

AUTHORS:

Mrs Liezl Myburgh¹ Professor Janet Condry¹ Dr Elna Barnard¹ 

AFFILIATION:

¹CPUT

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v38.i2.16>

e-ISSN 2519-593X

Perspectives in Education

2020 38(2): 241-254

PUBLISHED:

04 December 2020

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS OF LEARNERS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: PERCEPTIONS OF THREE FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS

ABSTRACT

There are limited studies into the exact pervasiveness of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in sub-Saharan Africa, and fewer still into early intervention for learners with autism. This paper focuses on how three foundation phase teachers provided explicitly structured classroom experiences to develop social skills training, particularly independence, behavioural etiquette and self-esteem of their learners. Some learners with ASD do become well-adjusted independent adults, but others experience challenges in interpreting emotions or forming and sustaining healthy interpersonal relations. This study was underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory which highlights the importance of social learning in the education of children with disabilities. A qualitative research design and an interpretivist paradigm were used for generating the data needed to track the development. Three purposively selected foundation phase (FP) teachers in three different types of schools were selected as the sample. Three vignettes provide the background to the discussions. Knowing that ASD is characterised by order and disorder, some pedagogical approaches may generate new divisions, while those presented here have noticeably benefited the learners with ASD; the teachers created learning opportunities to elevate the social skills of their high functioning learners with ASD.

Keywords: *Autism spectrum disorder (ASD), qualitative, pedagogical approaches, social skills.*



Published by the UFS

<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie>

© Creative Commons

With Attribution (CC-BY)



1. INTRODUCTION

There have been limited studies on pedagogical approaches that teachers use when working with learners with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Southern Africa (Franz, Chambers, Von Isenburg & De Vries, 2017). Prior to 2016, there have been few studies on the importance of social skills in learners with ASD. Badiah (2018) states that young learners with ASD may experience difficulties with

social skills and social interactions, although this difficulty may depend on the age level and the level of autism in the learners (Brink, 2012). Children with high levels of social skills will be easily accepted by their peers in their community, they will be able to resolve problem conflicts and have a sense of friendship. Whereas others may be rejected and vulnerable to be bullied by their peers. Brink (2012) suggests that learners with ASD need to interact with people in their environment but, without assistance, they could experience mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. The gap in this particular field of research and pedagogical approaches teachers use when working with learners with ASD, encouraged the researchers to explore how three teachers attempted to develop social skills in their learners with autism in the FP classroom.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V (DSM-V) (2013:50) defines ASD as a “neurodevelopmental, biologically determined disorder; characterised by a triad of impairments which involve social interactions, communication skills and imagination”. The following three social skills are experienced by learners with ASD:

Deficits in *social-emotional reciprocity* can range from abnormal social approach and failure of orthodox back-and-forth conversation, to reduced sharing of interests, emotions or affect, to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.

Deficits in *non-verbal communicative behaviours used for social interaction* can range from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication, to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures, to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication.

Deficits in *developing, maintaining and understanding relations* can range from difficulties adjusting behaviour to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.

The South African Constitution (1996) states that every person has the right to basic education whether they are disabled or not, and subsequently since 2001, there has been a plethora of policy documents that unambiguously regulate the inclusion of learners who experience barriers to learning. The latest policy from the Department of Basic Education (SIAS, 2014) called “Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support” paradoxically states that one of the barriers to the implementation of this document is the inflexible curriculum in our schools, particularly prevalent in Special Schools with learners with ASD.

The Fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) (2019) on Quality Education states that the quality of learning in many of our schools is a challenge and is about the restoration of the dignity and hope of people leaving no-one behind (2019). Although many South African teachers are willing to accommodate learners with ASD in their classes, they often have a limited understanding of the unique combination of character traits of learners with ASD (Franz *et al.*, 2017). It is therefore not surprising that teachers find it difficult to adjust their curricula and classroom environments to address these learners’ distinctive social skills needs. Creating an environment of understanding amongst teachers of learners with ASD may enable them to make modifications to their curriculum, classroom environments and teaching styles to allow these learners to experience optimal social skills learning (Franz *et al.*, 2017). This information is a precursor to the research question, which is: What were three foundation phase teachers’ experiences of explicitly developing social skills with their learners with ASD?

