

CHAPTER 5

PILOT STUDY

1. INTRODUCTION

The pilot study of the current research was the first step of the practical application of the Gestalt play therapy emotional intelligence programme for primary school children. It is also the last step of the first grouping of steps of an intervention research study (De Vos, 2002:409-418) namely, “Early development and pilot testing”. The three groupings of steps are presented visually in Chapter 1, Figure 1.6 Research procedure. This chapter covers a theoretical background of the definition and value of pilot studies. It also covers the goal of the pilot study – what the researcher expects from a pilot study. The researcher then discusses the application of the pilot study in the current research. The outcomes of the pilot study will also be discussed shortly, because these have a very direct influence on the actual research itself.

The researcher will first define a pilot study and state the value thereof following the introduction to clarify what a pilot study really is and why it is needed in the research process.

2. DEFINITION OF A PILOT STUDY

A pilot study is a mini-version of a full-scale study or a trial run done in preparation of the complete study. The latter is also called a ‘feasibility’ study. It can also be a specific pre-testing of research instruments, including questionnaires or interview schedules. (Compare Polit, *et al.* & Baker in Nursing Standard, 2002:33-44; Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001:1.)

The pilot study will thus follow after the researcher has a clear vision of the research topic and questions, the techniques and methods, which will be applied, and what the research schedule will look like. It is “reassessment without tears” (Blaxter, Hughes &

Tight, 1996:121), trying out all research techniques and methods, which the researcher have in mind to see how well they will work in practice. If necessary it can then still be adapted and modified accordingly. (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1996:121)

The pilot study in the current research can be defined as mainly a try-out of research techniques and methods, but also of questionnaires and interviews. The researcher compiled an emotional intelligence programme and applied this to a pilot group of primary school children. During this process, the researcher also tested a short open-ended questionnaire on the cultures of the families of the children, questionnaires on their learning styles for the parents, a behaviour style instrument / questionnaire on the children in the pilot group and feedback reports on these to the parents. The pilot study of the current research can therefore be defined as both a feasibility study as well as a pre-testing of instruments, questionnaires and interviews.

The value of first piloting the whole research process is discussed in the next section, because if a pilot study is of too little value, the researcher can waste time, energy and money.

3. VALUE AND GOAL OF A PILOT STUDY

The researcher first discussed the value of a pilot study as stated by different authors and then the applicability to the current study in the following paragraphs. After stating the value of such a study, the researcher compiled the goal of a pilot study for the current research project.

3.1 The Value of a Pilot Study

Blaxter, *et al.* (1996:122) states that “You may think that you know well enough what you are doing, but the value of pilot research cannot be overestimated. Things never work quite the way you envisage, even if you have done them many times before, and they have a nasty habit of turning out very differently than you expected”. It is thus very clear to the researcher, that the pilot study in the current research was essential to

prevent the waste of time, energy and money. The value is also emphasised by the points listed below.

According to Welman and Kruger (1999:146) many novice researchers are disillusioned when they find out that the guidelines for research are only valid in an ideal environment, and not in the practical research environment where they conduct their research study. This might be the main reason why a pilot study is needed. Welman and Kruger (1999:146) also listed the following three values of a pilot study:

- It is needed to detect **possible flaws in measurement procedures** (including instructions, time limits, etcetera) and **in the operationalisation of independent variables**. This value of the pilot study was very applicable in the current research study. The researcher used two different measurement procedures with the research groups to gain information and to do a pre- and post test. The practical application of these in a group environment had to be piloted as well as the time to be allowed for each of these. Also the feedback structure to the parents had to be piloted to clear out practical difficulties, like duplication of information to parents, the need for the feedback and the time consumed by the specific format of feedback.
- A pilot study is also valuable to **identify unclear or ambiguous items in a questionnaire**. Although the current study did not make use of self-designed questionnaires for the pre- and post-test or for the behaviour style / personality assessment within the research process, piloting of the use of the existing tests was necessary. The items of the DISC behaviour style instrument were read to the group members. It was necessary to pilot this action to clear out unclear items and also to determine time limits and the clarity of instructions. The latter two were already covered in the first point of value here.
- The **non-verbal behaviour of participants** in the pilot study may give important **information about any embarrassment or discomfort experienced concerning the content or wording of items in a questionnaire**. The latter could be valuable to a smaller extent in the current research, because this study is not using a purely quantitative method, but a combined qualitative-quantitative method. Children's reactions on the retest in a group format could be noted as well as their reactions on certain measurement situations during the group therapy process. The latter took place in the form of the DISC

questionnaire to determine the children's processes and an exercise to determine their culture at home. The latter was not piloted in the pilot group, but the need for this originated from the pilot study. The research process involved two groups. The culture exercise was thus tried out on the first group and could be adapted where needed for the use of the second group. This might also not be a very good example of the current value of pilot studies, as this was an experiential exercise and not a questionnaire. Different children and groups, depending on their needs and processes, thus handled it in different ways.

Other advantages of pilot studies include the following as listed in Nursing Standard (2002:33,34):

- It can give advance warning about where the main research project can fail
- It indicates where research protocols might not be followed
- The pilot study can also identify practical problems of the research procedure
- It indicates whether proposed methods or instruments are inappropriate or too complicated

Some of the advantage points listed above are relevant to the pilot study of the current research project. The pilot study in the current research process was very specifically used to identify practical problems in the process, sessions and methods used. The research itself has as a goal the applicability of Gestalt play therapy techniques to enhance the emotional intelligence of primary school children in a cultural sensitive way. The pilot study could thus indicate whether the proposed methods and / or instruments are appropriate. The pilot study could thus also give advance warning of possibilities where certain types of techniques or the study as a whole could fail.

The pilot study can therefore be of value for testing the feasibility of both research instruments or data collection instruments like questionnaires, interview schedules, or other testing instruments and also of the research process itself. The following section combined the statements of the value of pilot studies in a goal of pilot studies in general as well as for the current research project.

3.2 The Goal of a Pilot Study

The researcher sees the goal of a pilot study in general as related to the aim of the research project of which it forms part. The general goal of a pilot study is to provide information, which can contribute to the success of the research project as a whole. The latter is supported by the following quotes concerning the value and goal of pilot studies: “to see if the beast will fly” (De Vos, 2002:410), “reassessment without tears” (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1996:121), and “Do not take the risk. Pilot test first.” (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001:2). The general goal thus seems to save some time, effort and money, which can be lost if a major research study fails because of unforeseen attributes. The goal is thus to test the study on small scale first to sort out all the possible problems that might lead to failure of the research procedure. It might minimise the risk of failure.

In the current study the goal of the pilot study consists of two parts. The first was to find as many as possible practical arrangements that might have a negative influence on the success of the research procedure. The other included sorting out all practicalities related to measurement instruments as well as the applicability of these instruments to the potential outcomes of the study.

The procedure of the pilot study in the current research project is discussed in the following paragraphs.

4. THE PILOT STUDY IN THE CURRENT RESEARCH PROJECT

The pilot study of the current research follows the design phase, which is the research strategy as stated in Chapter 1, 8. RESEARCH DESIGN / STRATEGY. After the strategy is in place and the procedural elements of the intervention are determined (as far as possible), the early development and pilot testing (De Vos, 2002:409) could follow. The researcher stated in Chapter 1, 8.2 Specifying procedural elements of the intervention, that certain procedural elements in the current study could only be developed while the research procedure itself was already in process. Some

procedural elements were therefore identified during the process of the pilot study. It is part of the research procedure as stated in Chapter 1, 9. RESEARCH PROCEDURE. The research procedure is divided in three main sections, namely:

- Early development and pilot testing
- Evaluation and advanced development
- Dissemination

The pilot study is part of the first phase of the research procedure, following the literature study. De Vos (2002:410) states that the pilot study usually takes place in a setting which is convenient for the researcher and that resembles the one used for the intervention. The research procedure of the pilot study in this research project therefore greatly resembles the true study. The following is a diagrammatic representation of the research procedure of the pilot study.

