"DON'T TREAT ME LIKE I'M BAD!"
Social Competence and Teacher Roles in Young Children's Social Development at Three Primary Schools in Trinidad

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This qualitative case study investigated how teachers at three primary schools, classified as high-, medium-, and low-performing, contributed to social competence development in 5-7-year-old children. The schools served children from one community in Trinidad who were most likely to have come from disadvantaged situations. The Caribbean cultural context was considered in analysing the effectiveness of supports provided by teachers for children's social competence development. The results indicated that the children studied could be classified as *Troublemakers, Troubled-aggressive* or *Troubled-passive, Typical* or *Good,* based on the social behaviours they displayed. Each classification group seemed to have needed different types of assistance from teachers based on the origin and nature of the behavioural difficulties observed. Teachers at the three schools, however, responded with similar strategies of control to manage the behaviours of all children. These methods were ineffective. Teacher training, reduced adult-child ratio, and parent outreach programmes are recommended for supporting children's development of social competence.

Introduction

"My boy ain't a terror! I think Miss not treating him right…the humane part...that is what the education part of the system is missing...human relations." This view was expressed by a single parent whose 5-year-old son entered primary school with social competence problems. She hoped that the class teacher would have assisted in guiding her son towards better behaviours and increased learning. Although not realizing it, this mother was advocating social competence development for her child. In this context, and independent of any study, she had made an important link. She had linked the class teacher as being crucial to the development of her child both in terms of his social competence and also in terms of his intellectual development.

Katz and McClellan (1997) suggest that teachers can play a significant role in facilitating social development in children. That role

can be fulfilled by establishing an early childhood environment that supports the development of social competence in children. The extent to which that favourable environment is created can vary tremendously from one setting to another, depending on teacher characteristics. Those characteristics include an understanding of the social needs and capabilities of the children, being knowledgeable about appropriate supports that children need, and intentionally and purposefully supporting children's social development (Katz & McClellan, 1997). The issue of the strategies and approaches used by three teachers to facilitate children's social competence development forms the crux of this study.

There are several definitions of social competence. Those definitions usually revolve around the ability of an individual "to initiate and maintain satisfying, reciprocal relationships with peers" (Katz & McClellan, 1997, p. 1). The definition used in this study (Welsh & Bierman, 1998) states that social competence is a broad term used to describe social effectiveness in children. It refers to the social, emotional, and cognitive skills and behaviours that children need to establish successful social relationships. Those skills and behaviours include social skills, social awareness, and self-confidence. Emotional intelligence, which refers to the child's ability to understand others' emotions, perceive subtle social cues, "read" complex social situations, and demonstrate insight about others' motivations and goals, is also included in this definition of social competence. As a result, children who are socially competent have a wide repertoire of social skills and are able to establish and maintain satisfying relationships, and avoid negative interactions.

Several teaching strategies that can be used to support young children's social development have been reviewed by Kemple (2004). Those strategies have been ordered in a schema that advises teachers about which strategies to consider first (Brown, Odom, & Conroy, 2001). Teachers are encouraged to consider the most naturalistic approaches first, before moving on to more structured approaches. A hierarchical pyramid model represents this approach for supporting social competence and preventing challenging behaviours in young children (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, Joseph, & Strain, 2003). The model suggests that naturalistic strategies such as facilitating the development of meaningful relationships and creating a supportive classroom environment be used before progressing to specific individualized teaching strategies and interventions.

London (2002) suggested that teaching practices which occur in classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago are rooted in our colonial past. Those practices entrench habits of obedience, order, punctuality, and honesty,

which were needed to teach the masses to accept the then highly unequal social and economic structure of the colonies. These beliefs led to practices of drill repetition and memorization of rules and tables to develop mental discipline. Punishment for infringement of school rules also became an important feature. London believes that despite massive efforts to change the traditional, formal teaching practices (since political independence in 1962), many restrictive approaches like rote learning are still in operation today. These deny children the opportunities needed to practise and develop appropriate social skills.

This paper examines strategies used to teach 12 children in three schools in Trinidad, in order to understand how some teachers support social competence development in young children. Findings from the investigation informed recommendations for appropriate practices for supporting the development of social competence in young children.

The investigation asked the following research questions:

1. *What are the social competencies displayed by 12 young children during their second year at three primary schools?*

2. *What is the role of the infant teacher in the social development of children with different levels of social competencies?*

The study was guided by two theoretical positions that facilitate a systematic investigation of children's social development within a cultural context. Firstly, the theoretical position of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) guided the study. This position advocates that programmes for children should be based on age-related characteristics that are used to develop experiences most likely to promote children's optimal learning and development. Those programmes should also adapt and respond to each child as an individual. Additionally, what is known about the social and cultural context of children's home situations should be considered in order to understand children's values, expectations, and their behavioural and linguistic background. This understanding is necessary to make learning experiences at school more meaningful, relevant, and respectful of the children and their families (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Secondly, the Developmental Niche theoretical framework, which was developed from studies of child behaviour and development in different cultural contexts, was also used to focus the study. This model recognizes that behaviour and development are co-produced by the interaction of the individual and the environment. Additionally, in this model, three major subsystems function like a larger system that interacts with aspects of the culture. Those subsystems are the physical and social

environment in which the child resides, the customs of child care, and child rearing that is mediated by customs and the psychology of the caretaker (Harkness & Super, 1994). This model was therefore used in conjunction with Developmentally Appropriate Practice to analyse the cultural contexts that shaped the children's social development.

Literature Review

Katz and McClellan (1997) identified three aspects of social behaviour that constitute social competence. Those aspects are Individual Attributes, like showing the capacity to empathize; Social Skills Attributes, like asserting rights and needs appropriately; and Peer Relationship Attributes, such as being usually accepted instead of being neglected or rejected by classmates. They further advised that teachers should examine children's progress towards developing these three categories of attributes every three to four months. If the attributes are usually observed, children can be said to be developing adequate social growth. However, if many of the items are not observed for a child, intervention strategies are recommended.

