

Running Head: Addressing Preschool Aggression

NIPPING AGGRESSION: PRESCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE  
EFFECTIVENESS AND CHALLENGES OF THEIR INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN AN  
URBAN SCHOOL IN TOBAGO.

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URBAN SCHOOL IN TOBAGO.

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Abstract

Nipping Aggression: Preschool Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness and Challenges of their Intervention Strategies in an Urban School in Tobago.

The preschool classrooms of today is filled with numerous outburst of behavioral problems that tend to impinge on the teaching and learning process. When students exhibit various aggressive behaviours in the classroom, teachers must be equipped with sound intervention strategies. The study was conducted at an urban school located in Tobago and sought to report the perspectives of preschool teachers as it relates to aggression, intervention strategies used, their challenges experienced and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of these strategies. A qualitative case study was employed to explore the following research question: “What are the teachers’ perceptions of aggression and the effectiveness and challenges of their intervention strategies?” Two teachers were chosen through purposive sampling and were interviewed individually. The semi-structured interview was the instrument used to collect data. Member checking and peer-debriefing were strategies used to assure validity. Major findings revealed that managing preschool aggression depended to a large extent on a knowledge of child development, ongoing training, policies and procedures, documentation and monitoring of progress, collegial relationships, administrative support, and parental involvement.

Key words: aggression, pre-schooler, intervention strategies.

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## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

There is a heightened attention given to conduct problems among preschool, primary and secondary students and this has been highlighted locally, globally and internationally. Researchers in the field of education, policy makers and governments alike have articulated their concerns about this phenomenon. One form of conduct problems that have received serious attention worldwide, and in particular, to professionals in the field, is aggression among preschoolers.

Most, if not all teachers have encountered a child who hurt others and interrupts the normal classroom routine by various outburst of aggression such as hurting others, destroying learning materials, kicking over toys in the learning centres or simply cries whenever they cannot have their way. According to Gordon and Browne (2008), .....these are normal scenes in any preschool classroom.....and it does not matter if the teaching and learning resources are adequate, or how the teacher manages the classroom.....there will be conflicts among students.

Helmsen, Koglin, and Petermann (2012), cited in Hawkins and Haskett (2014), agreed that aggression, whether verbal or physical, tend to have a serious impact on a child's overall development, particularly, socially and emotionally, interrupts the teaching and learning process and impedes the child's capacity to maximize their fullest capabilities.

Although aggression is usually viewed as been normal for the developing child, however, it can lead to an alarming amount of rejection and avoidance by peers and even

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teachers. It can also generate challenges for parents, teachers and the wider society. Additionally, aggression can aid as an antecedent for delinquent behaviours and criminal activities in the later years (Walters, Ronen & Rosenbaum, 2010).

The government of Trinidad and Tobago is cognizant of this fact and is on a drive to address this knowledge by constructing early childhood centres all over the country to cater for this critical age-group, three years to five years to ensure the holistic development of these children. The government has also outlined in its Draft National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum Guide (2005) that fostering a beginning of harmony in our young children would result in raising a group of people who will be fortified with the necessary qualities needed to live at peace with all men in this present world.

It should be noted however that at this level of the education system the children will develop an awareness of the value of developing friendships and healthy social interactions and the limits and restrictions that are needed in interacting socially. Through education showing respect for others and developing problem solving skills are critical in ensuring that students are socially and emotionally secured and acquire the basic skills to be well attuned and living in accord with each other.

In ensuring that students' develop holistically demands that any outburst of aggression be carefully monitored and addressed or else it can result in greater problems in later years. The teachers of children in the preschool setting who display aggression must therefore have a heightened awareness of the impact of early recognition and intervention seeing that they are in an ideal position to intercept behavioural difficulties.



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### *School Context*

The New Start preschool is a mixed, coeducational, and non-denominational private institution located in a rural community in Tobago and caters for children three years to five years. It has been in operation for the past seventeen years and is housed in a rented facility. The school is in very close proximity to two primary schools and one secondary school, the health and community centres, two churches and the recreational facilities for sports and physical education.

The staff at this school consist of one principal and four teachers, all female. The principal holds a bachelor's degree and is presently pursuing a concentration in curriculum, Master of Education degree. Among the teaching staff, one is trained and certified in early childhood care and education, another holds a degree in music education and the other two are untrained in early childhood care and education but have five C.X.C O'levels.

The school facilities include a library and sick bay and there are three classes namely beginners, grade 1 and grade 2. The school has a population of sixty five students who live within close proximity to the school and come from predominantly low and middle class families. The students are grouped according to their age and level of development and usually spends two years at the school following which there is a graduation to mark the end of their tenure at the institution. A teacher is assigned to each class and is responsible for the planning and execution of appropriate readiness skills.