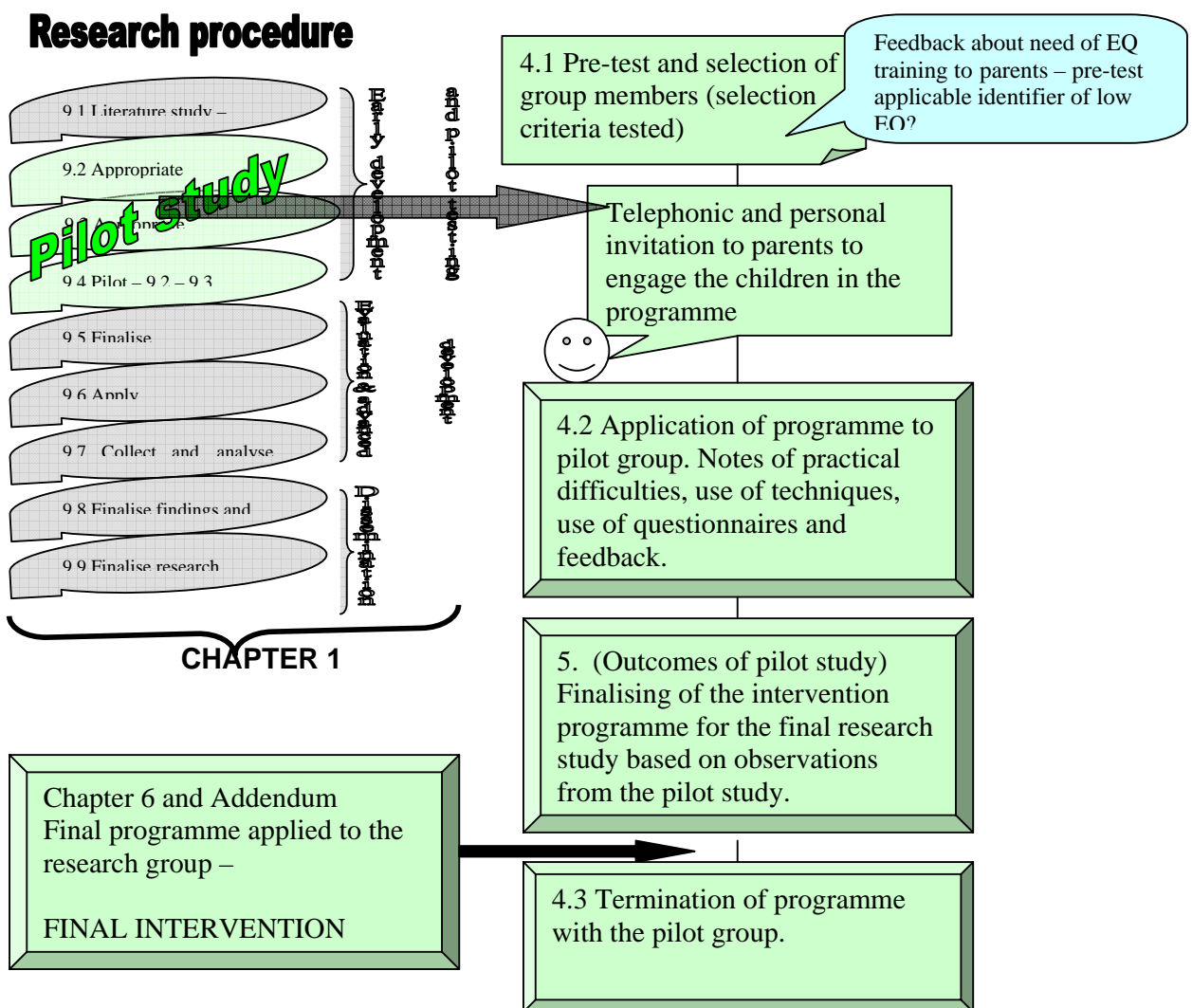


Figure 5.1: Research procedure and procedure of pilot study

4.1 Selection of group members for the pilot study

The researcher used the same selection criteria for the pilot study as for the final intervention. The criteria used specifically for the pilot study is discussed very shortly in the following paragraphs. Some criteria were added to the final selection criteria as a result of the outcomes of the pilot study. The final selection criteria are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, 5.2 Selection of the group members.

The following are the main selection criteria used for the members for the group of the pilot study:

- The use of the results of a specific pre-test to determine the need for enhancement of emotional intelligence
- Gender
- Age
- Cultural groups
- Maintaining an ethical approach to the group members and their care takers

4.1.1 Use of the results of a specific pre-test

The researcher made use of the results from the Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System (Naglieri and Das, 1997a). The theoretical background of this assessment tool is discussed in Chapter 2, 1.5 Cognitive development – Planning processes and 3.4 Assessment of emotional intelligence. Children who needed help with planning processes as part of the four processes underlying effective intellectual functioning (Naglieri & Das, 1997b:2) were included in this research project. Difficulties with planning processes are related to difficulties with control of behaviour, interpersonal problems and impulsivity (Naglieri & Das, 1997b:10). The latter are also very typical attributes related to emotional intelligence (compare Goleman, 1996; Le Roux & De Klerk, 2001; Le Roux & De Klerk, 2003; Maree, 2004; Vermeulen, 1999; Wood & Tolley, 2003:7). As stated in Chapter 2, 3.4 Assessment of emotional intelligence, the children included in this study's emotional intelligence were assessed as part of their cognitive processes also, and not only on the base of emotional and behavioural related problems. The researcher has a holistic approach to children including their assessment as well as designing intervention programmes to help them.

The researcher therefore found the results from this standardised cognitive assessment system very valuable as a selection tool. The findings from this assessment were discussed with the children's caretakers, who confirmed the need for improved emotional intelligence. Children of whom the caretakers did not confirm this need were not included in the intervention.

4.1.2 Gender

The aim of this research is to identify Gestalt play therapy techniques to enhance the emotional intelligence of primary school children within their cultural context (Chapter 1, 4.1). This intervention should thus be sensitive to the cultures of the group members – the children's cultural contexts are essential to the outcomes of the intervention of this research study. The researcher therefore attempted to include children from different cultural groups as well as different gender types in the groups. Groups were not homogenous concerning gender. According to Hofstede (2005:1) certain cultures experience a higher degree of gender differentiation and inequity between genders than others. In cultures with a lower degree of gender differentiation and inequity, females are equal to males in all aspects of the society and vice versa. The researcher is thus of the opinion that different genders are accepted and treated in different ways in different cultural contexts. It thus seemed necessary to include children from different gender types in the pilot study (as well as in the main intervention) to increase the need for cultural sensitivity in the intervention.

4.1.3 Age

The aim of this study is to focus on primary school children, thus children in their middle school age developmental phase. According to a variety of authors this phase range from seven years to about twelve years (compare Le Roux and De Klerk, 2003:23; Mwamwenda, 1996:353). The children in the pilot group's ages did not vary much, although two of the children were younger (eight and nine years) and two were a little older (ten and eleven years). The researcher had thorough contact with these children before they were included in the sessions. This contact included individual play therapy, educational help and other activities related to the institutions where they were situated. This group of children's functioning on emotional level was relatively the same, although they differed in age. The researcher trusted the information concerning the children's development and needs gained by contact

together with pure factual information like chronological age. This group were functioning on nearly the same level and could join together in a group.