The researcher, who was teaching at a “Learners with Special Educational Needs” (LSEN) school after she graduated from her undergraduate studies, taught learners experiencing a variety of barriers to learning, and became interested in how to work with developing social skills in learners with ASD. During this five-year period, she observed that some of the more autistic learners often showed delays in social skills, behaviours that are unacceptable to general society and made it difficult for these learners to act in a socially acceptable way. The more the researcher investigated this field of interest, she discovered that many teachers resorted to developing their own programmes as there was indeed a lack of training and knowledge in this field. The Global Monitoring Report of 2017/2018 confirms this, as it states that there is unsatisfactory professional capacity development in the South African schooling system, complemented by insufficient support from the Department of Education (2017:46). This lack of information amongst Department of Education officials, principals and lecturers in Higher Education Institutions motivated the researchers to investigate how other FP teachers were attempting to develop social skills with their learners with ASD. In order to understand this environment fully, the researcher conducted relevant national and international literature reviews on diverse interactive skills of learners with ASD when they are in a group or community situation. This discussion follows.

Social skills: Lemmer (2009:22) points out that learners on the autism spectrum, experience challenges regarding their social development. Social challenges may include limited interactive communication skills, restricted eye-contact during social interaction, limited sharing and being aggressive. Despite this old, but relevant reference, Iovannone, Dunlap, Huber and Kincaid (2003:162) accentuate the pivotal role by teachers to ensure that their interactions with learners who experience interactive communication and social skills challenges, should correspond with each learner’s specific and distinctive needs in order for growth to occur. They recommend that multiple approaches and methodologies such as personalised assistance, regular and organised coaching and tutoring as well as creating clear and logical learning situations with a practical and purposeful approach to challenges be utilised by teachers.

Brink (2012) supports the idea that there should be good communication relations between teachers, parents and learners in order to give the learner with ASD the best possible support. The importance of social interactions with other people, including peers, is stressed by Badiah (2018), when she cautions that, unless learners with ASD are exposed to encouraging and constructive interactions with friends, even forming friendships, they may be intimidated and even bullied, by their peers. Furthermore, failing to read and interpret the body language, feelings and meanings of their peers and other people during social and communicative interactions especially when they are engaged with play activities with their friends, some learners with ASD may be anxious, depressed and think about taking their own lives (Badiah, 2018).

Maljaars, Noens, Scholte and Van Berckelaer-Onnes (2012) explain that learners with ASD may experience problematic communication and language abilities, which complicate their social interactions. They distinguish between communicative language and symbol formulation in language. Language for communication is an intended action where learners become aware that their language gestures influence the behaviour of others whilst symbol formation refers to “an understanding of the relationship between a sign and its referent” (Maljaars *et al.*, 2012:2182).

Although there are many social skills, for the purpose of this research, the researchers focused on only four social skills that learners with ASD struggle with as these were the skills that emerged as prominent in the study. They include sharing; independence; behavioural etiquette and self-esteem. Each of these social skills is discussed in more detail below.

Sharing: Learners with ASD experience challenges joining or inviting class friends to participate in fantasy play activities and cooperative games which have an element of sharing. They struggle to act on communicative cues given by their peers that may include the sharing of apparatus, sharing of attention and sharing of emotions and ideas during these play activities (Gillis & Butler, 2007). The ability to share is not only an important element in cooperative games and fantasy play activities, but it contributes to social and communicative skills, which form the basis of healthy and positive peer relations (Lang *et al.*, 2014). Wolfberg, McCracken and Tuchel (2008) warn that learners with ASD do not necessarily prefer solitary play but that they articulate their play interests and socialising needs in ways that are their own and this sets them apart from their friends. The exclusion of these learners in play and social activities affects their formation of friendships negatively and learners with ASD may experience feelings of rejection.

Independence: Badiah (2018:23) alludes to the importance of teachers in guiding learners with ASD to become more autonomous, especially in their socialising interactions with their peers and other people in their community. Lemmer (in Eloff & Swart, 2018:390) stress that all learners need to be taught functional communication skills in order to become more independent. For learners to become more autonomous, she advises teachers that social instructions need to be given in different situations and environments; preparing the learner with ASD to adapt to a variety of instructions, activities and locations. Techniques to assist learners to become more self-reliant include using of visual cues, a list or schedules depicting the various activities to be engaged with as well as facilitating the changeover from one activity to another. Iovannone *et al.* (2003) emphasise that the learning environment should be structured and enable learners with ASD to envisage what is currently being taught, as well as to predict what the following activity will entail and how the knowledge and/or skills that have been taught, can be generalised to another environment or situation.

