

THE INFLUENCE OF A PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMME ON THE ACQUISITION OF SOCIAL
AND COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

by

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DECLARATION

Student number: **4507-172-1**

I declare that **THE INFLUENCE OF A PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMME ON THE ACQUISITION OF SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Mrs. L. Dworetzky

Date

SUMMARY

The critical role of children's play in the development of peer relationships, social and communicative skills is reviewed and discussed. The difficulties experienced by a pre-school learner in engaging in peer relationships, communicating successfully in a classroom situation and constructively using play materials was explained. This was done through the use of anecdotal records, checklists, questionnaires, photographic evidence and a semi-structured interview with the learner's parent.

A pre-school play programme, using blocks, dough and puppets (BDP Programme) was devised and used to assess its influence on the acquisition of social and communicative skills by a non-social and non-communicative learner.

The study found the BDP Programme to be very successful in assisting this learner to develop peer relationships and communicative skills in the peer group and thus played a critical role in the social development of this learner.

KEY TERMS:

Early childhood development; play; pre-school play programme; socialisation; social skills; social play; social competence; peer relationships; language; communicative skills; selective mutism

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Play is universally accepted as a reflection of and an influence on all areas of children's development – the vehicle by which they communicate, socialize, learn about the world, understand themselves and others, deal with problems and conceptualize skills that may be useful to them in later life.

A major focus of pre-schoolers' development is on socialisation. Children must learn skills such as cooperation, sharing, helping and problem solving (Johnson, Christie & Yawkey, 1999:59).

The development of social competence is a critical task for young children to accomplish to function successfully in school, since socially competent children are able to recognise and respond to the established social norms operating in the school context (Glover Gagnon & Nagle, 2004:174). Possessing social competence is fundamental to leading a normal, healthy life (Kennedy & Shukla in DiSalvo & Oswald, 2002:198). Inadequate social skills impinge on development by “increasing behaviour problems that result from not having the appropriate skills for social interaction; increasing the likelihood for maladaptive behaviour later in life; and decreasing the positive developmental support and learning opportunities found in successful peer relationships” (Frea, 1995:53).

Through successful play activities, children are able to acquire many of the social skills required to get along with their peers and form relationships. Children who are unable to successfully develop social skills are at risk of having social and emotional issues later in life (Fisher & Haufe, 2009:1). Although parents contribute to children's social skills it is mainly acquired through interactions with other children who provide opportunities to learn and practice new skills, refine old ones and gain proficiency in social interactions (Ashiabi, 2007:201).

Children who have verbal difficulties communicating may find it hard to “master” communication through verbal language. This does not necessarily mean that their play

forms are not creative, expressive and communicative. It may mean that their use of verbal language for play and communication is limited. Developing a style of communication can be approached through the child's own spontaneous and creative play, as well as by learning from others. One may ask the question, "Why is 'communication', verbal or otherwise, important"? The researcher believes strongly that communication is a foundation life skill for all children and developing communication skills in the early years leads to better outcomes in education and social skills later in life.

Landreth (1991:10) states that children's play can be fully appreciated when recognised as their natural medium of communication. Tepperman (2007:2) adds that through pretend play, children develop their skills in using language and in telling and understanding stories. Tepperman (2007:2) continues by saying that oral language skills and storytelling are the building blocks of reading and writing, as well as subjects like social studies and science. Children express themselves fully and more directly through self-initiated spontaneous play than they do verbally, as they are more comfortable with play. To play out their experiences and feelings is the most natural dynamic and self-healing process in which children engage.

Craig-Unkefer and Kaiser (2002:3) go on to state that although play offers opportunities to develop relationships with peers, children with limited communication skills may not be able to access the opportunities. The range of language and social skills required for play is considerable.

Chazan (2002: page unknown) states that as children play with each other, they learn spontaneously through their interactions and from these play situations, develop the ability to form peer relationships and both socialisation and communication skills.

Bearing the importance of this in mind, what is the effect on the learner who does not play or communicate both verbally and socially with his peers around him? In the study that follows the researcher will attempt to show the importance of play in all aspects of a child's development, more specifically the importance of play with reference to social communication skills.

1.2 INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

Weininger (1980:44) asserts that for very young children, all activity is play, and from all play they learn. The desire to play, the absorption in play, and the concentration in play activity are signs of a healthy child. The child who does not play is a child who needs encouragement and stimulation.

The author goes on to add that teachers of culturally disadvantaged children who were not given much opportunity to play and experiment with their home environments have noted that these children come to school with a different linguistic, perceptual, and cognitive repertory from children who had a rich play life (Smilansky, in Weininger, 1980:45). Their natural drive to touch and to understand their world has been smothered by their environment. They have learned that in their home they have to behave in a certain way and to do otherwise is to risk rejection, hurt or deprivation.

As these children come to school there is no reason to think that the teacher, another adult, is not going to behave in just the same way as all the other adults. The children are then restricted in what they may do and practically have to be helped to play and to explore. The teacher has to create the kind of environment which will be sufficiently safe for the children so that they may risk their prior understanding that play is dangerous. The teacher must help these children to bridge the gap between the home and the school by providing "home-like" materials and by becoming involved with the play and by inviting the child to "come and do things with me" (Weininger, 1980:45).

The researcher's interest in the value of play in the pre-school curriculum began at the beginning of 2009 with the arrival of a learner who presented with typical symptoms of selective mutism. This particular little boy, RS (name changed to guarantee anonymity), aged 3 years 6 months, was a second-language learner and whilst he was most capable of speaking and understanding the English language, experienced an unwillingness to do so. He also did not appear to know how to play spontaneously and during free play in the classroom usually took an aeroplane and sat idly watching the other children play with an assortment of different play materials. He required much support and encouragement to communicate and interact with his peer group. Whilst he was completely overwhelmed by group situations, when asked direct questions, would either mouth or whisper the answer

to the researcher or completely clam up and refuse to respond. The researcher felt that it would be of great benefit to determine whether the implementation of a play programme could make a difference to this child's level of socialisation and communication skills.

After reading and researching play and the value thereof in the overall development of the pre-school learner, the researcher came to the conclusion that when exposed to play situations, learner's inhibitions are usually lessened as the activities selected are generally of the learner's own choosing, stress-free and most of all, fun!

By creating a play programme based on the use of a variety of play materials usually found in a pre-school classroom, the researcher was of the opinion that this individual learner could be assisted with the acquisition of social and communication skills through play.

1.3 AWARENESS OF PROBLEM

Children's play has been conceptualized in terms of creativity, adaptation, exploration, experimentation, learning, communication, socialisation, acculturation and mastery. From a social constructivist perspective, play enables children to build and extend their knowledge and skills as they interact with their environment, with others and on their own (Ashiabi, 2007:200).

Krasner (1975:6) states that it may well be true that a major function of early language is purely social – a means of establishing and maintaining interpersonal contact in which information exchange is secondary, and much is implied rather than stated. An analysis of the speech of very young children – particularly at play – should lead to better understanding of the dimensions of the child's social development and social world. A benefit is that, by studying the development of social speech, it may be possible to detect early failures and abnormalities in the growth of interpersonal behaviour.

For a learner who is inhibited by the lack of social communication skills, he often does not make the most of play situations afforded him or alternatively when faced with play activities does not have the necessary skills to interact or communicate successfully with his peers. This could be due in part to a lack of confidence in his abilities or to the realisation that his language skills are not on par with those of his friends.

Therefore the problem exists when the child does not make any effort to interact with his environment or with others for fear of failure and because he feels he does not possess the necessary skills to do so. He, in turn, tends to withdraw more into himself and continues to be an onlooker in play situations as opposed to an active and meaningful participant.

1.4 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Play is a natural activity for young children and provides an important window through which to view development. Play contributes to growth in cognitive, language, social-emotional and academic skills. Since these domains tend to be emphasized in preschool curricula, they are readily observable and open to intervention. Children enjoy play and are motivated to engage in it, expending substantial social and cognitive energy in play activities. Because play proceeds through a regular developmental sequence during childhood, evaluations of children's play can provide indications of maturation and social competence (Glover Gagnon & Nagle, 2004:173).

Hurlock (1978:292) states that by playing with other children, children learn how to establish social relationships and how to meet and solve the problems these relationships give rise to. She also postulates that to play successfully with others, children must learn to communicate with them in terms they can understand, and they, in turn, must learn to understand what others are trying to communicate to them.

The problem statement ensures that the researcher has a good grasp of the specific problem he or she wishes to investigate (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:47). A specific problem statement will also enable the researcher to communicate the research problem to others. Providing a specification of the study purpose at the outset also has the advantage of guiding the research process by, for example, indicating how and by what methods the data will be collected (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:47). The problem statement merely indicates what is probably necessary to conduct the study and explains that the findings will present this information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:84).

Mouton and Marais (1996:37) make the point that the research problem is usually formulated as a series of questions as a way of focusing the problem. Creswell (in Fouché,

2005a:102) states that in qualitative studies the nature of the research relates to the subject being of a questioning nature.

For the purpose of this research, the following informal questions can be posed while attempting to delineate the topic:

- What are the components of a play-based programme applicable to the pre-school child who lacks social and communication skills?
- What will be the best method to assess a child of this nature?
- Can the methods implemented through a play programme, provide valuable information regarding the acquisition of social and communication skills?
- What would the benefits of a play programme such as this be for the non-social and non-communicative child?
- What is the role of the teacher in such a play-based programme and would the information gained from this programme assist other non-social preschool children with communication skills?

In the light of the previous discussion (cf 3.4), the research statement appears as follows:

The influence of a pre-school programme on the acquisition of social and communicative skills.

In order for the dissertation to remain focused and to provide an in-depth analysis of certain concepts, the next section aims at limiting the issues included in this study.

1.5 DEMARCATION OF FIELD OF STUDY

It is important for this dissertation to limit the scope to the points listed below:

- The concept of “play”, incorporating the development of play stages and the value thereof for the pre-school child.
- The importance of play and communication for the child’s social development.
- The concept of “selective mutism” and the typical symptoms thereof.

- The development of a play-based programme to assist the child with the acquisition of social and communication skills.
- The programme used should provide qualitative information regarding the participant.

It is equally important to recognise that this project was undertaken in the researcher's place of employment. This particular pre-school is situated in the affluent, upmarket area of the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. It is a private, co-educational, non-denominational, multicultural school offering well-equipped classrooms filled with an assortment of age-appropriate play materials and activities (cf Appendix C - Materials Available Checklist).

The following section will outline the general and specific aims of this study. The purpose is to maintain the focus of the research project, making it easier to effectively justify the research statement that has been proposed.

1.6 THE AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Mouton and Marais (1996:42) state that "the research goal provides a broad indication of what researchers wish to attain in their research".

The aim of the study is to explore whether a pre-school play programme is able to influence a non-social and non-communicative learner's acquisition of social and communication skills.

1.6.1 Objectives of the study

According to Fouché (2005a:104), an objective denotes "the more concrete, measurable and more speedily attainable conception of such an end toward which effort or ambition is directed". Mouton (2002:101) agrees by stating that the research objective or purpose gives a broad indication of what researchers wish to achieve in their research. In this study, four objectives were identified to achieve the goal of this study:

- to conduct an in-depth literature study in order to define the concept of children's play, the value thereof and to investigate the importance of the establishment of social and communication skills to the pre-school child.
- to undertake an empirical study through the use of learner observations, an interview and questionnaires to explore the utilisation of a play programme in assisting the non-social and non-communicative learner's acquisition of social and communication skills.
- To analyse data in order to describe the use of a play programme for such purpose.
- To derive the appropriate conclusions and to make recommendations for educators working with learners who experience a lack of or a delay in socialising and communication skills.

The following section will clarify the methods used in this dissertation.

1.7 METHOD OF RESEARCH

The research procedure used in this study is regarded as a qualitative research design.

1.7.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is based on the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as observations, interviews and other more discursive sources of information. Qualitative research tends not to state hypotheses or research procedures before any data are collected; research problems and methods tend to evolve as understanding of the research context deepens. Additionally, the number of participants studied tends to be smaller. Qualitative research analyses data interpretively by organizing the data into categories, identifying patterns and producing a descriptive narrative synthesis. Finally, researchers, using qualitative methods often interact extensively with the participants during their study (Gay & Airasian, 2000:9).

According Bisschoff and Sayed (1999:312), a qualitative study can be regarded as:

... An inquiry process for understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants and conducted in a natural setting.

Qualitative researchers generally study a phenomenon in an open-ended way, without prior expectations, and they develop hypotheses and theoretical explanations that are based on their interpretations of what they observe. While observing, qualitative researchers try not to draw attention to themselves. That is, they try to be unobtrusive so that they will not have an influence on the naturally occurring behaviour being studied. Qualitative researchers view human behaviour as dynamic and changing, and they advocate studying phenomena in depth and over an extended period of time. The product of qualitative research is usually a narrative report with rich description rather than a statistical report (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:312).

A qualitative research design is not entirely pre-planned. It is flexible and emerges during the research. Typically the qualitative researcher selects a topic and generates preliminary questions at the start of the research study. During data collection and analysis, if any of the questions are found to be naive or less important, they can be changed or modified. This is one of the reasons that qualitative research is often said to be an emergent or fluid type of research (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:312).

There are two parts to the collection of qualitative information in this research project. Firstly, the researcher will conduct a literature study. In order to conceive the research topic in a way that permits a clear formulation of the problem, some background information is essential. This is obtained mainly by reading relevant publications. This process is called a literature review (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:22).

1.7.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin this research an investigation of relevant literature will be undertaken. The purpose will be to assist in identifying relevant ideas and to form a theoretical basis for this research.

The literature study will, as stated earlier, increase the researcher's understanding of the following:

- ❖ A broad definition of the concept of “play” and the value thereof.
- ❖ The development of children’s play.
- ❖ A brief understanding of the concept of “selective mutism” and the symptoms of this childhood anxiety disorder.
- ❖ The importance of play to the child’s social development.
- ❖ The importance of the child acquiring social and communication skills.

The second part of the data collection process will be an empirical research project which aims at implementing the following procedures:

- ❖ The researcher intends to base her study on an individual learner; therefore this dissertation will be based on a single case study.
- ❖ The researcher will design observational checklists which will provide qualitative information regarding the importance of play as a tool to assist the non-social learner with the acquisition of social and communication skills.
- ❖ Prior to the learner being assessed, his mother will be asked to complete an interview. The researcher chose the mother for this purpose as she is able to shed more light on the biological information which is vital for the research. The researcher will formulate specific questions which explore basic developmental stages and more specifically social and communication skills demonstrated by the learner in an informal environment.
- ❖ The data collection procedure will include various observations, anecdotal records and photographs of the learner during free spontaneous play sessions. These observations, anecdotal records and photographs will be transcribed and interpreted.
- ❖ Educators in the pre-school phase will be requested to complete two questionnaires (pre-test/ post-test) after observing RS during an outdoor play session.

1.7.3 Observation

In research, observation is defined as the unobtrusive watching of behavioural patterns of people in certain situations to obtain information about the phenomenon of interest (Johnson & Christensen, 2000:147).

According to Gordon and Browne (2004:225), observation is the ability to observe – to “read” the child, understand a group, “see” a situation – and as such is one of the most important and satisfying skills a teacher can have. Observation is the basis of the majority of a teacher’s work. It influences how a teacher sets up the environment and how and when it will be changed. It helps a teacher create the daily schedule, planning appropriate time periods for various activities. It allows the teacher to make sense of and respond well to the many interpersonal exchanges that mean so much to parents and caregivers alike.

Bentzen (2000:v) states that observation is the primary means of assessing young learners. Observing learners is not merely a casual activity, but should be based on a sound knowledge of developmental theories and practices. For instance, Bentzen (2000:v) says that to watch children play, the teacher must understand what play is, and know the theories regarding play, the different forms of play, and the developmental levels of play.

In this research the learner will be observed in order to view his interaction with adults and peers as well as how he responds to his educator and peers in the pre-school classroom setting. The researcher intends to take on the role of a participant observer.

1.7.4 The role of the researcher: Participant observer

Participant observation has been defined by Flick (1998:141) as “a field strategy that simultaneously combines document analysis, interviewing of respondents and informants, direct participation and observation, and introspection”.

The outcomes of observation are only as good as the observer. Being a good observer requires self-awareness, sensitivity, knowledge about young children and their development, knowledge about cultural differences and environmental expectations and the ability to integrate observational information with other assessments and to translate these results into meaningful instruction or intervention strategies.

The parents of the chosen research participant will be asked permission to allow the researcher to observe their child in his classroom setting. The main reason for this is so that the researcher can observe how this learner interacts socially with his peers and adults in the pre-school classroom. It might also allow the researcher to establish the validity of some of the answers given during the interview. By observing the learner, the researcher may be able to find consensus between what was actually observed and the information gained from the literature study as well as the questionnaires, checklists, anecdotal records and the interview.

1.7.5 INTERVIEW

The mother of the chosen learner will be interviewed. The parent will be interviewed to obtain her view on the nature of her child's social interactions and social communication with the adults and peers in the pre-school classroom and in his home environment. An unstructured interview with a schedule will be used.

1.7.6 UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEW WITH A SCHEDULE

The unstructured schedule contains a small number of topics or themes that the researcher wants to cover during the interview. However, the sequence of the interview can differ since the natural flow of conversation is followed (Gorman & Clayton, 1997: 126).

The topics for the unstructured interview will be identified during the literature research which may bring pertinent questions to light for the researcher to ask during the interview with the parent.

The next section will define pertinent terms that are used in the title of this dissertation so that the reader has a clear understanding of these terms.

1.8 ELUCIDATION OF CONCEPTS

It is important for the researcher and the readers to have a clear understanding of the principle terms which will be used throughout this study. Thus, in each case the term's specific meaning relevant to this research will be emphasised. The following terms and key concepts require particular emphasis because of their importance to the study.

1.8.1 Play

“The ability to play is one of the principal criteria of mental health” (Almon, 2003:1).

While various meanings are applied to play, researchers have found certain characteristics that are typical of play. According to Riley and Jones (2010:146), play involves the following criteria: 1) intrinsic motivation to participate, 2) active involvement of players, 3) non-literal meanings of the activity, 4) focus on participation rather than outcome, 5) meaning of activities and objects supplied by players, and 6) flexibility of rules.

Play is usually referred to as only those activities that are freely chosen and directed by children and arise from intrinsic motivation. This is the kind of play that is most critical for children’s overall development. It emerges from the child’s own drive to make sense of the world and is not imposed, directed, or controlled by adult agendas.

Sometimes, however, adults need to intervene to help children get started on play or to redirect them from destructive play (Miller & Almon, 2009:65).

Riley and Jones (2010:146) propose that “play is not a luxury but rather a crucial dynamic of healthy physical, intellectual, and social-emotional development at all age levels”.

Play is a major mode for learning in early childhood. With sensible boundaries and support from teachers, it leads to enormous growth in all aspects of the child’s development – cognitive, social, emotional, imaginative, and physical. Furthermore, it is the primary tool through which children explore their interests, express their joys, and process their fears, disappointments, and sorrows (Miller & Almon, 2009:24).

The power of play as the engine of learning in early childhood and as a vital force for young children’s physical, social and emotional development is beyond question. Children in play-based kindergartens or preschools have a double advantage over those who are denied play: they end up equally good or better at reading and other intellectual skills, and they are more likely to become well-adjusted healthy people (Miller & Almon, 2009:8).

Playing has long been recognised as a critical aspect of childhood and child development. Some of the earliest studies of play started in the 1890’s with Stanley Hall, the father of the child study movement that sparked an interest in the developmental, mental and

behavioural world of babies and children. The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) published a study entitled: “The Importance of Play in Promoting Healthy Child Development and Maintaining Strong Parent-Child Bonds” (Ginsburg, 2006). The report states: free and unstructured play is healthy and – in fact – essential for helping children reach important social, emotional, and cognitive milestones as well as helping them manage stress and become resilient”.

Play is mainly children’s “work”. They devote to it most of their thoughts, energy, and time. Play is an educational process – one of the vital forms of self-education. It is an activity by which every individual obtains basic knowledge and wisdom. Through play, children learn for themselves what no one else can teach them. Children’s play is an intrinsic and vital part of their lives. “Play involves a free choice activity that is non-literal, self-motivated, enjoyable and process oriented. Critical to this definition is the non-literal, non-realistic aspect. This means external aspects of time, use of materials, the environment, rules of the play activity and roles of the participants are all made up by the children playing. They are based on the child’s sense of reality” (Wardle, 1987:27).