4.1.4 Cultural groups

The pilot group consisted out of a variety of cultures, although these were more Western oriented than African oriented cultures. The pilot group represented the following cultural groups: English Western culture, Afrikaans Western culture, Afrikaans Coloured culture. The children's family background also differed a lot. One member stayed in a children's home, two came from single-parent families and one from a more traditional and upper-class family. The different background and family structures were also part of the culture of the children. Culture in this study is seen as: "...biological and social attributes that help people to make sense of and give meaning to life" (Chapter 3, 1.2.5 A conclusion on the definition of culture).

4.1.5 An ethical approach

During the pilot study the researcher aimed to try the compiled programme out on a group of children, as stated in 2. DEFINITION OF A PILOT STUDY above. The researcher therefore used this group to identify as many as possible practical difficulties, to find which Gestalt play therapeutic techniques are the best to use in this intervention and to test the applicability of the tests and questionnaires used in the intervention.

In order to keep this part of the intervention as ethical as possible and therefore prevent negative and emotionally damaging experiences to the children, the researcher applied the following pre-cautions:

4.1.5.1 Interview and follow-up telephonic conversation with caretakers

The researcher already had a feedback session with the parents / caretakers of the possible group members, as part of the pre-test done. During this session the results of the test and its meaning were discussed with the caretakers of the children. The possibility of engaging the child in a programme, specifically developed to increase the emotional intelligence of primary school children, was also discussed. Most of the children also attended this session. The latter is important for the children to also understand why they are going to join a

specific intervention programme. The feedback session as part of the selection criteria has been discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The researcher had telephonic conversations with the caretakers (and face to face contact with some caretakers), during which the goal of the pilot study was explained. The goal was stated as the following: This intervention is a pilot study for the final intervention to increase the emotional intelligence of primary school children in a culturally sensitive way, using Gestalt play therapy techniques. The caretakers who agreed to put their child into the pilot study were listed and informed later (by telephone) of the practical considerations, like day of the week and time of sessions and duration of the programme. Each caretaker received a letter, after the first session of the programme, to inform them in written form about the content, duration and sessions of the programme. They could also sign an agreement for their child to engage in a programme for the sake of research and also to be video taped if necessary. This was done as a written confirmation of the oral agreements before the programme commenced. A child was thus not included in the programme before his caretakers did not agree on all of the above-mentioned factors. Children were thus not taken out of the programme after the first session, because of caretakers who did not want to sign the agreement. Caretakers who did not agree on the conditions of the programme did not engage their children at all.

A copy of the letter mentioned above can be found in Addendum B, INFORMATION AND AGREEMENT LETTER TO CARETAKERS OF CHILDREN JOINING THE PILOT STUDY, at the end of this research report.

4.1.5.2 Sessions free of charge

The children used for the pilot study were mostly from families or institutions that could not really afford any intervention or help for the children. This was thus an ideal opportunity for the children to receive some intervention to improve their emotional intelligence. One of the children who joined the pilot study did not have any financial constraints, but joined the pilot study because it fitted her year and daily programme better.

The researcher did therefore not charge any fees for time and material used to present the pilot study, because this was used to determine the success of the final programme. The group members were thus exposed to situations, which might not be as effective as those in the finalised research intervention.

4.1.5.3 Effort and quality of intervention

Although the children formed part of a pilot study, the researcher attempted not to treat this group any differently from the groups of the final study. The researcher therefore spent just as much, if not more, energy and effort on the success of this programme. The children were treated equal to any one of the other children who attend helping programmes at the researcher's practice. The researcher attempted to spend optimum time, effort, energy and the necessary back-up service needed, on this group of children.

If these children did not feel important and valued as a person, the researcher would fail to improve their self-images and to maintain contact for emotional growth (good interpersonal relationships), which is integral to emotional intelligence and Gestalt therapy (compare Jarosewitsch, 1995:2; Le Roux and De Klerk, 2003:25; Mackewn, 2004:71-79; Vermeulen, 1999:65; Yontef, 1993:3).

According to the researcher, the extent to which she gave herself (including effort, energy and enthusiasm) is already a very important way to increase personal contact and a sense of importance experienced by the group members.

4.1.5.4 Feedback and termination of sessions

The researcher attempted to keep the caretakers informed about the content of sessions and assessments done during the programme. It was important to the researcher to maintain the same quality of feedback in the pilot study as that of the final intervention. The children who participated in the pilot study received a total of three feedback sessions and / or reports from the initial selection test to the end of the intervention. These included the following:

- Written and face-to-face feedback of Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System (Naglieri & Das, 1997a) – used as selection criteria for inclusion in an emotional intelligence programme
- Written report on the children’s behaviour / personality style assessment and a learning style questionnaire completed by the caretakers after the first three sessions of the intervention programme
- Written report and verbal feedback (where needed) after termination

After the selection process of the group members was completed, the intervention programme could commence. The process of this part of the intervention is discussed in the following section.

4.2 Intervention applied to the pilot group

The intervention as applied to the pilot group is discussed here in summary form. The final intervention is discussed in Chapter 6 in more detail. The researcher will use this section specifically to give an overview of the intervention as applied to the pilot group. The outcomes and meaning of this for the final intervention is discussed in 5. OUTCOMES AND APPLICATION TO FINAL PROGRAMME OF THE RESEARCH STUDY, following the last part of this section.

The intervention programme is based on the Schoeman model for Gestalt play therapy. The sessions thus took the form of a typical Schoeman model Gestalt play therapy session as far as possible. (Schoeman, 2004b:118-119) This form is already discussed in Chapter 4, 5.3.2 Group Process. As stated in Chapter 4, 6. CONCLUSION, the programme is a combination of Gestalt therapy and group therapy – it makes use of play therapy techniques and it is set in a group therapy environment, which is culturally sensitive.

The steps of the Schoeman model as applied to the programme of the pilot group will be repeated in the diagram below, which indicates the programme content of the pilot study.