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The Newstart preschool uses the thematic approach to teaching and learning where a theme is selected each term by the teachers and lessons and activities are planned to reflect the particular theme. Within the confines of the school, there is limited space for outdoor activities and the classes are usually overcrowded.

The **school's vision** is that of providing a warm, caring and stimulating atmosphere for students, teachers and other stakeholders, that will foster excellence through holistic, educational activities.

The **Mission** is to always see the students as unique and to promote an environment where they can develop the highest spiritual and moral values and excellence in basic skills enabling them to make valuable contributions to the world.

At this school goals and objectives are identified and they are aligned to the vision and mission of the school. These goals are as follows:

- To develop highest spiritual and moral values.
- To create a cordial and amiable place of work
- To develop students, creative abilities
- To develop physical, mental and social skills
- To enable students to make valuable contributions to society.
- To become professionally and technologically efficient

The physical arrangement of the classroom reflects little evidence of student directed learning and the arrangement of the furniture suggests that collaborative learning is not promoted among the students. There is only one centre accommodated in each classroom,

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that is, the block area and there is a paucity of adequate materials to serve the number of students.

The teachers do not always collaborate and they do not always agree with each other. They do not always participate in mutual working interactions which involves planning together and exchanging effective classroom learning strategies. Although they are expected to meet once per month to plan for each ensuing month, most times, only two or three will meet this appointment.

Although the school is performing well academically, there has been recent resurgence of concerns with the escalation in cases of aggressive behaviours manifested among most of the students in many ways including pushing, biting, cuffing and hitting. These forms of aggressive outburst exhibited by students on a regular basis are of utmost concern by teachers.

The teachers at the Newstart preschool feel ill equipped to handle aggression and would usually resort to one-size-fit-all strategies. Additionally, some of the incidences of aggression are left unattended.

The frequent reoccurrences of aggression among the students has triggered great concern among the teachers. It was this concern that has heightened the researchers' interest in conducting this research study thereby engaging the teachers in reflecting on their perceptions of aggression and their challenges and effectiveness as they implement various strategies in managing aggression among their students.

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### *Statement of the problem*

It was highlighted in the introduction that hitting, kicking their peers and even throwing over toys in the play area are common for the average preschool child. However, the concern here is when these behaviours are consistent, they can more likely become engrained over time and will lead to adverse effects in the future. Additionally, seeing that most children attend school from as early as three years, the school is the ideal setting for intervening early with aggressive behaviours.

It was against this backdrop therefore that the problem this study seeks to address is teacher perceptions on the challenges and effectiveness of intervention strategies used in managing preschool aggression at the Newstart preschool.

### *Purpose Statement*

The present study was undertaken in pursuit of a more distinct knowledge of the perceptions of teachers about aggression and to gain a deeper insights of their challenges and effectiveness of the use of particular strategies in managing aggression among their students. Although the literature abounds with a myriad of effective and ineffective strategies in managing aggression, in the international arena, the researcher wanted to find out what particular factors may be contributing to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness in managing aggression among preschoolers locally.

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The study is also undertaken to identify what additional strategies are used by teachers in our context and can be used by other teachers in successfully managing aggression at the preschool level.

### *Research Question*

To successfully guide this study, there will be one fundamental question and four sub-questions. They are:

1. What are the various perceptions of teachers about aggression among preschool students at the Newstart preschool and the effectiveness and challenges of their intervention strategies?

### *Sub-Questions*

- a. What are the various experiences of teachers as they encounter aggression among preschool students?
- b. What specific behavior management strategies are used to promote positive behavior among preschool students?
- c. What strategies are the teachers employing in the classroom to prevent negative behaviours among the students?
- d. How do preschool teachers perceive the effectiveness and challenges of their intervention strategies?

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### *Significance of the study*

It was the intention of the researcher that through this study the experiences (feelings, concerns, perceptions) of the teachers involved would be highlighted. It would also expand teachers' understanding of the complexities of aggression and how critical it is to use proactive strategies to successfully manage it. The researcher hopes that it will contribute significant insights as to ways in which teachers can be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with various outburst of aggression in ways that will yield positive outcomes. It will also contribute to the body of literature both locally and globally by offering an awareness as to the strategies that can be used effectively in managing aggression among our preschoolers.

### *Justification for doing the study*

Aggression in schools and especially among preschoolers is a cause for concern because aggression and its related behaviours presents negative consequences for all. Trinidad and Tobago is a twin island republic that believes in education and the impact it will have on our development on the world stage. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with other non-government organizations has promoted a heightened awareness to aggression and its effects by implementing intervention strategies focused on the primary and secondary schools with little or no attention given to aggression at the preschool level.

