Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour to explore the social inclusion of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Abstract: The theoretical framework of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1985) was used to explore the factors affecting mainstream children's attitudes and behaviour towards an included peer with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Support was found for the use of the theory to conceptualise the factors which affect children's pro-social behavioural intentions and behaviour towards a child with ASD.

Methodology

Participants: 318 children aged 8-12 years from an urban east London borough.

Design: quantitative, non experimental survey design using structured questionnaires.

Procedure: mainstream classrooms were selected on the basis of having at least one included child with a diagnosis of ASD. A vignette and five questionnaires, aimed to measure each component of the TPB were administered to all the children in the class.

Data analysis: multiple regression was used to analyse the relationships between the predictor and outcome variables as described in the TPB. Information from this analysis was used to create a PATH summary model (see figure 1).

Results

• The study supports the use of the Theory of Planned Behaviour as a pertinent framework in which to understand and research mainstream children's inclusive behaviour towards children with ASD.

• Previous research has focussed on linking attitudes to behavioural intentions and behaviour. The current research highlights additional areas of potential importance (subjective norms, perceived behavioural control).

• Future research would benefit from investigating the possible links between intervention focussed on the model components (attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm, behavioural intentions) and behavioural change.

Background and Aims

• Positive peer attitudes and friendship behaviours have been found to play a crucial role in ensuring the success of inclusive education programmes (Forlin & Cole, 1994; Lewis 1995; Meijer, Pifl & Hegarty, 1994).

• Children with ASD often face difficulty with social interactions and building friendships (Bauminger et al. 2008).

• This study contributes to the literature on the social inclusion of children with ASD by considering the role of peers in the success of these inclusion programmes within a robust theoretical framework by measuring the relationships between the components of the Theory of Planned Behaviour.

Definitions: **Attitude** = cognitive attitude towards a peer with ASD. **Subjective Norm** = perceived social pressure from teachers, parents and peers to behave inclusively to a peer with ASD. **Perceived Behavioural Control** = perception of how easy/difficult it is to carry out a given behaviour with a child with ASD.

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1985)

- **Attitude**
- **Subjective Norm**
- **Perceived Behavioural Control**
- **Behavioural Intentions**
- **Actual Behaviour**

Figure 1: Summary model to show the effect sizes (beta value) of each predictor variable on the outcome variable of the TPB

Future Research and Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

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References:


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