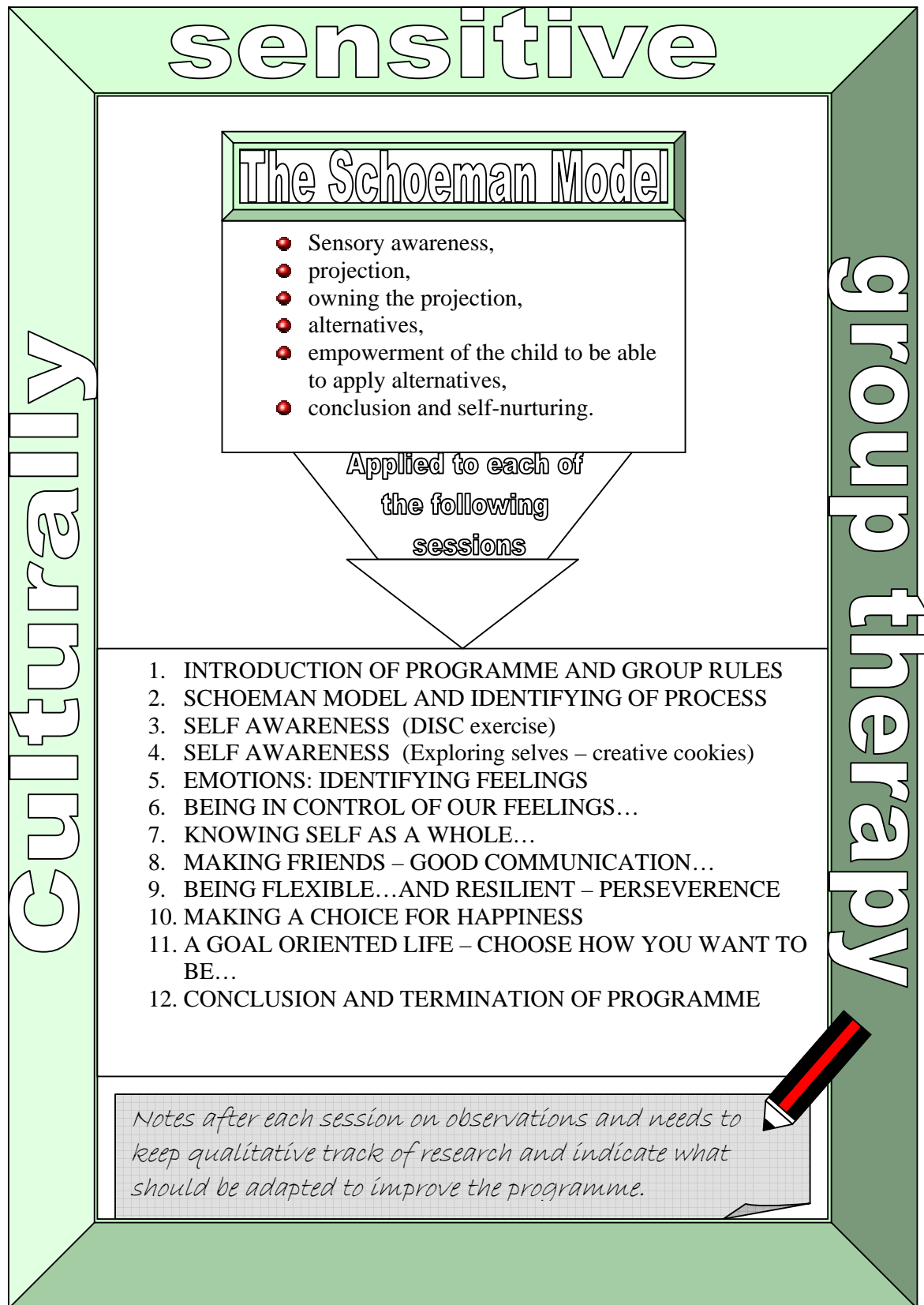


Figure 5.2: Framework of the programme content of the pilot study

A very short summary of the content of each one of the sessions as listed in Figure 5.2: Framework of the programme content of the pilot study, is given in the following sub sections:

4.2.1 Introduction of programme and group rules

This is the first session by which group members are introduced to each other and the programme itself. The researcher does a lot of talking, especially if the group members still feel uncomfortable in the unknown environment. The group members got the opportunity to introduce themselves. If they were too shy, the researcher did this for them, because she already knew them. The researcher cleared issues of why they are attending the sessions, the need for them not to miss sessions, and practical arrangements concerning the time and length of the sessions. The researcher also explained the process of the therapy, including the themes, which they are going to cover during the programme and the format of sessions. The latter included the introduction and explanation of a sensory exercise in the beginning of each session, the kind of activities they could expect and the self-nurturing closure of each session. The group practiced a sensory exercise as part of the explanation of what it is. They also did a projection in the form of a game to help them to share something more about themselves. A variety of toy animals were presented. Each group member had to choose one with which they can associate and had to explain this to the rest of the group. In such a way the group members could start to know each other better. The group discussed some rules, which they would like to apply in their sessions and made A3 posters of this. The session was ended by a self-nurturing exercise.

4.2.2 Identifying of processes of group members (DISC exercise) and finalising of group rules

During this session the group could finalise their group rule posters. The DISC instrument was introduced and the questionnaire done as a group activity. The DISC exercise takes up a lot of time. The assessment had to be continued during the next session. Each group member received a learning style questionnaire to take home and to be completed by their parents and returned during the next session.

4.2.3 Self awareness

The DISC assessment was completed here. The whole process of all the sessions were presented to the members in the form of an open flow diagram, which they could complete each week, indicating the theme of the next week. In such a way the group members could know what to expect and have a visual presentation of the flow of the programme. They could then understand where all the sessions fit into the whole. Each group member received a life book with headings containing topics about themselves, which they had to complete each week at home. It resembled a sort of creative journal.

4.2.4 Self awareness (Exploring selves – creative cookies)

During this session the researcher made use of a creative exercise to give feedback to the group members about the outcome of the DISC exercise. The researcher explained each one's behaviour / personality style to them and had a short discussion on whether they agree with this or not. After this, a variety of cookie shapes were presented, as well as icing sugar in different colours and other cake decorations. All group members had to represent their behaviour styles by decorating one cookie. After this each one had a chance to present the cookie and explain what it means. Here after they had to make another representation of themselves, which they could take home and share with someone they trust. The self-nurturing exercise of this session included making the most enjoyable cookies possible for themselves.

All group members received a feedback report for their parents about their processes as assessed up to the present.

4.2.5 Emotions: Identifying feelings

During this session the group members learned to identify their feelings by learning the concepts related to the feelings. They also explored different situations, which caused these feelings in their own lives and the value or 'job' of feelings in general. This was also applied to their own lives to increase their understanding of feelings / emotions.

4.2.6 Being in control of our feelings...

Here the group members could start to apply their knowledge about feelings to their lives. Taking responsibility for their own lives was a very important theme to cover from now on. The group members learned a method of how to control certain feelings like test anxiety and anger.

4.2.7 Knowing self as a whole...

The researcher focused a lot on holism both as part of Gestalt therapy as well as emotional intelligence. During this session the children used games to understand how all the different parts of their selves are influencing each other. Discussions on how they experienced this in their lives were used to own the projection.

4.2.8 Making friends – Good communication...

Good social skills are important to good emotional intelligence as well as to children in primary school. The researcher designed two different fun games to teach social skills focusing on relationships with peers. The latter seems very important to children in this developmental age (Chapter 2). Discussions on the application of these in their own lives and promises to try it out in the coming week were used as owning of the projection.

4.2.9 Being flexible...and resilient – Perseverance

This session was mainly based on discussions on projections of things that can go wrong in the children's lives. The researcher led the group to a way to handle these things. They used creative exercises to make it their own. The continuous theme of taking responsibility for their lives were emphasised using this theme too.

4.2.10 Making a choice for happiness

Choosing happiness was also part of taking responsibility for their lives. The group members used discussions and biblio play to find how they can make themselves happy. They made a big collage poster of things to use to make themselves happy. The ABC theory of Albert Ellis (compare Corey, 1996:371-390; Möller,1990) was used in the discussion and imaginary exercises were used to understand this theory.

4.2.11 A goal oriented life – Choose how you want to be...

Responsibility was still a continuous theme. The children could now start to use their previously gained knowledge about themselves to create a goal for their own lives. They each made a flag as a symbol of the goal for their lives. Discussions on the meaning of their flags were used as owning of the projection.

4.2.12 Conclusion and termination of programme

The last session of the programme was used to do a group retest of the planning processes of the Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System (Naglieri & Das, 1997a). The latter was used as the main assessment tool for emotional intelligence in this study. The group ended the session with a group party for which each member provided something to eat. They played games, had something to eat and could enjoy their last session together in any way they preferred. The researcher took some photographs of the group to add to their feedback reports sent to them and their parents after completion of the programme.

4.3 Termination of pilot programme

The group contact sessions of the pilot programme was terminated after the last session. The pilot programme was only completed after the researcher mailed a report to all the caretakers containing information about the content of the programme, programme goals, and whether the post-test and observations of the researcher proofed the intervention to be successful or not. The processes of the children were repeated in this feedback report so caretakers could have a better understanding of the child as a whole. The researcher also invited caretakers to further discussions should they have any queries or a need for more information. If needed the researcher also added information to this report to use for extra help, like notes on lifestyle changes for children with concentration problems.

The results from the notes taken after each contact session were used to adapt the programme to be more effective in reaching the aim of this study – Gestalt play therapy techniques to increase the emotional intelligence of primary school children

in a culturally sensitive way. The next section thus covers the information gained from the pilot study and how it can be applied to the final intervention programme.