Young children learn many skills through play and social interactions with their peers. Skills such as understanding social roles, sharing, communicating, and appropriate responding to situations are learned in this manner (Terpstra & Tamura, 2008:405).

Social play is about relating to others, playing and making friends – all of which are key elements for social inclusion, adjustment and well-being. From the understandings of play discussed briefly above, play is indeed a most worthwhile, critical and necessary aspect of early childhood development and as such is regarded as a crucial part of the pre-schoolers day.

Adults are convinced that one needs to “teach” young children. It is certainly true that adults need to set an example in all kinds of activities. It is also suggested that adults need to create appropriate spaces where children can play and learn, and that they need to lend a helping hand – and at times even intervene when things are going wrong. But mostly they need to honour the innate capacity for learning that moves the limbs and fills the souls of every healthy child. The child’s love of learning is intimately linked with a zest for play (Almon, 2003:1).

The concept of play and the social benefits thereof will be discussed in greater detail in the literature review in Chapter Two.

1.8.2 SELECTIVE MUTISM

“Aphasia voluntaria” states that the absence of speech was considered to be under the control of the child’s will. In 1934, the disorder began to be called selective mutism (SM), a name that still implied purposefulness on the part of the silent child. In the 1994 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM IV) the disorder was renamed selective mutism. This name is considered preferable because it suggests that the child is mute only in certain situations, without the implication that the child remains silent on purpose.

Nowakowski, Cunningham, McHolm, Evans, Edison, St. Pierre, Boyle and Schmidt (2009:271) refer to selective mutism (SM) as a disorder in which children fail to speak in certain situations, usually outside the home, despite speaking normally in other situations, usually the home. Selective mutism is characterised by a child’s inability to speak in one or more types of social situations, although the child is developmentally advanced to the point that speech is possible. The child speaks proficiently in at least one setting, most often at home with one or both parents, and sometimes with siblings or extended family members.

The most common place for children to exhibit mute behaviour is in the classroom, so the disorder is often first noticed by teachers. Because of this occurrence, selective mutism is most frequently diagnosed in children of pre-school age through to the third year of the foundation phase (Grade Two). As the expectation of speech becomes more evident, selective mutism can have more pronounced negative effects on academic performance. It has been shown in later research that children, who do not talk in classroom settings or other social situations because the language of instruction is not their first or mother tongue, are not necessarily considered to have the disorder of selective mutism (Davidson 2010:pages unknown).

Nowakowski et al. (2009:273) add that one area of importance in terms of its impact on children’s functioning is whether SM affects children’s performance in school. Verbal participation at school is considered an important part of the learning process. Given that SM is characterised by a lack of speech, it is reasonable to suspect that children with SM

may score lower on tests of academic abilities due to their inability to ask questions when they require clarification. Nowakowski et al. (2009:273) continue by stating that based on the current literature, it appears that children with SM or classical symptoms of SM have lower receptive vocabulary and expressive language abilities.

Chapter Two fully explains the concept of selective mutism will be fully explored in conjunction with the behaviour typically displayed by the chosen research participant. Various common aspects will be examined to see if they are applicable to the learner's situation.

1.8.3 Socialisation

Socialisation is a general term used for the many different ways and processes by which children come to be able to function as members of their social community. It is in part, a process of learning and in part a process of being taught, but modern views of socialisation also stress the active role of children in making sense of their social world and constructing their own ways of being part of their social group (Oates, 2004: page unknown).

Social competence is important to bring to school. It is believed that children who start school able to interact effectively with their peers and teachers, and to adjust and adhere to school routines and procedures for conduct, are more likely to be successful learners (Porath, 2009:101). Socially competent children have the capacity to understand others' internal states and relate them to their actions; in other words, they grasp why others may think, feel, and act the way they do (Porath, 2009:100).

Porath (2009:100) found that social competence includes the ability to analyse and reflect on one's own activities and interactions and those of others in social settings. The classroom is a complex social setting requiring understanding of the expectations and roles of teachers and peers and adaptation to a particular set of social rules and responsibilities. Moreover, there are "contexts within contexts" in classrooms, as groups, friendships and instructional situations evolve and change over time.

Fisher and Haufe (2009:1) state that social issues can negatively affect a child's learning and self-esteem, making it difficult for them to establish positive relationships. The authors

continue further by stating that it is crucial that these issues are addressed and that social skills are taught at an early age.

Social skills or “pragmatics” are a vital part of living and functioning in our world today. Many children are subjected to factors such as delays in speech and language, neurological development, cognitive disabilities, lack of exposure to the appropriate skills, low socioeconomic status, late intervention and environmental factors which impact the development of social skills (Fisher & Haufe, 2009:11).

Fisher and Haufe (2009:11) go on to add that positive social interactions are a crucial skill children need to develop in early childhood. The authors note that “peer relationships in particular contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which we function as adults”.

Play serves as a bridge for children to social situations and gives them an opportunity to learn the rules for getting along with others. Children can make discoveries, reason, and think alone, but they need to communicate with others whose dimensions of thought are about the same as their own – other children. The imaginary world of the child needs other children who have similar experiences, capacities, and ways of expression. Most adults cannot reach the level of understanding and the peak of enthusiasm for a child’s make-believe situations that another child can. Children playing and socialising together learn from one another that their experiences, feelings, and ideas are similar. This encourages the self-confidence of each child and leads to a group feeling. Group play also gives each child an opportunity to experiment with being a leader as well as a follower, a situation that rarely occurs outside of play (“Play”. 2010. Available at <http://kids.britannica.com/comptons/article-206689/play>. Accessed: 24 July, 2010).

Social skills consist of the ability to relate to others in a reciprocally reinforcing manner, and the ability to adapt social behaviours to different contexts (DiSalvo & Oswald, 2002:198).

Fisher and Haufe (2009:13) state that “social skills are necessary to help students interact with one another and others in and out of the classroom”. Significant consequences may occur for children of pre-school age as a result of delays in social competence.

Researchers have shown that many children experience failure in pre-school due to difficulties with their skills and behaviour (Lane, Stanton-Chapman and Phillips, 2007:86).

In the literature review that follows in Chapter Two, the lack of social skills will be discussed with reference to the participant in the case study and the possible implications for this will be investigated.

1.8.4 COMMUNICATION

Durkin (2009:291) states that language is a gift of special significance to our species. From infancy, language is integral to just about everything one does, sharing, understanding, perceiving and achieving.

Children's early experiences with language and literacy are vital to their later learning (Riley & Jones, 2010:147), Play allows for the practice of literacy skills. A critical part of literacy learning is language development. Very young children begin their path to later literacy as they hear and use language in their environment (Riley & Jones, 2010:147) Language provides the means for the children to create play scenarios. Moreover, language allows children to interact with others, helping them to learn the expectations of their socio-cultural environment (Riley & Jones, 2010:148). Riley and Jones (2010:148) add that as children play together, they develop their understanding of language and how it allows them to interact with people in their environment.

The importance of learning to talk is central to all other aspects of early childhood development. It is very important for social and emotional development and for the development of intellectual abilities. Being able to talk allows children to gain control over their social and emotional world. Coplan and Weeks (2009:240) reveals in their research that communication skills are viewed as an important contributor to social competence in childhood.

Durkin (2009:291) asks the question: What of those who speak softly, speak little or, on occasion, speak not at all? They have language but may not always employ it as effectively as some of their more outgoing peers. They have social capacities and motivations, but are not always realising them as fully, or as comfortably, as do others.

There is a strong relationship between language and make-believe. Both language and symbolic play involve the ability to represent the world mentally to oneself. It is not surprising, therefore that the developmental patterns of language, communication and play are parallel and that language impairment is related to deficits in symbolic play. A young child, whose language is limited, is better able to express his feelings and understand his world through play rather than through the communication of complicated words.

Delays in speech and language development can significantly affect a child's social skills and can impede appropriate interactions with their peers. Children with speech and language delays can become frustrated and conflicts can frequently occur due to misunderstandings (Fisher & Haufe, 2009:33). Studies of pre-school and school-age children with language delays indicate that deficits in language are associated with increased problem behaviours (Fisher & Haufe, 2009:33).

The students in our classrooms who have language delays often lack social skills because they cannot clearly communicate with peers and adults which, in-turn leaves them overwhelmed and frustrated. When children are delayed in language development, they may have difficulty in peer social interactions that require communication skills for play and problem solving (Fisher & Haufe, 2009:33).

The problem that exists in this research which will be explored in more detail is that of the research participant, who is unable to play competently with his peers and refuses to communicate verbally with them in any situation.

The researcher hopes to examine the ways in which play is beneficial in facilitating children's social and communication skills.

1.9 PROGRAMME OF INVESTIGATION

This dissertation comprises five chapters. A brief summary of each chapter now follows:

- ❖ **Chapter one** clarifies the purpose and relevance of the study. It presents the research problem.
- ❖ **Chapter two** provides an in-depth literature study. This will focus on the concept of play with reference to the social development of the pre-school child who presents

typical symptoms of selective mutism as well as non-social and non-communicative behaviour. The play programme to be implemented to assist the pre-school child will be discussed briefly here.

- ❖ **Chapter three** discusses the research design that will be implemented in the empirical research section of this study. Aspects such as data collection and analysis methods as well as observation checklists will be detailed.
- ❖ **Chapter four** analyses and discusses the findings of the study. A summary of the empirical research will be given and finally the results of the interview and observations undertaken will be discussed. Reference will be made of the initial research statement presented in Chapter one.
- ❖ **Chapter five** briefly summarizes the content and findings of the dissertation. Further, the limitations and recommendations as well as possibilities for further research will be outlined.

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has been critical in orientating and setting the focus for the research as well as ensuring that the research remains focused on its major theme.

Chapter one provided the reader with a basic overview of the study, research methodology with regard to problem formulation, aims and objectives, as well as the problem statement and approach. It also discussed the strategy and work procedure, along with a brief explanation of key concepts involved in the study.

This lays the foundation for the following chapter; the literature overview, in which play, social communication and social skills are discussed in greater detail.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE STUDY: THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY TO THE CHILD'S HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This literature study aims at exploring the concept of “play” and hopes to provide an understanding of the term as the basis of describing its importance in all facets of a child’s development. Various features of play will be discussed, giving an insight into the significance of play in the lives and development of young pre-school children, especially for a selective mute learner.

The empirical research component of this dissertation of chapter three aims at designing and implementing a play programme in order to assist the non-social learner with spontaneous social communication and integration. It is therefore relevant to focus on the issues associated with play and its relevance to socialisation and communication.

2.2 EARLY THEORIES OF PLAY

Tepperman (2007:1) asserts that many parents and others have speculated about the meaning and value of play and its effect upon the individual child. Play often seems like a simple activity whose only purpose is to keep a person busy and occupied. In the past, play was often considered a waste of time and frowned upon because it might lead to idleness. But, play is a self-directed activity and for this reason, play is probably more complex than it seems – as complex as human beings themselves. Tepperman (2007:1) states “that pre-schoolers learn differently from school-age children and as such play is essential to early learning. Play is the main way children learn and develop ideas about the world. It helps them build the skills necessary for critical thinking and leadership. It’s how they learn to solve problems and to feel good about their ability to learn”.

According to Hughes (1995:16) early play theorists (Herbert Spencer,1873; GTW Patrick, 1916; Stanley Hall,1899 and Karl Groos,1901) described play as an instinctive mechanism that either promoted physical development or reflected the evolutionary history of the

human species as proposed by the theorists below. Hughes summarises their views as follows:

- Spencer (1873) - play is necessary to allow children to discharge pent up energy.
- Stanley Hall (1899) - Each person's development reflects the evolutionary progression of the entire human species. The purpose of play is to rid children of primitive instincts that are no longer needed in modern adult life (Johnson et al., 1999:7).
- Groos (1901) - play is the body's natural way of preparing itself for the tasks of adult life.
- Patrick (1916) - play was also considered the renewal of energy. He went on to state that when children are tired and relaxed, play keeps them occupied and helps them avoid boredom while they wait for their natural energy supply to be restored.

All of these classical theories of play have serious weaknesses according to Hughes (1995:8). He finds them very limited in scope and only explains a small segment of play behaviour. In spite of their limitations, however, these theories are still important for the following reasons:

- ❖ They give historical perspective to contemporary adult attitudes about play.
- ❖ Several of these theories are still very much with us
- ❖ A number of the modern theories of play discussed below have their roots in the early theories.

Modern theories of play, however, try to determine play's role in child development and in some cases to specify conditions that lead to play behaviour.

Play has been of great interest to scholars of child development and learning, psychologists and educators alike. Bodrova & Leong (2003:50) state that Jean Piaget (1962) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) were among the first to link play with cognitive development. Researchers found evidence that play contributes to advances in "verbalisation, vocabulary, language comprehension, attention span, imagination,

concentration, impulse control, curiosity, problem-solving strategies, co-operation, empathy and group participation” (Bodrova & Leong, 2003:50). The authors continued that Piaget maintained that a primary function of all living organisms was to adapt to the environment and that this could be successfully achieved through play situations (2003:50). Bruner (1972) in Hughes (1995:19) upheld the belief that play situations provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere in which children can learn to solve a variety of problems.

Johnson et al (1999:10) stated that Vygotsky’s views on play were holistic. He considered play to be important to the social and emotional development of children, as well as to their cognitive development; in his view, all three domains of development interrelate.

Bergen (1988:9) observed that Froebel (1782-1852) developed the original kindergarten in which he used play as a medium for education. He observed children, abstracted the essential ingredients of their activities, creating an educational programme from this. He called the educational materials he designed “gifts” and the educational activities “occupations”.

According to Scales, Almy, Nicolopoulou and Ervin-Tripp (1991:16), “Froebel saw play as the perfect medium for self-activity – for the release of the child’s inner powers. He was not content to accept the happy exuberance of play, but he watched for evidences that symbolized the awakening of the child’s inner nature”. Furthermore, Froebel, who emphasized the importance of the earliest play between mother and child, saw school as an extension of the family setting and a place for disciplined social development.

In Italy, more than a half-century later, Saracho & Spodek, (1995:132) postulated that Maria Montessori (1870-1952) also abstracted the essential elements of her method from the natural play activities of children. When developing her methods, she brought materials that she was designing into her classroom and watched children play freely with them. She also advocated placing apparatus at the child’s level facilitating easier access at all times.

Saracho and Spodek (1995:132) theorized that while both the Froebelian kindergarten and the Montessori methods were based on the observations of the play activities of children, the educational methods they derived from play were quite distinct from each other, because they had different views about the nature of knowledge and the aims of

education. Froebel was an idealist; he used materials and the activities of his kindergarten to help children gain the abstract ideas and spiritual meanings he had selected them to symbolize. Montessori was an empiricist; by manipulating her materials, she thought children could be helped to gain a greater awareness of their properties. By using Montessori materials, children could sharpen their abilities to gather and organize their sensory impressions in order to better absorb knowledge.

Thus it can be deduced that the modern concept of play as a medium for learning and development in the early years and especially the value of dramatic play started in the Progressive Era. Play reflected children's free and natural impulses. Play differed from work, which was an activity done for external reward (Saracho & Spodek, 1995:134).

Many people view the psychoanalytic theory as the most important of them all. They hold that play is regarded as a reflection of children's emotional conflicts and developing intellectual competence. Psychoanalytic theory was developed by Sigmund Freud and his followers. Freud speculated that play served as a catharsis that allowed children to rid themselves of negative emotions and to substitute them with more positive ones. According to Freud, children used play as a vehicle to help them master their covert thoughts and overt actions (Saracho & Spodek, 1995:139).

Gordon & Browne (2004:137) wrote that Erik Erikson (1963) believed that through play, children dramatize the past, the present and the future and resolve the conflicts they experience in each stage of development. He also stated that the sense of autonomy and of initiative are developed mainly through social and fantasy play. He suggests that play is "the infantile form of the human ability to deal with experiences by creating model situations and to master reality by experimenting and planning...To 'play it out' in play is the most natural self-healing measure childhood affords". Erikson quoted in Lindberg and Swedlow (1985:60) also theorized that play is a means through which children act out unconscious feelings and ideas. He suggested also that play can also have an ego-building function, since it brings about the development of physical and social skills that enhance a child's self-esteem (Hughes, 1995:16).

Piaget also made extensive observations of young children in play situations and found that when a child plays, he/she engage in activities for the mere pleasure of mastery (Lindberg & Swedlow, 1985:60). Piaget has explained that play "consists of responses

repeated purely for functional pleasure”. According to Hurlock (1978:290), play activities are those “having no rules other than those the player himself imposes and no intended end result in external reality”.

In summary, the major theorists agree that play contributes to children’s development. Play allows children to transform reality and develop symbolic representations of the world in order to meet psychological and physical needs. In addition, the qualitative differences in children’s play reflect different levels of abilities (i.e., from sensorimotor activities to fantasy play). Play can also facilitate children’s development from lower to higher functions and from understanding simple concepts to performing advanced mental activities. Play can help children master their behaviours, beginning with the exploration of their sensory and motor skills and proceeding through to the gradual acquisition of social skills with peers. Moreover, play helps children prepare for the future (Ling-Ling, 2002:page unknown).

2.3 WHAT IS CHILDREN’S PLAY?

Santer and Griffiths (2007:7) state that play is a difficult concept to define. The authors (2007:7) assert that: “Grappling with the concept of play is analogous to trying to seize bubbles, for every time there appears to be something to hold on to, its ephemeral nature disallows it being grasped.” It is perhaps more helpful to consider play as a process that embraces a wide range of behavioural skills, motivations and opportunities. Santer and Griffiths (2007:7) regard play as a multifaceted layer of activities.

Brown (2009:15) asserts that at its most basic level, play is a very primal activity. It is preconscious and preverbal. Like digestion and sleep, play in its most basic form proceeds without a complex intellectual framework.

Duncan and Lockwood (2008:87) define play as a generic term that is applied to a wide range of activities and behaviours. In all contexts, play is a form of activity that exhibits particular characteristics related to the player’s creativity, control, engagement, enjoyment, motivation and purpose and in which the viewpoint and perception of the player are predominant. The authors add further (2008:91) that play is an active form of learning that involves the whole self; it engages both brain and body; it draws on all the senses. Play engages the child physically, intellectually, linguistically, socially and emotionally.

Play is the work of the young and it contributes to all domains of development. Through play, children stimulate the senses, learn how to use their muscles, coordinate sight with movement, gain mastery over their bodies and acquire new skills. Through pretending, they try out roles, cope with uncomfortable emotions, gain understanding of other people's viewpoints and construct an image of the social world. They develop problem-solving skills, experience the joy of creativity and become more proficient with language (Papalia, Olds & Bolles, 2002:275).

Play is the manner in which the learner learns about his or her world. It is essential for his or her healthy development. Play is serious and purposeful. It allows the learner to develop mentally, physically, socially and offers a form of self-therapy, through which confusion, anxieties and conflicts are often worked through (Oaklander, 1988:160).

Play is an invaluable activity in the child's development and forms the basis of all learning in the pre-school years. During the course of each day, the child is involved in some sort of play. Play promotes healthy development. Through play children learn about their physical surroundings, their own capabilities and limitations, social rules and the difference between fantasy and reality.

Saracho and Spodek (in Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2004:171) state that since the 1930's, multiple definitions of play have emerged, influenced by theoretical approaches and focuses of research spanning across a broad spectrum. Researchers assert that play assumes several forms. One perspective describes play as an activity with an educational focus. Youngquist and Pataray-Ching (2004:172) posits that genuine play resides within the child, controlled by the child's acts, driven by the child's motivations and based on the child's sense of reality.

In its strictest sense, "play" means any activity engaged in for the enjoyment it gives, without consideration of the end result. It is entered into voluntarily and is lacking in external force or compulsion (Hurlock, 1978:290).

Play is a most influential learning medium for young children. It is the means in which children learn what they need to know in order to take their places as creative, responsible adults in our complex society. Play is the most essential thing a child can do. Play is not

only the core of a happy childhood, it is the manner in which children learn about their bodies, their environment, ideas, events and the people and objects around them.