Behavioural etiquette: Learners with ASD display complicated behavioural manners due to the possible manifestation of anxiety disorders (Adams, MacDonald & Keen, 2019). They may experience an overload of senses, a deviation from everyday schedules and practices and social bewilderment. Other non-social deficits include inability to show facial expressions and empathy, verbal intonation and making eye contact; looking through or beyond a person (Daou, Vener & Poulson, 2014). Running away without the consent of the parent constitutes a challenging behaviour. Strang *et al.* (2012) allude to an inability to demonstrate acceptable behaviour in his or her social interaction with others, which may lead to depression and anxiety within the learner. Subsequently, the relations between the parents and child are further strained as parents and caregivers are under stress due to their child's behaviour in the house and broader society (Almansour *et al.*, 2013:62).

Self-esteem: Interaction with peers and forming of friendships can have a detrimental affect on the social esteem of learners with ASD. Healthy relations contribute to the development of a learner with ASD in totality; enhancing intellectual, language, social and emotional as well as physical abilities (Rowley *et al.*, 2012). However, they caution that the lack of social and interaction skills to form and maintain healthy interactions with friends, may lead to a learner

with ASD feeling anxious and stressed as well as isolated and lonely. Such a lonely learner may be victimised and bullied by their peers (Rowley *et al.*, 2012).

Support strategies: Support strategies used in this research project include group work, structured play, social stories and visual aids. Badiah (2018) is of the opinion that social skills that are modelled and taught in social groups, is an effective strategy to be employed in classrooms with learners with ASD. Radley *et al.* (2017) agree that working in groups makes provision for observations of learners with constructive and practical feedback to occur constantly. Davin (2013) explains that structured play entails guided learning opportunities by the teacher while O'Connor and Stagnitti (2011) view structured play as an intervention by the teacher to assist in the enhancing of social skills, language and behaviour, in planned play activities. In order to succeed in developing these important play activities, Bedrova and Leong (2015) believe that they need to be strategically and explicitly scaffolded by classroom teachers.

Coogee *et al.* (2018) advocate the employment of narrative techniques for learners with ASD to understand as well as address their improper social interactions. They believe that this technique entails a team consisting of important people in the lives of learners with ASD, namely parents, teachers, and therapists utilising strategies such as comic strips, cartooning, social scripts, smartboards and power cards to obtain specific identified behaviour, knowledge and skills.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMING

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory was appropriate for the interpretation of this study in that he emphasises the active roles of the teachers and learners in the learning and development process (Verenkikina, 2010). The teachers and learners co-construct knowledge together; it is the quality of the teacher-learner collaboration that is crucial. Kozulin and Gindis (2007) explain that to move a learner from the known knowledge to the unknown, requires the learner and the more knowledgeable other to scaffold, mediate and guide the learner through the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky's (1978) term "mediation" is used in the ZPD to extend the learners' cognitive skills from the lower-order to the higher-order cognitive functions to assimilate and accommodate new knowledge until the learner is in a phase of equilibrium. This process appears three times: first socially amongst peers, then on an individual level or between people and thirdly inside the learner where they are able to function effectively independently (Vygotsky, 1978). "Good learning occurs in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)" (Verenkikina, 2010:17). In this research project, the teachers scaffolded the new knowledge through using many examples of guided practise and role modelling, so that the learners with ASD could move to their own zones of ability and independence.

When working with learners with ASD, Vygotsky (1978) contends that a disability has an impact on the learner's relations with the community and affects interactions with the general public. This socio-cultural theory stresses the value of learning in and amongst people when rearing and educating learners with disabilities. The ZPD is illustrated by Vygotsky (1978) as the space between what the learners are currently doing and their potential with support from more knowledgeable others (MKOs) and their peers. Verenkikina (2010:20) explains that Vygotsky argues "rather than having education dragging behind in sociological development it must anticipate it; it must run ahead". The amount of learning depends upon the individual learner's potential and readiness to learn (Mutekwe, 2018).