5. OUTCOMES AND APPLICATION TO FINAL PROGRAMME OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The first part of the discussion of this section covers the information gained from the pilot study. Hereafter the researcher indicated how the final programme was adapted accordingly. The researcher also compiled all the information in a diagram for a quick overview of the outcomes and adaptations to the final programme.

5.1 The outcomes of the pilot study relating to the intervention

The researcher divided the outcomes of the pilot study in two categories, namely practical considerations and assessment instruments and questionnaires. This relates to the goal of a pilot study as discussed in 3.2 The Goal of a Pilot Study. The information gained through the pilot study is discussed in the following paragraphs and was applied to the final intervention programme.

5.1.1 Practical considerations


The practical considerations which needed attention included: the time limit per session, the language of group members as selection criteria, children coming late for sessions, the researcher's rushed process, keeping the sessions active, the friendship puzzle game, culture as an extra session and the programme being longer than planned each one of these practical problems will be discussed shortly in the following paragraphs.

5.1.1.1 Time limit per session

The time limit per session was set for 60 minutes initially, due to practical implications for the practice where the intervention programme was applied. The researcher soon found that this time limit was much too short. Indications

in the literature study concerning the time limit for group therapy were thus ignored, but proved to be very valid in practice (Chapter 4, 5.2.3.2 Frequency and length of therapy sessions). The children could not benefit much from the sessions because they could not finish projections and there was no time for discussions and thus owning of the projections.

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem:



SESSION 1

OBSERVATIONS

- **General / organisational**

Time is very short – needs 90 minutes

SESSION 2

OBSERVATIONS

- **General / organisational**

Time is very short – needs 90 minutes – did not complete process / DISC exercise.
Has to continue next time.

SESSION 3

OBSERVATIONS

- **General / organisational**

Still an hour of time, but not that hurried. Could focus a little on the children's needs.

Figure 5.3: Process notes – session length

5.1.1.2 Language of group members as selection criteria

Language was not used as selection criteria for differential selection of the members of the pilot group. The pilot group consisted of children with both English and Afrikaans as home language. Although they could understand and speak a little of the other language, the children could not freely communicate in the language which was not their home language. The sessions were thus conducted in a mixture of English and Afrikaans. This led to difficulties in communication. Language seemed to relate closely to the fields of the children. It seemed to be part of their culture. As discussed in Chapter 3,

1.4.5 Language and culture, language is a means through which cultural norms and values are communicated and thus closely related to the child's culture. There was thus a need to incorporate different languages, but not in one group. In one group it inhibited communication and effective building of relationships, especially between the researcher and the group members. The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem. Letters of the alphabet indicate children's names, for the sake of confidentiality, here and in all similar extracts.

SESSION 1

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

Difficult to accommodate English and Afrikaans children in one group – try to focus on one language medium.

SESSION 2

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

Difficult to accommodate English and Afrikaans children in one group – try to focus on one language medium, but today it went a little smoother, as A could understand most of the BOTS stories in Afrikaans.

SESSION 3

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

Handled English and Afrikaans mixed group by speaking mostly Afrikaans. Questions from A were answered in English, because she could understand Afrikaans, but does not feel comfortable speaking it.

Figure 5.4: Process notes – Language as selection criteria

5.1.1.3 Children coming late for sessions

If the children came late for their sessions the whole group had to sacrifice valuable contact time and it made the matter of fitting all that had to be done into the time available worse. The researcher knew that it was difficult for

caretakers, from a practical point of view, to make an afternoon activity in time if it started at 14:00. Although this was the case, the time could not be changed to 14:15, because of other practical arrangements at the practice where the researcher works. In certain cases, it seemed like a habit of some families to be late for sessions, as this was experienced in contact sessions before this programme too. The researcher related this to the culture of the family, because this was their way of doing and thinking about reality. Some children missed sessions without prior arrangements by the parents, which was also disturbing.

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem.

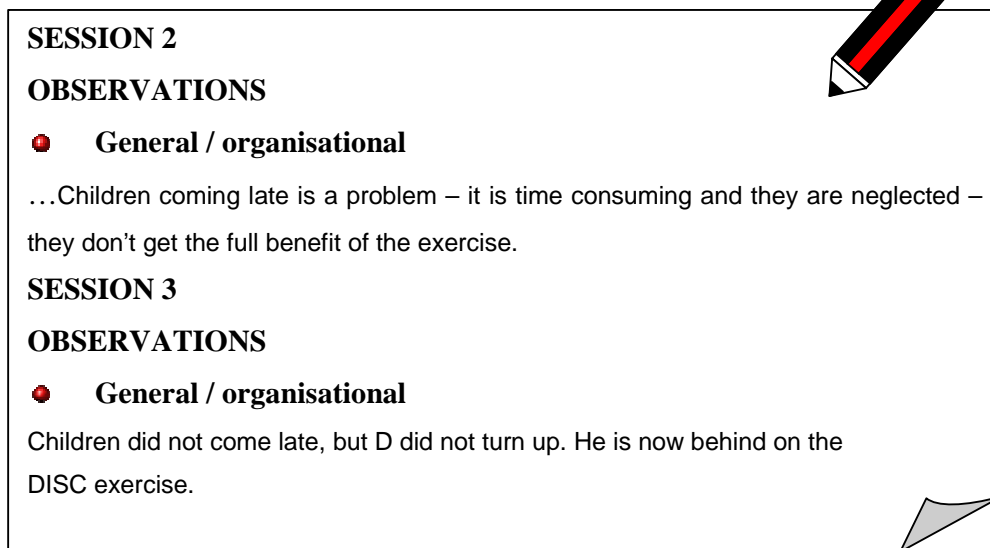



Figure 5.5: Process notes – Children coming late for sessions

5.1.1.4 Personality traits / process of researcher

The researcher found an urgency in herself to push the children to complete all the planned exercises for each session. In doing this, the researcher violated the Gestalt play therapy principle of 'biding one's time' (compare Chapter 4, 2.2.4.3 Objectives for the therapeutic relationship; Schoeman 1996b:30). When the children were rushed to just do the exercises and learn the content of the lesson, the researcher missed important messages from the children's being. Their foreground could easily be missed and very little contact took place. The children could not grow optimally if the researcher was only focused on cognitive learning and not on emotional growth. The latter is part

of the aim of this research and should not be missed because emotional growth is part of Gestalt play therapy techniques (Chapter 4, 2. GESTALT PLAY THERAPY, 2.1 Introduction).

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem.



SESSION 2

OBSERVATIONS

- **General / organisational**

...Children coming late is a problem – it is time consuming and they are neglected – they don't get the full benefit of the exercise. I rushed through the session to fit all activities, but felt as if I had lost contact with the children.

SESSION 3

OBSERVATIONS

- **General / organisational**

The therapist was so hooked on getting the message over and doing all the exercises, that she did not handle the emotional needs of two of the children in the session – H had a need to deal with his feelings of hate towards his father and A was falling asleep all the time – they were sending messages and it was only recognised and not addressed.

SESSION 7

OBSERVATIONS

- **General / organisational**

The activities still were too many to fit into 90 minutes. It is better to include a sensory awareness exercise and one other experiment or exercise leading to an experiment. If needed the session can stop at the sensory awareness exercise and an experiment can be taken from there.

The main goal is to improve the children's awareness of themselves. It is also important that this environment should be a building place for the self-image. Children should feel better about themselves after the sessions. The latter is still missing.

Figure 5.6: Process notes – The researcher's rushed personality style

5.1.1.5 *Keep sessions active*

This problem experienced in the pilot study was related to the previous problem of being rushed, but here the researcher attempted to teach and not

relate to the children's true feelings or needs. The children wanted to do and experience things. They did not want to listen to explanations.