Studies suggest that unless children obtain at least a minimal level of social competence in the early years (by about age 6 years) they can become "at risk" for developing a number of social problems that can affect them throughout life (Ladd, 2000; Parker & Asher, 1987). Research also suggests that what children learn later in school largely depends on their social and emotional competence, as well as the cognitive skills they develop in their first few years of life (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Studies also provide significant evidence which shows that when frequent opportunities are provided to strengthen social competence during childhood, a child's long-term social and emotional adaptation, academic and cognitive development, and national pride are enhanced (Hartup & Moore, 1990; Kinsey, 2000; McClellan & Kinsey, 1999; Parker & Asher, 1987).

Theories suggest that children's peer relationships affect their later development and school adjustment. One study investigated peer relationships in aggressive children on entry to kindergarten and followed the children for two years (Ladd & Burgess, 2001, as cited in Ladd, 2005). The purpose was to determine whether aggressive behaviours were predictive of adjustment problems during the first years at school. The aggressive children studied were found to develop problems in thinking, behavioural problems, negative attitudes towards school, classroom disengagement, and tended to underachieve. If aggression continued throughout the primary school their adjustment

problems worsened. The conclusion from the study was that childhood aggression is a predictor of adjustment and conduct problems into adulthood. This suggested that children who are aggressive need school intervention.

Further, Ladd (1999), in a review of research on children's peer relationships and social competence, identified enduring themes prior to the1990s that continued to influence research. He also listed research that was based on new concepts and issues. Among the themes that were repeated were investigations that looked at the effects of children's behaviour on the formation and maintenance of peer relationships. Correlation play group and experimental studies were the methods used to identify a link between prosocial behaviour and peer acceptance (Denham & Holt 1993; Dodge, Coie, Pettit, & Price, 1990,). For example, when the role of aggression was investigated in play group studies, it was found that some forms of aggression, like angry-reactive aggression, significantly reduced peer acceptance throughout primary school, while rough play was more likely to be tolerated.

Children differ in aggressiveness and individual differences in aggression remain fairly stable over time (Ladd, 2005). Findings indicate a link between early aggression and later misbehaviour and involvement in serious crimes and violent behaviour (Loeber & Farrington, 2000; Moffitt, 1993; Tolan & Gorman-Smith, 1998, as cited in Ladd, 2005). Another strand of investigation examined withdrawn behaviours and problems that become internalized. The findings were that children who display withdrawn or solitary behaviour can get caught up in debilitating cycles of behaviour that lead to negative self-perceptions and internalizing problems (Mc Dougall et al., 2001, as cited in Ladd, 2005). Gazelle and Ladd (2003) further expanded on this theory as they hypothesized that withdrawn children fail to develop some social skills. These children, they state, also become aware of their deficits and develop negative self-perceptions that lead to internalizing problems like anxiety and depression.

Teachers should ensure that the environment they create supports social competence development. Social competence is most likely to be facilitated in an environment of warmth, respect, acceptance of the child, and belief that the child can become socially competent (Katz & McClellan, 1997). Kyriacou (1997) noted that classrooms dominated by teacher talk afford students the opportunity to speak in a constrained context, usually only in response to questioning. Children's contributions and comments tend to be adjusted to what the teacher anticipates as dialogue. In this scenario, students' responses are rejected not because

they do not make sense or are incorrect but because they do not match the teacher's requirements. This type of classroom practice tends to undermine the self-esteem of learners and impedes the development of language skills and critical thinking—all necessary elements of social competence development.

Bredekamp and Copple (1997), in their discussion of children's self-esteem (estimation of self-worth, pride, or shame in their competence), state that experiences which shape young children's self-esteem are very important as they also influence children's behaviour. If children develop a negative image of themselves they are likely to become more aggressive. This leads to dislike by peers and further erosion of their self-esteem

Stipek, Daniels, Galluzo, & Milburn (1992) found that in programmes which are highly teacher-directed, emphasis is placed on children's academic performance. As a result, the social aspects of learning are ignored or neglected. This is contrary to evidence supporting good teaching practice (Hartup & Moore, 1990). Their findings support the view that appropriate teaching practices should encourage children's intellectual development while also enhancing their social, emotional, and physical development. Practices that narrowly focus on academic skills limit intellectual development and might damage the social and emotional development of young children. Cohen (2001) expressed the view that at school, children should have opportunities to strengthen their affective and cognitive abilities simultaneously. He contends that children with average intellectual abilities but superior social and emotional skills may be more successful at school and later on in society than those with superior intellectual abilities who have lesser social and emotional skills.

Although research on the social aspect of child development in the Caribbean is thin, there are some findings from studies which reflect cultural understandings that impact on child development. Roopnarine (2006), in establishing current understandings of the child and childhood in the Caribbean, noted that images of childhood are developed from a variety of sources, which include religious traditions, ancestral culture, sociohistorical understandings, and new understandings of the rights and needs of children. Parents believe, for example, that good parenting practice includes the use of physical punishment to train children appropriately (Rohner, Kean, & Cournoyer, 1991, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006).

Support for this belief is found in a survey of 10-14-year-old Barbadian children conducted by Anderson and Payne (1994, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). They found that 40% of boys and 51% of girls

approved of flogging 5-7-year-old children. Similarly, Barbadian adults held the same views (Handwerker, 1996). Caning or beating the child with a stick or belt, or using verbal denigration were common disciplinary methods used both in the home and at school (Anderson & Payne, 1994, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). This is a troubling practice since physical punishment in the Caribbean appears to be severe and very different from other countries. Also, available evidence shows that physical punishment is associated with psychological difficulties in children (Gershoff, 2002).

Additionally, definitions of competent children can be gleaned from African-Caribbean and Indian-Caribbean parents' belief about appropriate childhood behaviours. The view is that children should be obedient and compliant, and they should demonstrate utmost respect for adults and exhibit proper conduct in their presence (Durbrow, 1999; Wilson et al., 2003, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). A study conducted by Grant, Leo-Rhynie, and Alexander (1983) found that 100% of parents in Antigua, 96% in St. Kitts, 85% in St. Lucia, 94% in St. Vincent, 82% in Barbados, and 95% in Jamaica believed that children should obey their parents. Dominican parents, in describing childhood competence, included respecting and obeying adults, academic competence, doing chores well, getting along with peers, and participating in community and school activities (Durbrow, 1999, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006).

