

ABSTRACT

As a measure to support inclusive practices in education, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are increasingly being included in general education classrooms. Despite this desire for inclusion children continue to have negative attitudes towards their peers with autism and are less accepting of them (Nowicki, 2006; Tonnsen & Hahn, 2016). The present study explored if a facilitated group conversational approach with elementary aged students had a mediating or predicting factor in fostering inclusive attitudes towards their peers with autism. The theoretical framework for this study was Theory of Mind (ToM) and a mixed quantitative and qualitative design was implemented. A pre/post test of Attitudes Towards Inclusion of Students with Autism Scale was administered to 26 grade six students. The interventions included 4 sessions, involving a discussion of an overview of autism and inclusion, reading parts of the biography of Naoki Higashida, watching YouTube videos, from the Canucks Autism Network in which children with autism share their personal stories, as well as learning about other high profile individuals living with autism such as Austin Riley. Follow up interviews were conducted with 5 random students. The participants were 26 grade 6 students 15 boys and 11 girls aged 11 and 12 from an elementary school in Surrey, B.C. The results illustrated that there was a positive change in student's attitudes toward inclusion after participating in a conversational approach, which appeared to provide them with a greater understanding of autism.

Keywords: Autism, inclusion, theory of mind

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