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem.

SESSION 6

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

... The children found the explanations boring. I used a story and imaginary mental experience of the story. They did not really realise the message that it is really what we think, which causes what we feel. They were more interested in drawing the feeling faces with the whiteboard markers on the whiteboard / laminated poster. They should thus learn through exciting doing exercises.

SESSION 7

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

... The session is more action oriented, so the children needed to explore and apply. This worked and insight was better.

SESSION 8

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

As this group especially is very action oriented – doers – I did not attempt to do a long discussion on what makes a good friend. I designed a board game,...

SESSION 9

OBSERVATIONS

● General / organisational

The friendship puzzle game was repeated. The adapted question cards were used to move faster and discuss more. The discussions bored the children. Only the one who was busy with the question was entertained. The others listened when they tried to give the right answer if the one who was busy answering made a mistake.

Discussions on the answers got boring to the others. We moved too slowly again, as some made mistakes. Activity and interest levels should be kept very high.

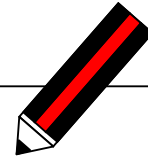


Figure 5.7: Process notes – Keep the sessions active

5.1.1.6 *The friendship puzzle games did not work*

The researcher designed two games as a projection, a board game and a card game. The board game did not work well, because it took too much time to progress through the whole game, no-body could win within the time limit. The questions did not work well, not being interesting enough and taking up too much time of discussing issues, rather than doing active things or moving on to the next player. The card game was more exciting and active, but it was completed in a very short time.

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem.

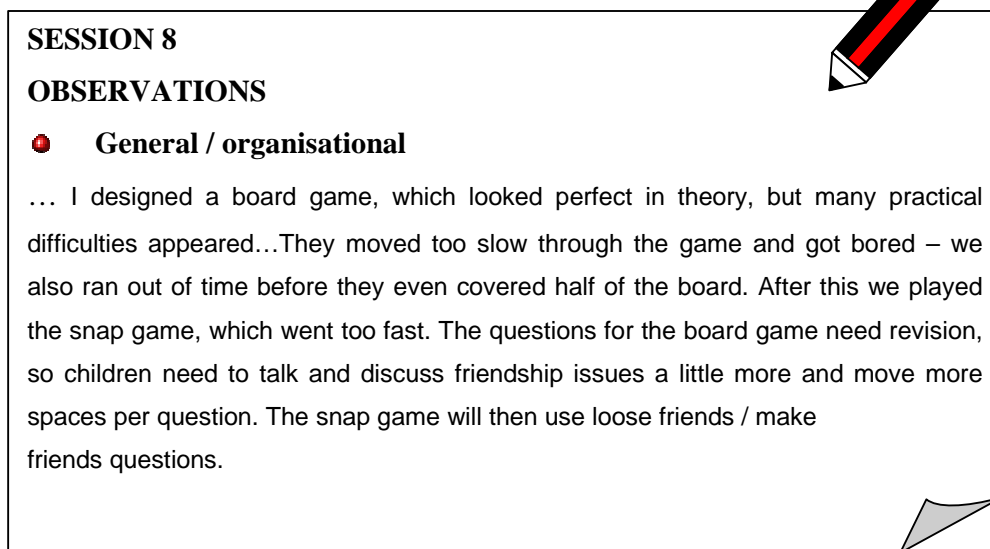


Figure 5.8: Process notes – The friendship puzzle games

5.1.1.7 *Cultural background as a separate session*

The children in the group were part of their own fields – their own cultural backgrounds. It was important for the researcher to understand their fields from their own frame of reference. The pilot study did not include a session to focus on the children's fields / cultures as a main theme.

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned need.

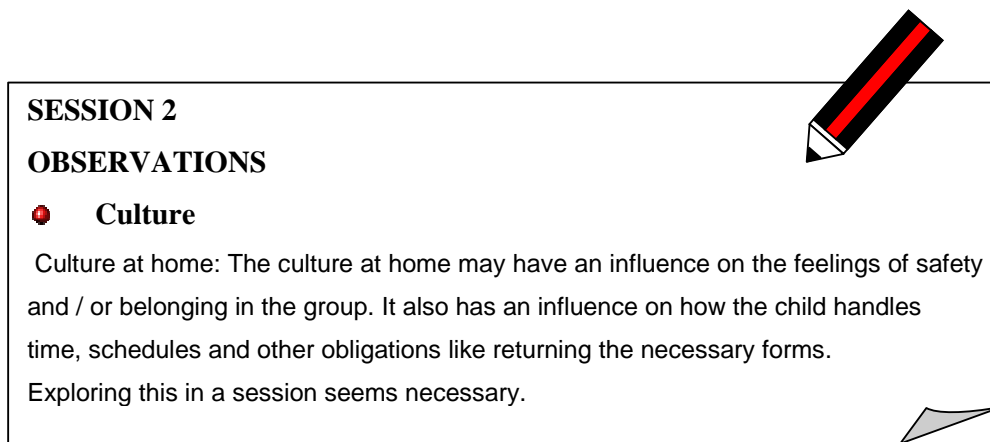


Figure 5.9: Process notes – Culture

5.1.1.8 Programme longer than planned

The researcher planned the programme to be completed within twelve sessions. It was found that if the researcher would push for time to complete the themes within the time limit, contact with the children and time for emotional exploration and growth was sacrificed. The researcher therefore included extra sessions where necessary. The DISC exercise was for example completed over two sessions. The friendship puzzle game was repeated because this group needed a better understanding of friendship.

The following is an extract of the process notes taken by the researcher, indicating the above-mentioned problem.

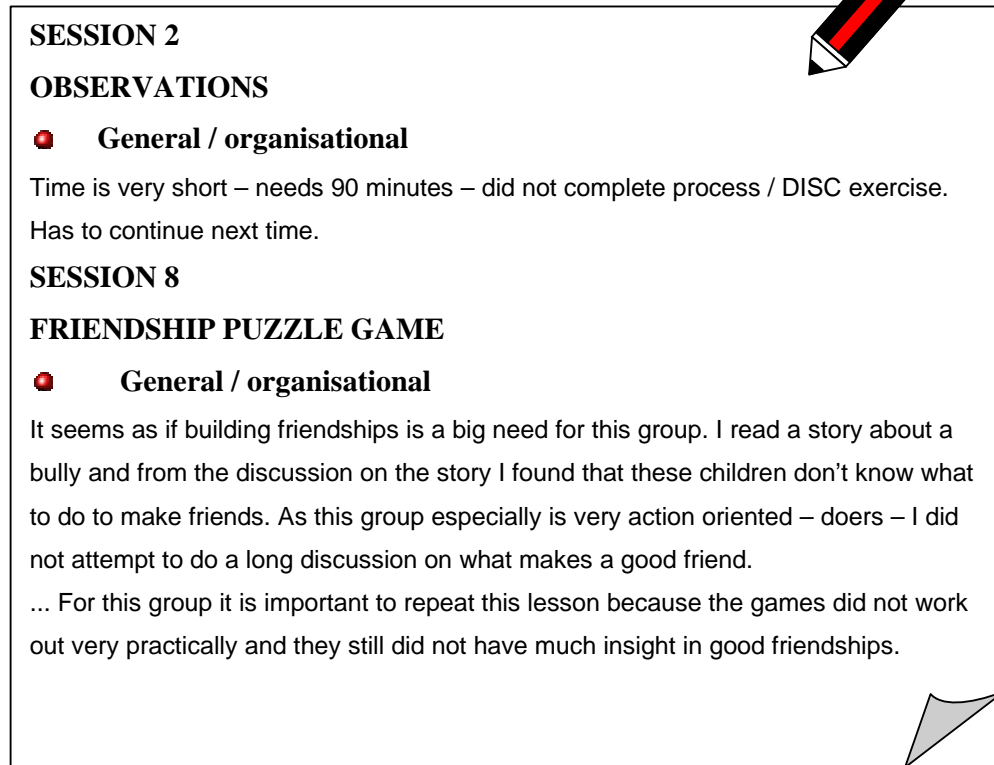


Figure 5.10: Process notes – Programme longer than planned

5.1.2 Assessment instruments and questionnaires

The Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System used as a pre-test and of which the results were used to select the children for this intervention programme, is a standardised test. The use and application of this test did not need any revision as it was applied as suggested by the test instructions. A part of this assessment system was used as a post-test and needed to be piloted first to find whether it was possible to apply it in a group situation. The DISC assessment also needed piloting to sort out any practical difficulties. The other feedback letters, questionnaires and information slips had to be tried out first to find whether it is effective or not. These were thus the instruments and questionnaires, which needed confirmation of effectiveness. Any difficulties and / or needs, which came up from the use of these is discussed in the following paragraphs in the same chronological order as they appeared in the intervention programme.

