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**A PLAY TECHNIQUE PROGRAMME FOR AUTISTIC  
CHILDREN  
IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD**

**By**

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**PROMOTER: PROF. C.S.L DELPORT**

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**PRETORIA**



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This study is dedicated  
to my husband, David.  
Thank you for everything.



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I would like to thank the following individuals. Without their constant support, encouragement and understanding, this study would not have been completed successfully.

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**Thank you**



## SUMMARY

### ***A Play Technique Programme for Autistic Children in Middle Childhood***

by

**Catherine Davies**

**Promoter: Prof. C.S. L Delport**

**Department of Social Work and Criminology**

**Degree: Doctor Philosophiae (D.Phil)**

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In this study an attempt was firstly made to theoretically conceptualize autism as a phenomenon in Middle Childhood and the impact thereof on the family, as well as play techniques in the context of autism. The characteristics, behaviour and statistics of autism were looked at as well as the expectations of development of a child (with autism) in middle childhood. The impact of the diagnosis of autism, particularly on the family, was also discussed as well as play techniques in the context of autism. Secondly the researcher focused on exploring the nature of existing play technique programmes on a national and international level.

The focus then was placed on developing a play technique programme for autistic children in middle childhood (between the ages of six and 12 years). This programme was then implemented with 12 autistic children in middle childhood at The Key School for Specialized Education in Parktown West, Johannesburg. Each of the 12 respondents were seen for six sessions, with each session lasting 30 minutes.

The empirical results were then given through evaluating the play technique programme to assess the effectiveness of the play technique programme. Finally



the researcher came to conclusions and recommendations, based on the research findings, regarding the effectiveness of the play technique programme for autistic children in order to enhance the impact of the play technique programme.

The broad aim of the study was to develop and evaluate the effectiveness of a play technique programme to enhance the social behaviour of autistic children between the ages of six and 12.

The following hypothesis was developed: if autistic children are involved in the play technique programme, then their social behaviour will improve. Consequently, the following sub hypotheses were developed: (1) If autistic children are involved in the play technique programme then their verbal communication skills will improve; (2) If autistic children are involved in a play technique programme then their non-verbal communication skills will improve; (3) If autistic children are involved in a play technique programme then their social interaction skills will improve; (4) If autistic children are involved in a play technique programme then their challenging behaviours will decrease.

In the context of applied research, intervention research was the most appropriate type of research for this particular study. This is due to the fact that the researcher aimed to conduct an intervention, namely a play technique programme, which was attempting to impact a particular problem within society, namely the lack of support provided for parents and/or professionals dealing with autistic children in middle childhood.

The research approach used in the study was quantitative. The researcher utilized the one-group pretest-posttest design (i.e. quasi-experimental/associative design). In this particular design there is a measurement (pre-test) of a dependent variable (the autistic children's social behaviour) when no independent variable (play technique programme) is present. Subsequently the independent variable is introduced, followed by a repeated measurement (post-test) of the dependent variable. The 12 respondents were selected through



probability sampling, more specifically stratified and systematic sampling. A self-constructed measuring instrument was used, within structured observation, to evaluate the respondents' changes in social behaviour, due to exposure to the various play techniques. The specific behaviours focused on included verbal communication, non-verbal communication, social interaction and challenging behaviours.

The findings confirmed that the play technique programme had a highly significant effect on all four areas measured (verbal communication, non-verbal communication, social interaction and challenging behaviour). The respondents (the autistic children) therefore showed a marked improvement in their social behaviour due to being involved in the play technique programme and the conclusion that can be reached is that the play technique programme can be perceived as having had the impact that was hoped for.

### **Key terms**

Play therapy, gestalt, projection, play techniques, autism, autistic behaviour, middle childhood, social behaviour, children, and research.