The Trinidad and Tobago Early Childhood Survey (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1995), designed to understand children's experiences in early childhood settings, collected data on teacher beliefs about important areas of learning and development for children. The participants were 4-5-year-old children in 96 public and 96 private early childhood centres. The methods of data collection included two 10-minute observations per child, questionnaires, and child development status measures. Social competence of children was measured. The findings were that there were some positive aspects of provision for children but there were also many areas for concern. These included the limited amount of free activity for children in the programmes, as well as limited choice and an overemphasis on academics.

One study conducted in a rural community in St. Vincent examined relations among peer status, academic scores, and how teachers rated delinquency, learning problems, conduct, and sensitivity in 168 children ages 6-12 years old (Jimerson, Durbrow, & Wagstaff, 2009). Children nominated by their peers were classified in five groups as: rejected (28); popular (24); average (85); controversial (8); and neglected (23). The

findings revealed that the academic scores of rejected children were significantly lower than popular children. Another significant finding was that unlike in developed countries, rejected children were not rated significantly higher by teachers in terms of sensitivity, delinquency, and conduct problems.

In another study, Samms-Vaughan (2000) investigated the consequences of changes in family structure on Jamaican children. Her findings were that children who live in homes where the relationships of their parent figures were less "stable," such as common-law (unmarried parents) and visiting unions, and those in single-parent homes or homes with a biological and step-parent were more withdrawn in their social interactions. Additionally, children who frequently moved from one residence to another, in the process of child shifting, also exhibited problem behaviours, including depression, silent resentment, and anger. It was found, too, that the problems demonstrated by these children negatively affected their impoverished homes and their schooling.

The literature review established the meaning and significance of social competence in child development. The review also examined teacher activities that can assist children to acquire social attributes which are necessary for successful social interactions and learning at school. In the Caribbean, where the study was conducted, cultural understandings of childhood and childrearing provided an important aspect of the context for interpreting study findings.

Methodology

The underlying consideration in choosing the method for this research was consistent with the view of Greig and Taylor (1995), which is that it should facilitate a systematic and scientific search for information aimed at improving our knowledge about children. In choosing between the two principal methods of scientific inquiry, the quantitative and the qualitative research approaches, the qualitative research approach was preferred. Hatch (1995) expressed the view that qualitative methods are better suited for answering questions in early childhood settings where in-depth rich understandings are sought. As a result, the design facilitated observing and listening to interactions to draw conclusions.

Ethnography was chosen as the method since it is particularly useful for studying childhood. This method of inquiry allows children to participate in the production of sociological data. The voices of children are directly heard as opposed to experimental or survey research studies (Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). Further, the case study was the most appropriate design to investigate the multiple variables that impact on

young children's social learning. Those variables include the child, peers, the teacher, and the significant adults in the child's life, both at school and in the home community. They were important because those variables in turn impact on the child's development of social competence. The case study allowed for an empirical inquiry of the issue of social competence within the real-life context of the school. Merriam (1998) recommends the case study method of investigation in situations where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not always clear.

After deciding on the case study approach for this inquiry, a review of the theoretical framework and the problem (to understand the experience of social competence learning for different children in different schooling situations) revealed that multiple cases needed to be studied. Also, selecting cases at multiple sites seemed to be the optimum method for obtaining the unique cases that Abramson (as cited in Merriam, 1998) believed to be essential to capture an understanding and an appreciation for the human condition.

The Research Sites

From the review of the literature and the general objective of the research it was decided that schools which appeared to reflect differences in social experiences for children within one cultural community should be selected. This selection criterion was adopted to address the problem of generalizability, which is often raised by critics of qualitative research (Parry, 2000). That is, to what extent can findings from one school be generalized to another school? Although there is no intention of the qualitative researcher to adopt the random sampling approach used by quantitative research approaches, the issue of generalizability is addressed by purposively selecting sites that share similarities and yet have differences with each other.

Since policymakers and researchers have been especially concerned about increasing the achievement levels of poor children who live in urban environments, the research sought to provide data on children from a disadvantaged situation. The schools selected were from one community considered to be a depressed and high-crime area, based on media reports and statistics from the Central Statistical Office. For example, in 1999 the Morvant Police Station reported the highest number of total crimes and serious crimes committed in the North Eastern Division (Trinidad and Tobago. Central Statistical Office, 2002).

From my 15 years experience as a primary school teacher and curriculum facilitator working in north Trinidad, as well as from

discussions held with school supervisors, it was understood that primary schools have been informally categorized as *high*, *medium*, and *low* performing. At the time of the study, these categories were based on the academic results primary schools received when students sat the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) Examination. The results determined whether students got secondary education at the 5- or 7-year Traditional Sector schools, which offer an academic-type programme; or the New Sector schools, which comprise mainly a two-tiered system of the 3-year junior secondary schools with transitions to the 2-year or 4-year senior secondary or senior comprehensive schools. This second system also includes the 5-year composite and the newest secondary schools, which offer academic and technical/vocational courses (George & Quamina-Aiyejina, 2003). Parents, students, and teachers preferred the Traditional Sector schools.

Based on the secondary school placement results, the data indicated that it was valid to classify the primary schools under review as high-, medium-, and low-performing schools. Secondly, the analysis also revealed that parents seemed to prefer to send their children to the better performing primary schools, as the school population was higher in the better performing primary schools and lower where the SEA results were poorer and fewer children secured places at the prestigious traditional secondary schools. As a result, in the classification of schools, high, medium, and low academic ratings equated high, medium, and low demand by the parents. Three schools representing the categories of high, medium, and low performing or demand were finally selected.