5.1.2.1 *DISC analysis and learning style questionnaire*

The main difficulty experienced with the presentation of the DISC analysis – “*All About Bots! All About You!: A Behavioural Style Analysis for Pre-teens*” (Rohm, 1998) was the issue of presenting it effectively in two languages. The problem of accommodating two languages at once led to a time problem and the possibility of a threat to the validity of the analysis if the items were misunderstood. It seemed as if this exercise could be finished within one session if it could be presented in one language at a time. Explaining all items in two languages each time used about double the time to finish the assessment, as when the items had only to be repeated in one language. The researcher had to put extra effort in making sure that both English as well as Afrikaans speaking children understood the items very well. If this was not the case, the results here could be invalid. The validity of the results was tested during the feedback session with the children. They had the opportunity to say whether I spoke the truth about them. This was done in a non-threatening environment, so children could feel free to disagree. The researcher also knew them rather well before the programme commenced and could relate the outcomes of the assessment to current knowledge about their personality and behaviour styles. The outcomes of the DISC-analysis thus seemed valid, although tested in a qualitative way.

5.1.2.2 *Information letter and feedback report on DISC analysis and learning style questionnaire*

The caretakers did not complain about the clarity of the information letters or learning style reports. All group members returned their learning style questionnaires fully completed. Concerning information letters, the researcher started to send little strips with the next date and time of sessions as well as a summary of the current session with the children after each session. This helped a lot to make sure that children turn up at the correct times and on the correct dates, especially after a session was skipped because of a public holiday.

The researcher found that a feedback report after the third or fourth session containing information about the children’s behaviour and learning styles might have been interesting, but it took too much unnecessary time and effort

from a therapist. This information was repeated in the final report at the end of the whole programme. It might thus be acceptable to send a feedback report at the beginning of the programme, but it is not necessary. The information was duplicated in the final report.

5.1.2.3 Post-test – Planning processes of the Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System

The researcher found the piloting of this part of assessment very important. The Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System was designed as an individual test. It is possible to apply the first part of the Das-Naglieri Cognitive Assessment System (Naglieri & Das, 1997a), namely the planning processes, in a small group environment. It was needed to try this out in a group situation to sort out any practical problems. If it seemed impossible or inhibited the reliability of the assessment, the post-test should be changed to an individual assessment. The difficulties did not seem significant enough to change to an individual assessment though. The researcher found the need to place little dividers between the children so they don't check on the other's work. This could be added during the main study. The researcher also needed to observe the children's performance in a test situation, which was part of the skills they learned through the intervention. The group post-test situation was ideal for this.

5.2 Application of the outcomes to the final programme

The following adaptations concerning the outcomes of the pilot study were applied to the research groups who participated in the final intervention programme:

5.2.1 Time limit per session

The researcher found in the literature study a proposed time limit of sessions of 90 to 120 minutes depending on the age of the group members. The time per session for the research groups was thus set on 90 minutes. This allowed for a little more time to finish the necessary quality of contact. Two-hour sessions might even be better, because many of the extras, like checking the life books, were still neglected after the

increased time limit. The researcher changed the time from one hour to 90 minutes in the middle of the pilot study.

5.2.2 Language

The researcher decided to use two research groups for the final intervention, one English and one Afrikaans. The latter two languages are regularly used as communication languages in Namibia. The people who visit the researcher's practice are thus fluent in at least one of these two languages. Language confusion and inhibited communication and relationship building could therefore be minimised by dividing the research group in an Afrikaans and English group. Each one of these two groups still consisted of a variety of ethnic cultures.

5.2.3 Children coming late for sessions

The researcher sent a reminder of the time for each session and also an information letter to request caretakers to bring children on time and to inform the researcher if a child will miss the session.

5.2.4 Personality traits / process of the researcher

The researcher missed important messages from the children in the pilot group because she tend to be too rushed and too focused on completing all the exercises, rather than to focus on opportunities to use experiments.

The researcher had to be aware of this tendency of hers and could trust Gestalt therapy's paradoxical theory of change. Awareness of this problem of hers could lead to change and growth in the researcher as therapist. This awareness helped the researcher to relate to the children's emotional growth much better during the final intervention than during the pilot study.

5.2.5 Active sessions

The researcher as therapist attempted to be more focused on active alternatives to dialogic exercises, which were experienced as too passive by the children in the groups. She focused more on the children's needs. As soon as energy levels and enthusiasm seemed to lower, the researcher as therapist attempted to adapt the planned exercises to more active or interesting experiences.

5.2.6 The friendship puzzle games

The researcher adapted the questions of the board game to simpler questions and answers. The spaces to move after each correct answer were increased to speed up the game. The extra tasks given were left unchanged, but could be changed to more action oriented tasks. The card game was changed to a more practically applicable game, with more cards to use up more time. This was an energising game during the pilot study and should be used further even as part of a self-nurturing exercise at the end of the session. It can be something fun to do so the children can leave the session energised and excited.

5.2.7 Culture

The researcher needed more information about the children's cultural experiences at home for a better understanding of them and their fields.

The researcher therefore decided to add an additional session after the first awareness sessions, which made use of the DISC analysis. This session was used to understand the children's interpretation of their family culture. Together with this session the children received an information letter for their caretakers, explaining the importance of the culture-oriented session. An open-ended questionnaire was included. The caretakers were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it with the child at the following session. The completion of the questionnaire was voluntary.

5.2.8 More sessions than planned for – flexibility to adapt the programme

It seemed important to the researcher to be in confluence with the children – to work within a structure but not allowing the structure to be the main director of what is happening in the groups. The needs of the group members needed to be the main director of what was happening in the sessions. The researcher already applied this flexibility in the pilot study. It was necessary to try this out to find whether the proposed time limit should be kept at all cost. As discussed earlier in this paragraph, the researcher still found it necessary to be flexible in the number of sessions included in the programme. In order to make this adaptation of the programme more acceptable to caretakers, the researcher did the following: She kept the parents informed of the flow of the programme by sending notes on when the sessions would repeat and when the number of total sessions would increase.

5.2.9 DISC analysis and learning style questionnaires

As indicated above, the only real problem concerning these instruments was the accommodation of two languages during the assessment. The final research groups were thus divided in an English and Afrikaans group. In this way both languages could be accommodated for the sake of culture, but the difficulties with language confusion in one group were eliminated.

5.2.10 Feedback reports

The researcher did not write any feedback reports after the first four sessions of the final intervention programme. A detailed final feedback report was written and mailed after the last session of the intervention programme. The researcher as therapist spent much effort, time and energy on these to provide enough information on the children's processes and growth during the programme, as well as recommendations where necessary. The researcher also included a little memorabilia for each one of the group members – a key ring with a photograph of the group and themselves individually.

