Scores were split into high and low ToM at the mean ($M = 26.49$)

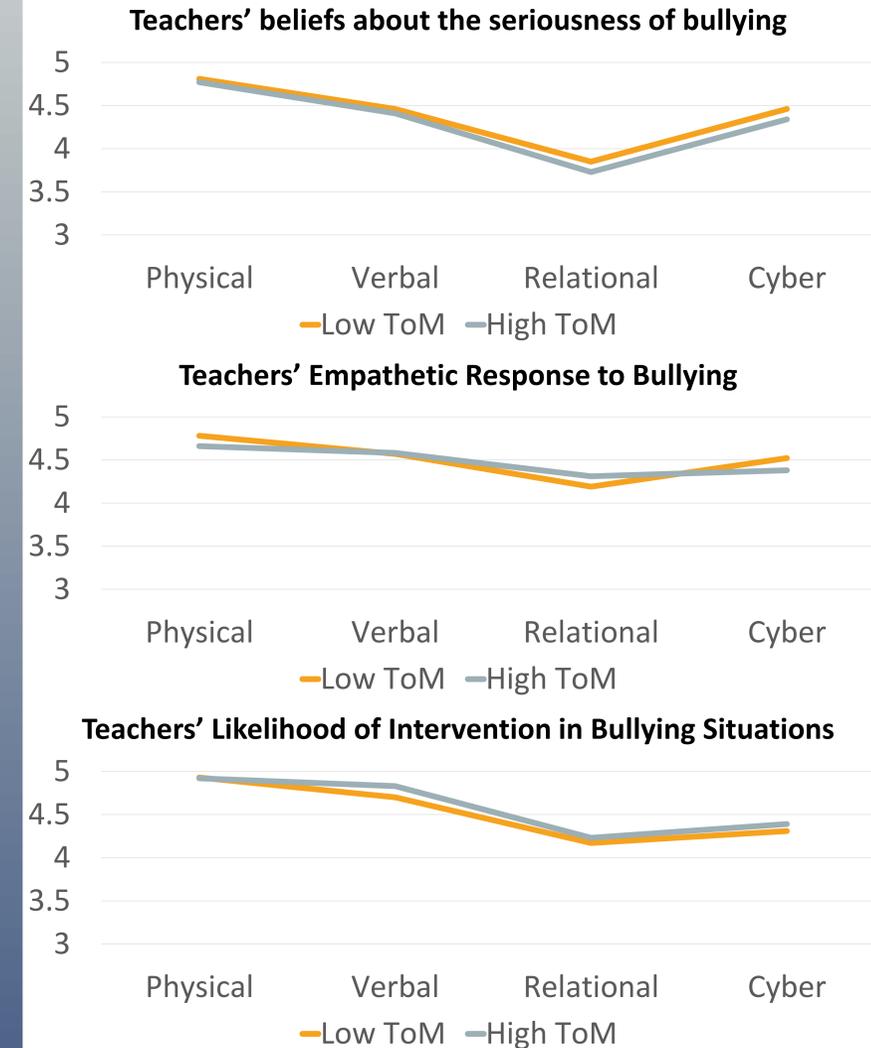
Bullying Vignettes (Boulton et al., 2013; Yoon & Kerber, 2003)

- Bullying vignettes measured teacher attitudes regarding different types of bullying (i.e., physical, relational, verbal, and cyber)
- Measured seriousness of situation ($\alpha = 0.65$), how upset they would be (i.e., Empathy; $\alpha = 0.78$), and likelihood of intervention ($\alpha = .62$).
- E.g., "Adam/Veronica brought a dinosaur-shaped eraser to school. He/She boasts that it was a prize from a game arcade. Morgan/Tanya goes over and smacks his/her head, demanding the eraser. Adam/Veronica refuses at first, but eventually gives in."

Conclusions & Implications

- Small to medium effect sizes suggests the need for a larger sample
- Teachers rated **physical** and **verbal bullying** situations as more serious than relational and cyber bullying, felt more empathy for the victims of bullying, and were more likely to intervene as compared to relational and cyber bullying situations.
- The inclusion of an educational program that promotes emotional intelligence and empathy training may help prepare teachers to better cope with bullying in the classroom.
- Improving bullying prevention and antibullying initiative training for teachers may help to mediate the negative consequences children face due to bullying (e.g. internalizing problems such as anxiety, depression, poor academic achievement and others).

Results



- Significant main effect of bullying type for teachers' beliefs about the seriousness of bullying, their empathetic response, and likelihood of intervention.
- No main effects of ToM or interactions were found.