Abstract

Recent researches placed an emphasis on training the autistic children to understand the concept of false belief. The major aims are to alleviate the impairments in social interaction that were so debilitating in autism and to testify the theory of mind hypothesis underpinning the impairments of social interaction in autism. The present study investigated the treatment effectiveness between the aid of picture-in-the-head strategies and the thought bubbles (Swettenham J., 1996 and McGregor, E. et al, 1998) and the highlighted keywords in the general principles, which underlay the mental state scenarios. Fourteen autistic children aged from 6 to 8 with normal intelligence were assigned into two groups to receive the two different training programs. Nine belief tasks and one deception task were given at pre-intervention, post-intervention and one-month follow-up to assess their mental state understandings. Results found that the treatment effects of both training programs were equally effective in helping the autistic children to tackle the false belief tasks. Moreover, generalizations from the tasks that had been trained on to the task that was acted out with real people were noted in both groups. Besides, the treatment effects were found to be maintained for one month. However, there was no generalization from the belief tasks to the deception task. The characteristics of the two training programs contributing to the improvement of belief understanding were discussed.