While providing a lot of enjoyment, play-based activities allow for differences between children's levels of development. The child gets fully involved in an activity, only when he finds it interesting and derives happiness from it. Therefore pre-school education is most effective when developed around play-based activities.

Play is a very strong tool for developing a child's language. Landreth (1991:10) states that children's play can be fully appreciated when recognised as their natural medium of communication. Play in later childhood is important in social relationships and language will be required to develop and support these. Terpstra and Tamura (2008:405) state that young children learn many skills through play and social interaction with their peers. Skills such as understanding social roles, sharing, communicating and appropriate responding to situations are learned in this manner. All types of play permit a child to practice his language.

Play is a useful expression of the child's feelings, crucially, both positive and negative. Through play, the child learns to direct negative emotions, like jealousy, anger and fear, helpfully. Calm play activities (e.g. reading a book in the book corner) demonstrate an impressive outlet for the child to just be by themselves.

Hess (2006:17) states that play is a primary way through which children socialize in a peer culture. De Witt (2009:237) asserts that play indisputably has an extensive influence on a child's socialisation. It forms the foundation for practically everything that he learns in his early years and through play much of a child's social repertoire is acquired (Gordon & Browne, 2004:546). De Witt (2009:237) continues by stating that it is through play that the child learns to control his environment, increasingly using his imagination and learns to make choices and decisions.

Play is an activity which is concerned with the whole of his being. Play uses every ounce of a child's energy. It encourages his imagination. It develops skills of both body and mind. Play is one of the most important ways in which children learn that feelings can be safely expressed, that aggression and hostility can be controlled and managed and that its energy is available to be used constructively (Cass, 1971:11).

Isenberg & Jalonga (1993:32) makes the statement that play enables children to create understanding of their world from their own experiences and exerts a strong influence on all aspects of their growth and development. Children become empowered in play to do things for themselves, to feel in control, to test and practice their skills and to affirm confidence in themselves. Play is important for children's developing sense of competence.

It is the researcher's opinion that play can develop co-ordination and direct the child's physical actions as there are opportunities to run, skip, hop and jump which develop muscle tone and balance.

Children's play has been described as intrinsically motivating; pleasurable; freely chosen; non-literal; actively engaging; opportunistic and episodic; imaginative and creative; fluid and active and predominantly for the moment and therefore concerned more with the means than ends (Ashiabi, 2007:200).

Play is an essential and critical part of all children's development. Play starts in the child's infancy and ideally, continues throughout his or her life. Play is how children learn to socialise, to think, to solve problems, to mature and, most importantly, to have fun. Play connects children with their imagination, their environment, their parents and family and the world (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey. 2010).

The following quotation sums up the main concept and understanding of the term "play":

"Play is fun. Play brings pleasure. Pleasure comes from doing what one wishes to do and freedom to choose is part of play" (Smart & Smart, 1982:254).

2.3.1 The development of children's play

As children grow and develop, they move through different stages of play. Their progression may involve engaging in different stages at different times, depending on the physical environment and their individual temperament.

According to Pugmire-Stoy (1992:33-55) and de Witt (2009: 134) there are six stages within this period of play development:

- ❖ The new-born: Using the first stage, practice and repetition of reflexes are noted. Although the new-born is awake for relatively short periods, they begin interactions with their first playmates – usually their mother – soon after they are born. de Witt (2009:134) describes this play as gradually developing as the neonate's energy exceeds his biological needs. Initially play is closely linked to activities which are concerned with meeting the child's primary needs and therefore it centres round oral activities.
- ❖ One to four months: Although the young infant's movements, smiles and cooing when handled and talked to obviously indicates responses to enjoyable stimulation, what is commonly regarded as "true" play, does not begin yet. Piaget referred to this stage as practice or functional play. He referred to this type of play as "a happy display of known actions" in which children repeatedly practice their schemes for actions with objects or their own bodies. It is exemplified by the play of the infant, the grasping and pulling, kicking and propelling of arms that infants engage in for the pleasure of mastering the movement (van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales and Alward, 1993:34).
- ❖ Four to eight months: At this stage, a baby can reach for and grasp a rattle and shake it. He has discovered the possession of feet and often uses them as auxiliary claspers. He brings every grasped object to his mouth. The infant plays games such as "Peek-a-boo". De Witt (2009:134) states that these sorts of games predominate in which mother and child lose visual contact and then experience joy at finding one another again. The child learns through his senses as well as his movements (Pugmire-Stoy, 1992:33). They explore objects and people and investigate the effects of their actions on these objects and people. The nature of this play is active.
- ❖ Eight to twelve months: From about eight months, the child sits steadily on the floor, stretches out in all directions for toys within his arm's reach without falling over. He enjoys banging or sliding solid objects such as blocks or bells on hard, flat surfaces.
- ❖ Twelve to eighteen months: In this period, a child becomes increasingly mobile, inquisitive and self-willed and sometimes difficult to control. The child is dominated

by an urge to explore and exploit his environment. Language acquisition is starting to flourish.

- ❖ Eighteen to twenty four months: Between this period the child is able to take advantage of improved control of his body and limbs; engage in many gross motor activities such as pushing, pulling and carrying of large objects; show increased interest in the nature and detailed use of small objects and take advantage of increased independence.

Pre-schoolers spend most of their play time in symbolic play. From about two to four years of age, children learn the use of simple or manageable play materials and use them to satisfy their own purposes. Play at this level is used for the child's own ends rather than a means of accomplishing some result which adults could recognize as a play outcome. This type of play involves the repetition of new skills as they are being learned. One may observe this stage of play when children begin to use simple play materials. Eventually they create and construct things, playing longer and concentrating longer.

They rough out themes around which to organize their play (Butler, Gotts & Quisenberry, 1978:28). Whilst pre-schoolers often engage in fantasy play, it is generally focused on their own experiences. As the child matures, he plays fantasy games, where he might act out rough and aggressive roles, or become a super hero who "saves the day". The pre-schooler might initiate ghost or monster games, in which an unsuspecting person, such as the teacher, becomes the "monster" from whom all the children have to run away (de Witt, 2009:134). The play of pre-schoolers is vigorous, they like to chase one another and climb and jump.

Physical games or play with motion, "rough and tumble" play is popular in pre-school years (Fernie, 1996:2). In this type of play, groups of children are able to run, jump and wrestle. Action patterns call for these behaviours to be performed at a high pitch. Adults may worry that such play will become aggressive, and they should probably monitor it. Children who become skilled in their movements, distinguish between real and feigned aggression, and learn to regulate each other's activity – these are based on fitness and assists in the development of strong muscles and coordination (Krasner,1975:27). Some examples include, "Follow-my-Leader", "Hide and Seek", "Catches or Tag", "Hopscotch" and "Obstacle races".

Brewer (2004:146) went on to state that kindergarteners and primary school children engage in sociodramatic or reproductive play that involves several children in the play episode. Social play revolves around social interaction. One example of this type of play is “rough-and-tumble” play. Butler et al. (1978:29) goes on to state that children progressively use play materials and perform actions in more conventional ways, thereby accomplishing ends that are regulated either by physical reality or by cultural prescription.

Most play of primary-grade children is considered constructive play. This stage generally extends from about seven to twelve years of age. Constructive play occurs when a child uses their imagination and skills to create a product. This type of play leads to an end product (Pugmire-Stoy, 1992:14).

Games with rules become more important in the play of early primary students and the children in the group conform to the goals that the game set out to achieve and the rules by which the game needs to be played. The emphasis on rules forces children to cope with their own desires, such as winning, to the extent that these may conflict with their desire to be liked and accepted by their peers (Butler et al, 1978:29). Games teach the learners on turn taking, the basis of all relationships. Games also reopen doors into the world of pretence and childhood. It reminds the learners of fun and creativity. Games allow learners to be free. According to Teitel (1998:1) it takes the negative stress of socialising out of the social situation, while leaving the positive stress. Games have rules and structure, which make things safe. Games are projective because they allow the learner to present elements of his or her personality that reveal who he or she really is. Most importantly, games are a powerful tool for communication. A game not only facilitates listening, but also demands it. The idea of turn taking exemplifies civilised communication behaviour. It is important that learners learn from an early age the skill of waiting for their turn (Teitel, 1998:6).

“Games with rules”, are the most prominent form of play during middle childhood (Piaget, in Fernie, 1996:2). Games such as board games increase mental and physical skills. Some examples include basic “Snakes and Ladders”, “Checkers” and “Ludo”. Fernie (1996:2) adds that children use games flexibly to meet social and intellectual needs. These games provide children with shared activities and goals and they often negotiate rules in order to create the game they wish to play. Fernie (1996:2) goes on to add that children

can learn reasoning strategies and skills from strategy games like “Checkers”. A predominance of this type of play marks the transition from pre-operational to concrete operational thought in Piaget’s theory.

Computer games assist the pre-schooler to develop his computer skills. Many affluent pre-schools offer a computer period to their older pre-school children. Children as young as 3-4 years can play colour and shape matching games or simply “Paintbrush”. There are many educational computer games available to purchase for the pre-school child.

Educational games encourage sharing, taking turns and communication, all of which are vital elements of social development. Mathematic games involve counting, sorting and matching, all distinct and essential early mathematical concepts. Some examples of educational games include, “Memory/ Picture Lotto”, matching games, sequencing, threading and sorting games and transference activities such as “Logishape, Geostacks and Pegboard games”. Children also enjoy assembling puzzles and building with construction toys. Moulding and creating with play dough or clay is also a vital element of classroom play.

Fantasy games are a type of play considered crucial for children’s development. The functions of dramatic play include the following (Hartley, Frank & Goldenson, 1952:4):

- ❖ Imitate adults.
- ❖ To play out real life roles in an intense way.
- ❖ To reflect relationships and experiences.
- ❖ To expressing pressing needs.
- ❖ To release unacceptable impulses.
- ❖ To reverse roles usually taken.
- ❖ To mirror growth.
- ❖ To work out problems and experiment with solutions.

Games teach children about teamwork and sportsmanship. They also teach children what is good and bad and gives them a chance to learn more about their environment. Games allow children to process information and to make sense of their world in a fun way.

2.4 THE VALUE OF PLAY FOR THE YOUNG CHILD

Children's play is an intrinsic and vital part of their lives. It serves as a means of communication and provides a way to express ideas and emotions that are too complex for verbalisation with a limited vocabulary. Through play, children reveal themselves by acting out their hopes, fears and needs. Play also helps children recognise emotions in themselves and in others.

Play is a natural way in which the child explores, discovers and eventually masters the world around him. For that reason, it is crucial in the development of his abilities at all levels: his thinking and memory, language skills, mobility, hand-and-foot-eye coordination and his social and emotional maturity (Pieterse, 2001:17).

According to several researchers, the value of play lies in the following (de Witt, 2009:130):

- ❖ Play fosters the physical development of the child.
- ❖ Play provides energy and serves to organise the young child's cognitive learning.
- ❖ Play promotes constructive socialisation and the development of empathy.
- ❖ Play enhances the young child's emotional development.
- ❖ Play also plays a vital role in the prevention of stress and the processing of traumatic experiences.
- ❖ Play offers the child the opportunity to be independent, to make his own decisions and thus to become self-reliant.
- ❖ Play develops the child's creativity.
- ❖ Play is relatively free of rules except for self-generated rules.

- ❖ Play is usually controlled and dominated by the child.
- ❖ Play is practised as if it were a reality.
- ❖ Play focuses on the activity and not the product.
- ❖ Play requires involvement and intense interaction from the child.

Play is important in early childhood because it helps prepare the child for school. Engaging in play situations helps to nurture social and language skills. When a child engages in hands-on play activities it helps to refine his listening and reasoning skills. It is also essential in that it aids in the physical development of the child. Outdoor games help to nurture and coordinate the sensory motor development of the preschool child.

Play helps to hone mathematical skills. The child grasps the concept of mathematics at an early stage. It is vital to develop this skill by engaging the child in play activities such as counting objects, teaching him various relationships like short and tall and big and small.

The child also develops self-esteem through play opportunities. Playing invites the child to express his own ideas and thoughts while he explores and masters new materials. The child enjoys “free-choice” activities as they offer the opportunity to take the initiative in his own learning. Brewer (2004:18) also reflects on the development of self-esteem as another vital element of social development. The concept of self is developed gradually; the young child develops a concept of himself as a separate individual over a period of years. Through interactions first with the parents and family and then with peers and others outside the family, children gradually develop a concept of who they are and what they are like.

Brewer (2004:17) states that an important element of social development is the development of personality. Erik Erikson in Brewer (2004:17), concentrated on studying the development of the ego – a sense of self. Building friendships is important in early childhood. Brewer (2004:17) states that forming friendships offers children the chance to learn skills in negotiation and compromise that are necessary for mature social interactions as adults. In addition, having good peer relationships as a child is an excellent predictor of achieving adequate social adjustment as an adult.

To this end, play activities are vital to the developing child. Pieterse (2001:17) says that through play, a child expresses how he sees and experiences his world. Play offers the child a safe environment in which he can dare and explore. Playing with other children develops a child's social skills. He learns to share, to be considerate towards others and that he cannot always be the centre of attention. Play also assists the child to rid himself of excess energy in a positive way. It also encourages a child's concentration and teaches him to order his thoughts and plan his activities. Playing provides many opportunities for problem-solving and teaches the child to take the initiative, to make use of what he already knows and to integrate it with his life experiences.

Wolfberg (2009:4) suggests that research links play (both with objects and with people) to advances in cognitive, social, communicative, linguistic, and emotional development and as such it is a valuable tool. It is a cherished part of childhood that offers children important developmental benefits and parents and teachers alike, the exciting opportunity to fully engage with the child.

Kaltman (2006:2) asserts that the natural need and importance of play for the young child cannot be overemphasized. Everything that a child does that is not adult-directed is play. It is the most important part of a young child's education. Regardless of language, culture, or economic status, young children play. Play is truly a universal experience.

Play is involved in the development of personality. It encourages interpersonal relations, stimulates creativity, adds to the joy of living and advances learning (Caplan & Caplan, 1973). Children need to gain first-hand experience to construct knowledge, develop abstract thinking and generalise their knowledge to new situations. Play is a means by which a teacher may attract children's attention to new ideas and concepts. Educators often think of learning as accompanied by adult guidance and expectations. Play is a voluntary activity that is dependent upon and respectful of individual children's learning pace and children at play are intrinsically motivated to learn (Ling-Ling,2002).

There are many benefits to play. Children gain knowledge through their play. They learn to think, remember and solve problems. Play gives the children the opportunity to test their beliefs about the world. Play allows children to be creative while developing their own imaginations. It is important to healthy brain development. Play is the first opportunity for the child to discover the world in which he lives. Play offers the child the ability to master

skills that will help develop self-confidence and the ability to recover quickly from setbacks. Play allows children to express their views, experiences and, at times, frustrations. (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010)

Kaltman (2006:2) states further that “Play is the way the child learns what no one can teach him. It is the way he explores and orients himself to the actual world of space and time, of things, animals, structures, and people...Play is a child’s work”.

2.5 HOW CAN CLASSROOM PLAY BE PROMOTED?

In order to promote play in the classroom, it is the teacher’s responsibility to create an optimal environment. The general classroom atmosphere is important for any kind of play situations. It should be warm and inviting and most of all, fun! The fantasy section should be appealing to both genders.

Adequate space for play should be provided. The games and activities should be easily accessible to the young child and the play area should be secure and non-threatening. There should be a variety of activities to hold and keep the child’s interest. There should be an ample supply of materials available and all activities and toys should ideally be intact.

Good play equipment is essential for children. It should be chosen with the child’s interests and abilities in mind. Toys, books, musical recordings, games, and other objects for play should show respect for the child’s world. A good plaything stimulates children to do things for themselves. Play equipment should encourage children to explore and to create, or it should offer them opportunities for dramatic play. Playthings must be appropriate for the child’s age and stage of growth and development. They must not be too few or the child will lack stimulation and not too many or this may lead to confusion and lack of concentration (Pugmire-Stoy, 1992:22).

It is advisable to rotate toys and games regularly to ensure that the children’s interest is piqued at all times. If children are to be encouraged to play and if they are to feel that their play has value, a teacher needs to give careful attention to the neatness of the area.

Play becomes enjoyable when friends from the child’s peer group share the play experiences together and it is fundamental that the teacher minimise interference and

prescription to allow the children to experience meaningful, spontaneous play episodes (de Witt, 2009:137).

One thing is constant about the nature of play and that is that play is a messy business. Whilst a good play environment invites the child to enter and change it, it should be orderly enough to be easy to clean up again. There is a place for everything and it becomes fun for the children to know where each object belongs and to put it back at the end of play time.

2.6 HOW CAN ONE PROVIDE FOR PLAY AS WELL AS USING IT IN THE DAILY PROGRAMME?

The researcher is of the opinion that the educator should foster play in the classroom. Musselwhite (1986) in De Witt (2009:140) identifies four kinds of play as a basis for the child's cognitive development:

- ❖ Physical play: this play focuses on action. Play is social, boisterous and often competitive.
- ❖ Manipulative play: this type of play focuses on attempts to manipulate, gain control over or master the environment. Toys such as pegs, blocks, dough and puzzles can be used during this play.
- ❖ Symbolic play: this type of play involves the manipulation of reality. It includes pretend or fantasy play.
- ❖ Games: this refers to play that is governed by rules or conventions such as card games, board games and educational games.

There should ideally be a period of two and a half hours per day set aside for free, spontaneous play. This period of time incorporates both in and outdoor play.

Within the context of this dissertation, only the benefits of classroom play will be investigated. Bearing this in mind, there should be a variety of play experiences available to the learner indoors.

- ❖ A fantasy corner incorporating a variety of items, some of which could include the following: dress-up clothes, dolls and doll equipment such as prams, highchairs, baby utensils, mini-kitchen area incorporating a stove, oven and utensils, perhaps a medical section, including a bed and medical equipment such as make-believe stethoscopes, syringes, bottles and medical trays.
- ❖ A box containing a variety of motor toys including cars, trucks, fire-engines, ships helicopters and planes.
- ❖ An area solely for the purpose of construction using equipment such as wooden blocks of varying sizes, Lego, Lasi, Duplo and other age-appropriate construction toys.
- ❖ A play dough or clay table with a variety of moulds, rollers and cutting equipment.
- ❖ An educational game section stimulating various areas of development. Some examples of games in this area include:
 - Memory lotto
 - Puzzles
 - Picture/ number dominoes
 - Matching, sorting, classifying games
 - Threading, lacing activities
 - Shape/ colour games
 - Variety of board games to be played in groups of between 2 and four players.
- ❖ A book corner where children can take a book and sit quietly and comfortably and read.
- ❖ A creative table where a variety of creative activities such as cutting, painting, drawing, sticking and tracing are on offer each day.

These areas should be vital in capturing the learner's interest. While more formal learning activities could be taking place in one section of the classroom with a specific group of learners, the other learners can be left to actively explore and utilize the play areas

demarcated above. This allows for free, spontaneous play of their choice and without any direction from the teacher. Alternatively, the play can be semi-directed with the teacher giving a specific instruction, for example. "Joe, Jack and John, I would like you to see if you can make a structure that a car or train can move under. You may use whatever you like from the shelves". Whilst the teacher gives a specific instruction, she allows the learners freedom of choice to plan and solve the problem.

2.7 THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN PLAY

Brewer (2004:144) states that the teacher plays a vital role in play within the classroom setting. The teacher must be an observer, an elaborator, a model, an evaluator, and a planner of play.

In observing, the teacher should watch children's interactions with other children and with objects. She should observe the length of time that children can maintain play episodes and she should look for any children who have trouble playing or joining play groups.

Another aspect of the teacher's role is that of elaborator. If the children are playing "going to the hairdresser", the teacher might help them collect items that could be used to represent those found at a hairdressers shop. The teacher might even join in the play briefly and ask questions that would guide the children in thinking through their roles.

Brewer (2004:145) goes on to state that teachers who value play often model appropriate behaviours in play situations. Sometimes the teacher might model play behaviours that will get a play episode started or back on track if it has gone in a direction that she considers negative.

As an evaluator of play, the teacher has to be a careful observer and diagnostician to determine how different play incidents serve the needs of individual children and what learning is taking place as children participate in play.

Finally, the teacher has to serve as planner. Planning involves all the learning that results from observing, elaborating and evaluating. The teacher must plan for new experiences that will encourage or extend children's interests.