## SAMEVATTING

### ***‘n Speltegniekprogram vir Outistiese Kinders in hul Middelkinderjare***

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**Graad: Doctor Philosophiae (D.Phil)**

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Daar is in hierdie studie ten eerste probeer om ‘n teoretiese konseptualisering te vorm van outisme as ‘n verskynsel in die middelkinderjare, die uitwerking wat outisme op die gesin het, asook van speltegnieke teen die agtergrond van outisme. Die eienskappe, gedrag en statistiek van outisme en verwagtings oor die ontwikkeling van ‘n kind (met outisme) in die middelkinderjare is ondersoek. Afgesien van die gevolge wat die diagnose van outisme by ‘n kind op veral die gesin het, is speltegnieke teen die agtergrond van outisme bespreek. Ten tweede het die navorser bestaande nasionale en internasionale speltegniekprogramme ondersoek.

‘n Speltegniekprogram vir outistiese kinders in hul middelkinderjare (tussen die ouderdom van 6 en 12 jaar) is ontwikkel. Twaalf outistiese kinders in hul middelkinderjare by die Key School for Specialised Education in Parktown-Wes, Johannesburg het hierdie program deurloop. Hulle het elk ses sessies van 30 minute bygewoon.

Die empiriese resultate is verkry deur die speltegniekprogram te evalueer en die doeltreffendheid daarvan te bepaal. Op grond daarvan het die navorser laastens tot ‘n slotsom gekom en aanbevelings vir die verbetering van die speltegniekprogram gemaak.



Die hoofmerk met hierdie studie was om 'n speltegniekprogram vir outistiese kinders tussen 6 tot 12 jaar oud te ontwikkel en die effek van die program op hul sosiale gedrag te evalueer.

Die volgende hipotese is gestel: Indien outistiese kinders die speltegniekprogram deurloop, sal hul sosiale gedrag verbeter. Voortspruitend hieruit is die volgende subhipoteses geformuleer: (1) Indien outistiese kinders die speltegniekprogram deurloop, sal hulle verbale kommunikasie verbeter; (2) Indien outistiese kinders die speltegniekprogram deurloop, sal hulle nie-verbale kommunikasie verbeter; (3) Indien outistiese kinders die speltegniekprogram deurloop, sal hulle sosiale interaksie verbeter; (4) Indien outistiese kinders die speltegniekprogram deurloop, sal probleemgedrag afneem.

Teen die agtergrond van toegepaste navorsing was intervensienavorsing as die mees geskikte soort navorsing geselekteer en toegepas omrede die navorser het met behulp van die ontwikkelde speltegniekprogram (intervensie) aandag gegee aan 'n bepaalde maatskaplike probleem, naamlik die gebrek aan ondersteuning vir ouers en/of professionele persone wat by outistiese kinders in hul middelkinderjare betrokke is.

Die kwantitatiewe benadering is in hierdie studie gevolg. Die een-groep voortoets-natoets ontwerp (kwasi-eksperimentele/assosiatiewe ontwerp) is in die studie benut. Volgens hierdie ontwerp word 'n afhanklike veranderlike (die outistiese kinders se sosiale gedrag) gemeet wanneer geen onafhanklike veranderlike (die speltegniekprogram) teenwoordig is nie (die voortoets). Dan word die onafhanklike veranderlike (die speltegniekprogram) ingevoer en dit word opgevolg deur 'n tweede meting van die afhanklike veranderlike (die natoets). Die 12 respondente is met behulp van waarskynlikheidsteekproeftrekking en in die besonder deur 'n kombinasie van gestratifiseerde en sistematiese steekproeftrekking gekies. 'n Selfontwerpte meetinstrument is binne gestruktureerde waarneming as data-insamelings metode gebruik om die verandering in die respondente se sosiale gedrag na blootstelling aan verskeie





speltegnieke te evalueer. Verbale en nie-verbale kommunikasie, sosiale interaksie en probleemgedrag is geëvalueer.

Daar is bevind dat die speltegniekprogram ten opsigte van al vier genoemde veranderlikes 'n beduidende verandering te weeg gebring het. Die respondente se sosiale gedrag het merkbaar verbeter as gevolg van die speltegniekprogram. Daar kon dus tot die slotsom gekom word dat die speltegniekprogram die gewenste uitwerking gehad het.