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research may be described as a qualitative study embedded within an interpretive case study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Data were collected to explore the selected phenomenon of how three FP teachers taught social skills to their learners with ASD. Three different types of schools in the Western Cape were chosen since they accommodated learners with ASD: a resource class in a full-service government school (rural), a non-profit school (rural) and a government special needs school (urban). Purposive sampling was used to select three foundation phase teachers: T1 [female], T2 [female] and T3 [male] working with high functioning learners with ASD.

The data were generated through open-ended and one-on-one interviews and being a non-participant observer. Prior to the study, a pilot study was conducted at the LSEN school where the researcher taught. She invited colleagues to pre-test the two data collection instruments before the data collection commenced in order to enhance the value and credibility of this study and to identify possible challenges (Dikko, 2016). As a result, the language structure and wording of a few interview questions were adapted, and another question was added.

The researcher collected detailed, subjective understandings of the teaching of social skills experienced by the three FP teachers using structured, open-ended, one-on-one interviews with each of the teachers. The open-ended questions provided individualised responses from the teachers because this method enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions when needed (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). Observations were used to generate rich, contextual information on the phenomena and enabled the researcher to collect first-hand information. The researcher conducted individual, highly structured observations as a participant observer in the two teachers' classrooms (Flick, 2018). Although the researcher tried to observe T3 in his classroom, his children were unexpectedly called to the hall, so he was interviewed instead.

The researcher began the data analysis by preparing, transcribing and translating all the collected data and returned it to the teachers to check for accuracy (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Once it was approved by the teachers, the researcher read and re-read all the data and then began the inductive data analysis process. The researcher identified similarities within the data that was used to develop categories and themes. The coded data included the experiences of the four social skills discussed in this research paper.

To increase the credibility of this study, the researcher utilised instrument triangulation (Cohen *et al.*, 2018). She used three structured open-ended, one-on-one interviews along with three classroom observations for the data collection. In order for the researcher to promote validity and collect credible, in-depth responses that were relevant to the research phenomenon, the data collection was conducted in the natural setting (classrooms) of the three FP teachers working with learners with ASD. To minimise bias, the researcher asked the three FP teachers to member-check the transcribed interviews to see if they corresponded with their truth (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004).

To improve the trustworthiness of this research project, it was conducted in an ethical manner. Ethical clearance was obtained from both the University of Technology at which the researcher was a registered student, and the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) granted the researcher the right to collect data in the three schools. Furthermore, signed

consent forms were obtained from all the research participants and the principals of the selected schools.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research paper was to investigate how three FP teachers developed four social skills: sharing, self-esteem, behavioural etiquette and independence with their learners with ASD. Four Vignettes provide the background to the discussions. T1 (Vignettes 1 and 2) and T2's (Vignette 3) observations are provided then discussed, whereas T3 (Vignette 4) was not observed. Rather, inside T3's Vignette is a short clip of his interview, followed by a discussion.

Vignette 1

T1

In a group, T1 told her learners a story about a girl who grabbed another girl's lollipop and took it for herself and walked away with it. She then role modelled this experience using one of the learners in the class. Following this, T1 asked the learners, as a group, what emotions the learner would be feeling and why she would be feeling that. T1 followed up with a discussion asking if this was acceptable behaviour or not.

During the interview with T1, she informed the researcher she experienced her learners with ASD had started to demonstrate they understood that they must **share** with their classmates. This became evident in the learners' response to sharing their experiences of how they would feel if their lollipops were taken without permission.

An example of T1 developing the social skill of **independence** with her learners with ASD, was by asking the learners to independently role model the scenario of taking someone else's lollipop without their permission. For long-term effectiveness of social skill interventions that focus on self-worth and self-reliance, these learners with ASD have experienced how to independently identify and resolve social difficulties in everyday situations (Lantz, Nelson & Loftin, 2004). As learners with ASD have trouble developing and mastering social skills, they need social skill interventions that enable them to independently participate in a socially acceptable manner in the community (Isni, 2018).

T1 modelled the social skill of **behavioural etiquette** by using group work. As she was aware that her learners with ASD experienced difficulty in interpreting nonverbal language in social situations, she presented a problem involving behavioural etiquette skills to them in a visual and practical manner (Lowth, 2015). T1 prompted and motivated her learners to communicate whether they thought it was acceptable behaviour to take the lollipop without asking permission. This strategy of behavioural etiquette training to improve the interaction of learners with ASD with their classmates has been shown to be effective (Orton, 2011).

