

## **COMBINING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY BASED IN SENSORY INTEGRATION PRINCIPALS**

*by*  
**Annette Joosten**

This pilot study was a qualitative study which described and analysed the use of sensory integration within an occupational therapy model. The literature review covers the development of sensory integration theory and practice and their relationship to autism spectrum disorders. Specifically this study described the use of the Sensory Profile.

Four single case studies were completed. All participants were of primary school age and attended a generalist Specialist School setting on a full-time basis. A carer and a teacher completed a Sensory Profile for each child.

Baseline observations, prior to sensory integration intervention, were then compared, with data recorded during the intervention period, to show whether, in this study, sensory

integration therapy affected the frequency of self-injury, self-stimulation, vocalisation, non-engagement, and engagement with people and objects. The comparisons indicated that there was sufficient positive trend and descriptive evidence to suggest an association between sensory integration therapy and the frequency of these events, to warrant further research. The review also indicated that effective intervention relies on the therapist having knowledge and understanding of the theories related to the causes of behaviours that their programs are designed to influence. It also indicated the need for occupational therapists to record and evaluate clinical practice related to the application of sensory integration theory with individuals with autism spectrum disorder and intellectual disability as it is an increasingly popular approach but research is limited.

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## **ASPECTS OF THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF CHILDREN WITH A DISABILITY WHO ARE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS**

*by*  
**Jo Shearer**

The quality of life of children with a disability has rarely been the focus for study. Nor has the quality of life of students with a disability been a topic of academic attention in schools. This study focuses on the quality of life of children with a disability who are educated in inclusive school environments, from the child and parents' perspectives. A personal account of the experiences of the child with a disability at school, at home and in the community, was discussed with the researcher through face to face interviews. Three members of the same family, (the mother, father and child with a disability), who lived in the same home, were each interviewed separately

using the same interview questions. In total, five families were involved in the study. Four of the children had Down syndrome and one had cerebral palsy. Incidentally, all of the children with a disability were girls. The ages of the children ranged from 9 to 12 years, at the time of the interviews, with the year of school ranging from year 4 to year 6.

The data generated by the study contained the perceptions of individuals and was subjective in nature. The information collected within families was amalgamated, creating a greater understanding of the life of the child with a disability, and

was subsequently analysed using a recognised framework of quality of life. The families' responses were also examined in comparison to each other, in order to detect emerging themes which may have been common to more than one family. This qualitative data has been discussed in relation to aspects of quality of life including the impact of an inclusive school setting.

The families demonstrated a commitment to inclusion across environments. The children with a disability were empowered to make choices in their lives, although these choices were restricted within a boundary of options approved of by the parents, or that the school allowed. More major decisions were clearly the responsibility of parents or others, (such as teachers), rather than the child. In families where there was more than one child, the parents endeavoured to parent each of their children according to similar principles, accommodating the children's individual needs, without overtly focusing on disability. The children with a disability appeared to be valued highly by their respective siblings and extended families. All of the children were involved in extra curricula activities, either on an individual basis or with family and friends. In each instance the family felt well supported by the school, in particular by the principal, classroom teacher and special education support staff, although this had not always been the case in every family. In some instances parents expressed concern over staff, (who may have only briefly

or not consistently been associated with the child with a disability). Some staff's attitudes and practices regarding the child's education proved to be problematic, from the parent's perspective. Open lines of communication were imperative to the success of inclusive education. It was also noted by parents that there were benefits for children without a disability as a result of interacting with a child with a disability at school. The children with disabilities discussed their friendships with enthusiasm. However, as the children with disabilities aged, the distance between their scholastic competence and that of their school peers became greater, and this broadening gap appeared to impact on their social relations. This was a point of concern for parents, particularly as they considered future schooling decisions.

Although it is not possible to generalise from such a small sample, the results raise questions for more general consideration. The quality of life of these children appeared rich. These are probably not 'typical' families and are likely to be representative of a more positive group, but through their behaviour and interaction they provide models and attributes, which appear to enhance each child's perception of their world, despite their disabling condition. In this context, suggestions for professional and parental guidance have also been presented for consideration.

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## **ATTITUDES TOWARDS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AMONGST SPEECH PATHOLOGY STUDENTS**

*by*  
*Sue McAllister*

It has long been proposed and accepted within the rehabilitation field that the attitudes of professionals towards people with disabilities has an important impact upon the quality and type of services that they are able to access. It has also been suggested that undergraduate curricula and its relationship to acquisition of practical professional skills may have an important impact upon the nature of professionals' attitudes towards people with disabilities. This study undertook to examine the nature of attitudes amongst Speech Pathology students participating in a Bachelor of applied Science (Speech Pathology) program at an Australian University. Two dimen-

sions of attitudes were examined, general attitudes towards people with disabilities and the level of comfort experienced while interacting with people with disabilities. It was found that students were generally more positive than the average person toward people with disabilities, but that this did not appear to change over the course. Students also experienced higher levels of discomfort than the average person, with levels rising over the course until the final year group, who reported lower levels of discomfort. These results were discussed in the light of evidence regarding the students' perception of disability and impact of factors such as year level,

frequency and nature of contact with people with disabilities, age, motivation to be a speech pathologist, and the curriculum and practicum structure of the course. A number of recommendations for promoting positive attitudes and greater confidence in interacting with people with disabilities amongst students were made for consideration by speech pathology programs of a similar structure.