2.8 WHAT IS SOCIAL PLAY?

Lutfiyya (1987:47) wrote that “the purest form of relationship among equals exists in social play “and that “the social spirit of play comes to full expression in the deep sense of solidarity we experience when we play together”.

Lutfiyya (1987:47) views play from a symbolic interaction standpoint of social behaviour as continually being constructed by people functioning in a cooperative fashion. Facilitation and making possible this cooperation is language and language use.

Social play is characterized by engagement in non-literal behaviours (an essential component of all forms of play) within the context of a social interaction (Hughes, 1995:186).

Hughes (1995:186) goes on to say that, according to Catherine Garvey (1983), three abilities are essential for social play:

- ❖ The child must have a firm grasp on reality.
- ❖ The child must be able to recognise the existence of and obey the rules for taking turns.
- ❖ The players must share their imaginations when developing the themes of a play episode.

In the pre-school years, children make major strides in social development through the medium of play. Play affords opportunities to share objects and materials in practice, constructive and pretend play; to rehearse scripts and co-operate in sociodramatic play; and to take turns and follow rules in game-like play, all of which enhance social learning and the development of social cognition (Bergen, 1988:129).

Ruben and Thompson in Wolfberg (2009:6) assert that social play fulfils a number of interrelated social cognitive functions that are necessary for developing social competence and forming mutual friendships. Wolfberg (2009:6) goes on to add that since play is important to a child’s growing capacity to understand and relate to the social world, and ultimately to participate in the culture of play with peers, providing opportunities for children to become competent in play is of prime importance.

2.8.1 The development of children's social play

De Witt (2009:133) states that a major scheme for observing children's play and its development was formulated by Mildred Parten (1932). In her studies of young children, Parten observed that social play increases with age. She suggested dividing play according to the social interaction that takes place among children during their play and for the purpose of this dissertation, the six stages most vital are discussed hereafter:

2.8.1.1 Unconcerned or unoccupied play: The pre-school child appears not to be playing but occupies himself by looking at anything that captures his attention. Sometimes he plays with his own body, climbs onto chairs, simply hangs around or sits looking around in the classroom.

2.8.1.2 Onlooker or spectator play: The child spends much time watching others play. This allows the child to make sense of how to play (de Witt, 2009:133). Some children, however, may engage in this type of play for the majority of the time. For these children, low self-esteem, immaturity or a developmental problem may prevent them from participating in play with peers. These children need special support from teachers in order to grow as social individuals (Catron & Allen, 1993:195). This dissertation hopes to address this concern, using a play programme designed to assist the non-social child.

2.8.1.3 Solitary Play: Eliason and Jenkins (2008:28) state that during solitary play, the child acts alone and independently of others. De Witt (2009:133) remarks that the child takes no notice of the other children and makes no effort to communicate with them. Children, as they mature, may still seek solitary play as a means of getting away from it all or because they are goal directed and have something they desire to accomplish.

2.8.1.4 Parallel play: The child individually plays with toys similar to those used by nearby children, but their activities are unrelated. Its purpose may be to allow children to become acquainted with one another or to gain social acceptance, or it may serve as a transition between solitary and more cooperative, interactive play (Eliason & Jenkins, 2008:28)

2.8.1.5 Associative play: In this type of play, the child plays with another child. They communicate with each other and lend and borrow toys (de Witt, 2009: 133). Children engage in basically the same activity, but no attempt is made to divide the play tasks or to organise the activity.

2.8.1.6 Cooperative play: Children organise in a group for some purpose. In this give-and-take interaction, they share not only materials and equipment, but also ideas and goals. Cooperative play is the ultimate play behaviour that parents and early childhood teachers seek (Eliason & Jenkins, 2008:28)

Mildred Parten's work was extremely valuable in helping us to understand the various degrees of social involvement that categorize young children's play. However, modern psychologists wonder if her categories are really developmental stages. Questions have arisen about Parten's implication that solitary play is a sign of social immaturity. A child who plays alone may be incapable of relating to peers, but may instead simply seek solitude to explore play materials or to work quietly on a play project. Pre-school children who engage in a lot of solitary play are not necessarily seen as less popular than their peers (Hughes, 1995:82).

Play experiences provide an opportunity to try out social behaviours, that is, to put social development and thought into action. They build social skills that allow the child to move to higher stages of play (Eliason & Jenkins, 2008:28).

2.8.2 The benefits of social play

According to Hughes (1995:187), social play has benefits in both a general sense and in many specific areas of socialisation. In the most general sense, social play encourages children to focus on the rules that underlie the play episode and makes them aware that certain rules underlie all social interactions. In play, Vygotsky in Hughes (1995:187) argued that play involves an emphasis on symbolic meanings rather than on the specific actions that signify them.

Play can build children's self-confidence and empower their potential (Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Trawick-Smith, 1994). The function of play is to "encourage children to make up the

rules to govern their own interactions and stimulate them to focus on the meaning behind all human social interaction” (Hughes, 1999:193).

Social play facilitates children’s integration into their peer groups, a particular benefit for a child who is socially withdrawn. Certain types of play materials and activities – blocks, clay, music, creative movement and sociodramatic play – have been found to be especially helpful in promoting social integration. Some of these play materials will form the basis of the play programme that follows towards the end of this chapter.

2.9 WHAT IS SOCIAL COMPETENCE?

Brown, Odom and McConnell (2008:4) assert that social competence is displayed in the interactions that occur between an individual child and members of his or her peer group.

Osman (2009: pages unknown) refers to social competence as a person’s interpersonal skills with family, friends, acquaintances, and authority figures, such as teachers and coaches and states that “Social competence refers to those skills necessary for effective interpersonal functioning. They include both verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are socially valued and are likely to elicit a positive response from others.”

According to Davidson, Welsh and Bierman (page unknown: 2010), social competence is referred to as the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviours that children need for successful social adaptation. Despite this simple definition, social competence is an elusive concept, because the skills and behaviours required for healthy social development vary with the age of the child and with the demands of particular situations. A child’s social competence depends upon a number of factors including the child’s social skills, social awareness, and self-confidence. The term social skills describes the child’s knowledge of and ability to use a variety of social behaviours that are appropriate to a given interpersonal situation and that are pleasing to others in each situation. The capacity to inhibit egocentric, impulsive, or negative social behaviour is also a reflection of a child’s social skills.

Social competence is the broader term used to describe a child’s social effectiveness. It defines a child’s ability to establish and maintain high quality and mutually satisfying

relationships and to avoid negative treatment or victimisation from others (Davidson et al. page unknown: 2010).

During the pre-school years, social competence involves the ability to separate from parents and engage with peers in shared play activities, particularly fantasy play. As pre-school children are just learning to coordinate their social behaviour, their interactions are often short and marked by frequent squabbles, and friendships are less stable than at later developmental stages. In addition, physical rough-and-tumble play is common, particularly among boys. During the pre-school and early grade school years, children are primarily focused on group acceptance and having companions with whom they can play (Davidson et al. page unknown: 2010).

2.10 IMPORTANCE OF PLAY AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Duncan and Lockwood (2008:93) state that Vygotsky recognised that play was a vehicle for social interaction, essential for learning, and an opportunity for children to develop confidence and mastery. During the past two decades, a convincing body of evidence has accumulated to indicate that unless children achieve minimal social competence by about the age of six years, they have a high probability of being at risk into adulthood in several ways.

McClellan and Katz (2001:1) note that peer relationships in particular contribute a great deal to both social and cognitive development and to the effectiveness with which one functions as adults. He states that “the single best childhood predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and not classroom behaviour, but rather, the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children who are generally disliked, who are aggressive and disruptive, who are unable to sustain close relationships with other children, and who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk”.

Parents are the primary source of social and emotional support for children during the first years of life, but in later years peers begin to play a significant role in a child’s social-emotional development. Increasingly with age, peers rather than parents become preferred companions, providing important sources of entertainment and support. In the context of peer interactions, young children engage in fantasy play that allows them to

assume different roles, learn to take another person's perspective, and develop an understanding of the social rules and conventions of their culture. In addition, relationships with peers typically involve more give-and-take than relationships with adults and thus provide an opportunity for the development of social competencies such as cooperation and negotiation (Welsh & Bierman, 1998:1).

When children experience serious difficulties in peer relations, the development of social competencies may be threatened. Rejection or victimisation by peers may become a source of significant stress to children, contributing to feelings of loneliness and low self-esteem. When children with poor social skills become rejected, they are often excluded from positive interactions with peers that are critical for learning social skills. Rejected children typically have fewer options in terms of play partners and friends than do accepted children (Welsh & Bierman, 1998:1).

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Wolfberg (2009:34) states that a major contribution of play is its influence on children's social competence. Peer play is an especially important social and cultural context within which children acquire various skills equated with social competence. For instance, they learn to express and interpret subtle social cues to successfully extend invitations and gain entry into peer group activities. They also learn to negotiate and compromise to resolve conflicts over space, materials and play roles.

Kopp, Brown and Baker (1992:45) assert that research has consistently shown that children with developmental delays often have problematic social interactions with others, show fewer initiations of social contact, spend more time in isolated play, and are less responsive to the social bids of others. These delays tend to lead to reduced amounts of

social interaction and social play engagement. In the case of the study child, this statement appears to be merited.

2.11 LANGUAGE, PLAY AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Wolfberg (2009:35) adds further, that play's implicit relationship to language and literacy is supported by a large body of research. Wolfberg goes on to add (2009:35) that in early development, children play with different forms and rules of language. Through experimentation with phonological, syntactic, and semantic rules, they practice and perfect newly acquired language skills and develop meta-linguistic awareness (Wolfberg, 2009:35).

Communication is a key element in social interaction among peers, and to some extent, social communication and social competence is inextricable (Brown et al., 2008:17).

Welsh and Bierman (1998:1) state that social skills is a term used to describe the child's knowledge of and ability to use a variety of social behaviours that are appropriate to a given interpersonal situation and that are pleasing to others in each situation. The capacity to inhibit egocentric, impulsive, or negative social behaviour is also a reflection of a child's social skills. Children who have a wide repertoire of social skills and who are socially aware and perceptive are likely to be socially competent.

The development of social skills is also mediated by the use of language. The early learning of the language of emotions helps children later in life to recognise the emotions of others and, by reading signals accurately, to manage social encounters more successfully. Children learn to match "emotion words" to non-verbal signals such as facial expression, tone of voice or body language ("Language, Play and Social Skills".2009. Available at: <http://www.slc.cambridgeshire.nhs.uk/default.asp?id=13>. Accessed: 10 November, 2010).

If children experience a difficulty with their verbal and non-verbal communication skills, this will affect how they relate to others. A situation could be misinterpreted and/ or an inappropriate response given to someone.

The effects of any difficulty can begin to show, even at pre-school, in terms of forming successful relationships among peers. Peer relationships play an important role in emotional, social, academic and behavioural developments:

- ❖ It is in this context that new social skills are acquired and existing ones refined and elaborated
- ❖ They provide emotional support and the models for behaviour
- ❖ They are the prototypes for subsequent relationships

Children who do not have the support of their peers may be at risk of developing low self-esteem. Strategies employed by schools, such as employing speech, language and play therapists, can help make a difference for those children who experience difficulties in developing appropriate social interaction and communication skills.

Krasner (1975:6) states that it may be that a major function of early language is purely social – a means of establishing and maintaining interpersonal contact in which information exchange is secondary and much is implied rather than stated. Riley and Jones (2010:148) asserts that language allows children to interact with others, helping them to learn the expectations of their socio-cultural environment. Riley and Jones (2010:148) add that as children play together, they develop their understanding of language and how it allows them to interact with people in their environment. Krasner (1975:6) states further that this might be particularly true of speech in play. Analysis of the speech and language of the very young child – particularly at play – should lead to better understanding of the dimensions of the child's social development and social world. The research is carefully examining the ways in which children – even very young children – learn from one another, thus providing information that should be useful in many educational settings. Krasner (1975:6) states that another ultimate benefit is that, by studying the normal development of social speech, it may be possible to detect early failures and abnormalities in the growth of interpersonal behaviour and, as a next step, to find ways of preventing such failures.

A study by Garvey and Hogan (Krasner, 1975:7) has shown that pairs of children of pre-school age can and do produce mutually responsive speech, well beyond simple

exchanges. Further work by Garvey (Krasner, 1975:7) suggests that as early as age three, children have already worked out, in the way they make requests or responds to them, well-advanced social-cognitive patterns or schemata that systematically use conventional language and vocabulary. Language is not only a means for, but an important aspect of, social interaction.

Garvey states in her research that early conversation – especially role-playing conversation – becomes a basis for social contact. It reveals the beginnings of the conventions of mutual understanding that underlie all social discourse. Through interpersonal experience and conversation the child becomes, and can be shown to become, a practicing social being (Krasner, 1975:14).

Garvey's findings confirm that to pre-school children, play is not relaxation from the serious business of life. It is part of the serious business of life. The children are trying on adult roles they will later act – or play – and exploring them. They are learning about things and about relationships. They are sharpening their language skills and social skills. Play includes many things, and with children the transition between play and “real” life is easily made, with children moving back and forth rapidly and without serious discord (Krasner, 1975:14).

Play is flexible. It is not any single behaviour, but it includes many behaviours and a unique opportunity to study them. It often contrasts with “reality”, and yet appears to have its own rules and internal consistency. It includes many kinds of interactions, with rules peculiar to each. It includes ritual play, boisterous activity, and pretend play. When children are alone they often play; and for the purpose of Garvey's research the play had to be spontaneous. Spontaneous play gives the observer of social development an added advantage because it tends to decrease all restraints imposed by external reality. In play, the children can “wing it” – impose their own criteria, make up their own situations, create or adapt their own realities (Krasner, 1975:14).

Play also provides a base for building language (Caplan & Caplan, 1973: page unknown). A number of studies support strong correlations between symbolic play and language. Saltz and Brodie (1982: page unknown) indicate that teaching young children to be involved in thematic pretend and socio-dramatic play can improve their vocabulary abilities. Indeed, McCune-Nicholich and Bruskin (1982: page unknown) point out that

language and play share joint functions at age two. When children play, they are also involved in the communicative function of sharing objects with others. Hence, play is closely associated with language use and communication (Dunn & Herwig, 1992; McCune-Nicolich & Bruskin, 1982). Furthermore, children's ability to communicate about important aspects of play is related to their language development (Brown & Prescott, 1999; McKimmey, 1993).

The link between play and language comprehension is complex and the mechanisms involved are not fully known. When children are regularly engaged in play situations, "they seem to improve over time in their ability to draw meaning from spoken language" (Hughes, 1999:185). So, while play may not be necessary to understanding, sufficient evidence suggests that it serves a facilitative function (ling-Ling, 2002).

Children not only use language in play, but they play with language itself, using it as the resource for play, manipulating the words, playing with sounds or concepts.

At its simplest level, play can be made with the sounds themselves, even with children too young to speak clearly. It can be used for sound effects – motor noises, animal noises. It can be used as a rhythmic accompaniment to motions, for example, clicks and hums. Or sounds can provide a play activity – in rhythmic chanting of nonsense syllables.

Garvey in Krasner (1975:18), states that by the time children are three years old, they usually have considerable command of the language they need. The form of play with words that then is most distinctive is "ritual play", which consists mostly of ritualised repetitions and rhythms with variations on the common themes.

Krasner (1975:19) found that children play with language socially in a number of ways. They play spontaneously with the words themselves and with rhyming; they play with fantasy and nonsense; and they play with the standard conventions of conversation. In each case they change, distort, and make fun of the norms, the accepted forms, and the literal meanings.

All social play requires discrimination between play and not play, the ability to abstract the organising rules or principles from their play expression and to keep them consistent, and the ability to identify a theme and contribute cooperatively to its development. Research

continues to prove that children learn a great deal from play and as such play must be considered an important aspect of children's everyday lives.

2.12 THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

The Down Syndrome Association of South Africa (Lloyd, page unknown: 2010) states that an important part of being human is our ability to communicate with each other in a social sense. The reason for communication is to exchange information between two or more human beings. Talking means children can ask for what they want, share experiences, understand what is about to happen and express themselves when they are hurt, angry or upset. In order for communication to take place the participants must both speak the same language.

When a child struggles to communicate this can lead to problems within his peer group. Children need to form relationships with other people. In order to do this they need to talk about their feelings, their thoughts and to talk about things, events and actions as well as understand other children. When they communicate, they can get people to do things, they can make them react to them. Being able to communicate in the pre-school enables children to play together, to share and to learn together. Throughout life communication underpins the development of friendships, supporting one another and negotiating our way through the world.

Children can communicate verbally by talking, laughing, groaning, listening, or by using non-verbal communication, that is, by making gestures, using body language, eye contact or facial expressions, or written communication. Learning to talk is an everyday activity. Children will communicate because they want to. The human being is a social being above all else.

Brinton and Fujiki (1993:195) state that the ability to participate in social interactions with other people is essential to integration within our society. In recent years, there has been great interest in the development of social skills of young children and the ways in which they use those skills to initiate and maintain relationships with others. It has been observed that as many as 10% of children in the general population have difficulty developing

appropriate social skills. Because language skills play a critical role in social interaction, it seems likely that children with language difficulties would be at particular risk for social failure (Brinton & Fujiki, 1993:195). These difficulties might be compounded by distinct cultural expectations in children from diverse cultures. The authors go on to add that although research is on-going, several studies document how deficits in language form, content and use affect the social interactions of children. These studies strongly suggest that language impairment may have a notable impact on patterns of social interaction.

Brinton and Fujiki (1993:197) conclude by stating that much remains to be learned concerning the association of language impairment and social and emotional domains. Issues such as the relationships between language impairment, social skills, socio-emotional problems, and challenging behaviours, as well as the interaction between language usage and cultural expectations, are of prominent importance. The exploration of these issues will provide information important to the practice of speech-language pathology.

2.13 FOSTERING SOCIAL COMMUNICATION THROUGH PLAY

Play is the socialising experience that allows young children to develop positive, caring attitudes toward others and to build effective skills for interacting with others. Young children learn about themselves in relationship to other people when they establish trusting relationships with adults, make friends within their peer group, learn to cooperate with others, resolve conflicts and exhibit kindness and respect toward different groups of people. A creative play classroom environment enables young children to learn about themselves as social beings in relationship to other children through a variety of play settings and activities (Catron & Allen, 1993:194).

Catron and Allen (1993:194) go on to state that young children become increasingly aware of the needs of others through a variety of play situations. They respond to verbal and nonverbal social cues and learn responsibility and control over their own behaviours. Children begin to establish their separateness from others as they learn to distinguish their emotions from the emotions other children are experiencing.

In order to develop social competence young children must learn to cooperate with peers and act in a socially responsible manner. Children develop a cooperative spirit through

participating in a variety of dramatic play and small group activities (Catron & Allen, 1993:194).

Teachers encourage the development of social competence in young children when they model caring, nurturing interactions with others and establish a classroom climate that promotes cooperation, respectful communication and mutual problem-solving. In addition, providing a classroom environment rich in opportunities for social interactions during play activities allows children to recognise their individual differences and supports their development as social beings (Catron & Allen, 1993:202).

Young children with social communication delays frequently have difficulties engaging with their peers in sustained interactions. To engage in social interactions competently, young children must be able to initiate and respond to social stimuli, take verbal turns, sustain social contact and negotiate conflicts. Play is the primary context in which pre-school children acquire and practice skills essential to developing social competence (Craig-Unkefer & Kaiser, 2002:3)

Craig-Unkefer and Kaiser (2002:3) go on to state that although play offers opportunities to develop relationships with peers, children with limited communication skills and poor social skills may not be able to access the opportunities. The range of language and social skills required for play is considerable. These skills include receptive and expressive vocabulary and social pragmatic skills such as strategies for maintaining the topic of conversation and repairing breakdowns in communication. These linguistic and pragmatic skills overlap with social skills such as initiating and responding to peers and joining in on-going play schema established by peers.

Often children who avoid socialising are referred to as isolates. In a study of children who were found to exhibit signs of social isolation at preschool, Bergen (1988:223) found that these children tend to exacerbate their isolation by spending less time playing and more time watching their peers. They rarely try to influence or structure how peers behave and they spend relatively little or no time in imaginative dramatic play.