District Christian Primary (DCP) emerged as the highest demanded school, Upper Central Government Primary (UCP) as the school of medium demand, and Palm Grove Government Primary (PGP) as the school of lowest demand [all names are pseudonyms]. The schools cater for both boys and girls in the Port of Spain Central Educational Division. The highest performing school, DCP, is a denominational school. The other two schools, UCP and PGP, are both government schools. These represent the categories of schools needed for the study. At the highest ranked school, 25% of the students passed for the traditional secondary schools. At the medium-ranked school, 8% secured places at the traditional schools, and at the low-performing school, 0% of the students secured places at the traditional schools.

The Schools on Entry: Selecting Classrooms
My main purpose thereafter was to select a first-year class at each of the three primary schools. At DCP, the children were streamed by ability,

based on their performance on the teacher-made entrance examination. I did not select the A-stream because they were the "brightest" children from the intake, and were treated differently from the "others." The classes were more orderly, and the teachers appeared to be stricter in terms of their constant demands for discipline and neat completion of assigned seat tasks. The C-stream was also not selected because the teacher was untrained and often absent. After observing each of the three infant classes in session over a one-week period, I chose the first-year B-stream (29 students) since the teaching context seemed to represent the average teaching/learning situation at the school.

At UCP, there were two first-year classes. The classes were not separated by ability. After an informal interview with the principal and observation of the classes in session over a two-day period, the class with 24 students was selected. Observations focused on looking for similarities in teacher characteristics with the B-stream teacher selected at the first school site. The first-year teacher was on her first appointment after receiving her pre-degree diploma from teachers' training college and was in the same year group as the teacher selected at the first school.

At PGP there were two first-year classes. The children were not separated by ability. During my one-week observation period at this school, I saw only one first-year teacher since the other teacher was always absent. There was great indiscipline in the teacher's absence. I therefore decided to conduct the study in the class with the teacher with a low absenteeism rate. There were 24 students in that class.

The teachers at both DCP and UCP had been teaching for four years and most of that time was in the infant department where the children were 5- and 6-year-olds. They both had a pre-degree teacher's diploma and their attachments were the second school appointment to which each was assigned after graduating from teachers' training college. The teacher at DCP had studied early childhood education as her elective course at training college. At PGP, the teacher had been teaching for 31 years. She had a teaching diploma like the other two teachers, but in addition she had received a certificate in Early Childhood Education and a bachelors' degree in Education from The University of the West Indies.

Student Selection

Using purposeful sampling, first-year students at each school, whose ages ranged between 5 and 7 years, were selected with the assistance of the class teacher. Since there was no available record of social competence, students were selected based on teacher perceptions of a range of student behaviours. The cases also represented both sexes and as

far as possible the ethnic mix and academic status of students. I was aware that in order to obtain comprehensive data the sample had to be limited. As a result, 12 students—two males and two females at PGP and DCP, and one male and three females at UCP—were the participants selected based on consultation with the class teacher, observation of behaviours, and parental consent. Details of their profile are recorded in Table 1.

Table 1. The 12 Case Study Children

School	Name	Sex	Age	Ethnicity	Identified Behaviour	Academic Status
DCP	Joel Chandra Tenika Nkosi	M F F M	6 6 6 6	Mixed Indian African Mixed	Bad Good Fair Good	A+ B+ B B
UCP	Tania Jack Sherry Laura	F M F F	6 6 5 5	African African African African	Bad Good Good Fair	A+ A B B
PGP	Diana Dane Sita Ken	F M F M	6 6 5 6	African African Indian African	Bad Fair Good Excellent	B B A A+

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected over 16 months. That period included the last term in the First Year when initial observations were made to select observation sites and participants, and the three terms in the Second Year when study data were collected. Non-participant observations of student/teacher, student/peer and student/adult interactions were conducted during formal classes. Three infant classrooms were observed for two half-day sessions each week for the first term. Thereafter, the observation method was modified to include a mid-term observation period of six weeks, during which time three consecutive whole-day sessions were spent at each school. During each visit one child was

identified for close observation. In this way each child was targeted for focused study at least once every month.

The Social Attributes Checklist (McClellan & Katz, 1993) used in this study identifies attributes of a child's social behaviour that teachers are advised to examine periodically. The checklist was intended as a guide to support other methods, like teacher observations, used to assess a child's social status. Teachers were asked to collect data on children's social competence at the start of the study to establish the initial social competence of each child. It was again used at the middle and at the end of the study to identify any changes that might have occurred in the social attributes examined by the instrument. Since the checklist items were not entirely culture-specific to the children studied, teachers were asked to write additional jottings to explain their observations when necessary.

The second source of data was from interviews conducted with participants and significant adults like teachers, principals, and parents, which were audiotaped and later transcribed, coded, and analysed for emerging themes. Those themes guided further data collection. Home visits were also undertaken to understand the culture of the home community. The final source of data was derived from student work samples and school records, which were used to triangulate data from other sources.

Trustworthiness

The research design considered the notion that interviewing young children is problematic because of their limited verbal capacities, level of conceptual development, and information processing skills (Martin, 1988, as cited in Hatch, 1995). They sometimes confuse the order of events. Reliability was therefore established by overlapping sources of data, for example, observation and audio recordings. Additionally, time was a limitation as there were delays in gaining official access to the schools and data had to be collected during children's 2-year stay in the infant department. As a result data collection was limited to children's second year at school.

Findings

Research Question 1

What are the social competencies displayed by 12 young children during their second year at three primary schools?

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To respond to this question, data from the 24 categories examined by the Social Attributes Checklist was used to first establish the general level of children's social competence at each school. Then the social competencies of each child were determined. A cross-case analysis of the checklist findings was then completed (see Appendix). Three significant findings were:

1. All children showed a capacity for humour and used non-verbal interactions to communicate.

2. All children accepted peers or adults of other ethnic groups. In addition, 6 of the 12 children studied demonstrated more than 80% of the social attributes examined. These more socially competent children still needed to learn skills like expressing their wishes and wants, turn taking, and how to enter discussions.

3. A significant finding was that four of the better behaved children did not demonstrate empathy. Of the 12 children studied, 7 did not display empathy. None of the boys showed empathy.

