

# Emotion changes children's understanding of reality and fantasy

6 September 2013

Children are much more likely to believe that Peter Pan is a real-life character than his Neverland nemesis Captain Hook, psychologists have found.

Researchers from the University of Reading discovered that three- to six-year-old children were much more likely to believe that 'positive' characters from TV and film existed in real life than their 'negative' counterparts.

Previously, child development specialists thought children were equally able or unable to classify fantasy characters on TV, whether positive or negative, as make-believe.

Allán Laville, from the University of Reading's Department of Psychology, said: "These findings support a growing understanding that 'affect', or [emotional connection](#), has a role to play in children's decision making and [critical thinking](#).

"This has many wider implications for parents, teachers in early years education, and the [entertainment industry](#). For example, we are increasingly becoming aware that 'affect' influences everyday decision-making in early childhood."

Researchers believe that their findings could also develop our knowledge of what children experience when they watch people acting, and how emotions influence children's review and critical appraisal of new information.

The research was presented today (Thursday 5 September 2013) at the British Psychological Society's Cognitive Developmental Psychology Annual Conference, a major international conference being held at the University of Reading this week.

**More information:** 'The role of affect in fantasy-reality judgments: looking at real, near-real and make-believe entities' by Allán Laville, Rachel

McCloy and Fiona Knott (School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, University of Reading) is presented at CogDev 2013 by Allán Laville.

[www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/pc ...ogramme\\_Document.pdf](http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/pc...ogramme_Document.pdf)

Provided by University of Reading

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