Bergen (1988:225) suggests that one way to prepare these isolated children for peer relations is to foster close teacher-isolate relationships in which the child is encouraged to take the initiative. Two specific techniques suggested are “mirroring” in which the teacher

reflects on what the child is doing, may be thinking or feeling, and co-playing, in which the teacher encourages the child to assume a leadership role by imitating the child's actions and following the child's directions.

In order for pre-school children to increase their social skills, Craig-Unkefer and Kaiser (2002:4) suggests an implementation of peer and adult-mediated strategies and interventions. They mention that peer-mediated interventions take advantage of children's ability to learn social and communication skills from peers in the context of play. Because play partners have equal status, peer interactions in play can provide opportunities to gain negotiation skills, role-taking ability and popularity with peers.

In adult-mediated interventions, adults provide the support necessary for children with limited social communication skills to engage in the play of the peer group. Adults may support play by selecting high interest activities and elaborating on the current play level of the child. Adult-mediated strategies to support language during play include:

- ❖ Giving children labels to describe objects.
- ❖ Providing responses contingent on children's communication attempts and assigning meaning and interpretation of their language.
- ❖ Modelling language in context so that children can learn the forms, semantic content and social-communicative use of language appropriate to the interaction.

It is clear that the playfulness of the classroom environment can predispose children to engage in successful social interactions with peers. Sometimes, however, the play itself, the materials used or the activities engaged in, can help timid or socially awkward children interact with their peer group.

2.14 SELECTIVE MUTISM – A BRIEF UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPT AND SYMPTOMS

Given the aforementioned research findings, it is necessary to pay brief attention to selective mutism.

Selective mutism occurs when children are able to speak and do speak in some situations but persist in remaining silent when interacting with some people in some other setting (Cline & Baldwin, 2004:4).

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – DSM1v (1994), the criteria that needs to be considered for Selective Mutism is as follows:

- ❖ Constant failure to speak in specific social situations (in which there is an expectation for speaking, e.g. at school) despite speaking in other situations.
- ❖ The disturbance interferes with educational or occupational achievement or with social communication.
- ❖ The duration of the disturbance is at least one month (not limited to the first month of school).
- ❖ The failure to speak is not due to a lack of knowledge of or comfort with, the spoken language required in the social situation.

Early writers identified the most frequent age of reported onset of selective mutism as three to five years. Population studies tended to confirm age of reported onset as between the age when fluent conversational speech is normally expected and the age of school entry (Cline & Baldwin, 2004:24).

For most of the children who are described as selectively mute, a key moment is said to have been when they started nursery or school. For some the school situation stimulates anxiety that causes a strong adverse reaction (Cline & Baldwin, 2004:61).

Each of the following parameters should be assessed separately and their interactions understood before a complete diagnosis of Selective Mutism can be made:

- ❖ Child: Child's temperament is usually anxious and shy, which leads to social inhibition. This phenotype is often compounded by developmental issues, such as language delay or disorder (cf Appendices N-N4 - Photographs).
- ❖ Family: Often other members of the family are also shy and socially inhibited. This leads to social isolation and a difficulty generally with communication skills, outside

the close family. More often associated with immigration, where families are more likely to have increased stress and are socially ill-at-ease (cf Appendix D - Interview)

- ❖ Environment: these children are pressured to assimilate and to function in another culture with different norms. The school does not help these children to overcome their fears and expects them to learn and use the language of the environment successfully, thus increasing the stress factor (Vlassopoulos & Anagnostopoulos: 2006:6).
- ❖ Research suggests that children who do not talk in classroom settings or other social situations because the language of instruction is not their mother tongue are not considered to have the disorder of selective mutism. The diagnosis of selective mutism may or may not apply to children from immigrant families who feel comfortable conversing in a second language (Vlassopoulos & Anagnostopoulos: 2006:6).

2.15 PLAY PROGRAMME – BDP (BLOCKS, DOUGH & PUPPETS)

For the purpose of this research, the researcher would also like to consider other forms of play, despite considerable research on the relationship between sociodramatic play and social development. Feng (1987:14) supports block play as it has the potential to foster social development through the promotion of positive social exchanges between young children.

Working with block building in an early childhood program has many positive benefits for broadening the minds of children. The process of playing with blocks supports the groundwork for learning in every area of a child's growth. It provides children challenge, visual stimulation and hands-on stimulation. Block play involves the entire child in the ability to be creative. It also touches on many different stages of development of physical, social, emotional, artistic, language, scientific and mathematics growth. Working with blocks gives the child a creative release and basic ease for learning. "in short, 'building with blocks' is exactly what the name implies: building for the child's total growth". (Montopoli, 1999).

Hartley et al. (1952:192) state that **blocks** have been described by many as the most important material in the pre-school classroom. Blocks are universally appealing and they offer the possibility of a broad spectrum of social interaction. Children at play with blocks can play in total isolation. They can play in parallel and they allow for co-operation when children share responsibility for building towers, cities etc.

Feng (1987:14) endorsed the use of block play to promote social development. He emphasised that a child's relationship to the physical world may help that child make "more accurate judgements about the social world". In addition, block play often puts children in many "forced cooperation" situations in which they must either share some of the blocks and build together or forfeit constructing the grandiose structure they had planned to build. They learn to share out of necessity and self-interest, but in the process gain an understanding of how sharing and cooperation can be beneficial to others and to themselves.

It is not unusual in childhood for an activity to begin in total solitude and then evolve gradually into one that is inherently social.

Another appealing play material is **clay or play dough**. Using play dough is an endless tactile learning experience for all children. The use of play dough has the following benefits:

- ❖ It helps to gain control over hand and arm movements which improves co-ordination;
- ❖ Modelling and using cutters and rollers is great for muscle development;
- ❖ Play dough is a natural outlet through which children can express their emotions;
- ❖ Cooperative play and dramatic play can be seen when children use play dough;
- ❖ Discussing what has been made helps build communication skills and develops imagination;
- ❖ Dividing it up can be used later on to help the older child learn about numbers and counting;

- ❖ Playing with play dough with others helps children understand the importance of sharing;
- ❖ Receiving praise and compliments for their “creation” helps children develop their self-esteem and confidence;
- ❖ Play dough can be used as therapy for special-needs children

Source: (“Play dough”. 2010. Available at: <http://www.4akid.co.za>. Accessed: 3 January 2010).

Psychologist, Ruth Hartley, spoke of the “almost magical tongue-loosening quality of clay” (Hartley et al., 1952:192). By this she meant that even the most inhibited of children will often socialise freely when immersed in “clay” play. Clay can serve as a shield behind which children can hide and study their peers until they are ready to enter the group on their own terms.

Puppets are another play activity that is strategically used in the field of social development. The art of puppetry is presenting an inanimate object in the form of a living character. For the purpose of easy manipulation, glove or hand puppets are often used by the pre-school child. Their advantage is that the child’s hand becomes the puppet’s body. Puppets are fascinating – they can be used to initiate discussions in small group settings. They are also used quite effectively in story telling (Chetna Child Resource Centre, 1995:1).

The materials discussed above are very valuable and useful in promoting social communication skills. When the non-social child feels non-threatened in one-on-one play with his teacher, another child can be included in the play until eventually the teacher withdraws and sits on the fringe of the play activity, but is not actively involved in the play conversation.

These materials form the basis of the play programme that was implemented in the researcher’s pre-school classroom to assist RS with the skills required for meaningful play, socialisation and communication.

It is important to clarify here that the play programme implemented was not designed to be complicated, but rather simply intended to introduce the non-social child to other play materials other than the already observed repetitive play with cars and planes. It was anticipated that whilst learning to play with the other materials, he might spontaneously start to communicate with his peer group.

The results of the play programme and the data collected and observations will be analysed in chapter four of this dissertation.

2.16 CONCLUSION

The aim of the literature review has been to better equip the researcher for the empirical research which follows. The researcher has focused on the many facets of play, its importance within the broader context of child development and exploring in more detail, the importance of play and communication within the social context in order to highlight its relevance within this research project. The programme implemented was discussed and the materials used were highlighted as being most crucial for social development.

The following chapter will deal with the empirical research aspect of this dissertation. It will include an explanation of the type of research to be implemented and the methods for using the relevant samples. The measuring assessments to be used in the empirical research section will also be explained.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a continuation of chapter one in the outline of the research methodology used in the study and provides an understanding of the qualitative research paradigm and how it is applied in this study.

3.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Chapter one gives a detailed description of the research problem to be investigated in this dissertation. To summarise chapter one, the research statement that will guide the empirical investigation is the following:

The influence of a pre-school programme on the acquisition of social and communicative skills

The following section will explore the aims of the empirical investigation which will aid the researcher in focusing and delineating the research.

3.3 AIM OF RESEARCH

The aim and objectives of the study were introduced in Chapter one. The objectives, which involved a detailed literature study to examine the concept of play and the value thereof to a child's social development, provided the groundwork for the empirical investigation. The following points are discussed below as they relate specifically to the empirical research project.

1. The researcher will implement a play programme (BDP Programme) using specifically chosen classroom materials (blocks, dough & puppets).
2. Prior to implementing the BDP Programme, one parent will be interviewed to ascertain the parent's perception of the child's social functioning within his family and peer group.

3. The researcher will administer the BDP Programme to a non-social learner, presenting with typical symptoms of selective mutism and will interpret the results from various observational checklists, the parent interview and anecdotal records.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to conduct research, a research design must be chosen. A research design is the plan and structure of the investigation used to obtain evidence to answer the research question (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:31).

In the empirical investigation, a qualitative research design will be followed. The qualitative research, descriptive in nature, aims to explain the results of the programme implemented and the success or failure thereof.

McEwan and McEwan (2003:76) state that “to many, qualitative research is embodied in the term ethnography, which includes both observations made by an individual during an extended stay in a specific culture and the construction or interpretation of that culture in a written form”.

The research design consists of the following:

- A **baseline pre-testing** phase comprising a week’s observation of the study child involved in free, spontaneous periods of play.
- A phase, comprising **thirty individual sessions**, whereby an intervention programme (BDP Programme) will be implemented.
- A **post-testing** phase comprising a week’s observation of the study child involved in free, spontaneous periods of play.

3.4.1 Research paradigm

For this study, the use of the qualitative research paradigm was most appropriate because of the nature of the topic to be researched as it involves the study of human behaviour in its own unique setting. In contrast to quantitative methods, the qualitative paradigm aim, as postulated by De Vos, Fouché, Poggenpoel, Schurink and Strydom (1998:243), is to

“understand reality by discovering the meanings that people in a specific setting attach to it”.

In the study, children engage in experiences, activities and discussions through play episodes which challenge them to make meaning of their social environment and as a result, build a more complex understanding of themselves and the world around them. Cohen and Manion (1994:36) suggest that the qualitative, interpretive paradigm is characterized by a concern for the individual and as such, the researcher will be focusing this study on a single child.

3.4.2 Research method

Berg (2004:7) states that the purpose of research is to discover answers to questions through the application of systematic procedures. The systematic procedures which the researcher chose derive from a qualitative research approach as it seeks answers to questions by examining a social setting, namely the pre-school classroom and the study child who inhabits that setting.

The researcher applied the qualitative research method to this study. According to Fouché (2005a:268) “... the qualitative researcher almost always develops their own designs as they go along using one or more of the available strategies or tools as an aid or guideline”. Creswell (1998:2) defines design in the qualitative context as “the entire process of research from conceptualising a problem, to writing the narrative”. According to Fouché (2005a:116) the qualitative methods usually do not have a precisely delimited problem or hypothesis and the purpose of the method or design is to discover important questions, processes and relationships, and not to test them. Usually the problem statements develop logically from the review of the literature. A tentative problem should be formulated, but is able to adapt and change direction and scope according to the progress of the research that is being conducted.

3.4.2.1 A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Bogdan and Biklen (1998:14) state that research methods on human beings affect how these persons will be viewed. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2001:16) state that there is greater flexibility in both the strategies and the research process of qualitative

studies, compared to quantitative methods. Therefore, qualitative procedures provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the people whom researchers observe or talk to. In light of this, the researcher's mode of enquiry was qualitative.

Creswell (1998:15) defines the qualitative approach as an investigation process of concepts, based on the description and exploration of social and human problems. The aim of this research was to determine if a programme of classroom play could assist a preschool learner with the acquisition of social and communicative skills. As far as possible, the study took place in a natural and informal environment. According to Fouché (2005a:116) the qualitative method aims to discover important questions, processes and relationships, and not to test them. Creswell (1998:17-18) further explains that the qualitative approach does not intend to identify variables, explain behaviour through change or create new theories, but to describe the experience of participants in detail.

The researcher chose a qualitative method in order to investigate the influence of play on a pre-school non-social child and evaluate the effectiveness of such a programme on his social and communication skills.

The researcher identified some advantages of using qualitative methodologies in a school environment. These are listed as follows:

- ❖ The capacity to observe a non-social child's behaviour within the school context. This was done through daily observations of his integration within his peer group.
- ❖ The opportunity to be close to him allowing the researcher the opportunity of capturing and presenting data as distinctly and accurately as possible. This was achieved by the researcher being the study child's class educator.
- ❖ The researcher was the main data collection instrument.

3.4.2.2 The researcher as instrument

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:15) assert that qualitative research is more concerned with understanding the social phenomena from the participants' perspective as well as immersion in the situation. This was achieved by the researcher's participation in the play

situation. There are three possible roles, all of which the researcher was involved in, namely:

1. The researcher observed the child and his interactions with his peer group.
2. The researcher participated in order to develop trust and acceptance of herself as an outsider and to ensure reciprocity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:436).
3. The researcher was an inside observer, which McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 435) describe as a researcher who occupies a formal position in the organisation in which the research is being conducted. This occurred as the researcher was the classroom educator.

McEwan & McEwan (2003:79) put their fingers on the essence of a qualitative research: "You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture that takes shape as you collect and examine the parts".

3.4.2.3 The case study

The case study is a way of organising social data for the purpose of viewing social reality. It examines a social unit as a whole. The unit may be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution, or a community. The case study probes deeply and analyses interactions between the factors that explain present status or that influence change or growth (Best & Kahn, 1998:248).

According to Fouché (2005b:272) a case study is defined as an observation of a process, activity, event, program or individual within a certain time or place. In conformity, an instrumental case study (Fouché, 2005b:272) is defined as follows: to gain a better understanding of the social issue – in this case the social issue centred around a pre-school learner who found it difficult to interact both socially and communicatively with his peers in a classroom setting. Fouché (2005b:272) is further of the opinion that this case study merely serves the purpose of facilitating the researcher's gaining of knowledge about the social issue.

Case studies include different concepts, namely detailed descriptions of the case, interviews and/ or documents (Creswell, 1998:36).

Possible advantages of a case study are:

- ❖ Case studies are down-to-earth and attention holding, in harmony with the reader's own experience. And thus provide a "natural" basis for generalisation.
- ❖ Case studies recognise the complexity and "embeddedness" of social truths.
- ❖ Case studies are a "step to action". They begin in a world of action and contribute to it.
- ❖ Case studies present research or evaluation data in a more publicly accessible form than other kinds of research report.
- ❖ Case studies are capable of serving multiple audiences.
- ❖ Case studies may contribute towards the "democratisation" of decision-making (and knowledge thereof). At its best, they allow readers to judge the implications of a study for themselves.

Source: Cohen & Manion (1994:123)

3.4.2.4 Data collection

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001:406), in the data collection phase, the enquirer begins to "hear", "see" and "read" what is going on. Henning, van Rensburg and Smit (2004:6) maintain that data collection should involve at least two methods or sources and preferably three which should ensure that the phenomenon has been investigated by means of different sources of information, thus giving the data variety. The researcher used six sources in the study as detailed below:

- ❖ **Parent interview** (Appendix D)

Henning et al. (2004:53) define the interview as a mechanism, if used methodically according to strict principles of objectivity and neutrality, which will yield information that represents reality more or less "as it is" through the response (and the filters) of an interviewee. The interview that was conducted was a one-on-one semi-standardised interview, which Berg (2004:80) describes as the type of interview involving the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and special topics. This interview

was used to gain a detailed picture of the participant's belief about, or perceptions or accounts of the particular topic (Greeff, 2005:296). The interview took place without the researcher bringing any prior information, experiences or opinions about the specific subject to the table, which led to bigger insight.

The semi-standardised interview consists of the following: a time and place that was acceptable for the participant, and the interview schedule (cf Appendix D) that was used to guide the interview. The interview took place at a specific place that suited both parties and where interruptions were restricted (Greeff, 2005:294).

❖ **Checklists** (cf Appendices E & F, Appendix G, Appendices H & I)

Johnson et al. (1999:218) states that checklists are observational instruments that specify exactly which behaviours to look for as well as providing a system for recording the presence or absence of play behaviours.

Checklists make play observation more systematic by focusing attention on specific aspects of play. Checklists also provide a quick way to record information, making them very time efficient.

❖ **Observation schedule/ Anecdotal records** (cf Appendices J & K)

Henning et al. (2004:82) stress that observation implies seeing as well as observing with the other senses.

Observation is the key to understanding children's play behaviour. By watching children at play, we can learn much about their play activities – the types of play they like to engage in, the toys and play equipment they prefer to use, the spaces in which they choose to play and their interactions with the peers around them (Johnson et al., 1999:218).

Observation is the starting point for adult facilitation of play. As the researcher is assessing a non-social child, who displays typical selective mutism behaviour, it is absolutely imperative that observation form a major aspect of this research study.

Anecdotal records are brief narrative accounts written by teachers and may include important developmental milestones or events that are a source of concern. Anecdotal records are useful to help teachers chart development, test their hypotheses, identify

possible problem areas or review the effects of instruction or other forms of intervention (Brassard & Boehm, 2007:66).

❖ **Questionnaires** (cf Appendices L & M)

Questionnaires are an inexpensive way to gather data from a particularly large number of respondents. The questionnaire should be viewed as a multi-stage process beginning with a definition of the aspects to be examined and ending with the interpretation of the results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001: 505).

❖ **Photographic records** (cf Appendices N & O)

Photographs were taken of RS at various intervals throughout the programme and are included for interest.

3.4.2.5 Ethical measures

According to Heaton (2004:77) certain ethical and legal issues must be taken into account when doing social research.

Strydom (2005a:56) states that ethics guide the researcher in what is proper in research and what is not. Ethics is described as a set of accepted morals, whereby the rules and expectations related to desired behaviour as well as the most appropriate conduct towards others involved in the research is guided. The following ethical measures guided the research process:

❖ **Informed consent**

The principle of informed consent was followed to ensure that the teachers' and the parent who took part in this study and were involved in completing a questionnaire/ interview, were informed regarding the aim and procedures of the research.

Cohen & Manion (1994:350) define informed consent as “the procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of facts that would be likely to influence their decisions”.

Berg (2004:64) defines this as the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free of any element of fraud, deceit, duress, or similar unfair inducement or manipulation.

Strydom (2005a:59) states that obtaining informed consent implies that all possible information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures that will be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which participants could be exposed, be rendered to potential participants. In the case of this study the respondent was too young to sign a consent form. Therefore it required that the mother of the research participant sign the consent form and give permission for her son to participate. She was also informed of her right to withdraw her child from the study at any time (cf Appendix B).

The researcher also obtained informed consent from the principal of the school on the 15th May, 2009 (cf Appendix A) to use the school as a research site.

❖ **Violation of confidentiality**

This implies an undertaking by the researcher to protect the anonymity of the research participant (Strydom, 2005a:61). In this study, participants (mother and son) were given the assurance that personal names will not be mentioned in the research report at any stage. Their names were therefore replaced by pseudonyms. Participants were also assured that the data will only be used for the stated purpose of the research and that no other person will have access to the collected data.

Berg (2004:65) states that in qualitative research, because participants are known to the investigators, anonymity is virtually non-existent. For this reason, it is important to provide the subject with a high degree of confidentiality.

❖ **Integrity**

Integrity guided the entire process of the study. The researcher ensured that no deception of respondents occurred and that facts were not deliberately misrepresented. The real goal of the study, the real functions of the participants in the research and the possible experiences the respondents may be exposed to, were discussed with them (Strydom, 2005a:60). In terms of the literature study, all sources utilised were acknowledged.