The lack of empathy demonstrated by the boys in particular can be explained within the context of the culture. Cultures define differently what is appropriate interaction and feelings for its members. Additionally, cultures have different expectations for the social behaviours of boys and girls (Katz & McClellan, 1997). It is quite possible that the children learnt that it was inappropriate for males to demonstrate feelings like empathy. However, empathy is an important social attribute. Berk (2006) noted that as early as age 2 a child can sense and try to relieve another's distress.

Additionally, the checklist findings revealed that all schools had one or two children who did not demonstrate one third or more of the 24 attributes examined. Even though the schools were ranked in the community according to their academic rating, children demonstrated or did not demonstrate similar social attributes across schools. The least demanded school did have children with the largest number of unobserved social attributes. Dane and Diana were the students who seemed to be demonstrating the least social competence. The attributes that they did not display were often the same, such as being acutely lonely, not expressing wishes clearly and asserting needs appropriately, not taking turns easily, and not being able to negotiate and compromise. Additionally, the social difficulties that children displayed at the start of the year-long study remained the same at the middle and at the end of the study regardless of the school students attended.

The reason for no improvement in children's behaviours might be that while there was an emphasis on ensuring that children were taught the academic syllabus, there was no documentation to record, or planned intervention to address, social competencies that children lacked. The focus on academics in education observed seems consistent with beliefs about childhood competence and appropriate behaviours expressed by low-income African-Caribbean and Indian-Caribbean parents in Caribbean countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Grenada, and Antigua. The belief is that good children are academically competent, cooperative, respectful, compliant, and obedient (Roopnarine & Brown, 1997; Wilson, Wilson, & Berkley-Caines, 2003). The expectations of parents seem to mirror practices at school that focused on academics. As a result, no social intervention programme existed to assist children who needed to learn social competencies, like Dane and Diana, to improve in behaviours.

An additional finding was that the two children for whom the greatest numbers of social attributes were not observed (Diana – 17 out of 24; and Dane – 10 out of 24) attended PGP, the school parents least wanted their children to attend. PGP seemed to have had the highest number of children from homes with difficult family circumstances. Katz and McClellan (1997) noted that one group of children with social difficulties at school enter school with social/emotional problems. Dane and Diana seemed to fit into that group. Diana, for example, arrived at school late and moody. The teacher said that her face was always "*wrench-up and sour.*"

A check of her home background revealed that she came from a poor family with an unemployed stepfather, and a brother and a younger stepsister. She also lived in a violent community and was used to severe corporal punishment. Her mother said, "*I does cut her skin sometime when she misbehave.*" Her mother also said, "*Diana and Damien [her brother] need a lot of things. They father not helping. They aint have no proper clothes, shoes. That does stress them out. Diana does be vex she aint have nice clothes to go out.*"

This type of childhood experience can be interpreted in the context of childrearing and socialization in the Caribbean, particularly within disadvantaged home situations. Parents believe, for example, that a good parent would use physical punishment to train children properly (Rohner, Kean, & Cournoyer, 1991, as cited in Roopnarine, 2006). As a result, the use of corporal punishment is a widely held belief that has resulted in harsh disciplinary measures being sometimes practised. This may have affected the behaviours of some children. Findings from a cross-national

study of mother-child dyads in China, India, Italy, Kenya, the Philippines, and Thailand revealed that the perceived normativeness of physical discipline had a moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and childhood aggression and anxiety. However, the more frequent use of physical discipline was associated with behavioural difficulties in children even when viewed as normative (Lansford et al., 2005).

Another finding was that children identified by their teachers as "good behaved" at two schools (Sherry at UCP and Nkosi at DCP) were among the five children in the study who did not demonstrate one third or more of the social attributes examined. Classroom observations confirmed that the teacher's definition of "good behaved child" in both instances was quiet and non-disruptive during class time. The data revealed that the children who were identified as "good behaved" were experiencing social difficulties. They were not, for example, participating in discussions, negotiating and compromising, approaching others, expressing wishes and wants clearly, or empathizing.

Their behaviours were consistent with the aforementioned definition of a good child in the Caribbean being cooperative and respectful. However, these children seemed to have also demonstrated some behavioural characteristics that could have made them victims of bullying. Nkosi, more so than Sherry, for example, did not get involved in situations that required negotiation and compromise as he did not voluntarily interact with his peers. Instead he followed whatever was decided by others. Not only did he not assert himself but he also allowed others to bully him at times. That bullying extended from the playground into the classroom, where during seatwork he allowed his academically weaker but more socially assertive seatmates to "copy" from him. This type of passive behaviour had a negative impact on his peer relationship. He was not accepted by most children and, therefore, was not invited by friends to join in play, friendship, and work.

Nkosi was not identified as a child with serious social competence problems but rather as an over-dependent child. The checklist however revealed that he did not demonstrate many social attributes examined. However, it seems quite likely that because he was non-aggressive his grave situation was underestimated by his class teacher who did not believe he had a serious interaction problem. The idea expressed by Katz and McClellan (1997) that children may lack appropriate skills because they do not have opportunities to learn and practise them seemed to apply to Nkosi. His grandfather did almost everything for him so he learnt not to try for himself.

Sherry was similarly quiet and good behaved. She did not readily contribute to the discussions but had to be invited. Her teacher said, "*She does not talk much at work or play. Sherry never seems angry. She has to be asked to contribute. She may tell a peer to tell Miss* [what she wanted to say]." At the end of the school year, however, her teacher reported that though minimal she was initiating conversations at times. The social attributes that were not observed for Sherry may have been linked to her maturation. Fields and Fields (2006) said that it was important to have long-term goals for children when helping them to develop behaviours that are associated with maturation.

What seemed to be emerging from the data was that the children could be classified into four child types based on the similarities of their observed social behaviours. The four child types were:

- The Troublemakers   2 children

- The Troubled Child
    o   Aggressive   2 children
    o   Passive   1 child

- The Typical Child   6 children

- The Good Child   1 child

The child types discovered in this study have similarities to the "sociometric status types" named in a seminal study by Coie, Dodge, and Coppotelli (1982), as reported in Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2003). Peer relationships were examined to determine some reasons for successful and unsuccessful peer relations. Children were asked to say whom they liked and did not like among their peers. Based on the findings children were categorized as *popular, controversial, rejected, neglected,* or *average*.