Vignette 1 indicates how T1 explicitly developed the **self-esteem** of her learners by providing each of them the opportunity to express how they would feel if someone took their lollipop without permission. T1 focussed on increasing the learners' self-esteem by teaching all the classmates to respect each other's verbal contributions and gave everyone a chance to express their views.

Vignette 2

T1

After the first break, T1's ASD class went outside with the mainstream Grade R class, to do some gross motor activities as a group. The more independent Grade R learners were paired with a "buddy" and a learner with ASD during this activity.

T1 got all the learners to mirror her when she stretched, crossed her midline and jumped up and down. Afterwards the learners and their "buddies" played on the gym equipment. One of the boys with ASD pushed in front of the Grade R "buddy" to get to the slide and did not say sorry.

As individuals with ASD do not tend to assimilate skills through implicit learning, it is important that they receive clear and direct instruction from the teacher when they are focusing on the development of specific social skills such as **independence** (Laushey & Heflin, 2000). T1 provided direct instruction to guide her learners with ASD to interact with the Grade R learners in a socially acceptable manner and improve their **behavioural etiquette** by using the peer support strategy.

During the interview, which occurred after the observation, T1 shared how she provided daily assistance and guidance to her learners with ASD to encourage the skill of **sharing**:

...sharing has improved a lot with group work. We struggled a lot with the learners to share in the beginning of the year, they did not want share or give anything to each other. This sharing has improved a lot during the year.

According to Vygotsky's ZPD theory, a child with ASD who receives appropriate support from an MKO will achieve higher levels of learning than if they attempted the learning on their own. In this example, T1 knew that direct teaching and using Vygotsky's (Gindis, 2007) scaffolding skills is useful for teaching learners with ASD specific social skills (Laushey & Heflin, 2000).

Vignette 3

T2

In T2's class, each learner had a chance to be the leader for the week. This role included managing the morning ring and assisting the teacher throughout the day with any administrative or teaching/learning tasks.

On this particular day, the class captain began the morning ring session. He asked his classmates to say what day it was and how the weather was. After this he said: "We are going to dance with this song today". He opened his laptop and selected the Just Dance music program, then selected the Justin Bieber song. This played on the large interactive whiteboard with him in front of the class facing the whiteboard with his back to the class. He comfortably led the group without any help from T2.

Vygotsky (1987) contends that learners with disabilities struggle with relationships close to them and on a broader scale with the world, as well as their interactions with the people closest to them.

Vygotsky (1987:102) asserts that a disability “not only alters the child’s relationship with the world, but above all affects his interaction with people”. T2 addressed the social skill of **sharing**, by providing each learner with an opportunity of taking a leadership role and learning to respect each other. Sharing leadership roles assisted these learners with ASD to experience the importance of not interrupting, knowing when to interrupt and dealing with making mistakes (Reyes, 2013). All these behaviours lead to treating each other with respect and listening to others’ opinions when they worked in groups. The class captain for that particular day used visual cue cards and asked his colleagues questions such as “What is appropriate clothing for this season?” He showed his pictures of a variety of clothing and asked which clothes were the most appropriate. The peers shared their ideas in a respectful way and completed the activity in a respectful manner.

By modelling the morning-routine and allowing each learner to take leadership roles, T2 was encouraging the social skill on working **independently** with her learners with ASD. T2 had previously explained what was expected of her learners in this role of being the class captain and leading the morning-ring. This learner had brought in his own laptop, found his own choice of music for the day and shared it with his peers. The music he chose was timeless as Justine Bieber was expected to visit South Africa. He independently led the morning-ring, answered his peers’ questions and managed their responses.

T2 further reinforced **behavioural etiquette** by teaching her learners with ASD to be respectful of each other and not hurt each other’s feelings. T2’s approach reflects Sotelo’s (2009) belief that a well-structured routine and good classroom management are vital when it comes to the enhancement of behavioural etiquette of learners with ASD.

T2 increased the **self-esteem** of the class captain by providing him with an opportunity that he successfully managed. Using modelling combined with stories and discussions, helps learners with ASD to learn social skills and develop their self-esteem more effectively (Badiah, 2018).