❖ **Competency**

Strydom (2005a:63) states that researchers are ethically bound to ensure competency to undertake research. The researcher ensured that the study was conducted in a well-planned and ethically correct manner. Objectivity was maintained and the boundaries between being a researcher and not the learner's educator in this research were maintained.

3.4.2.6 PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

Qualitative researchers selectively choose persons, situations and events that are most likely to yield information-rich data about the anticipated problems (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:433).

The researcher purposefully chose a pre-school learner, aged 4 years, with whom she was in daily contact and who presented with an intriguing problem which she felt could be assisted through the implementation of a classroom-centred play programme.

3.4.2.7 PROCEDURE OF RESEARCH

The research was conducted over an eight week period. The first week involved baseline pre-testing. The following six weeks saw the implementation of the play programme and the final week involved the post-testing.

The researcher was at school by 07:30 each morning and left the school by 13:30 each day. The specific research conducted was done in 10-15 minute daily blocks over the eight week period.

3.4.2.8 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

When compiling data from interviews or any other medium, it was important to keep the data accurate and trustworthy. In qualitative research, determining validity and trustworthiness of research results is not the same as in quantitative research which focuses on measuring, but in the manner of data collection and the validity and trustworthiness of the total research approach (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996:138).

According to Mouton and Marais (1992:81) trustworthiness is determined through the researcher, the individual(s) being studied, and at the end determined by the measurement and research context.

Creswell (1998:124) describe validity in qualitative research as the accurate and reliable way in which the participants' social phenomenon is being described. In other words, validity is not determined through the data but through the interpretation thereof.

Due to the open-ended and exploratory nature of qualitative research, researcher bias is a potential threat to validity and reliability.

❖ **Validity**

Validity is that quality of a data-gathering instrument or procedure that enables it to measure what it is supposed to measure (Best & Kahn, 1998:276). McMillan and Schumacher (2001:324) state that "validity" refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world.

Mouton (2001:162) states that the strength of qualitative research is the establishment of rapport and trust with research participants.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407) suggest that as many strategies as possible should be used to ensure the validity of the research. The researcher used the following:

- A case study
- Observation of the research participant. This was conducted in a natural setting, namely the child's own classroom.
- Multi-method strategies – these included the literature study, an interview, questionnaires, checklists and anecdotal records.
- The anecdotal records that were used were concrete, precise descriptions from play sessions with the study child.

❖ Reliability

Best and Kahn (1998:276) refer to reliability as the degree of consistency that the instrument or procedure demonstrates.

In qualitative studies, researchers are concerned with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of their data. Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998: 36).

Gorman & Clayton (1997:137) argue that:

Reliability pertains to the degree to which observations are reported as consistent with some phenomenon during the lifespan of the inquiry. Unlike quantitative measurements, which often applies an instrument (e.g. a thermometer) or a mathematical formula, in ethnographic research, it is the researcher who judges the findings as reliable or not.

To ensure the reliability of this study, numerous strategies will be employed. Observations, together with anecdotal records, checklists, an interview, questionnaires and photographic examples will be correlated with the literature review to determine the match between findings and the study child's reality.

According to May (2002:154) one of the most important factors determining the strength of a study is to address generalising ability and reliability. This refers to whether the sample population is an accurate representation of other populations in society. In South Africa, one is faced with multicultural, multilingual population groups, yet the researcher's sample only involved an individual, second language learner; therefore the research sample was relevant only to the research in question.

Further research involving other groups is recommended to obtain a broader picture of the value of play in the pre-school system in South Africa.

3.4.2.9 THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Best and Kahn (1998:298) refer to the questionnaire as "the general category of inquiry forms which includes data-gathering instruments through which respondents answer

questions or respond to statements in writing". A questionnaire is used when factual information is desired.

There are advantages to administering questionnaires and these according to Best and Kahn (1998:299) are detailed below:

- ❖ The person administering the instrument has an opportunity to establish rapport, explain the purpose of the study, and explain the meaning of items that may not be clear.
- ❖ The availability of a number of respondents in one place makes possible an economy of time and provides a high proportion of usable responses.

The researcher chose to use the open-form or unrestricted questionnaire. This type of questionnaire calls for a free response in the respondent's own words. The researcher used both a pre-test questionnaire as well as a post-test questionnaire. The questionnaires were given to the entire Grade 000 and Grade 00 educators of the pre-school as well as any other educator who had the opportunity to observe RS in the school setting (cf Appendices L & M).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

As McMillan and Schumacher (2001:461) and Henning et al. (2004:127) explain, qualitative data analysis is primarily an on-going, emerging, non-linear, inductive process of organising the data into categories and identifying relationships among the categories.

De Vos et al. (2005:334) indicate that data analysis starts with data collection which is essentially an accumulation of information with a view to gaining answers to the research question.

Analysing qualitative data is an eclectic activity; there is no one right way. Most qualitative researchers are wary about prescriptions. They wish to avoid standardising the process, because a hallmark of qualitative research is the creative involvement of the researcher. There is no fixed formula; data can be analysed in more than one way. Each analyst must find his or her own style of intellectual craftsmanship. Although there are no strict rules that can be followed mindlessly, the researcher is not allowed to be limitlessly inventive.

Qualitative analysis should be done artfully, even playfully, but it also demands a great amount of methodological knowledge and intellectual competence (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:505).

In qualitative data analysis the primary tool is an investigator's innate human ability to collect enormous amounts of information and to make sense of it. But this tool must be honed through practice and used with patience. To begin with, qualitative data analysis is a test of the researcher's ability to think and process information in a meaningful and useful manner (Gorman & Clayton, 1997:201). Qualitative data analysis is thus a complex task (Gorman & Clayton, 1997:202).

With regard to this study, the response to the results of the verbatim and written accounts of the interview and questionnaires will be transcribed. The observations, including anecdotal records, checklists and photographs will be analysed. These analyses will make constant reference to the information collected from the literature study and by doing so will ensure that the analysis of data is relevant and useful.

3.6 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of this study need to be taken into consideration. Limitations with regard to the method and the sample size, as well as the researcher, can have an impact on the applicability of the findings. The limitations include:

3.6.1 Participants

This research study examined an individual child using a case study method. The findings of the study were examined against the individual child and located research material only. In order for the findings to hold academic weight, it is necessary to compare these findings against other children of the same age experiencing similar problems to ascertain if there is a correlation between the results.

3.6.2 Site

With reference to section 1.5, the research was conducted in an upmarket private pre-school in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The classrooms are very well equipped with an assortment of play materials appropriate to the level of the child. This may be

perceived as a limitation of the study as most South African schools, especially those in the rural areas, are not equipped with play materials at all and other more equipped schools still do not have the variety of equipment as the school in the study.

3.6.3 The researcher

Silverman (2001:270) points out that all research is contaminated to a lesser or greater degree by the values of the researcher. This was born in mind by the researcher throughout the research process due to the researcher occupying the dubious task of being both researcher and educator of the child in study. It can be stated categorically that no research findings were compromised by the researcher holding the two positions, but in order for the research study to hold more credibility, it would be preferable to study a child without the close relationship that RS and the researcher hold.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the research design of the study and started by stating the purpose of the research, which was explored in the summary of the literature and empirical investigation. It was important to clarify how the data was collected and which research methods were used in order to conduct the research. The role as researcher was clearly defined, in order to assist in the interpretation of the results. Finally matters such as the validity and reliability and research ethics were taken into account to lend credibility to the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the research study was to explore whether a classroom-centred programme of play could influence a non-social and non-communicative child's acquisition of social and communication skills.

The empirical data was collected through conducting a semi-standardised interview with the respondent's mother (cf Appendix D); the completion of checklists (cf Appendices E-G); the recording of anecdotal records (cf Appendices H-I4) observed during various free-play sessions; the completion of observation schedules (cf Appendices J-K4) and two questionnaires (cf Appendices L-M6) completed by educators in the pre-school unit. The BDP programme was implemented as the intervention programme and the analysis and evaluation of this programme as well as the information gathered from the data collection methods listed above will be discussed in this chapter. The empirical findings will be presented within the context of a literature control.

4.2 RESULTS

The results of the data collected will now be analysed and evaluated with reference to the literature study conducted in chapter two.

4.2.1 Findings and analysis of the parent interview (cf Appendix D)

❖ Home Circumstances:

RS is from a stable home environment. His parents are married and his father is a businessman by profession. His mother is a housewife. His family unit consists of his parents and an older brother (four and a half years). His father's brother, wife and two small children live in the family home. His father originates from Pakistan and both families speak Urdu at home. His mother reports that his father is a very quiet, shy man who does

not like to socialise or go out too much whereas she is completely the opposite (cf Appendix D).

❖ **Birth and Medical History:**

RS's mother described her pregnancy as good, with no complications. RS was born full term via Caesarean section. RS's birth weight was 4,07kg.

Developmental milestones were recorded as normal: sitting at 5 months, crawling at 7 months and walking at 11 months. RS's mother could not recall with accuracy when he spoke his first words or sentences but reflects that they were observed at "the correct time". Particularly striking is the report that RS was fully toilet-trained at twelve months.

RS is described as a good, non-fussy eater. His sleeping habits are described as good and school tests conducted show no problems with either his sight or hearing (cf Appendix D).

❖ **Characteristics:**

RS tends to be quieter, shyer and more reserved while his brother is a lot more confident and outgoing. The two siblings get on very well and both have good relationships with their cousins. Apart from this contact, RS plays with no one outside their family unit. RS plays constantly with his bicycle and it is reported that this is his favourite play thing at home. He is also fond of watching television and this has been encouraged for an hour odd per day. His mother reports that he has no difficulty socialising within their home environment, but also admits that there are no other children with whom RS can socialise apart from his sibling and cousins (cf Appendix D).

❖ **Scholastic History:**

RS attended a pre-school for three months prior to attending his current school. His mother reports that while he appeared to enjoy school, he was sick quite often so they made the decision to keep him at home. It is also of interest that in that school environment he also did not socialise or speak with his peers (cf Appendix D).

❖ **Mother's Concerns:**

His mother is extremely concerned about the fact that he does not talk to the children or adults in the unit, or play at school whereas he does both of these at home. She is of the opinion that communication and socialisation does not occur as he is a shy child and that English is not his first language and as a direct result, he does not know how to express himself. She is very concerned about these aspects and this was very evident in the responses to some of the questions posed in the interview (cf Appendix D).

❖ **Analysis of interview:**

From the information gathered by the researcher there appears to be a number of correlations between the content of the interview (cf Appendix D) indicated below and the literature study (cf Chapter 2).

- RS is a shy child who appears somewhat anxious at times. His mother is extremely concerned that he does not speak to or socialise with his peers at school. She explains this behaviour as due to English not being her child's home language and the fact that he is shy and has difficulties expressing himself.
- RS speaks freely within his home environment and with his family members, but struggles to do the same within a school setting.
- His father is described as being shy and socially inhibited. This is clarified by the mother of the respondent who admits that RS is not in regular contact with any other children apart from those who inhabit his family setting.
- His mother reports that the family speak Urdu at home, but is aware that he knows and understands the English language which is the language of instruction at his present school. RS presents with a language delay for which he is currently receiving speech and language therapy.
- While both parents were born outside of South Africa, RS was born in South Africa and as such knows only his country of birth.

Many of the concerns voiced by RS's mother during the course of the interview bear direct correlation to those of a child typically diagnosed with selective mutism.

It is also important to point out that when asked what her child's favourite toy was at home she only made mention of his bike. This correlates with the repetitive behaviour observed during the observation periods of free-play sessions that were conducted in the classroom.

The results of the interview suggest a parent who is concerned with the fact that her child is not socialising and communicating at school and as such is displaying particular feelings of anxiety about her son. There has been pressure put on RS by both his parents to "talk" at school and this has further compounded the problems experienced by this child.

4.2.2 The BDP programme (Blocks, Dough & Puppets)

The researcher initiated the programme by removing RS from his comfort zone of only playing with cars or aeroplanes and initially worked one-on-one with him introducing the three play materials listed above. Each of the materials were introduced over a period of a week, more specifically, the first three days of each week, leaving the final two days for observational and free play purposes. Thereafter, the researcher concentrated on periods of observation whereby RS was observed during free play sessions. The BDP programme was incorporated into the remaining three weeks of the programme, but did not follow a set structure or plan. The researcher preferred to see if RS would incorporate any of the new materials into his free play.

4.2.2.1 Session one (Week one)

- **Goal of session**

To establish a relationship with RS and to introduce him to another play material offered in the classroom.

- **Course of session**

With the introduction of block play (week One, days 1-3), the researcher sat on the carpet during a free play session and invited RS to come and join her. The researcher felt that it was important to acknowledge RS's passion for cars and asked permission for her to assist him in building a garage for his car.

Researcher: "RS, I can see that you love your car. Shall I help you make a garage for it?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "What shall we use to make our garage? Can you show me something on the shelf that we can use?"

RS: (Shakes head)

Researcher: "What about these blocks (coloured plastic blocks of varying sizes and shapes)? Do you think these can make your garage?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "RS, we need to build walls and a roof. Do you know that all rooms have walls and a roof?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "RS please pass me the long rectangle-shaped block". (RS obliges) "We need to leave an open space for your car to drive in. Can you find me two more to build the base of our garage? Can you pass me them? (RS obliges). "That's very good". What do you think we should do now?"

RS: (Shakes head)

Researcher: "We must build up the walls. Do you think you can find more blocks that look like the big rectangle one over here (points)?"

RS: (Nods and proceeds to find two more identical blocks and places them on the carpet near the researcher).

Researcher: "Thank you, RS. Can you put them on top of the others, just like this?"

RS (nods head and complies).

Researcher: "RS, we are just about done except for the roof. Would you like me to show you how to build the roof?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher finished the structure and invited RS to “park his car”, which he did. The researcher then thanked RS for allowing her to play with him and then left the carpet area and observed from the fringe.

- **Evaluation of session**

There was no verbal input from RS at all during this exchange, although various degrees of non-verbal communication were noted. He did not attempt at any stage to initiate or contribute to the play episode except on request. He was content to sit back and observe. It was interesting to note that after the researcher left the carpet area, RS left the garage with his car and continued his independent play while the other children made use of the completed garage structure.

4.2.2.2 Session two

- **Goal of session**

To build and expand on previous block play session and to see if anything was retained from the previous session.

- **Course of session**

Researcher once again invites RS to join her at the blocks. This time she makes use of the wooden blocks.

Researcher: “RS, what would you like us to build today?”

RS: (Smiles)

Researcher: “Shall we make a bridge today? Do you know what a bridge is?”

RS: (Shakes head)

Researcher: “A bridge is something that is built for us to either go over or under it. Shall we try to make a tall bridge for a boat to pass under it?”

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: “Which blocks do you think we can use?”

RS (No answer)

Researcher: "I think we can use this shape (rectangle). Do you know what shape this is?"

RS: "Rectangle" (whispered)

Researcher: "Yes, this is a rectangle. Well done, my boy. We need to find two more rectangles just like this one. Can you find them for me?"

RS: (Shakes head)

Researcher: "Shall I do it?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "Here we go. Let's count how many rectangles we have altogether 1-2-3".

RS: (Counts in whispered tone as well)

Researcher: Do you think you can put them together like this? (Researcher shows him what to do, then removes the blocks)

RS: (Shakes head)

Researcher: "Okay, RS, watch what I'm going to do. One goes here and the other one there. RS please put the long one on top of the others for me".

RS: (Obliges)

Researcher: "Thank you RS. Do you want to get a boat and put it under the bridge?"

RS: (Nods and does so)

Researcher then left the carpet and observed once more from the fringe. Solitary play continued for a further three minutes with RS passing the plastic boat under the bridge in a monotonous manner.

- **Evaluation of session**

RS whispered twice during the course of this session, but for the most part was uncommunicative. He was fairly willing to comply with the researcher's requests and it was

of interest to note that his play continued for a short while after the researcher had left the carpet area.

4.2.2.3 Session three

- **Goal of session**

As with the previous two sessions: to continue to expose RS to different play materials in the classroom, more specifically the different kinds of construction blocks.

- **Course of session**

Researcher got out the box of Duplo and invited RS to build something with it.

RS: Proceeds to take out three blocks, all the same length, same shape and same colour and places them one on top of the other.

Researcher: Verbalises how clever he is, stating: “Oh look at you, you clever boy”

RS: (He continues building upright, this time taking the same shape and same size but different colour until a tower of nine blocks has been produced)

Researcher: “RS, what a lovely idea! You’ve built a tall tower all by yourself. You should feel very proud of your tower”.

RS: (Nods)

He keeps building until he has a total of twelve blocks in his tower. Another child joins in the play and RS continues building. The researcher is quite interested to observe what will happen, so she leaves the carpet area and observes from the fringe.

- **Evaluation of session**

It was extremely encouraging to note that a bit more initiative occurred during this play episode and more importantly, it was observed that he did not get up and move away when the other child joined his play. There was no verbal communication between the two boys – both were content to build alongside each other. This play continued for a period of five minutes then it was time for outdoor play.

4.2.2.4 Session four and Session five

RS was absent from school on both these days, so no observation of free play episodes was possible.

4.2.2.5 Session six (Week two)

Play dough was introduced over the course of Week Two (days 1-3). As with the blocks, the researcher asked RS to join her at the dough table where she proceeded to talk him through the basics of dough play.

- **Goal of session**

The goal of this session was to introduce RS to dough play. The researcher explained what the various items in the dough box were used for:

E.g. this is a roller. It is used for rolling out the dough to make the dough flat. This is a dough cutter. It can cut the dough for you if you push it like this etc.

- **Course of session**

The researcher gave RS a ball of play dough and asked him to copy whatever she did. She proceeded to roll out her dough using the roller. She verbalised the entire process giving the necessary labels for the utensils that were used.

The researcher started with a basic play episode of rolling the dough out on a dough board and getting RS to cut out a teddy bear shape using the teddy bear mould.

- **Evaluation of session**

This session took place for five minutes after the other children had gone off to their music period. The researcher was of the opinion that RS was fully engaged and seemed to enjoy the session. He appeared reluctant to leave the dough table and re-join his group at Music. The researcher promised RS that they would play together with dough soon.

4.2.2.6 Session seven

- **Goal of session**

To introduce RS to the variety of ways in which play dough can be manipulated.

- **Course of session**

This time the researcher explained to RS that they would not be using any of the cutters or moulds in the box. She wanted to see what he could accomplish by using his fingers and hands. She proceeded to model how play dough can be manipulated by the fingers and hands and this was done by rolling the dough between her hands. She asked him to copy her once again and this time she explained that they were making a “long snake”. He complied with her request and proceeded to squeeze the dough between his hands copying the researcher. She then went on to ask him to roll the dough between his hands to make a soft, round ball. He did all that was asked. The researcher then left RS at the table with two other children and observed him from an adjacent table.

- **Evaluation of session**

RS complied with all that the researcher asked him to do and seemed quite keen to resume his dough play. No communication was forthcoming at all during this play session. Once the researcher had left the dough table, RS got up and walked to the motor toy box and proceeded to get out a car and watch the other children at their play episodes.

4.2.2.7 Session eight

- **Goal of session**

To show RS that one can build three dimensional figures with dough as well as to introduce another small group of children to his play session.

- **Course of session**

The classroom theme for the week was Winter. The researcher invited RS and two of his peer group (all boys) to join her at the dough table. She asked various questions pertaining to the Winter theme, all of which had been covered in theme discussions e.g.: “What can

children in other countries build in the snow” (Snowman). The researcher picked up some dough and asked the three children to do the same. She then asked them to roll the dough between their fingers to make a ball. All three complied. She then asked them to take a bigger piece of dough and do the same as before, which they did. The researcher then showed them how to assemble the small ball of dough on top of the larger ball of dough and to mould it together so as not to enable it to roll off. She then encouraged the children to put “eyes, nose and a mouth” on their snowman.

- **Evaluation of session**

RS was quite willing to participate in the session, but did not communicate at all with the other children. The others were quite vocal and chatted the whole way through the session. RS just smiled and did what was asked.

4.2.2.8 Session nine (cf Appendix N1)

- **Goal of session**

To observe RS’s free play sessions

- **Course of session**

RS got out a car as he had done numerous times before and proceeded to move it from side to side all the time while watching his peers play their games.

- **Evaluation of session**

It was quite disappointing for the researcher to observe him play repetitively once again and even more of a disappointment to see that no effort was being made to join in his peer’s play although it was noted that he appeared quite interested in some of their games.