5.2.11 Post-test

The post-test was conducted in group-format in the final intervention programme again. Time constraints were a big consideration. Individual testing was not always possible, because of the time limits of both the caretakers of the children as well as the researcher as therapist. It was also necessary to consider the impact of the quality of observations of the children's behaviour in a group assessment situation. Although these considerations seemed negative towards a group test, the researcher decided on a group test to observe the children in the more demanding atmosphere of the group situation rather than an individual test. The time constraints were also a very salient factor in this choice.

The researcher only added dividers between the children to secure honesty in answering the questions in the research groups.

The following is a diagram to summarise the difficulties experienced in the pilot study and the applications of these outcomes to the final intervention programme.

Application of outcomes of PILOT STUDY

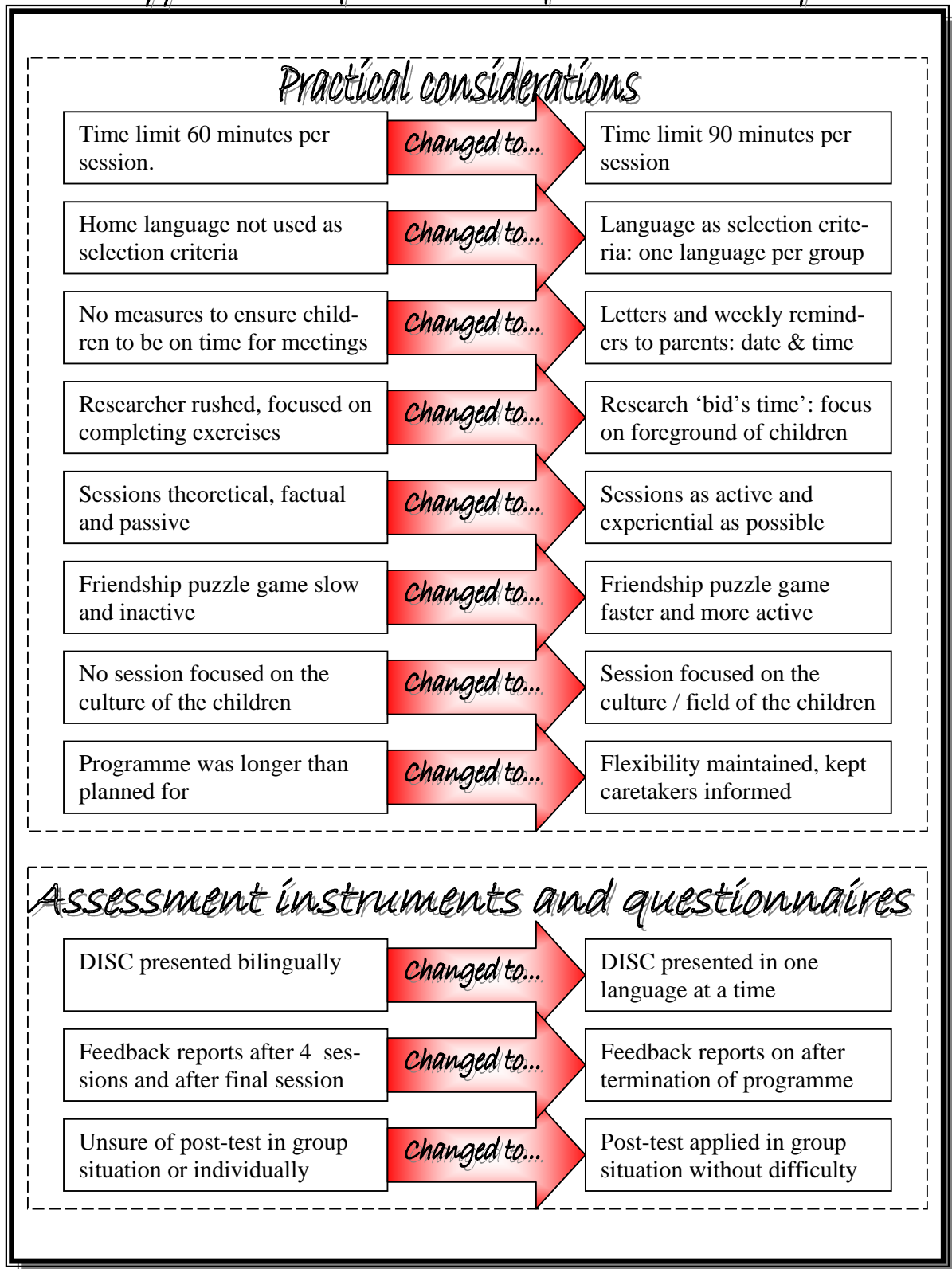


Figure 5.11: The application of the outcomes of the pilot study

5.3 The value of the pilot study in this intervention

The value of the pilot study is, according to the researcher, proven in the number of adaptations done on the final programme. The researcher found the pilot study of value for both the practical application of the programme as well as for the assessments, questionnaires and interviews done. The most important value though was personal. The researcher could identify possible difficulties related to her process, which had a negative influence on the application of Gestalt play therapy techniques. This was therefore also a process of personal growth towards a more Gestalt oriented way of being.

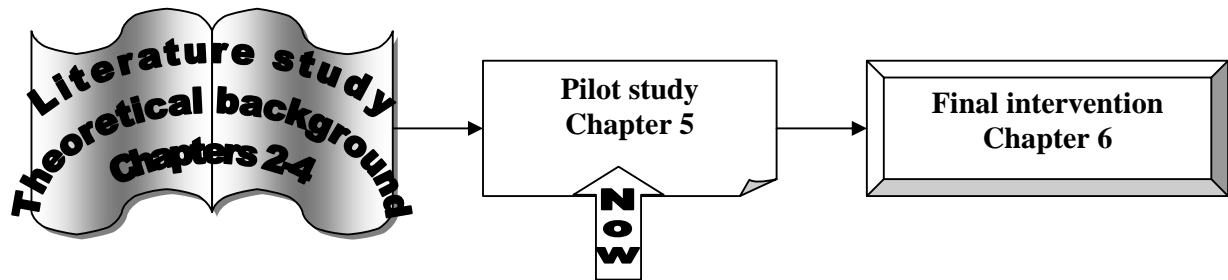
The value of a pilot study was clear at the end of the final intervention programme when the researcher could be able to identify more factors that could possibly have had a negative influence on the quality of the programme. In this case the final intervention programme acted as a pilot study for further research. The researcher found that two aspects of the programme were neglected in the final intervention because of a lack of time. The first one is the life book, which was created and used as homework assignments. The importance of spending time on the book each week was not emphasised enough. The researcher mentioned the life book each week, but did not spend enough time on this to utilise its full value. This could be a very valuable source of self-awareness and opportunities for group members to get to know each other. The second factor is the flow diagram of the programme, which was neglected in both the pilot study as well as the final intervention programme. The group members' comprehension of the whole programme and how the sessions fit into the whole could be increased with this diagram. This was thus a possible useful tool, which was not utilised in the final intervention programme.

The pilot study therefore had a very definite contribution to the success of the final programme, its possibilities for further research, and also to the researcher's growth as a person and as a user of the intervention programme.

6. CONCLUSION

This chapter covered the definition, value and application of a pilot study. The current research study is a combined quantitative-qualitative study. The pilot study was of value for both the quantitative as well as qualitative nature of this research project. This chapter therefore proofed the great value of a pilot study.

The next chapter covers the adapted, final intervention programme. The application of the programme, to what extent the research question has been answered, and whether the goal and objectives were reached is covered in this following chapter.



**Figure 5.12: Framework of development of the final intervention
(Pilot study)**