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Measures have been scarcely undertaken to address this phenomena at this level of the education system to determine how teachers are implementing strategies to intervene and handle aggression among our preschoolers, been cognizant of the fact that once left unchecked, these behaviours would be repeated in the future.

The Ministry of Education in Trinidad is responsible for the management of all preschools in Trinidad and Tobago. The Division of Education in Tobago is responsible for education on the island at the primary and secondary levels, but at present, there is no one appointed to monitor and supervise the preschools. The Newstart preschool is a private institution and it also lacks supervision and monitoring.

Teachers at the Newstart preschool are left to formulate their own strategies in handling outburst of aggression among their students, yet it is still spiraling out of control. Although evidence is presented throughout the literature with regards to various effective intervention strategies tailored for the older age groups (i.e. 5 – 6 and 6-9 years old), there is a paucity of studies that have been aimed at specifically examining the strategies and interventions teachers have implemented during the preschool period (i.e. 3-5years).

It is therefore expected that this study will give the administration at the Newstart preschool and other schools faced with similar challenges a deeper understanding of various intervention strategies in successfully managing the promulgation of aggression among their students.

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### *Limitations/Delimitations*

Limitations are those conditions beyond the control of the researcher and in this study time constraints was the major limitation.

The Delimitation is that this study will be confined to one site, the NewStart Preschool, two participants, one from each level of the school and during one school term. Therefore it will be difficult on a researcher's platform to generalize the findings.

### *Definition of Terms*

- Aggression – those displays of behaviours that are intended to harm others that affect students negatively and disrupt the teaching and learning process (Puckett et al, 2009).
- Preschooler- a child between the age of two and five years that attend school.
- Intervention Strategies – methods used with the intention to improve a deficit in a child (Allen & Cowdery, 2009).



Chapter 2

*Literature Review*

The specific focus of this study was on describing teacher perceptions of their effectiveness and challenges in managing aggression among preschoolers. A review of the literature will follow in order to situate the framework for understanding this research and will focus on: understanding of development and the preschool child, the nature and causes of aggression and management and intervention strategies.

*Development and the Preschool Child*

According to Gordon and Browne, (2008), various parts become so interrelated and blend so beautifully in the developing child that change overtime as the child grows and develops. This idea of change and growth is critical because what transpires during the formative years of a child is critical and profound due to the fact that the particular type of development that takes place will provide an ineffaceable during the first three years of a child's life is critical and profound because this stage of development provides an ineffaceable design for later years that can be either fragile or sturdy in its entirety. The preschool period in particular is the time when there is rapid growth and development physically, cognitively, socially and emotionally and therefore, a knowledge of how these are intricately related is critical in planning for a child's success at school.

To gain a better understanding of this growth and development, Santrock (2008) and Newman and Newman (2009) has outlined eight stages of development through which each

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person passes, proposed by Erik Erikson, a key figure in the study of children and development. These are in brief:

- **Stage one: Trust vs Mistrust.** This stage is stuck between birth and one year and is characterized as the most essential and critical stage in the developing child.
- **Stage two: Autonomy vs shame and doubt.** This stage of development occurs somewhere around age two and is specifically geared towards a child's emergent desire to acquire a greater awareness of personal control.
- **Stage three: Initiative vs Guilt.** It is during the early years, that is, between three and five years that children are beginning to be assertive and develop a sense of control in their own world when they engage in play activities and other social encounters.
- **Stage four: Industry vs Inferiority.** The early years that a child spends in the school setting, that is, age five to eleven years, is covered by this stage.
- **Stage five: Identity vs Confusion.** This stage spans somewhere between age twelve and sixteen, where children usually search themselves by developing a knowledge of who they are and assert their independence.
- **Stage six: Intimacy vs Isolation.** This stage takes into account the early phase of maturity when relationships of a more personal nature are explored.
- **Stage seven: Generativity vs Stagnation.** People usually continue to enrich their lives during this stage by spending quality time pursuing various careers and strengthening family relationships.
- **Stage eight: Integrity vs Despair.** This is the period that is known as self-reflection and usually occurs during that period known as old age.

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It must be highlighted however that all these stages are critical and equally important. However, for the purpose of this paper, two stages are important and will be expanded to give greater insights into understanding the preschool child in terms of their overall development. These are: Autonomy vs shame and doubt and initiative vs guilt.