4.2.2.9 Session ten

- **Goal of session**

To observe another free play session

- **Course of session**

RS took out an aeroplane and pushed it up and down the carpet, this time utilising a bit more space than before.

- **Evaluation of session**

No interaction or communication with the other children was recorded. RS did not play creatively with his chosen play material (aeroplane) and appeared rigid and repetitive in his approach. He played this way for five minutes, then lost interest and sat and watched the other children play.

4.2.2.10 Session eleven, twelve and thirteen (Week three)

RS was absent from school so no play sessions were monitored or observed.

4.2.2.11 Session fourteen

The researcher anticipated that this type of play (puppet play) would probably be the most problematic and challenging for RS. As with sociodramatic play, this type of play calls for initiative, imagination and most of all communication which up to this point had not been forthcoming from RS.

- **Goal of session**

The researcher aimed to introduce this type of play on a one-to-one basis with RS initially and then slowly introduce other children into other puppet roles.

- **Course of session**

The researcher started the puppet play by inviting RS to sit with her on the carpet. She showed him two puppets, one of which was called the “mommy” and the other, the “daddy”. She asked him if he’d like to be the daddy and if she could be the mommy. He nodded affirmatively and the puppet play began. The researcher used a basic play scenario that would possibly play out at home.

Researcher: “Hi Daddy. I see you are home from work. Did you have a good day?”

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "You must be hungry. May I bring you your food?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "I made your favourite curry. Do you like it?"

RS (Nods)

Researcher: "What can I get you to drink?"

RS: Juice (whispers)

Researcher: "Okay, here is apple juice. Do you have everything you need because I need to collect RS and A (his brother, name changed) from school?"

RS: Smiles and says "Yes" (whispers).

The researcher then left the carpet with "mommy" and watched RS from the fringe. He touched "daddy" for a while and then put him back in the box.

- **Evaluation of session**

The researcher was quite happy with the outcome of the first puppet play episode and deemed it necessary to ask questions that required a "yes/ no" answer initially to ensure that RS felt comfortable enough with the puppet play to proceed and possibly continue with it at a later stage.

4.2.2.12 Session fifteen

- **Goal of session**

The researcher's goal in this subsequent puppet play episode was to ask questions of RS that required a definite response and not just a "yes/ no" answer.

- **Course of session**

Researcher: "Daddy, you look sick! What is wrong with you?"

RS: Sick (Whispers)

Researcher: Prompting... "Daddy, I am very worried about you. What is sore?"

RS: "Head" (whispers)

Researcher: "Can I give you some medicine?"

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "Which medicine can I give you? The red one or the blue one?"

RS: Red

Researcher: "Here it is. I hope you will feel better".

- **Evaluation of session**

It was interesting to note that whilst non-verbal communication still prevailed the majority of this play episode he did speak more comfortable to the researcher through his "Daddy" persona.

4.2.2.13 Session sixteen (Week four)

- **Goal of play**

This play episode was introduced to the group as a whole, with the aim being to introduce the group to the entire puppet family i.e. mom, dad, big brother, big sister, baby sister, granny and grandpa. Thereafter eight of the thirteen children present that day, were asked by the teacher assistant to do their creative activity.

- **Course of session**

The researcher took the remaining five children (one of which was RS) and said to the children:

Researcher: "I'm going to be mommy, who would like to be daddy?"

Another child chose "daddy". The researcher went on in this manner until all the children in the group had a persona (mommy, daddy, Tom (big brother), Jo (big sister) and Sarah

(baby sister). It is of interest to mention that RS did not choose to be a character, but was finally allocated the role of “big brother”.

Researcher: “Shall we think of a story that we can use our puppets with?”

Children: All nod and various basic ideas pop forth. RS makes no contribution to the discussion.

Researcher (Mom): Following one of the children’s storyline begins... “Good morning, Kids. It’s time to get up”.

Researcher (Mom): “What do you think Dad could say to Tom?”

Child playing “Dad”: “Go and brush your teeth”.

Researcher (Mom): “Come, Jo, let’s get baby Sarah ready. Do you want to help me change her nappy?”

Child playing “Jo”: “Yes I would”.

Researcher: “RS, you are the big brother, Tom. What do you think he might say?”

RS: (Nothing, but a smile)

Researcher: “Children, what do you think RS could say?”

Child: “He could say that he was hungry and that he wants his breakfast”

Researcher: “Fantastic idea. RS, do you think you could say that?”

RS: (Nods and mumbles, breakfast)

Researcher: “Tom, what would you like to eat for breakfast?”

RS (Tom): “Coco”

Researcher: “Is that Coco-Pops?”

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: “I love Coco-Pops, they are delicious. Jo, would you like some too?”

Child playing "Jo": "Yes please".

Researcher: "Well that was fun. Did you enjoy yourselves? Can we play again soon?"

- **Evaluation of session**

RS was not that verbal in this structured play episode, but what was encouraging is that he joined the group and did not withdraw which is something that was evident in the other play periods observed.

4.2.2.14 Session seventeen, eighteen, nineteen and twenty

RS was away in Durban so the programme could not be implemented or observed on these days.

4.2.2.15 Session twenty one (Week five)

- **Goal of session**

To work with blocks again and see if there would be any spontaneity in RS's play.

- **Course of session**

There was no need to invite RS to the blocks as he was already there and had taken out three blocks. Researcher asked him if she could play with him.

RS: (Nods)

Researcher: "What are you going to build with me today, RS?"

RS: "A shark!"

Researcher: "Wow, a shark is really scary. Will it bite me?"

RS: "Nope" (giggles, but says the word quite forcefully)

Researcher: "That's good to hear. What do you want me to do?"

RS: (Takes out three more blocks and puts them onto the others)

Researcher: "Must I do that too?"

RS: "Yes" (shouts quite loudly)

Researcher: Follows his lead and they build up their three blocks until there is a total of fifteen blocks on the carpet.

RS: (Takes his hand and pushes the blocks over)

Researcher: "Uh, oh. What happened to your shark?"

RS: "It swam away".

Researcher: "Do you think it will come back?"

RS: "Nope, its dead now".

RS then got up and moved away from the carpet. The researcher called him back to thank him for allowing her to play with him, but also explained that when he is finished playing with something, he must put it away so that the other children can play with it too. RS complied and tidied up his blocks.

- **Evaluation of session**

A mini breakthrough! RS definitely was more engaging in this play episode and almost directed the whole session himself!

It was encouraging to note that he seemed to be gaining confidence in his ability to communicate with the researcher, but at the same time the pitch of his voice is unacceptably loud. It appears that he may experience difficulty self-modulating and the researcher was loathe to try and "quieten" him down, in case he withdraws once more.

4.2.2.16 Session twenty two

- **Goal of session**

The aim of this session was to invite RS to the dough table once more to see if any of the previous sessions work had been retained.

- **Course of session**

The researcher invited RS to join her at the dough table. Instead of directing the dough play this time, the researcher wanted to see if he would play spontaneously with the dough. RS picked up a ball of dough and proceeded to roll it with one of the larger rolling pins. He rolled the dough out carefully and repetitively until it became too thin and broke.

RS: (Smiles)

Researcher: "Oops, just how do you think we can fix your dough?"

RS: Takes dough away and scrunches it into a ball shape. Thereafter he proceeds to roll it out again. The dough breaks again.

Researcher: "Uh, oh. What are you going to do?"

RS: (Smiles).

He takes the dough and repeats the previous stage and once again it breaks and he breaks out into spontaneous laughter. The researcher then realised that he was enjoying this play and left him to observe from the fringe. This repetitive rolling and breaking of the dough continued for a good ten minutes after the researcher had left the table.

- **Evaluation of session**

RS finally is having a lot of fun with his play! He acted like the class clown and by the time the researcher had left the table, he had attracted two other children who proceeded to copy him and they were all laughing together. In between his laughs he was speaking single words, albeit very loudly. The researcher realised that RS experiences difficulty modulating his voice and makes a mental note to chat to the Speech Therapist to see how she can improve this.

4.2.2.17 Session twenty three

- **Goal of session**

The goal of today's session was to observe RS's free play during the early session (i.e. the session before the first ring officially begins). At this time of day the number of children in the class usually number maximum eight.

- **Course of session**

Two boys were actively involved in a new game that had been introduced to the children on the previous day.

The game involved picture boards, an egg timer and shapes and the aim of the game was to be the first player to successfully complete the picture puzzle using various coloured shapes.

The two boys were playing on the carpet with the game when RS arrived for the day. He ambled over to the carpet and stood at the fringe watching them. He then went a bit closer until he was directly in front of the boys. He sat down and idly picked up a card that they weren't using. He looked at the researcher, almost as if seeking permission. The researcher encouraged him to join in. Within five minutes he and the other two boys were chatting away and actively involved in their game.

- **Evaluation of session**

Whilst initially RS appeared to lack initiative to join in the boys' game, once he had been given "permission" to play, he joined in whole heartedly and appeared to enjoy his play with the boys. It was interesting to note that in this episode he also became quite loud and almost overbearing. He began to give orders, which was quite pleasing to see. At tidy up time, he had no difficulty helping his friends pack up their game.

4.2.2.18 Session twenty four (cf Appendices O4-O6)

- **Goal of session**

Once again to observe a period of RS's free play

- **Course of session**

Another child grabbed RS and started to build with the wooden blocks of varying sizes and shapes. They proceeded to place the blocks in a large line and when each block was placed by RS, he appeared to become louder and more excited. The researcher watched for a while and then joined the boys on the carpet and casually asked what they were building. The other child responded “plane” and RS promptly repeated what he had said and said “plane”.

- **Evaluation of session**

RS was so proud of his achievements (see photo page – photo with wooden blocks in a line on the carpet)! The researcher was careful to compliment both boys on their “plane” and assure them that it could stay there until their parents had viewed their construction.

This was a positive free play session indeed!

4.2.2.19 Session twenty five

- **Goal of session**

To incorporate a group of children into RS’s play

- **Course of session**

The researcher invited RS and a group of five other children to join her at the dough table. The researcher told the children that they were going to play a listening game while having fun with the dough. The instructions that were given to the children were as follows:

1. Take a bit of dough and roll it into a ball.
2. Now take a roller and roll out your dough so that it is not too thin and not too fat.
3. Find an animal mould.
4. Cut out your animal shape.
5. Put the dough that you have not used back into the dough box.

6. Tell me one thing about your animal.

The researcher thought this was a good idea in that it would get free, spontaneous conversation between the children as they described their particular animal.

- **Evaluation of session**

This session was relatively successful. RS tended to speak in short broken sentences throughout the exercise and tended to repeat whatever the researcher requested e.g.

Researcher: "Right boys' and girls', please roll out the dough".

RS: "Roll out the dough".

RS chose to roll out a teddy bear shape and when it was his turn to speak, he required much prompting to communicate in front of his peers. When he eventually did so, he giggled the whole time which the researcher attributed to nerves. He repeated the name of his animal, but failed to tell the group anything of interest about it.

What was encouraging was that he did not seem as threatened by the group as he was in previous observation periods. He was still quite shy when faced with group situations and the researcher hoped that as he grew in confidence this would improve.

4.2.2.20 Session twenty six (Week six) – (cf Appendix O & O3)

- **Goal of session**

To observe a free play session

- **Course of session**

RS arrived at school and immediately went to the motor box and got out a car. He did not attempt to play with it, but held it and watched another group of three boys on the carpet. They were playing a classifying game. One of the boys happened to glance up and saw RS watching them. This child called him and asked him to play and he responded positively.

For the next ten minutes the children were fully engrossed in their game.

- **Evaluation of session**

RS was fully engaged with the children in the group. He chatted to them and they appeared to be having a lot of fun. It was satisfying to see him involved in a group activity and obviously playing with another play material on offer in the classroom.

4.2.2.21 Session twenty seven

- **Goal of session**

To observe a free play session

- **Course of session**

RS went and stood at the interest table. He was joined by another boy. They started chatting about the animals on the table and then took a book from the shelf and proceeded to sit next to each other on the mini-couch and “read” their book.

- **Evaluation of session**

This was not a typical play session, but it turned into an excellent period of observation for the researcher. RS was once again actively involved in spontaneous conversation. He tended to be quite excitable and loud when “reading” his book and at one stage during the observation period, he needed gentle reminding not to shout.

It is interesting to note that the child who approached RS was the same child with whom he had built the “aeroplane” during a prior period of observation.

4.2.2.22 Session twenty eight

- **Goal of session**

To place a number of relatively new games and play materials on the carpet and observe what RS chooses to play with.

- **Course of session**

Half the children had been taken to the field leaving nine children in the classroom. The researcher had placed a few new memory, shape and colour games as well as the puppet box, a box of crayons and some paper on the carpet.

RS went over to the paper and took a sheet. He went up to another child and said, “Jet”. The other child took the paper from him and proceeded to make a jet. This child then made one for himself and together they “flew” their jets on the carpet.

- **Evaluation of session**

The researcher saw this as a mini-breakthrough! RS approached another child, asked him a question and then proceeded to play contentedly with him for a considerable amount of time. Once again this period of play was loudly inappropriate.

4.2.2.23 Session twenty nine

- **Goal of session**

To give a group of three children (RS included) the puppet box and observe what, if anything, is done with the puppets.

- **Course of session**

The box was emptied and immediately the other two boys took a puppet each. RS seemed to hang back a bit until he saw the others taking one and he then followed their lead.

The three puppets used were the “grandpa, the cat and the mouse”. RS had chosen the “mouse” puppet. One of the children took on a leadership role and attempted to direct the play. He started with a scenario that involved the Grandpa chasing the cat away because the cat had eaten the mouse.

- **Evaluation of session**

The other boys were quite involved in the play, but RS seemed a bit withdrawn although he smiled continually throughout the session. He did whatever the other boys instructed

him to do, but not once did he take the initiative in the play episode. He relied heavily on the others for creative input.

4.2.2.24 Session thirty

- **Goal of session**

To observe a free play session

- **Course of session**

RS went over to a table that was occupied by three children. They had taken out a box of paper and a container of wax crayons and scissors. He sat down at the table and proceeded to imitate the other children's play. He chatted quite amiably to the group and drew a "body image". He then took a pair of scissors and proceeded to cut through his picture.

- **Evaluation of session**

He appeared seemingly unafraid of the group and was expressing himself adequately so that the other children were able to understand him. The researcher observed another child asking RS why he was cutting through his picture. His response was "I am going to sleep". This observation was successful as RS had played yet again with another play material that he had not touched before.

4.3 GENERAL SUMMARY AND FINDINGS OF THE BDP PROGRAMME

The researcher concludes that there was a marked improvement in RS's ability to play spontaneously with his peers as well as an increase in the level of his communication skills. He learned to play with a variety of play materials on hand in his classroom and this play tended to be largely explorative compared with his mostly repetitive play during the pre-testing phase.

He still was inclined to revert to his known play materials at times. The researcher felt that this was indicative of his insecurities and lack of confidence at that particular time. As he

grew in confidence and enhanced the new skills he tended to become more adventurous in his play and this was evident to see in many of the recorded play sessions.

The researcher concurs that the BDP programme might not have been the major reason for this improvement – it might have been due to the fact that RS needed a longer time frame to settle into his school environment before he became secure enough to explore the classroom and its many benefits.

4.4 CHECKLISTS

❖ STAGES IN BLOCK PLAY CHECKLIST - PRE/POST TEST (cf Appendices E & F)

The initial checklist showed no interest in block play at all. The subsequent checklist found that although there was slightly more interest in block play, the respondent did not favour this play material at all.

It is of interest to note that while the respondent was engaged in the block play sessions with the researcher, he was more committed and involved in the play, but once the researcher withdrew to the fringe and other members of his peer group joined in the play, RS got up and walked away (cf 2.14)

❖ SOCIAL ATTRIBUTES CHECKLIST (cf Appendix G)

This checklist shows clearly that RS experiences a willingness to come to school. He arrives in a happy mood and the researcher is usually greeted with a huge smile. While he may not socialise and communicate with his peers around him, his interest in them is fairly evident by the way he observes their play and behaviours. He communicates albeit indirectly by means of non-verbal communication and usually smiles at the children around him. It is also of interest to note that when one of his peers would approach him, he would often move away and not facilitate the communication in any way.

❖ SOCIAL PLAY AND SOCIALISING CHECKLIST - BASELINE (cf Appendices H-H4)

This checklist shows that RS struggles to communicate verbally with both his teacher and his peers. He is also unable to initiate conversations or answer questions posed by his

teacher and his classmates. There is no interactive play between the respondent and his peers although he is content to play alongside them observing their play activities. RS is able to mouth or whisper to his teacher showing that he feels more comfortable using non-verbal communication. He feels comfortable conversing with the speech therapist or the assistant, but fails to communicate verbally with any of the other educators in the preschool unit. RS appears to enjoy outside playtime because he locates his elder brother on the playground and they play together (cf 1.73 - Observation).

❖ **SOCIAL PLAY AND SOCIALISING CHECKLIST - POST-TEST** (cf Appendices I – I14)

The results of the post-test checklists indicate a slight improvement in his ability to converse with his teacher and his peers. It is of interest to note that this improvement is more marked in his ability to answer questions from both his teacher and his peers, whilst at the same time his ability to engage in spontaneous, initiated conversation is still quite limited. His capacity to communicate more readily with his peers outside of the classroom is significantly evident. He appears more confident when relating to his peers and playing interactively with them. However this is not the case when faced with group activities. He tends to be shy and reticent and withdraws from the activity altogether (cf 1.73 - Observation).

4.5 OBSERVATION CHECKLISTS/ ANECDOTAL RECORDS

❖ **PRE-TEST** (cf Appendices J - J4)

The pre-test anecdotal records, recorded during periods of observation showed clear examples of RS's inability to play and communicate successfully with his peers and adults around him. Examples of his repetitive play behaviour were represented by his choice of play materials over the duration of the observation sessions (cf 1.73 - Observation).

❖ **POST-TEST** (cf Appendices K – K4)

In contrast to the pre-test, the post-test anecdotal records showed a marked improvement in his ability to play and communicate with his peers. Whilst no initiation of play episodes was recorded, he was content to join other children in their play. His verbalisation and ability to communicate was evident in one of the recordings when he displayed, at times,

quite inappropriate behaviour by shouting loudly at his peers. He also showed a willingness to play successfully with new play materials e.g. one episode of block play, another two with educational games and finally the completion of a puzzle albeit independently (cf 1.73 - Observation).

4.6 QUESTIONNAIRES

❖ PRE-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE (cf Appendices L – L7)

The educators in the unit were given a brief questionnaire which they were asked to complete over the course of a week.

The results were as follows:

RS appeared to socialise initially exclusively with his brother and then reportedly with some of his brother's friends. No socialisation with members of his own peer group was recorded.

The majority of the respondents noted that RS did not engage in spontaneous conversation with the children around him and all except for one respondent noted that no spontaneous chatter was evident with any of the adults in the unit either. One member of the unit reported that he had made loud, inappropriate noises whilst playing.

His favoured area of the playground appeared to be the jungle gym and the sandpit, where it was recorded that the same games seemed to be played. This repetitive behaviour draws a parallel with the findings of the various pre-tests indoors, where he distinctly preferred one or two play materials and adhered rigidly to this routine (cf 3.4.3.4 – The questionnaire).

❖ POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE (cf Appendices M – M6)

The respondents mostly found that RS started to show an interest in his peer group (ages three to four years) whilst still maintaining contact with his brother and his brother's friends.

There was a definite improvement in his ability to communicate spontaneously with the children around him however there was an absence of spontaneous conversation with any of the significant adults in the unit.

He began to show an interest in other areas of the playground e.g. cycle track and outdoor construction toys.

His overall levels of participation in these play episodes increased and he appeared to be “well-adjusted” during outside play time as indicated in the questionnaire (cf 3.4.3.4 – The questionnaire).

4.7 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

This chapter reports the empirical results of the use of the BDP programme with the research participant. The researcher, using the programme was able to:

- ❖ Gain the confidence of the child.
- ❖ Increase his self-esteem.
- ❖ Improve his ability to play successfully with materials other than an aeroplane or a car.
- ❖ Give him the confidence to begin interacting with his peers, both socially and through social communication.

Various data was collected and analysed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The problem statement reads as follows: “The influence of a play centred pre-school programme on the acquisition of social and communicative skills.”