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## **EXPLORING THE SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE OF VISUAL IMAGERY IN A CASE OF HOMONYMOUS HEMIANOPIA**

*by*  
**Roland Cichowski**

What is the nature of the subjective experience of visual imagery in someone with a homonymous hemianopia? A review of the literature revealed little that approached the topic from this perspective.

An investigator and subject who fortuitously share similar backgrounds become participants in a qualitative study of their experience of visual imagery.

Both participants, males aged 49, who had similar expectations and interests in architecture and art shared and investigated their subjective impressions of visual imagery abilities. One participant suffered a cerebral hemorrhage at 36. He experienced the effects of an infarction of the right hemisphere affecting parietal, temporal and occipital lobes. This caused a complete left homonymous hemianopia and he is registered blind. He has been taught to scan effectively. The study suggests the importance of effective rehabilitation programs for such individuals.

Some thirteen years after the hemorrhage this participant is drawing cartoons. This has led to a degree of curiosity concerning his ability to create visual imagery.

A series of interviews and discussions suggested that there is very little difference in the two participants' ability to generate visual imagery despite obvious differences in perceptual abilities.

The affected participant experiences an area he refers to as mirage or camouflage which, he says, fills in the missing part of his visual field. He claims it is a visual experience, sees flashing coloured lights in it as an aura and an hallucination, yet he is unable to visualise the area itself.

The study has two aspects of equal importance. One is a study of visual imagery as affected by a homonymous hemianopia. The other is the endeavor to develop a methodology capable of exposing the complexities of a subjective experience. This has necessitated the development of some less conventional methodological approaches that are discussed. It has enabled an exploration of the individuals' reflections and commentary on their own mental imagery and thus comparisons between the two individuals involved can be made. The methodology has allowed an approach in this dissertation, which touches on an analysis of consciousness as it applies to the nature of the subjective experience.

The study draws attention to our tendency to view mental visual imagery as a distinct and whole visual phenomenon. It suggests that what we experience subjectively as a visual phenomena may be composed of many other attributes drawn from other sensory inputs. Subjectively there is a sense of space in an image, which suggests it may be drawn from auditory and tactile inputs as well as the more dominating visual. Finally the study puts forward a series of recommendations for future research in this area.

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## **Ph.D THESIS ABSTRACTS**

### **FRIENDSHIP AND AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS: A PRACTICAL PROGRAMME**

*by*

*Vicky L. Duffield*

Individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are described as having a qualitative impairment in social interactions. Furthermore, individuals with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome often express an interest in friendship in adolescence and adulthood. Such individuals characteristically have insufficient skills to fulfil this desire. The development of friendships by individuals with ASD has received limited attention in both theoretical and practical research. Little is known of individuals' cognitive understanding and practical expression of friendship. There is a dearth of programmes constructed to address this area. This thesis explores individuals' perceptions of friendship as well as the design, implementation and evaluation of a programme designed to teach friendship skills to individuals with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome. There were two interrelated stages in which qualitative techniques were primarily utilised in the collection and analysis of data.

First, seven participants with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome who had friends were interviewed regarding their perceptions of friendship. The participants' suggestions, and other relevant research on friendship development, were used to develop a programme designed to teach friendship skills to adolescents with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome.

The next stage employed a case study design and involved implementing and evaluating a practical programme to teach friendship skills. This programme, consisting of structured teaching and an informal generalisation programme, was

implemented over twenty consecutive weeks. Six adolescent participants, who had expressed a desire to learn how to make friends, participated in this intervention. Data were collected through repeated structured interviews, assessments, observations, and documents, such as parental diaries and field journals. Participants' parents and nominated significant others were also interviewed to construct a holistic description of each participant's friendship behaviour. Data were analysed utilising qualitative techniques, but in addition, some descriptive statistics were employed.

This study provided a detailed description of the perceptions of friendship by individuals with ASD, as well as those of their parents and others involved in their life. Given the exploratory nature of this study, this research can be viewed as a pilot. The results indicate that whilst an intervention designed to teach friendship skills to individuals with high functioning autism and Asperger syndrome had positive outcomes for most individuals, programmes of such a nature need to be highly individualised. It was postulated that there is value in viewing friendship development and ASD within a quality of life framework, including viewing friendship development of individuals with ASD as important for the well-being of each individual and their parents. Individuals, their parents and others had differing perceptions of friendship. However, there is value in collaboration between all individuals in the development of programmes so that shared perceptions evolve. Steps for designing further programmes to teach friendship skills to individuals with ASD were proposed. A number of practical recommendations were also made.

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