Autonomy is viewed as finding satisfaction and a sense of self-assurance in pursuing things to please self and articulating one's desire. Simply put, it means self-government or independence (Newman & Newman, 2009; Puckett et al, 2009). As children begin to grow and have confidence in their immediate surroundings, and the people with whom they interact, growth, independence and a sense of autonomy will be realized (Erikson, 1963, cited in Puckett et al, 2009). For example, a child feeding himself, opening a bottle, buttoning his shirt, or even using the bathroom, are all independent skills. Confidence in running, jumping, and manipulating are indicators of healthy development. Additionally, the child will also show willingness to engage in new and challenging activities, games, and greater confidence in this domain is growing (Hooper & Umansky, 2009).

A lack of support for autonomy leads to a sense of embarrassment or doubt. This is ultimately accompanied by a wide array of destructive feelings and unsuitable behaviors (Puckett et al, 2009). It must therefore be understood that on one hand, developing children have that inner desire to be independent, whereas, in addition, they require the security-building presence, and direction and nurturing support from adults.

Gordon and Browne, (2008), established the fact that if this stage of development is successfully nurtured, it will allow the child to have a strong will. In other words, the

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distinction for the proportion of this stage becomes the decisive for the percentage of affection and hatred, collaboration and deliberateness, the freedom to communicate effectively or inhibition.

Boosting the desire for autonomy while outlining boundaries with the absence of embarrassment is quite a herculean task. Mooney, (2000), cited in Gordon & Browne, (2008), suggests that fostering independence in children involves allowing for freedom of choice, establishing simple, concise, consistent, reasonable limitations and accommodating their movements between freedom and dependence. In other words, adults should give allowances for a great deal of forward and backward movements by acknowledging the child's innate uncertainties and the balancing that transpires during this stage (Gordon & Browne, 2008).

Building on the previous stage of autonomy, the child is now struggling between a sense of initiative and a sense of guilt (Puckett et al, 2009). Initiative involves been able to master new skills, ask questions to seek new meanings and interact with others in work and play interactions. The child's social circle is expanding rapidly, and interactions with others are actively sought. The child uses initiative at this stage to engage others in conversation and play becomes more social and elaborate.

This sense of initiative is not always characterized by positive behaviours and can get out of bounds. Misdirected initiative is evident in some physical and verbal aggression. For example, pushing a classmate to be next in line, or hitting another to get a toy are examples of negative interactions in which child initiates an attempt to control others.

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Out-of-bounds initiative can therefore produce feelings of embarrassment and guilt as the child becomes aware that his or her behaviours are unacceptable to others. Both failure to guide and to teach alternatives undermines the child's opportunities to learn appropriate behaviours and to cultivate a strong balance between initiative or guilt.

### *The Nature of Aggression*

It is an established fact that by the time children are ready for preschool, most of them are already beginning to differentiate between the different emotions, and are also learning how to adjust theirs as well. Therefore, specific skills, are essential in traversing each type of preschool learning opportunities or social interactions, and these skills differ across learning activities. An example of this is when children are engaged in an activity that requires collaboration skills such as listening attentively, paying close attention, self-regulating and avoiding both oral and bodily activities will become critical. Additionally, during group activities, such as sand and water play, other important skills are necessary to build and maintain these peer interactions.

The young children who commence school and lack the capacity to work in harmony with their classmates, adhere to simple instructions, listen attentively and has independent work habits, are usually at a greater risk for a wide range of negative outcomes including peer rejection and school failure (Parker & Asher, 1987; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995, cited in Bagdi & Vacca, 2005).

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Hawkins and Haskett, (2014), has alluded to the fact that one of the most prevalent types of behavioural problems in preschool children is aggression and it is a comprehensive phenomenon that comprises an extensive variety of behaviours that are usually intentional with the intent to incur injury or to hurt or damage to others.

However, it must be highlighted and established at the onset that the literature has a general agreement on how the term aggression is defined, which is, according to Puckett et al, (2009), as “behavior that is directed at another with intentions to threaten, harm or hurt them in some manner” (p. 358). For example,(hitting, kicking, etc). An important observation is that aggression can be classified as physical, verbal or relational. Physical aggression is a behavior intended to injure the physical well-being of others. Examples of this is kicking or hitting. Verbal aggression is intended to harm through the use of words (e.g., name calling) and relational aggression is intended to harm relationships (e.g., false accusations, etc).

Over the last decade, there has been an increase in the percentage of school children facing numerous emotional, social, and behavioural challenges that inhibit the opportunity for interactive relationships, successful school outcomes, and their likelihood to develop into adults who are competent and productive citizens.