It was evident from the results of the empirical investigation detailed in Chapter Four that a classroom-centred play programme is an effective tool to assist the non-social, non-communicative child, specifically with socialising and communicating skills. This chapter is a summary of the research and results, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

5.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The researcher identified four objectives for the purpose of this study (cf 1.6.1). Each of these objectives will be discussed below:

5.2.1 Objective one

- ❖ To conduct an in-depth literature study in order to define the concept of children’s play, the value thereof and to establish the importance of socialising and communicative skills to the preschool child.

This objective was achieved by undertaking a literature study (cf Chapter two). Information was collected from books, journal articles, Internet and other documents.

5.2.2 Objective two

- ❖ To undertake an empirical study through the use of child observations, an interview and questionnaires and to explore the use of a classroom-centred play programme to assist a non-social, non-communicative child’s acquisition of these skills.

This objective was achieved by using a research participant who exhibited the above traits. An interview was conducted with one parent, two identical questionnaires (pre- and post-

test) were completed by educators in the pre-school classroom and observation schedules, checklists and anecdotal records were used as methods of data collection (refer **Appendices**).

5.2.3 Objective three

- ❖ To analyse data in order to describe the use of a play programme for such purpose.

This objective was attained by providing a detailed description of the play sessions conducted with the study child. At the end of the process, a general overview of all the information was presented. This was done by integrating and combining the information from all play sessions to form a meaningful whole. An in-depth description was given in chapter four.

5.2.4 Objective four

- ❖ To draw the appropriate conclusions and make recommendations to pre-school educators for the inclusion of play programmes to assist children who experience a lack of socialising and communicative skills.

These conclusions and recommendations are discussed in Section 5.3.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The researcher concludes that the aims and objectives of the study were achieved. The research statement was addressed with the aid of the literature study and the empirical investigation. The researcher established that:

- ❖ A child who does not know how to engage in play can be guided through indirect and more directed play sessions. So too, can he be taught how to make the most of a variety of play materials on offer in the pre-school classroom.
- ❖ A child who displays typical symptoms of selective mutism can be successfully assisted with communication and socialising skills through a combined play programme and regular speech and language therapy sessions (cf chapter four)

- ❖ The blocks, dough and puppets (BDP) used to assist the pre-school child with the use of language and social skills were justified in that the desired results were achieved. This equipment is available in most urban pre-schools.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this research, the researcher recommends that the non-social and non-communicative learner should where possible be given the benefit of regular play sessions in conjunction with speech and language therapy. Communication skills are extremely important and the physical aspect is addressed by conventional speech therapy.

- ❖ It is crucial that educators realise the benefit of play for the development of social and communicative skills by the pre-schooler.
- ❖ Parents and educators alike should be made aware that should a learner not have the necessary skills to play spontaneously within the peer group, the sooner an intervention method is put in place the more successful the outcome, as further emotional damage may be avoided or limited.
- ❖ The child in the school situation who presents as a non-communicative learner and is a second-language learner needs the necessary language tools to be in place before confident verbalisation can occur. In the researcher's opinion it is necessary to put speech therapy in place if indicated.
- ❖ The speech therapist and educator should work closely together as language skills and emotions are equally important. A multidisciplinary approach is therefore more effective in addressing the problem.

Brown et al. (2008:249) assert strongly that by teaching social and language skills to children with communication disorders at a very young age, educators and others increase the opportunities that children with communication and language disorders have for effective peer communication, interactions, and peer relationships, and many future problem behaviours may be prevented.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- The researcher has submitted research on a very limited scale and it would be beneficial to conduct the play programme in other schools, with other learners exhibiting similar difficulties to see if similar results are achieved. Additional studies could assist with the validation of this programme's results.
- The impact of culture could be explored in a similar research programme. The research participant was born in South Africa to Pakistani parents who have lived in the country for the past seven years and therefore can be classified as immigrant settlers.
- The establishment of a more detailed classroom play programme for non-social, non-communicative learners should be explored in further research.
- Pre-school children exhibiting problems in communicative and social skills for other reasons, such as Asperger's Syndrome/ Autism may benefit from a BDP or similar play programme.
- Brown et al. (2008:249) state that future research should attempt to focus on refinements of interventions for young children with common disorders that will expand our knowledge about effective social interaction strategies for children's enhanced social communications, peer interactions, and relationships.

5.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

It was never the intention of the research to reinvent the wheel, but rather to emphasise the importance of a Block, Dough and Puppet programme as to assess its influence on the acquisition of social and communicative skills.

Despite the limitations of the study, it nonetheless generated useful information and a play programme which can contribute to role of play in helping a non-social and non-communicative learner to develop and benefit fully from the experience.

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APPENDIX A

To whom it may concern,

The researcher is currently in the process of completing a M.Ed. degree. The research involves designing a play-based programme in order to assist a non-social child with social integration within the classroom.

The research aspect of the researcher's dissertation involves implementing the programme using a pre-school child for the study.

This letter serves to ask your permission to include your school as a research site for the study. It will involve the following:

- The researcher will need to conduct research on the school property, during school hours, for a total of 6 weeks (1 week pre-testing, 4 weeks programme implementation and 1 week post-testing).
- To ensure that all information in this study is kept and handled confidentially, the researcher will not mention the school's name as well as the identity of the participant. Pseudonyms will be used.
- As the principal of the school, you have the right to request that the school or participant be withdrawn at any time, with no consequences.
- The researcher will require permission to take photographs – all participants will have their faces blackened out to ensure anonymity.

The researcher would really appreciate using your school for the research study and should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher at 0824476500.

Thanking you

Lynne Dworetzky

I, _____ hereby give permission for my school to be used as a research site.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

Dear Parent,

The researcher is currently in the process of completing a M.Ed. degree. The research involves designing a play-based programme in order to assist a non-social child with social integration within the classroom.

The research aspect of the researcher's dissertation involves implementing the programme using a pre-school child for the study.

This letter serves to ask your permission to include your child as a participant in the study. It will involve the following:

- The researcher will need to observe your child, during school hours, for a total of 6 weeks.
- To ensure that all information in this study is kept and handled confidentially, the researcher will not mention the school's name as well as the identity of the participant. Pseudonyms will be used.
- The researcher will require you to complete an interview. The questions asked in the interview will provide the researcher with further information with regards the social characteristics of your child and will not expect you to divulge any sensitive, personal information.
- You have the right to request that your child be withdrawn at any time, with no consequences.
- The researcher will require permission to take photographs – all participants will have their faces blackened out to ensure anonymity.

The researcher would really appreciate your time and involvement in the research study and should you have any questions or concerns, please contact the researcher at 0824476500.

Thanking you

Lynne Dworetzky

I, _____ hereby give permission for my child to participate in the research study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

Checklist for available materials

School: _____

Date: _____

Materials which are likely to be found in early childhood education programmes are listed below in alphabetical order. If the classroom includes these materials **so that the children have free access to them**, place a tick. If the classroom does not include the materials, place a cross. If it does have the materials but the children do not have free access to the materials, place a star.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Balance beam (outdoors) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dramatic play props |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Balls | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dress up clothing |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Beads | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kitchen – equipped |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Blocks | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lego |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Books | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lotto games |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cardboard Boxes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Musical instruments |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cars | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paint |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Play dough | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Paper |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climbing apparatus | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pegboards |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cloth scraps | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Piano |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clothes pegs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Plastic animals |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Construction paper | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Puppets |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Counting Blocks | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Puzzles |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Crayons | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Spools (Threading) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dolls | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Telephones |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dolls furniture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tools |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dolls pram | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trucks |

APPENDIX D

Parent interview

Interview held with Mrs S in the classroom on Monday, 18th May 2009 at 12:40

Child's Name: **RS - Name changed**

Child's Date of Birth: **25 November 2005**

Child's age in years, months: **3 years, 6 months**

Child's weight at birth: **4.07kgs**

Interviewer: To be referred to as LD

Interviewee: To be referred to as **Mrs S**

LD: Thank you firstly for giving up your time to answer my questions. If there is anything that I ask you that you do not wish to answer, please tell me and we'll move on.

LD: Please tell me who lives in the house with RS?

Mrs S: His father, his brother, myself, his uncle, his aunt and their two boys.

LD: How old are the two boys?

Mrs S: The big one will be five and the baby is turning three years.

LD: What do you and your husband do for a living?

Mrs S: I am a housewife and my husband is a businessman.

LD: I know you and your family are from Pakistan originally. Was RS born in Pakistan too?

Mrs S: No. He was born in the Garden City Clinic in South Africa. My husband has been in South Africa for 10 years already. I have been in South Africa for 7 years.

LD: Was your pregnancy normal?

Mrs S: Yes. I had a caesarean section, but RS was born at full term with no complications. He was a very big baby. Did I tell you that his brother was born at 31 weeks?

LD: Yes, Mrs S, you did. That must have been a very anxious time for you.

Mrs S: Yes, it was.

LD: Did RS require any special medical care, or hospitalization, at birth or during the first month after birth?

Mrs S: No. He was a normal, healthy child

LD: Does RS have any other siblings?

Mrs S: No, just his brother.

LD: Has RS ever had a serious accident?

Mrs S: No. He has had some cuts and scrapes.

LD: When was the last time you took RS to a doctor?

Mrs S: Last week because he had the flu

LD: Is he on any medication?

Mrs S: No

LD: Describe RS's sleeping habits.

Mrs S: He sleeps very well and hardly ever wakes us up at night.

LD: What about his eating habits?

Mrs S: He is a good eater and usually eats what he is given.

LD: At what age did RS sit?

Mrs S: I can't be sure 100%, but I think it was at five months

LD: At what age did he crawl?

Mrs S: Again, I can't remember too well but I think at seven months

LD: At what age did he begin walking?

Mrs S: Eleven months. Yes, I think it was before his first birthday.

LD: Is RS toilet trained?

Mrs S: Yes

LD: At what age was toilet training complete?

Mrs S: He was fully toilet trained by one year old.

LD: Do you think RS can see and hear appropriately?

Mrs S: The school tests say that he can see and hear.

LD: At what age did RS first begin to speak?

Mrs S: I can't remember – sorry. I think it was at the time they are meant to talk.

LD: Does RS talk a lot?

Mrs S: Yes. He chatters all the time to us at home.

LD: In your opinion, does he seem to speak as well as his peers?

Mrs S: No. I'm not sure. I think it's because that English is not his language.

LD: Does he speak so that you can understand him?

Mrs S: Yes. I can understand him most of the time. We speak Urdu at home and sometimes he speaks too fast and then I need to tell him to slow down a bit.

LD: Does he speak so that other adults understand him?

Mrs S: Yes. My husband and his brother and his family and the cousins understand him well.

LD: Does RS speak so that other children understand him?

Mrs S: Yes. His brother and his cousins understand him.

LD: Do other children at school or at the shops understand him?

Mrs S: I'm not sure. Does he speak at school?

LD: No, Mrs S. RS does not speak spontaneously at school. Do you think he has difficulty communicating within his school environment?

Mrs S: Yes. I think it's because we are Pakistani and we speak Urdu at home. He can speak English. I have heard him.

LD: I was just going to ask what language you speak at home. Do you speak to the boys in English at all?

Mrs S: No we don't.

LD: Do you employ a domestic assistant at home?

Mrs S: Yes. She is a great help.

LD: Do you rely on her to look after the children when they get home from school?

Mrs S: Yes. I'm always in the kitchen cooking so she must watch them for me.

LD: What is RS's favourite thing to do at home?

Mrs S: He loves to ride his bike and play with his brother and his cousins. He also watches T.V.

LD: How much TV a day does he watch?

Mrs S: About one hour to one hour and a half.

LD: Does he have a favourite game or toy?

Mrs S: Yes, he loves his bike.

LD: Does he socialise easily within your family unit?

Mrs S: Yes. He has no difficulty talking and playing with us.

LD: Does he socialise with children of the same age outside of your family unit?

Mrs S: No. He usually plays with his brother and cousins.

LD: Does he play at all with other children that are not in your family unit? By this I mean does he play with anyone apart from his brother and his cousins?

Mrs S: No. Not that I have seen.

LD: Does he prefer to play alone at home?

Mrs S: No. He likes to play with his brother and his cousins.

LD: Does RS socialize easily at school?

Mrs S: No. You told me that he does not play with the other children at school.

LD: Why do you think this is the case?

Mrs S: I think it's because he's shy and also the language problem. I think he can't express himself properly.

LD: Does anyone read stories to your child?

Mrs S: Yes, I do.

LD: Has RS ever attended a playschool or nursery school prior to this one?

Mrs S: Yes

LD: For how long?

Mrs S: Only three months. He got sick a lot so we decided to keep him at home.

LD: Did he talk or play with other children at that school?

Mrs S: No, he didn't.

LD: Does RS talk to other family members that do not live with you?

Mrs S: All our family is in Pakistan, but when my aunt comes to visit, he is very shy and refuses to talk to her.

LD: Do you and your husband have any special concerns about RS?

Mrs S: Yes. I want that he should play with his own friends and talk more in school. That is the only thing I am worried about.

LD: Are either you or your husband very shy people?

Mrs S: Yes. My husband is very quiet and doesn't like going out a lot. RS is like him. I'm not shy. I can talk to anyone.

LD: Is RS's brother shy?

Mrs S: No. Have you seen him? He is so chatty to everyone. His teacher says that he plays with all the children and talks to them all the time. It is a worry why RS doesn't talk?

LD: I know it is a worry Mrs S, but from my side I am doing all that I can to help him. We just have to be patient and not put pressure on him to talk and hopefully when he feels comfortable and at ease he will begin to communicate and socialize with the other children.

LD: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. I really appreciate the time we spent together and feel that I know RS and your family a lot better.

Interview concluded at 13:30

APPENDIX E

Learner: _____

Date of birth: _____

Year: _____

Stages in Block play- CHECKLIST

Stage 1: Blocks are put down on the carpet, but not used for any construction.

Stage 2: Child begins to build, constructing rows only (either vertical or horizontal).

Stage 3: Child builds an object and can verbalise the object to a third party.

* - emerging

√ - mastered

Date	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Comment

APPENDIX F

Learner: _____

Date of birth: _____

Year: _____

Stages in Block play- Post-test checklist

Stage 1: Blocks are put down on the carpet, but not used for any construction.

Stage 2: Child begins to build, constructing rows only (either vertical or horizontal).

Stage 3: Child builds an object and can verbalise the object to a third party.

* - emerging

√ - mastered

Date	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Comment

APPENDIX G

The social attributes checklist

1. INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES

The child:

- Is usually in a positive mood.
- Usually comes to school willingly.
- Usually copes with rebuffs or other disappointments adequately.
- Shows interest in others.
- Shows the capacity to empathise.
- Displays the capacity for humour.
- Does not seem to be acutely lonely.

Comments (if any):

2. SOCIAL SKILLS ATTRIBUTES

The child usually:

- Interacts nonverbally with other children with smiles, waves and nods, etc.
- Expects a positive response when approaching others.
- Expresses wishes and preferences clearly; gives reasons for actions and positions.
- Asserts own rights and needs appropriately.
- Is not easily intimidated by bullies.
- Expresses frustrations and anger effectively, without escalating disagreements or harming others.
- Gains access to on-going groups at play and work.
- Enters on-going discussion on a topic; makes relevant contributions to on-going activities.
- Takes turns fairly easily.

- Has positive relationships with one or two peers; shows the capacity to really care about them and miss them if they are absent.
- Has “give-and-take” exchanges of information, feedback, or materials with others.
- Negotiates and compromises with others appropriately.
- Is able to maintain friendship with one or more peers, even after disagreements.
- Does not draw inappropriate attention to self.
- Accepts and enjoys peers and adults who have special needs.
- Accepts and enjoys peers and adults who belong to ethnic groups other than his or her own.

Comments (if any): _____

3. PEER RELATIONSHIP ATTRIBUTES

The child:

- Is usually accepted versus neglected or rejected by other children.
- Is usually respected rather than feared or avoided by other children.
- Is sometimes invited by other children to join them in play, friendship and work.
- Is named by other children as someone they are friends with or like to play and work with.

Comments (if any):

4. ADULT RELATIONSHIP ATTRIBUTES

- Is not excessively dependent on adults.
- Shows appropriate response to new adults, as opposed to extreme fearfulness or indiscriminate approach.

Comments (if any):

Adapted from McClellan & Katz (2001: page unknown) and McClellan & Katz (1993: page unknown)

APPENDIX H1-H5

Learner: _____ Date: _____

Social Play and Socializing -Baseline checklist

1= Requires support 2 = Developing competence 3 = Competent 4 = High level achieved

	1	2	3	4	Comment
Leaves the mother readily					
Converses with teacher - verbally					
Converses with teacher – non verbally (gestures/ mouths words)					
Converses with other significant adults					
Converses with peers					
Initiates a conversation with teacher					
Initiates a conversation with peers					
Answers a question posed by teacher					
Answers a question posed by peers					
Communicates more with children inside the classroom					
Communicates more with children outside the classroom					
Cooperates in classroom routines					
Listens while peers speak					
Engages in independent play					
Engages in parallel play					
Plays interactively with peers					
Takes turns and shares					
Tidies up after play					
Engages in group activities					

Adapted from Frost Wortham Developmental Checklist (Source: Wortham, 1984)

APPENDIX I1- I5

Learner: _____ Date: _____

Social Play and Socializing – Post-test checklist

1= Requires support 2 = Developing competence 3 = Competent 4 = High level achieved

	1	2	3	4	Comment
Leaves the mother readily					
Converses with teacher - verbally					
Converses with teacher – non verbally (gestures/ mouths words)					
Converses with other significant adults					
Converses with peers					
Initiates a conversation with teacher					
Initiates a conversation with peers					
Answers a question posed by teacher					
Answers a question posed by peers					
Communicates more with children inside the classroom					
Communicates more with children outside the classroom					
Cooperates in classroom routines					
Listens while peers speak					
Engages in independent play					
Engages in parallel play					
Plays interactively with peers					
Takes turns and shares					
Tidies up after play					
Engages in group activities					

Adapted from Frost Wortham Developmental Checklist (Source: Wortham, 1984)

APPENDIX K1-K5

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Post-Test Anecdotal Record No. _____

Date: _____ Time: from _____ to _____

Learner's Name: _____

Grade: _____ Activity: _____

Free play for the learners usually occurs from 8:30-9:30 and again between 10:30-11:00 within the classroom setting. At the same time, isolated groups of learners are removed from their free play to do their more formal work, usually creative and perceptual work. Once they have completed their work, they return to free play activities. During free play the learners may choose in which area to play: fantasy corner, block play, construction toys, play dough, creative table, perceptual toys/ games, puzzle table etc.

Area of free play	Description of Play	Comment

APPENDIX L- L7

Pre-test questionnaire

NAME (First name only): _____

DATE: _____

POSITION IN SCHOOL (e.g. Educator – Grade 000): _____

Please observe RS (name changed for anonymity) during an outdoor play time and complete the questionnaire below.

1. Indicate which applies (you may tick more than one)

Socialises with children his own age (i.e. 3/ 4 year olds)

Socialises with children older than him (i.e. 5 year olds)

Socialises with his elder sibling

Socialises with no one in particular

2. Does RS converse spontaneously with the children around him? Yes/ No

3. Does RS converse spontaneously with any adults? Yes/ No

4. Describe the area of the playground where you observed RS playing most frequently.

5. Describe the play episode that you observed and elaborate on RS's participation therein.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

APPENDIX M- M7

Post-test questionnaire

NAME (First name only): _____

DATE: _____

POSITION IN SCHOOL (e.g. Educator – Grade 000): _____

Please observe RS (name changed for anonymity) during an outdoor play time and complete the questionnaire below.

1. Indicate which applies (you may tick more than one)

Socialises with children his own age (i.e. 3/ 4 year olds)

Socialises with children older than him (i.e. 5 year olds)

Socialises with his elder sibling

Socialises with no one in particular

2. Does RS converse spontaneously with the children around him? Yes/ No

3. Does RS converse spontaneously with any adults? Yes/ No

4. Describe the area of the playground where you observed RS playing most frequently.

5. Describe the play episode that you observed and elaborate on RS's participation therein.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

APPENDICES N-N4

Photographs (Pre-test)

APPENDICES O-O8

Photographs (Post-test)