CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

1.1: INTRODUCTION.

Children with learning difficulties in the age group 6-8 years are most commonly referred for occupational therapy. On accepting the referral, the occupational therapist assesses the child’s development psychosocially and physically, as well as the specific internal performance skills needed for learning and occupational performance, such as fine motor and perceptual skills. The therapist uses the information gained from this assessment to determine the child’s specific problems and creates an individualised treatment programme to suit his/her specific needs, abilities and interests.

One of the areas assessed is that of visual perception. This is the ability of an individual to observe an object in the environment, and then to interpret the visual information with respect to oneself and other objects in the same environment. Visual perception is a fundamental skill needed for learning and is influenced by cognition. According to Zeitschel, Kalish, Colarusso visual perceptual development is most active during the ages of 5 to 8 years of age.

In order to determine a child’s visual perceptual development various standardised tests are used. Due to the lack of locally developed standardised tests specific for the South African child, imported tests are used most, of which have been standardised on the American population.
The Motor-Free Visual Perception Test (MVPT-3) is one such standardised test used to assess a child’s visual perception. This test was designed specifically for the purposes of screening and diagnosis. While producing a general score for visual perception the MVPT-3 evaluates the five different processes that have been identified within visual perception:

- Spatial relations,
- Visual discrimination,
- Figure ground,
- Visual closure,
- Visual memory.

1.2: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.

When selecting a standardised test to use for assessment it is important to consider the reliability and validity of that test for the population being tested as well as its appropriateness for the context in which it is being used.

The MVPT-3 test was found to have an internal consistency and temporal stability based on the test retest reliability during the standardisation programme. It was also proved to have content, criteria-related and construct validity. Although the reliability of the test had been established for age, when it was administered in English, the reliability of the test has not been evaluated when administered in a different language to English.
According to Bailey,

“the reliability and validity of a test can be ensured only if the test is administered to the prescribed population, under the prescribed conditions, and in the prescribed manner.” (p 103) 

Once any of these conditions have been changed the test cannot claim to be as reliable.7

When a non English-speaking child is referred to an occupational therapist for assessment in South Africa, it is common practice for the therapist to translate the test instructions into the appropriate language so that the child understands what he is required to do.

This practice may present a problem as the reliability of the test may be interfered with, as the test was standardised with the instructions written and presented in English, for an English speaking population. This may result in misdiagnosis and unnecessary treatment of children or even worse, result in children who should receive treatment being missed.5

1.3: PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.

The purpose of this research is then:

- To establish the effect translation of the instructions of the MVPT-3 test into Afrikaans has on the reliability of the standardised norms of this test when it is used to assess children of an Afrikaans population and culture.
1.4: NULL HYPOTHESIS.

The null hypothesis thus states:

The reliability of the MVPT-3 will not be affected negatively when the test instructions are presented in Afrikaans to a normal sample of 8 years 0 month to 8 years 11 months of Afrikaans speaking children, when compared to the norms determined for the American sample of 8 years 0 months to 8 years 11 months, where the test was administered in English.

1.5: ASSUMPTIONS.

In planning the research it was assumed that:

- The children would always answer to the best of their ability,
- Language could influence the reliability of the test,
- The MVPT-3 is valid for the South African population.

1.6: LIMITATIONS.

- Due to time restrictions set by the Gauteng Education Department no test-retest procedure could be completed to evaluate the retest reliability of the MVPT-3 when the instructions are translated into Afrikaans. This could have affected the reliability of the results.
- The time of the year that the research was done limited the sample to the grade two classes, and resulted in there not being an equal distribution of children over the 8-year old age range.
• No validity studies have been carried out to support that the MVPT-3 is valid for the South African population. The only validity tests that have been done are those the authors did to ensure the test was valid for the Canadian population. While this does not ensure validity, it was assumed that the test would be valid based on research done to validate other perception tests standardised on an American population.

1.7: DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS OF TERMS.

• **Reliability** refers to how consistently the MVPT-3 assesses visual perception and how accurately it will measure visual perception time after time. ⁸

• The **validity** of a test is defined as,
  “The extent to which a test measures the construct it purports to measure.” (p 55)³

• MVPT-3 refers to the Motor-Free Visual Perception Test, Third Edition developed by Ronald P. Colarusso and Donald D Hammill.

• Visual Perception is the ability to organize and interpret visual sensory stimulation in the light of previous experience. ⁹

• Spatial relations is
  “the ability to orientate one’s body in space and to perceive the position of an object in relation to oneself and other objects” (p 9),³

• Visual discrimination is
  “the ability to discriminate dominant features of different objects” (p 9),³

• Figure ground is
  “the ability to distinguish an object from background objects” (p 9),³
• Visual closure

“the ability to perceive a whole figure when only fragments are presented” (p 9), 3

• Visual memory

“the ability to recognize one stimulus item after a very brief interval”.

(p 9) 3