### **Kernbegrippe**

Spel terapie, gestalt, projeksie, speltegnieke, outisme, outistiese gedrag, middelkinderjare, sosiale gedrag, kinders en navorsing.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
SUMMARY	ii
OPSOMMING	v
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<b>GENERAL INTRODUCTION</b>	
<b>1.1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2. Problem Formulation</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.3. Purpose, goal and objectives of study</b>	<b>11</b>
1.3.1 Purpose of the study	11
1.3.2 Goal of the study	11
1.3.3 Objectives of the study	12
<b>1.4 Hypothesis</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>1.5 Research Approach</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>1.6 Type of Research</b>	<b>15</b>
1.6.1 Description of intervention research	15
1.6.2 Motivation for the choice of intervention research	16
1.6.3 Facets of intervention research	16
1.6.3.1 Knowledge development	16
1.6.3.2 Knowledge utilization	16
1.6.3.3 Design and Development	17
1.6.4 The process (phases) of intervention research	18
1.6.4.1 Phase 1: Problem analysis and project planning	20
1.6.4.2 Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis	23
1.6.4.3 Phase 3: Design	25



1.6.4.4 Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing	27
1.6.4.5 Phase 5: Evaluation and advanced development	28
<b>1.7 Research Design and Methodology</b>	<b>29</b>
1.7.1 Data collection	31
1.7.2 Data analysis	34
<b>1.8 Pilot Study</b>	<b>35</b>
1.8.1 Feasibility of study	36
1.8.2 Testing of data collection instrument	36
<b>1.9 Research Population, Sample and Sampling Method</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>1.10 Ethical Aspects</b>	<b>39</b>
1.10.1 Harm to respondents	39
1.10.2 Informed consent	40
1.10.3 Deception of subjects	40
1.10.4 Violation of privacy and anonymity	41
1.10.5 Actions and competence of researcher	41
1.10.6 Release or publications of findings	41
1.10.7 Debriefing of respondents	42
<b>1.11 Limitations of the study</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>1.12 Definitions of the key concepts</b>	<b>44</b>
1.12.1 Play techniques	44
1.12.2 Autism	45
1.12.3 Middle Childhood	46
1.12.4 Social behaviour	46
<b>1.13 Contents of the research report</b>	<b>47</b>



## CHAPTER TWO

### AUTISM AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

<b>2.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>2.2</b>	<b>Defining Autism</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>2.3</b>	<b>Characteristics of Autism</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Prevalence of Autism</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Causes of Autism</b>	<b>72</b>
2.5.1	Genetics	73
2.5.2	Pregnancy/birth	74
2.5.3	Parenting	76
2.5.4	Infection/medication conditions	76
2.5.5	Neurological causes	78
2.5.6	The final common pathway model	78
<b>2.6</b>	<b>Treatment of Autism</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>2.7</b>	<b>Social Effect of Autism</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>2.8</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>87</b>

## CHAPTER THREE

### AUTISM IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND THE IMPACT ON THE FAMILY

<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Defining Middle Childhood</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Development Stages within Middle Childhood: Comparison between Neurotypical and Autistic Children</b>	<b>92</b>
3.3.1	Physical Development	92



3.3.2 Intellectual Development	95
3.3.2.1 Neurotypical children	96
3.3.2.2 Autistic children	97
3.3.3 Social/emotional Development	100
3.3.3.1 Neurotypical children	100
3.3.3.2 Autistic children	102
<b>3.4 The Impact of Autism on the Family</b>	<b>104</b>
3.4.1 Definition of a family	105
3.4.2 Impact on the family	107
3.4.2.1 Financial Impact	110
3.4.2.2 Social Impact	111
3.4.2.3 Emotional Impact	112
3.4.3.4 Impact on the siblings	115
<b>3.5 Summary</b>	<b>117</b>

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PLAY TECHNIQUES WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PLAY THERAPY