These categories were described by later research as reported in Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2003). One profile of *popular* and *controversial* children was that they could manipulate social situations to ensure that they were the leaders. They disliked losing and were sometimes involved in verbal conflicts. They had a high dominance status among their peers during play. However, their leadership could sometimes be disruptive. The characteristics of this category matched some of the behaviours of the two Troublemakers [so labelled by their teachers] in this study.

Tania was one Troublemaker who often modified given assignments and bent the rules to engage in her "new" made-up tasks for as long as she could get away with it. She did not cope well with rebuffs and corrections from teachers or children as she became angry. She seemed

to be lonely at times because she had no real friend even though she had lots of playmates. Like Joel, the other Troublemaker, Tania quarrelled when she was angry. Also, she usually did not compromise with her peers appropriately because she always tried to take control in all her interactions. She always sought to be the centre of attention.

The "acting out behaviours" of Troublemakers seemed to have been a defence mechanism to cope with problems of being a child with above-average learning ability in a class with activities that were usually under-stimulating and boring. Katz and McClellan (1997) provided support for this idea when they mentioned that a child may engage in disruptive behaviour as a way of making school more interesting. Additionally, her actions may have been partly related to differences in the expectations for behaviour between school and home. Both she and the other Troublemaker were encouraged to be creative, independent thinkers in their home setting but forced to be passive followers at school. Fields and Fields (2006) referred to the cultural mismatch that negatively affects some children's behaviour when the school expects a standard of behaviour that is different from what is expected at home. Such children may fail socially at school.

Dane and Diana, the two Troubled aggressive children, displayed behaviours similar to *Aggressive rejected* children. *Aggressive rejected* children were described as dishonest, impulsive, and non-cooperative (Cillessen et al., as cited in Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003). As a result, they tended to engage in arguing and fighting. This type of behaviour was noted when on one occasion a group of boys complained to the class teacher that Diana was angry and was venting her feelings by pelting and quarrelling with another student by the school fence.

Nkosi was the Troubled passive child identified. Although his behaviours were similar to Sherry in that they were both quiet and well-behaved, observation revealed that he was sometimes bullied by his peers who demanded answers to class work. Also, when the teacher corrected him Nkosi became scared and sometimes acted nervously thereafter. His problem seemed to have originated from a dysfunctional home situation. His teacher said that his mother was in an abusive relationship and his grandfather over-compensated for the negative home situation by doing everything for his grandson. Nkosi just sat at his table in the back of the class and waited to follow the teacher's instruction.

Sherry was classed among the Typical children who were well behaved most of the times, and did not seem to have a home situation like the Troubled children or an individual need that was not addressed at school like the Troublemakers. The Typical child category, to which the majority of the children belonged, was really a continuum that included

Jack who was borderline Troubled passive and Tenika who was a borderline Troublemaker at one end of the continuum and Chandra whose social attributes were almost equivalent to Ken, the Good child, at the other end. The Typical child usually followed the rules during class time and obeyed teacher instructions. As a result, the names of children in this category were usually not called for admonition or singled out for praise. However, children who were borderline Troublemakers or Troubled aggressive, though demonstrating the behaviours of the Typical child most of the time, sometimes displayed behaviours consistent with a Troublemaker or a Troubled aggressive child and were punished.

Typical children experienced some problems at times but were generally willing and able to conform to school rules and to please the teacher. Out of class they played with friends with minimal conflict or sought help when problems arose. They needed help at times and they depended on the teacher or an adult to provide that assistance. One Typical child, Laura, turned and said to me as I observed at the back of the class, "*Miss, Tania miserable. She does beat up people. She does call me Lizard.*" She wanted me to intervene and tell Tania to stop calling her names she did not like. There were times when children in this category deviated from the norm but it was usually a temporary infringement. Adult monitoring was necessary to guide Typical children through conflict and or negative situations that sometimes arose.

The final category of child type observed, the Good child, was the most socially competent child in the study, who was referred to as a "gentleman" and promoted as the model student by his teacher. When the teacher was absent he automatically and always engaged in a silent activity, usually reading. Ken had the fewest social attributes shortcomings. His major asset was that socially he had good manners, was always quiet, and cognitively he was the "brightest" child in the class. His reading ability was above average, and he placed first on class tests. Also, he usually gave the right answers to questions. As a result, Ken's pro-social behaviour was usually mentioned in conjunction with his "brightness" [how intelligent he was]. This child was loved by all his peers. The qualities of the good child are consistent with Durbrow's (1999) findings, as cited in Roopnarine (2006), that children in the Caribbean are expected to be obedient, compliant, respectful, and have proper conduct.

The qualities of the good child appeared to be similar to the *Popular child* type identified by Newcomb et al. (1993) in Smith, Cowie, and Blades (2003). They suggested that popular children "have good interpersonal skills, are not high in aggression, and are not withdrawn"

(p. 148). Ken's teacher encouraged him to maintain his behaviour. As a result, at the end of the school year the teacher said, when asked to comment on his expressiveness, "*He still does not come forward to say anything.*" Ken seemed to have needed teacher intervention to learn how to clearly express his feelings, wishes, and wants to others. He may similarly not have expressed empathy because he did not risk interaction that may have jeopardized his "good child" status.

It can be summarized, therefore, that since all children did not demonstrate some of the identified social attributes, they needed assistance to improve their social competence. It was significant that none of the boys demonstrated empathy. Additionally, the classification of children in behaviour types facilitated analysis of observed behaviours. Troubled children seem to have needed intervention that also addressed their stressful home situations. Quiet children needed to be observed more closely for social problems that could easily go unnoticed. Also, Troublemakers may have been very creative or gifted children who needed to learn social competencies that they lacked and to be challenged to channel their energies.

Research Question 2

What is the role of the infant teacher in the social development of children with different levels of social competencies?