Aggression and other challenging behaviours during the early years of formal schooling and the later years has been featured quite prominently throughout literature. It would however be interesting to conduct research with younger children because of two reasons. Firstly, due to the fact that research with this age group is limited, and secondly,

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conduct behaviours and the development of negative tendencies tend to peak during this critical age. As a result of this knowledge, and it may be substantial to target interventions at this point.

There is evidence to support the fact that preschool emotional and behavioural problems usually persist throughout the preschool years. A study conducted in 2001 revealed that a child's knowledge of emotions at five years impacts academic competence at nine years, even after intervening for oral ability and disposition (Izard et al. 2001, cited in Kramer et al, 2010).

Emotional and behavioural difficulties in young students both negatively impact current academics and can lead to tragic long-term outcomes such as depression, school dropout, unemployment, and anti-social or violent activities (Denham and Weissberg 2004; Seifer et al. 2004, cited in Kramer et, 2010). Additionally, evidence indicates that without intervention many of these social-emotional problems become less amenable to intervention after age eight. Some have estimated that as many as 20% of students have emotional or behavioural problems and that 84% do not receive appropriate interventions (Walker 2004, cited in Kramer et al, 2010). Therefore an understanding of the outcomes of preschool aggression is critical and important to inform appropriate intervention and prevention strategies.

If left unchecked, children who are aggressive are usually placed at risk for a myriad of additional negative outcomes which include delinquent behaviours, violence, school dropout, and alcohol or drug abuse. It is therefore important to deal with aggression early to

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avoid such negative effects. Consequently, schools are viewed as the most ideal chance for intervening early with aggressive students, seeing that children are reachable in the school environment where teachers and other stakeholders would be readily available to offer services, and conduct and behavioural problems are most probable to occur therefore providing realistic prospects for intervention.

As early as age two, most children often display behaviours that jeopardize their chances to engage in sharing and cooperating, much to the misery of others. During the preschool years of the young child, mutuality has been displayed in their prosocial behaviours which is characterized by an upsurge in cooperative play. Therefore, during this period, it seems reasonable that this may project significant variations in their social competence around this time.

As children grow and mature and advance toward the preschool years, they become more selective about how and when they behave in an acceptable social manner with their peers and they begin to make accommodations for exchange. These children are at the onset to realizing their emotions and need adults in their lives to introduce, instruct and reinforce competences in handling these developing emotions.

### *Causes of Aggression*

When children enter preschool it is expected that they will interact with others which will eventually result in allowing them to develop a myriad of they must master many new intellectual and social skills. It is anticipated that these children will engage in group



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activities where they collaborate within the classroom context and a proportionate amount of time is expended in engaging in activities that has rules and entail teamwork. The children who have not mastered these skills would have difficulties in forming and sustaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships, gaining peer acceptance, and making meaningful friendships (Gresham, 2002, cited in Meyers et al, 2006).

As with aggression and other problem behaviours, the frequency, intensity, and character of aggressive behaviours are influenced by the child's individual temperament and level of cognition as well as the home and school. Some children frequently display various forms of aggression as a result of feeling excluded or may not be knowledgeable of suitable means of joining others in play activities. In addition, many children with developmental delays lack the play skills or the verbal courtesies that make them desirable playmates (Allen & Cowdery, 2009). Therefore, it becomes necessary to have an understanding of the various factors that contribute to the beginning and prevalence of these issues to adequately address and prevent them.

### Developmental factors

An important phase in young children that is usually overlooked and significantly impacts their social development during their early years is expressive language. For children, as for everyone, language is pivotal for making sense of the world and the vehicle to connecting with others (Taffe & Truscott, 2000). From the researcher's years of experience in early education, the children who show competence in language Researchers have found that children with better language skills are the ones who interact more during

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free play activities with their peers and also exhibit greater proficiency of cooperative play in the classroom. Therefore, it can be concluded that children's competence in language and interactive play abilities during the preschool years would assist in creating a platform for the growth of the regulation of behavior and consequently social skills during later years.

Similarly, when interacting with their peers, children who have delayed language would most likely experience challenges in understanding nonverbal social cues and understanding jokes and sarcasm (Meyers et al, 2006). Therefore, early language acquisition creates the basis for additional intricate skills that will open the way for more acceptable behaviours in social interactions.

## Home Influence

Over the last decade has witnessed a totally different group of children entering school. As a result of this difference observed, at some point, most of these children are described as been at risk. With the advent of globalization and women liberalization, divorce is on the increase and there is a vast number of single parent families which ultimately puts additional stress on these young children who, at their critical stage of development, enter school unprepared.

Observations throughout the literature revealed that aggression among children most likely occur out of encounters with their parents who usually deliver severe or punitive disciplinary measures, negative ways in solving problems, unclear commands, and inconsistency in monitoring the behaviours of their children. When parents use strategies

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that irritate and are punitive in their design, children will ultimately display aggression towards others.