<b>4.1 Introduction</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>4.2 The Nature and Content of Play Therapy</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>4.3 Gestalt Approach to Play Therapy</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>4.4 Projection in Play Therapy</b>	<b>134</b>
<b>4.5 Play Techniques within Play Therapy</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>4.6 Autistic Children and Play Techniques</b>	<b>142</b>
4.6.1 Fantasy	143
4.6.2 Relaxation play	144



4.6.3	Drawing	144
4.6.4	Biblio-play	145
4.6.5	Making things	146
4.6.6	Sensory experiences	146
<b>4.7</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>147</b>

## CHAPTER FIVE

### PLAY TECHNIQUE PROGRAMME

<b>5.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>148</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Phase one (Introduction)</b>	<b>149</b>
5.2.1	Goal of the phase	149
5.2.2	Objectives of the phase	149
5.2.3	Content of the phase	150
5.2.4	Comments on the phase	151
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Phase two</b>	<b>152</b>
5.3.1	Goal of the phase	152
5.3.2	Objectives of the phase	152
5.3.3	Content of the phase	152
5.3.4	Comments on the phase	153
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Phase three</b>	<b>154</b>
5.4.1	Goal of the phase	154
5.4.2	Objectives of the phase	154
5.4.3	Content of the phase	154
5.4.4	Comments on the phase	155
<b>5.5</b>	<b>Phase four</b>	<b>156</b>
5.5.1	Goal of the phase	156



5.5.2	Objectives of the phase	156
5.5.3	Content of the phase	157
5.5.4	Comments on the phase	158
<b>5.6</b>	<b>Phase five</b>	<b>158</b>
5.6.1	Goal of the phase	158
5.6.2	Objectives of the phase	159
5.6.3	Content of the phase	159
5.6.4	Comments on the phase	160
<b>5.7</b>	<b>Phase six (Termination)</b>	<b>161</b>
5.7.1	Goal of the phase	161
5.7.2	Objectives of the phase	161
5.7.3	Content of the phase	161
5.7.4	Comments on the phase	162
<b>5.8</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>162</b>

## CHAPTER SIX

### EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

<b>6.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Research Methodology</b>	<b>167</b>
6.2.1	Research Design	167
6.2.2	Sample and sampling technique	168
6.2.3	Data collection method	169
<b>6.3</b>	<b>Research Findings</b>	<b>173</b>
6.3.1	Biographical details of respondents	173
6.3.1.1	The respondents' age group	174
6.3.1.2	The respondents' gender	176



6.3.1.3 The respondents' race	177
6.3.1.4 The respondents' home language	179
<b>6.4 Empirical results: Social Behaviour of Autistic Children</b>	<b>182</b>
6.4.1 Verbal Communication	185
6.4.1.1 Level of spontaneous speech regarding respondents' needs	188
6.4.1.2 Level of spontaneous speech regarding respondents' feelings	190
6.4.1.3 Comprehensive speech regarding general social interaction	191
6.4.1.4 Comprehensive speech regarding present events	192
6.4.1.5 Appropriate speech within the phases	194
6.4.1.6 The ability to express comprehension	195
6.4.1.7 Speech when required	196
6.4.1.8 Appropriate use of vocabulary	197
6.4.1.9 Appropriate sentence structure	199
6.4.1.10 Clarity of speech	200
6.4.1.11 Use of tone when speaking	201
6.4.2 Non-verbal communication	208
6.4.2.1 Facial expression for the purpose of communication	212
6.4.2.2 Gestures	213
6.4.2.3 Appropriate use of personal space	215
6.4.2.4 Eye contact	216
6.4.2.5 Interest in listening	217
6.4.2.6 Appropriate use of silence	218





