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Lost in the Autism Spectrum: Assessment and intervention for improving social competence in high functioning girls displaying ‘autistic-like’ behaviours

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Denise F. Eddowes
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Abstract

This study is about a focused social skill intervention for pre-pubescent girls with high functioning ‘autistic-like’ behaviours to improve their social competence. Participants were four girls between the ages of 8-12 years who participated in the 16-session programme over an 8 week period. Using a case study design and a mixed methods approach, the intervention used video modelling to address the visual learning preference known inherent to those with ASD along with the incorporation of the SOLO taxonomy to meet their systemising strengths. The results showed that when provided with a targeted intervention their social skills behaviours improved and problem behaviours decreased. This study identified that girls with ‘autistic-like’ behaviours, when identified and provided with targeted intervention, have the ability to develop skills to engage in positive reciprocal interactions with peers, adults and family. The study concludes with identifying limitations and future research needs.
Dedication

For Lynette
Acknowledgements
My sincere thanks goes out to the best support team anyone could be lucky enough to have. Firstly, to my primary supervisor Vijaya Dharan whose unwavering generosity of wisdom, time and encouragement knew no bounds; you are the consummate professional. I would also like to thank my secondary supervisor, Hal Jackson, the participating schools, my local ASD support group, and in particular the enthusiastic girls and their families who participated in this study - it could not have happened without you. To Pam Hook who not only designed but also made available the excellent digital SOLO designed templates online. Finally to my fabulous husband Mark and supportive sons Jesse and Nick - thank you for the patience and love you have shown me not only this year but throughout the many years I have studied – I promise to make more dinners in 2015! Approval for this research was obtained from Massey University Human Ethics Committee, Southern A.
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