Bagdi and Vacca, (2005), alluded to the fact that as young children enter school they carry with them the aggressive tendencies and moral values learnt at home and in their various communities. This consequently causes conflict in the mind of the child because what is sanctioned as acceptable behaviours at home may be unacceptable and inappropriate in the school setting. Additionally, there are parents who have trained and provided their children with the necessary provisions for adopting appropriate behaviours, but, sometimes, due to the child's distinct temperament (e.g. language delays, attention deficits), may warrant extra care and supervision in the school environment .

Strategies used by parents that are not positive, damaging and controlling usually puts children in danger of Research has also clearly documented that damaging and controlling types of parenting place children at risk for emerging behavioural problems that would become sustained overtime. A research in 2002 has found that observed maternal negative control during an observation with their children when they were 3 years old was predictive of antisocial behavior and discipline problems when their children were 9 years old (Stormont, 2002).

Similarly, Stormont (2002) also found that children with more stable behavior problems had mothers who self-reported greater maternal control in child rearing when children were preschoolers than mothers of children who had improved and comparisons. In addition to determining that controlling and aggressive types of child rearing or discipline

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styles are associated with externalizing behavior and stable behavior problems, it is also important to understand the qualitative dynamics of the interactions that young children with externalizing behavior have with their parents

As a result of this knowledge, preschool teachers and other stakeholders who are engaged in early education are confronted with different challenges and using punitive strategies that are labeled as intervention for these behaviours will be ineffective.

Therefore teachers need to grasp a deeper knowledge of how diverse contextual factors impact a child's behaviour. Having a deeper understanding aids in laying the foundation for fostering collective relationships between the home and school compact, and assist the child in learning suitable forms of behaviours that will impact their interactions within a myriad of activities within the school setting.

### The Preschool Environment

Behaviour in general is also influenced by the quality of care children receive, the types of relationships formed with teachers and other individuals within the school setting and the particular environment within the classroom (Stacks, 2005). Research supports the view that the relationship that exists among a child and teacher that is viewed as non-negotiable, inconsistent and full of conflicts, can be connected with the child's aggressive behaviours. Whenever this type of relationship exist, it can arouse reactions from the teacher that will be quite negative thus advancing the child's negative behaviours.

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As was highlighted earlier, when children enter school, they bring with them certain behaviours and by interacting with their teachers they become aware of different expectations with regards to their behaviours which may be at variance with those in the context of the home. Teachers within the classroom setting is therefore responsible for creating the climate and setting the tone in particular as to how the children with challenges in their social behaviours are catered for, thus providing examples to the other children as to relating in acceptable ways to these children. This type of modeling exerted by the teacher, will indirectly impact the dynamics among the peers in the classroom.

The relationships that exist within the classroom among teachers and the students can have either a negative or positive impact on the students' general behavior and their overall development. For example, if the teachers' reaction within the classroom is one that lacks care and support, then the students would tend to react negatively. Therefore, the relationships among the teachers and students during their preschool years will predict whether or not aggressive behaviours will progress during the later years (Runions, 2008).

According to Runions, (2008), when children who enter school and show a high level of aggression but have a good relationship with their teachers, their problem behaviours usually decrease overtime. On the other hand, when there is conflict among teachers and students, who display conduct problems during their early years of school, there is the likelihood that problem behaviours and aggression may increase.

When negative reactions among teachers and students are left to become entrenched within the school setting, these students usually accept this pattern of interaction as the norm

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and as they progress to higher levels of education, they usually tend to move on and form other relationships with the same mind set. Additionally, relationships that are formed among their peers will also influence aggressive behaviours among students. When there is repeated aggression among students it may more likely result in poor relationships among peers and may result in poor academic performance (Stacks, 2005).

Additionally, inadequate learning resources, lack of space and overcrowding can significantly contribute to the outburst of aggression among preschoolers (Gordon & Browne, 2008; Hooper & Umansky, 2009).

### *Management of Aggression*

When pre-schoolers display various externalizing behaviours, such as aggression, it is imperative that teachers have a wide knowledge of intervention strategies that can be used in managing these behaviours. The literature is pregnant with both classroom and school wide behaviour management strategies that can be explored and adopted to effectively manage aggression and improve the outcome of students. Some of these strategies that will be highlighted in this review are positive reinforcement and praise, time out, classroom rules, time out, classroom management and rules, and individualized behaviour plans.