6.4.2.7	Level of appropriate response to listening	220
6.4.2.8	Ability to focus	221
6.4.2.9	Concentration span	222
6.4.2.10	Attentiveness	223
6.4.2.11	Openness to researcher	225
6.4.3	Social Interaction	230
6.4.3.1	Level of interest in appropriate social interaction	234
6.4.3.2	Desire for physical contact	235
6.4.3.3	Desire for emotional contact	236
6.4.3.4	Participation in the play phase	238
6.4.3.5	Ability to reach out emotionally	239
6.4.3.6	Ability to show obedience to instructions	240
6.4.3.7	Reaction to social interaction	241
6.4.3.8	Interactional cues	242
6.4.3.9	Invitational cues	244
6.4.3.10	Awareness of the researcher	245
6.4.3.11	Level of motivation	246
6.4.3.12	Appropriate response to social interaction	247
6.4.4	Challenging Behaviour	252
6.4.4.1	Repetitive behaviour	255
6.4.4.2	Inappropriate behaviour	256
6.4.4.3	Self-injurious behaviour	257
6.4.4.4	Aggressive behaviour	259
6.4.4.5	Agitation	260
6.4.4.6	Anxiety	261



6.4.4.7 Avoidance	262
6.4.4.8 Distractibility	263
6.4.5 Collective Summary of Social Behavioural Changes	268
<b>6.5 Summary</b>	<b>270</b>

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### GENERAL SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

<b>7.1 Introduction</b>	<b>272</b>
<b>7.2 Literature Study</b>	<b>275</b>
7.2.1. General Introduction to the study	275
7.2.1.1 Summary	275
7.2.1.2 Conclusions	276
7.2.1.3 Recommendations	277
7.2.2 Autism as a social phenomenon	278
7.2.2.1 Summary	278
7.2.2.2 Conclusions	280
7.2.2.3 Recommendations	281
7.2.3 Autism in Middle Childhood and the Impact on the Family	282
7.2.3.1 Summary	282
7.2.3.2 Conclusions	284
7.2.3.3 Recommendations	285
7.2.4 Play Techniques	286
7.2.4.1 Summary	286
7.2.4.2 Conclusions	289
7.2.4.3 Recommendations	289



7.2.5	Development of a Play Technique Programme	290
7.2.5.1	Summary	290
7.2.5.2	Conclusions	291
7.2.5.3	Recommendations	292
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Empirical Research Findings</b>	<b>293</b>
7.3.1	Quantitative Findings	293
7.3.1.1	Summary	293
7.3.1.2	Conclusions	294
7.3.1.3	Recommendations	298
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Aim and Objectives of the study</b>	<b>299</b>
7.4.1	Aim of the Study	299
7.4.2	Research Objective Achievement	299
<b>7.5</b>	<b>Concluding Statement</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>LIST OF REFERENCES</b>		
	<b>References</b>	<b>302</b>



## ADDENDUMS

- Addendum A: Letter of Permission
- Addendum B: Research Scale
- Addendum C: Informed consent
- Addendum D: Letter of Ethical Clearance



## LIST OF DIAGRAMS

Diagram 1:	The final common pathway to Autism	79
Diagram 2:	Feelings of family members associated with the diagnosis of Autism	114
Diagram 3:	Five Neurotic Layers	132
Diagram 4:	A pie chart of the age of respondents participating in the study	175
Diagram 5:	A bar graph of the gender representation of the respondents	177
Diagram 6:	Graphical presentation of the race of the respondents included in the study	179
Diagram 7:	Home language of respondents	181
Diagram 8:	Pre- and post-test scores for verbal communication for all the respondents individually	188
Diagram 9:	Pre- and post-test scores for level of spontaneous speech regarding respondents' needs	189
Diagram 10:	Pre- and post-test scores for level of spontaneous speech regarding respondents' feelings	190
Diagram 11:	Pre- and post-test scores for comprehensive speech regarding general social interaction	192
Diagram 12:	Pre- and post-test scores for comprehensive speech regarding present events	193
Diagram 13:	Pre- and post-test scores for appropriate speech within the play technique session	194
Diagram 14:	Pre- and post-test scores for ability to express comprehension	195