Vignette 4

T3

While learners were out of the class making bread in the kitchen, the researcher sat in T3’s class and conducted the interview with him. During the interview, there were examples of how he encouraged sharing, independence, behavioural etiquette and self-esteem during an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and a social science lesson. T3 mentions that his class had many successes regarding social skills in general, by integrating different support strategies.

T3 encouraged **sharing** in his classroom by stating:

... the children must be involved and get more answers coming out from their side as well. They will give their own personal experiences and then we relate the personal experiences to other children in the class and bounce questions around.

T3’s educational approach reflected Ogilvie’s (2008) beliefs of inclusion of students with special needs by providing a respectful and safe environment where the learners could share their opinions and views of Internet safety.

He was aware that the internet and technology are a part of his learners with ASD's daily lives – at school and at home – and taught his learners how to use the internet safely. He expanded the social skills and social experiences of his learners with ASD by guiding them to **independently** communicate with others in an acceptable and safe manner via the internet and social media.

T3 used **behavioural etiquette** to teach his learners how to make friends and communicate in a socially acceptable manner:

... I am teaching acceptable social interaction skills on how to make friends.

T3's focus on **behavioural etiquette** enabled his learners with ASD to form new friendships and is supported by Isni (2018) who states that an understanding of social skills can assist learners develop positive friendships.

T3 used incidental teaching when enhancing the **self-esteem** of his learners by sharing his own experiences of rejection during morning ring. He did this to show his learners that anyone can be rejected and victimised, how not to be socially isolated (Gates *et al.*, 2017) and that social interactions are vital in order to develop complex social functions. T3 reflected Vygotsky's (1978) view as he used the ZPD to promote his students' **self-esteem** by using technology that they already knew and expand their knowledge by sharing it with their peers (César & Santos, 2006).

5. CONCLUSION

This research identifies and explains pedagogical approaches to address the teaching of social skills with learners with ASD. Since there have been limited studies (Franz *et al.*, 2017) on early intervention programmes of learners with ASD in Africa and particularly South Africa, this research project is important to share. The two lessons learnt from this empirical research will be discussed below.

First, knowing that ASD is characterised by order and disorder, some pedagogical approaches generate divisions, while those presented here noticeably benefited the learners with ASD. These three teachers chose to proactively scaffold their social skills lessons to their learners, where they adjusted their classroom environments and provided practical solutions. They included rather than excluded, they built trust to reassure their learners and acted caringly. They built bridges by creating constructivist classroom environments and offered insights into how their learners with ASD learnt social skills to lead humane lives.

A second, and final interpretation that can be drawn from this study is that, contrary to the APA (2013:50) definition of learners with ASD characterised by a "triad of impairments which involve social integration, communication skills and imagination", these three teachers provided evidence where they drew on Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding and created learning opportunities to elevate their learners with ASD's understanding of social skills. They worked towards their learners' zone of abilities and independence.

The findings of this study must be viewed in light of some limitations. First, due to time constraints, the researcher selected only three FP teachers working with learners with ASD. Second, although all FP teachers mediate many social skills, the researcher limited her study to focus on the following social skills that emerged as the most prominent ones from her data:

sharing, self-esteem, behavioural etiquette, and independence. Third, all the schools selected were in the Western Cape.

Since learners with ASD frequently display limited interests, repetitive activities and stereotypical behaviour (DSM-V, 2013), it is proposed that teachers spend time getting to know their learners and are aware of the many support programmes that are available for the development of social skills of FP learners with ASD. In addition, teachers can educate learners without ASD on the substantial contribution that they can make when they engage in positive interactions, develop a sense of friendship and resolve conflicts with their peers with ASD. Since no thorough curricular guidelines may ever be available for learners with ASD, it is pertinent for parents and communities to become jointly involved in developing the self-esteem of learners with ASD for them to reach their full potential and live balanced lives, and not be rejected because of a lack of social skills.

6. DISCLAIMER

At the date of submission, this paper was extracted from an unpublished Master's thesis.