Research has highlighted that in recognition of the significance of implementing various strategies to manage behavior, some teachers every so often resort to two types of interventions that have proven to be quite positive. For example, reinforcement and praise. Although these two have been highlighted, similar studies have highlighted that some

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teachers however, other studies have shown that teachers are inclined to delivering a lower rate of praise (Tillery et al, 2010).

Evidence also seem to suggest that interventions are selected in a haphazard fashion with little or no direct connection to the individual child with no apparent standard for monitoring progress. It has also been reported that every so often that the interactions between the teacher and the students that exhibit aggressive behaviours are usually negative and their management strategies are usually punitive. For example, some teachers resort to reprimands, time out, restraint and removal of privileges (Tillery et al, 2010).

Although teachers have been employing positive behavior modification strategies to encourage positive behaviours and minimize negative behaviours, they usually resort to applying them in a one-size-fit-all manner.

### Positive Reinforcement and Praise

Sigler and Aamidor, (2005) posits that it is important, subsequently to discussions pertaining to behavior modification that a distinction should be made between praise and positive reinforcement. The authors went on to stress that a simple definition of positive reinforcement is that it is a specific method or methods used to recognize children whose behaviours are suitable and acceptable and those which are not. It is specifically used to identify and encourage suitable and acceptable behaviours with the expectation that these behaviours will continue. The purpose behind positive reinforcement is that whenever the

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behavior is preceded by a stimulus that is pleasant, most likely, the specific behavior will tend to be repeated.

Anything nice can be used as a pleasant stimulus and can also comprise a host of additional positive reactions and although praise has been highlighted as an example of positive reinforcement, it should not be viewed as the single or the ideal method intervening with young children. Teachers tend to use praise and positive reinforcement interchangeably. However, it is important to establish a clear distinction between them. For example, whenever a child is displaying a particular behavior, intentionally or unplanned, when the teacher responds in a positive manner, it functions as an indicator to the particular child, signifying that the behavior displayed is unlike the other behaviours (Sigler & Aamidor, 2005).

Hester, Hendrickson and Gable, (2009), found that praise is used as a positive reinforcement strategy and is a statement used in targeting a specific behavior. The rationale for the use of praise is to offer feedback that will be positive, thus encouraging and supporting the manifestation of the specific behavior. For example, whenever a specific child who repeatedly displays negative behaviours suddenly shares, sticks to a task or displays improved academic performance, praise is used to encourage it. Consequently, using praise in a timely manner and applying it to the particular child, the situation and the task, the behavior targeted would be most likely reinforced reoccur sometime in the future.

It cannot be overemphasized that when teachers use praise, in aids in increasing students' engagement in the learning process, their time on task, and the occurrence of



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acceptable behaviours. The effectiveness of praise is grounded in the applied behaviour analysis principle of positive reinforcement which states that a consequence (in this case, praise) that immediately follows a behaviour results in the strengthening of that behaviour and that the person (e.g., the child) is more likely to engage in that behaviour again in the future (Alberto & Troutman, 2009; Kerr & Nelson, 2010, cited in Hester, Hendrickson and Gable, (2009).

### Time out

Time-out provides a temporary relief from an uncontrollable problem and helps the child learn to respond to more desirable guidance procedures (Allen & Cowdery, 2009). For example, removing a child from the play area is particularly appropriate when the child is becomes aggressive. Removing that child from the particular site or area where the behavior was displayed by mixed emotions to an area where they can calm down and become more settled is usually more likely the best way to support them.

Gordon and Browne suggested that used appropriately, the time-out period is very much like that used in athletic events: a brief respite and a chance to stop all activity and regroup. The teacher's role is to firm and consistent with a positive attitude and the technique should not be used as punishment for misbehaviour (Gordon & Browne, (2008).

The authors' lamented that "too often, time out is punitive. Children are pulled from an activity, pushed into a chair and told to watch how the other children are playing nicely,

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or sit there until you can behave” (Gordon & Browne, 2008, pg. 299). As with other techniques, this should be used lightly and should be appropriate to the situation.

## Classroom Management and Rules

In ensuring that students are safe, the classroom is orderly and a specific tone is set, classroom rules have been established (Hester, Hendrickson and Gable, (2009). Within the preschool classroom, these rules should be easily understood, few in number, stated positively, and attainable. In addition, positive social and self-regulatory behaviours that are associated with academic success can be promoted and sustained with systematic application of classroom rules.

Teachers’ views of behaviour management have also highlighted the importance of consistent positive strategies and the importance of student involvement in the discipline process. Involving students in classroom decision-making is considered to be an effective classroom management technique (Hester, Hendrickson and Gable, (2009).