Diagram 15: Pre- and post-test scores achieved for speech when required	197
Diagram 16: Pre- and post-test scores for appropriate use of vocabulary	198
Diagram 17: Pre- and post-test scores for appropriate sentence structure	199
Diagram 18: Pre- and post-test scores for clarity of speech	200
Diagram 19: Pre- and post-test scores for use of tone when speaking	202
Diagram 20: Pre- and post-test scores for non- verbal communication of all the respondents	211
Diagram 21: Pre- and post-test scores for facial expression for the purpose of communication	212
Diagram 22: Pre- and post-test scores for gestures	214
Diagram 23: Pre- and post-test scores for appropriate use of personal space	215
Diagram 24: Pre- and post-test scores for eye contact	216
Diagram 25: Pre- and post-test scores for interest in listening	218
Diagram 26: Pre- and post-test scores for appropriate use of silence	219
Diagram 27: Pre-and post-test scores for level of appropriate response to listening	220
Diagram 28: Pre- and post-test scores for ability to focus	221
Diagram 29: Pre- and post-test scores for concentration span	222
Diagram 30: Pre- and post-test scores for attentiveness	224
Diagram 31: Pre- and post-test scores for openness to researcher	225
Diagram 32: Combined pre- and post-test scores for social interaction of each respondent	233
Diagram 33: Pre- and post-test scores for level of interest in appropriate social interaction	234
Diagram 34: Pre- and post-test scores for desire for physical contact	236



Diagram 35: Pre- and post-test scores for desire for emotional contact	237
Diagram 36: Pre- and post-test scores for participation in the play session	238
Diagram 37: Pre- and post-test scores for ability to reach out emotionally	239
Diagram 38: Pre- and post-test scores for ability to show obedience to instructions	240
Diagram 39: Pre- and post-test scores for reaction to social interaction	242
Diagram 40: Pre- and post-test scores for interactional cues	243
Diagram 41: Pre- and post-test scores for invitational cues	244
Diagram 42: Pre- and post-test scores for awareness of researcher	245
Diagram 43: Pre- and post-test scores for level of motivation	246
Diagram 44: Pre- and post-test scores for appropriate response to social interaction	248
Diagram 45: Pre- and post-test scores for challenging behaviour	254
Diagram 46: Pre- and post-test scores for repetitive behaviour	256
Diagram 47: Pre- and post-test scores for inappropriate behaviour	257
Diagram 48: Pre- and post-test scores for self-injurious behaviour	258
Diagram 49: Pre- and post-test scores for aggressive behaviour	259
Diagram 50: Pre- and post-test scores for agitation	260
Diagram 51: Pre- and post-test scores for anxiety	261
Diagram 52: Pre- and post-test scores for avoidance	263
Diagram 53: Pre- and post-test scores for distractibility	264
Diagram 54: Combination of ratings for social behavioural skills	270
Diagram 55: Pre- and post-test scores for impact of play techniques	297



## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Phases of intervention research	18
Table 2:	Characteristics of Autistic Spectrum Disorders	57
Table 3:	Criteria for diagnosis of autism	61
Table 4:	Do's and don'ts of early detection	65
Table 5:	Age composition of respondents participating in the study	174
Table 6:	Gender of respondents participating in the study	176
Table 7:	Race of respondents included in the study	178
Table 8:	Home language of respondents	180
Table 9:	Frequency distribution of the respondents' verbal communication ratings	204
Table 10:	Verbal communication ratings	205
Table 11:	Median scores of respondents' ratings with regard to verbal communication	207
Table 12:	Frequency distribution of respondents non-verbal communication ratings	227
Table 13:	Median scores of respondents' ratings with regard to non- verbal communication	229
Table 14:	Frequency distribution of respondent's social interaction ratings	249
Table 15:	Median scores of respondent's ratings with regard to social interaction	250
Table 16:	Frequency distribution of respondents' ratings regarding challenging behaviour	265
Table 17:	Median scores of respondent's ratings with regard to challenging behaviour	266





Table 18:	Combination of ratings for social behavioural skills	268
Table 19:	Comparing pre-test and post-test scores	269
Table 20:	Accomplishment of the study objectives	299