Two pedagogical approaches—modelling and ignoring—were generally used to cue the behaviour teachers wanted from children when they did not demonstrate it. First of all, the teachers modelled some behaviours that they wanted their students to adopt in response to situations. At other times certain behaviours were ignored. The teachers usually modelled desired behaviours as situations arose, as the following examples illustrate.

Modelling

A word study session was in progress during which the children were asked to volunteer words, which the teacher wrote on the board. Ken said his word after the teacher had taken the last word for that part of the exercise. She modelled the skill of negotiation when she said to him, "*Can we leave out your word Ken?*" he responded, "*Yes Miss.*" Later on in that same exercise caring was modelled when a child said "bat" as an example of an "et" word. When some children in the class laughed at the child who made the error, the teacher quickly pointed out to the class that children who said wrong things were not to be laughed at.

Good manners were also sometimes modelled. It was the most frequently taught social attribute. In spite of this teaching effort, the children who came to school lacking manners, like the Troubled children, did not develop social competence in that area over the period observed. It is quite likely that they needed practice opportunities to learn how to reason for themselves. As a result, even though the teacher demonstrated good manners, children did not internalize and so did not produce the desired response. Fields and Fields (2006) stated that too often adults focus on teaching children words that are socially acceptable, which they memorize and repeat sometimes only to get out of trouble. However, the utterances are superficial as the children have not understood what is being taught nor have they developed true caring feelings.

Ignoring

Name calling was another type of behaviour children demonstrated at times. The teacher's response was neutrality or indifference. From later discussion with teachers and parents, I came to understand that in that community name-calling was a regular practice and usually the person called was not offended. It was however unacceptable social behaviour in the wider national community, and even on occasion in that community as name-calling sometimes led to fights on the way home or in the schoolyard. Also, some children were hurt by name calling. For example, Diana's mother said that Diana complained that on her way home from school children called her "pumpkin head." Diana did not like the nickname.

Children therefore needed to know when it was appropriate to indulge in name-calling and how to recognize and desist when someone was offended. Katz and McClellan (1997) suggested that teacher intervention was necessary when negative labelling of peers who were different or disliked occurred. Since some children were hurt after name-calling episodes, the teacher needed to help the children to accept peers who were different. As a result, even though there were examples of teaching episodes to encourage appropriate behaviours or discourage inappropriate behaviours, children did not adopt the target behaviours. The one-time incidents of instruction in behaviour needed to be backed up by multiple opportunities for social interaction to provide the experiences children needed to adopt the desired behaviours.

There were other problem situations that arose where behaviour control was the method employed. This method of control was used at two levels: "Individual Behaviour Control," when a single child

displayed an inappropriate behaviour; and "General Behaviour Control," when the entire class was corrected for a problem.

Individual Behaviour Control

At the three sites studied teachers often resorted to controlling the behaviours of "children who were giving problems." They were usually the Troublemakers previously identified or those Typical children who were inclined to be Troublemakers at times. They were addressed by methods that included shouted commands, punishment, stern demands for obedience, and the use of prayers.

Shouted commands

Often for talking in class out of turn, children were quickly noticed by the teacher and singled out for mention. At DCP Tenika was a known "talker." She often talked to her seatmate as the teacher worked on the board. When the teacher noticed Tenika's distraction she stopped teaching. The teacher then shouted out to Tenika on two occasions, telling her to put her feet down and stop talking, before she complied. Similar instances of talking and playing in class occurred often at all three sites when the teacher was distracted or absent from the class. Sometimes the teacher next door would eventually come to the class and shout out instructions to the disruptive children [who were caught] to be quiet and seated. When teachers establish the supports for classroom interaction, many difficulties, such as those mentioned, cease or decrease in severity (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

Commands were sometimes quite stern when a teacher addressed a habitual offender. This occurred usually when whole-class teaching was taking place and the offender was a distance away from the class teacher. For example, at UCP the teacher suddenly shouted sternly, "*Tania I will not tolerate you disturbing the class this term*!" Like corporal punishment, this approach did not help the child to acquire social competence. Tania was quiet for a while, but soon returned to talking to a friend while the teacher was teaching. It appeared that methods used to change behaviours were ineffective for the long term. As a result, Troublemakers, who appeared to have been the most intelligent children, were the ones most often reprimanded. Their "acting out" behaviours persisted and often they disturbed other children and caused some of them to be also disruptive.

Punishment

After individuals were identified and called on to stop talking or playing in class, some form of punishment usually followed. These included

having the child stand up and close his/her eyes for up to 20 minutes or fold his/her arms placing a finger on the lips for up to 10 minutes. Corporal punishment was sometimes used. At times children had to stand in a corner of the classroom or just outside the classroom, or they were kept inside the class to do schoolwork during a recess period. These techniques did not result in a change in behaviour. In fact, for the Troublemakers, who were the most frequent offenders, punishment was a good opportunity to engage in an "outwitting behaviour."

Outwitting behaviours were behaviours that were deceptively clever and allowed Troublemakers to "beat the system" and avoid being punished for disobeying instructions or breaking the rules. Tania, for example, was observed running outside with a friend for water, when the rule was one at a time. She avoided being caught and so outwitted her teacher. Fields and Fields (2006) expressed the view that some adults believe that it is enough to tell children how to behave and then to punish them for non-compliance. This is an ineffective approach since changing social behaviours takes time and should be a long-term goal.

Demanded obedience

At all three centres disobeying teacher instructions was not tolerated. The teacher at UCP was the most adamant about not accommodating deviance from her instructions. To even question her directive was seen as disobedience that needed to be swiftly corrected. No child was allowed to be assertive or to question or challenge any teacher decision. The teacher's decision was final. This belief was constant at the three schools. The method of control used was authoritarian because the adult made the rules and punishment was administered for any deviation (Fields & Fields, 2006). There was little provision for power sharing where the views of both the adult and child would have been accommodated in the teaching/learning process.