REFERENCES

- Adams, D., MacDonald, M. & Keen, D. 2019. Teacher responses to anxiety-related behaviours in students on the autism spectrum. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 86, 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2018.12.009>.
- Almansour, M.A., Alateeq, M.A., Alzahrani, M.K., Algeffari, M.A. & Alhomaidan, H.T. 2013. Depression and anxiety among parents and caregivers of autistic spectral disorder children. *Neurosciences*, 18(1): 58–63.
- American Psychiatric Association (APA). 2013. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-V*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>.
- Badiah, L.I. 2018. The importance of social skills for autism. Proceedings of the 2nd INDOEDUC4ALL – Indonesian Education for All (INDOEDUC 2018). *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 272: 20–22. <https://doi.org/10.2991/indoeduc-18.2018.7>.
- Brink, E. 2012. *The SNAP programme*. Available at <http://www.snap.org.za/snapforautism.org.za/snap-programme>. [2 May 2016].
- Bodrova, E. & Leong, D.J. 2015. Vygotskian and post-Vygotskian views on children's play. *American Journal of Play*, 7(3): 371–388.
- César, M. & Santos, N. 2006. From exclusion to inclusion: Collaborative work contributions to more inclusive learning setting. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 21(3): 333–346. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03173420>.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. 2018. *Research methods in education*, 8th ed. Abingdon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>.
- Cole, M., John-Steiner, V., Scribner, S. & Souberman, E. (Eds.). 1978. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Oxford: Harvard University Press.

- Coogle, C.C., Ahmed, S., Aljaffal, M.A., Alsheef, M.Y. & Hamdi, H.A. 2018. Social narrative strategies to support children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 46: 445–450. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0873-7>.
- Daou, N., Vener, S.M. & Poulson, C.L. 2014. Analysis of three components of affective behaviour in children with autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 8: 480–501. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2014.01.005>.
- Davin, R. 2013. *Handbook for Grade R teaching*. Cape Town: Pearson Education South Africa (Pty) Ltd.
- Dikko, M. 2016. Establishing construct validity and reliability: Pilot testing of a qualitative interview for research in Takaful (Islamic Insurance). *The Qualitative Report*, 21(3): 521–528.
- Elliot, S.N. & Gresham, F.M. 1993. Social skills interventions for children. *Behaviour Modification*, 17(3): 287–313. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01454455930173004>.
- Flick, U. 2018. *The Sage handbook of qualitative data collection*. London: Sage. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070>.
- Franz, L., Chambers, N, Von Isenburg, M. & De Vries, P.J. 2017. Autism spectrum disorder in sub-Saharan Africa: A comprehensive scoping review. *Autism Research*, 10(5): 723–749. <https://doi.org/10.1002/aur.1766>.
- Gates, J., Kang, E. & Lerner, M. 2017. Efficiency of group social skills interventions for youth with autism spectrum disorder: A systematic review of meta-analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 52(1): 164–181. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2017.01.006>.
- Gillis, J.M. & Butler, R.C. 2007. Social skills interventions for pre-schoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A description of single-subject design studies. *Journal of Early and Intensive Behavior Intervention*, 4(3): 532–547. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0100390>.
- Global Education Monitoring Report. 2017. *Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
- Henning, E., van Rensburg, W. & Smit, B. 2004. *Finding your way in qualitative research*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Iovannone, R., Dunlap, G., Huber, H. & Kincaid, D. 2003. Effective educational practices for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Focus on Autism and other Developmental Disabilities*, 18 (3): 158–162. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10883576030180030301>.
- Isni, L. 2018. The importance of social skills for autism. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 272(2): 20–24.
- Koegel, R.I. & Frea, W.D. 1993. Treatment of social behaviour in autism through the modification of pivotal social skills. *Journal of Applied Behaviour Analysis*, 26(3): 369–377. <https://doi.org/10.1901/jaba.1993.26-369>.
- Kozulin, A. & Ginids, B. 2007. Sociocultural theory and education of children with special needs: From defectology to remedial pedagogy. In H. Daniels, M. Cole, & J.V. Wertsch (Eds). *The Cambridge companion to Vygotsky* (pp.332–362). New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521831040.014>.
- Lang, R., Machalicek, M., Rispoli, M., O'Reilly, M., Sigafoos, J., Lancioni, J., Peters-Scheffer, N. & Didden, R. 2014. Play skills taught via behavioral intervention generalize, maintain, and

persist in the absence of socially mediated reinforcement in children with autism. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 8(7): 861. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2014.04.007>.

Lantz, J., Nelson, J. & Loftin, R. 2004. Guiding children with Autism in play: Applying the integrated play group model in school settings. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(2): 8–14. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990403700201>.