Prayers

The school prayer was another method used to curb student disobedience. At DCP, in particular, belief in God was a core understanding. As a result, children had to ask daily for forgiveness for their mistakes in their school prayer. The School Pledge, which was recited daily, also addressed being respectful and obedient, and honest and truthful. It stated that there should be no fighting and cursing. Children were also frequently reminded at assembly to have respect for elders and the staff. Children with behavioural problems were asked to pay particular attention to their prayers and ask God to help them to change their ways.

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Even though these virtuous prayers were repeated daily they seemed to have no effect on the behaviours of the children with behavioural problems. Like the method used for teaching manners, children did not internalize the behaviours that were appropriate.

General Problem Behaviour Control

This refers to methods used to control the entire class. Though similar to methods used on individuals, a combination of two corrective measures, like shouted commands and punishment, rather than a single method, was more likely to be used.

Shouting, punishment, and threats

All the teachers referred to excessive talking by the class in general as a major social behavioural problem that negatively affected children's academic performance. Corrective measures usually involved shouting at the class and/or administering corporal punishment to the main culprits. Corporal punishment or the threats of it were common methods used to control whole-class talking.

Fields and Fields (2006) reported that classroom discipline is the single greatest challenge facing teachers today. They also stated that to be effective, disciplinary approaches must focus on more than behaviour control to teach other things. Teachers of young children, they further stated, should understand the early years to be an important time for children to learn complex functions related to behaviour, like emotion regulation. The method of commanding compliance was totally not in keeping with the support system young children need. Children seemed to have needed to be taught the desired social behaviours.

Teacher talk sessions

Teacher talk was another common method used to curb excessive talking. At UCP the teacher said, "*Every day you have to say the same thing. We pray on lines and then say the anthem every day. You ask them what they are supposed to do. They know. Yet still they don't do it. They twist and turn.*" Based on her comments the method was ineffective yet it continued to be used.

Another problem behaviour was fighting, which was a problem at all sites but was most prevalent among the children at PGP. The older children were usually involved in the fights but the infants looked on and learnt. Ms. Woodroff at PGP further identified the main fighters to be limited to "*the boys, I could pinpoint them.*" The class was spoken to about solving conflicts through dialogue when fights occurred. Fields and Fields (2006) referred to the work of King and Gartrell (2003), who

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cautioned against viewing typical boy behaviour as problem behaviour. Boys have more testosterone hormone and are therefore more aggressive. They need more physical activity than girls (Fields & Fields, 2006). Therefore, a curriculum that included more physical activity for boys, along with teaching conflict resolution skills, may have benefitted both boys and girls.

Conclusion and Recommendations

No significant difference was observed in children's social competencies that was linked to the type of school they attended. Type refers to whether the school was perceived as "good" and was highly demanded by parents or not. As a result, general statements about teaching for social competence can be made based on the behavioural characteristics of children rather than school types. This study was able to link social behaviours observed to four child types. This categorization facilitates identification of social competencies that groups of children are likely to have mastered or need to learn. As a result, teaching for social competence can target teaching specific social attributes to children by child types.

It was observed, too, that the teaching methods used to change children's behaviours did not result in long-term changes in behaviour. The majority of instances of social skills teaching were reactive and involved methods devised by the teacher to control either individual child behaviours or whole-class behaviours. As a result, the teacher's role in social competence development could be said to have been limited to behaviour control. This approach can be linked to cultural understandings of children—that they should be obedient and compliant and that adults should demand good behaviour, resorting to physical punishment if necessary.

Since teachers were using methods that appeared to be ineffective, teacher training based on philosophies that support developmentally appropriate practice for teaching social competence to children seemed to be needed. The introduction of teacher aides could reduce the adult-child ratio and may better facilitate individualized teaching of social skills. Parent outreach programmes may assist parents with relationship problems who sometimes have children with behavioural problems at school. Finally, intervention programmes for teaching social competence need to be introduced on the school curriculum.

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Appendix
Cross-Case Analysis of Checklist Findings

	Palm Grove Primary					Upper Central Primary					District Christian Primary			
Individual Attributes	Diana	Dane	Ken	Sita		Tania	Laura	Jack	Sherry		Joel	Chandra	Nkosi	Tenika
Positive mood	X	X	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	X	√	√
Not very dependent on adults	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	X	X
Comes willingly to setting	X	√	√	√		√	X	√	√		√	√	√	√
Copes with rebuffs	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	√		X	√	X	√
Shows capacity to empathize	X	X	X	√		√	√	X	X		X	X	X	√
Cares about peers	X	X	√	√		√	√	X	X		√	√	√	√
Shows humour	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Not acutely lonely	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Peer-Related Attributes														
Usually accepted vs. rejected by peers	X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Sometimes invited by other children to play & work	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√

Cross-Case Analysis of Checklist Findings (continued)

Social Skills	Palm Grove Primary					Upper Central Primary					District Christian Primary			
	Diana	Dane	Ken	Sita		Tania	Laura	Jack	Sherry		Joel	Chandra	Nkosi	Tenika
Approaches others positively	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	X		X	X	X	√
Express wishes clearly	X	X	X	X		√	√	√	X		√	√	X	X
Asserts rights & needs appropriately	X	√	√	√		X	√	√	√		X	X	X	√
Is not easily Intimidated by bullies	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	X		√	√	X	√
Expresses frustrations & anger effectively	X	√	√	√		X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Takes turn fairly easily	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	X		X	√	√	X
Shows interest in others	X	X	√	√		√	√	X	√		√	√	√	√
Negotiates/compromises	X	X	√	√		X	√	√	X		X	√	X	√
Does not draw undue attention to self	X	√	√	√		X	X	√	√		√	√	√	X
Accesses play and work groups	X	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	X	√
Interacts non-verbally with peers	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Accepts peers & adults of other ethnic groups	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
Enters discussions	√	√	√	√		√	√	X	X		√	X	X	√
TOTAL Attributes not observed for each child	**17**	**10**	**2**	**1**		**8**	**2**	**4**	**8**		**6**	**4**	**10**	**4**

Key: √ **Social Attribute observed**
     X **Social Attribute not observed**