Laushey, K.M. & Heflin, L.J. 2000. Enhancing social skills of kindergarten children with autism through the training of multiple peers as tutors. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 30(3): 183–193. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1005558101038>.

Lemmer, R. 2009. Die assessering van 'n leerder in Graad R met Asperger-sindroom. [The assessment of a learner in Grade R with Asperger syndrome]. Unpublished MEd thesis. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

Lemmer, R. 2018. Assessering en ondersteuning van leerders met Autismespektrum-versteurings. In I. Eloff & E. Swart (Eds.). *Understanding educational psychology*. Cape Town: Juta & Co.

Lowth, M. 2015. Understanding autistic spectrum disorder. *Business Source Premier*, 45(7): 20–23.

Maljaars, J., Noens, I., Scholte, E. & Van Berckelaer-Onnes, I. 2012. Language in low-functioning children with autistic disorder: Differences between receptive and expressive skills and concurrent predictors of language. *Journal of Autism and Development Disorders*, 42: 2181–2191. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-012-1476-1>.

Mutekwe, E. 2018. Using a Vygotskian sociocultural approach to pedagogy: Insights from some teachers in South Africa. *Journal of Education*, 17: 58–72. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i71a04>.

O'Connor, C. & Stagnitti, K. 2011. Play, behaviour, language and social skills: The comparison of a play and a non-play intervention within a specialist school setting. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 32(3): 1205–1211. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ridd.2010.12.037>.

Ogilvie, C.R. 2008. The impact of video modelling and peer mentoring of social skills for middle school students with autism spectrum disorders in inclusive settings. Unpublished DED thesis. Orlando: University of Central Florida.

Radley, K.C., O'Handley, R.D., Battaglia, A.A., Lum, J.D.K., Dadakhodjaeva, K., Ford, W.B. & McHugh, M.B. 2017. Effects of a social skills intervention on children with autism spectrum disorder and peers with shared deficits. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 40(2): 233–262. <https://doi.org/10.1353/etc.2017.0011>.

Reyes, N.M. 2013. Emotion regulation and emotionality: an examination of correlates of social skills in young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their typically developing peers. Unpublished PhD thesis. Blacksburg: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Rowley, E., Chandler, S., Baird, G., Simonof, E., Pickles, A., Loucas, T. & Charman, T. 2012. The experience of friendship, victimization and bullying in children with an autism spectrum disorder: Associations with child characteristics and school placement. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 6(3): 1126–1134. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2012.03.004>.

Sotelo, M. 2009. Improving social competence in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders through a combined-strategy group intervention: A pilot study. Unpublished DED thesis. Fort Lauderdale: Nova South-eastern University.

- South Africa. 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- South African Department of Basic Education. 2014. *Policy on screening, identification, assessment and support (SIAS)*. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- South African Department of Statistics. 2019. *Sustainable development goals (SDGs): Country report 2019 – South Africa*. Pretoria: Statistics South Africa.
- Stewart, M., Schnabel, A., Hallford, D.J., McGillivray, J.A., Forbes, D., Foster, M., Shandley, K., Gardam, M. & Austin, D.W. 2020. Challenging child behaviours positively predict symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in parents of children with *Autism Spectrum Disorder and Rare Diseases*, 69: 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2019.101467>.
- Strang, J.F., Kenworth, L., Daniolis, P., Case, L., Wills, M.C., Martin, A. & Wallace, G.L. 2012. Depression and anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders without intellectual disability. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*, 6, 406–412. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rasd.2011.06.015>.
- Verenkikina, M. 2010. Vygotsky in twenty-first century research. In J. Herrington & B. Hunter (Eds.). *Proceedings of World Conference on Educational Multimedia, Hypermedia and Telecommunications*, Chesapeake, VA: AACE pp.16–25.
- Vygotsky, L.S. 1978. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Walker, S. & Berthelsen, D. 2008. Children with autistic spectrum disorder in early childhood education programs: A social constructivist perspective on inclusion. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 40(1): 33–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03168362>.
- Wolfberg, P., McCracken, H. & Tuchel, T. 2008. Fostering peer play and friendships: Creating a culture of inclusion. In H. Dunn Buron & P.J. Wolber (Eds.). *Learners on the autism spectrum: Preparing highly qualified educators*. Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.