## Individualized Behaviour Plan

A strategy highlighted by (Smith, 2009), that can be effective in increasing appropriate behaviours in preschoolers is an individualized behavior plan. In planning for prevention and intervention strategies with regards to reduce aggression and managing other conduct problems, schools can develop and use an individualized behavior plan to monitor the progress of the particular child.

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The individualized behavior plans usually target a specific child and the particular behaviour displayed. Within this plan, specific reinforcements and consequences should be built in. One reinforcement method is whole interval differential reinforcement of other behaviors. An example of this is when the teacher gives the student a reward if the student displays any other behaviour besides a predetermined behavior during the observation interval (Smith, 2009).

### *Challenging and Effective Strategies*

Runions, (2008), has outlined some school-based programming that has been developed to address aggression, which have focused on explicit instruction around social skills and children's understanding of social cues and interactions. These include the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program (Kusche & Greenberg, 1994), the Fluppy Program (Capuano & Giard, 2001; Tremblay, Pagani-Kurtz, Masse, & Vitaro, 1995), and the Making Choices program (Fraser, Nash, Galinsky, & Darwin, 2000).

Recently, several intervention efforts have shown promising results by supplementing their core social-emotional learning components with a variant of the Good Behaviour Game (GBG; Embry, 2002). The GBG is a peer-focused flexible behaviour management approach that uses peer group dynamics to promote pro-social behaviours and demote disruptive and aggressive behaviours.

The GBG works to provide extrinsic motivation for aggressive children to develop self-control strategies, while also providing motivation for nondisruptive children to

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continue to engage positively with disruptive children and to aid them in managing their behaviour. The GBG is also a vehicle for children to make use of new social skills and social understandings developed in the structured emotion regulation and social information processing components of an intervention.

Programs that have consisted solely of the GBG have showed significant improvements in behaviour for aggressive primary students. Studies that have included versions of the GBG have noted markedly better results than the core versions of the programs on aggression and social competence measures. Based on these findings, strategies such as the GBG appear to be good candidates for multisystemic programs to reduce problems with aggression in early primary classes. These findings indicate that an intervention component that focuses on peer dynamics and works to modify that social system can have positive results for children's behavioural development.

*Methodology*

A detailed explanation of the research design with respect to method and type of sampling, data collection techniques and analysis of the data in answering the research questions.

*Justification for the use of qualitative research*

A case study using the tradition of a qualitative methodology was used in conducting the investigation into teacher perceptions of the challenges and effectiveness of particular strategies used in handling aggression among students at the school under study.

The qualitative paradigm was used to operationalize this research to explore a social problem (Merriam (1992), and Mc Millan and Schumacher (2001). The natural or familiar setting is used by the researcher to report detailed views of the participants.

Creswell (1998) also give a further rationale for using the qualitative paradigm;

- It is informed by the participant's view.
- Permits the views of the participants to drive the analysis while ensuring that their responses are grounded in theoretical and empirical literature.

It is also believed that individuals create or construct reality as they interact within their own settings, therefore, using this particular paradigm will allow the researcher to

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gather the personal views of the participants, how they interpret the phenomena under study and what conclusions they have made concerning it (Merriam, 1998)

This study is specifically geared towards gaining the perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness and challenges of their strategies used in handling aggression at the New Start preschool. In order to understand their different perspectives, understanding and describing their experiences from their personal views will become very critical. Therefore, applying the qualitative paradigm to this research will become critical.

### *Justification for the use of case study*

The case study will be used in operationalizing this research because of its apparent flexibility. It was used because it allowed the researcher to preserve the general features or characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events. Seeing that perceptions of aggression and the challenges and effectiveness of intervention strategies used by preschool teachers will be explored, the case study approach was selected. It will be used to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 1984).

Rossmann & Rallis, 2003, in adding to the literature concerning the usefulness and effectiveness of the case study approach posits that it seeks to:

“understand the larger phenomenon through close examination of a specific case and therefore focus on the particular details”. Case studies are descriptive, holistic, heuristic and inductive. They are also multilayered and complex. They are particularly useful for their rich description and heuristic value. Most case studies are descriptive or explanatory, that is, they

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depict events, processes, and perspectives as they unfold-the “real-life context” (Yin, 1994, p.25).

Additionally, the case study approach was selected because a bounded system consisting of teachers that belong to the same school over a fixed period of time was investigated (Creswell, 1998). The researcher has is passionate and has a genuine interest in the case and therefore has the intention of gaining greater insights of it.

This case study design, having derived meanings from the various perceptions of the teachers will be used as a backdrop for formulating plans and policies at the levels of the school and the Division of Education on their drive to manage student aggression.

### *Sampling Procedure*

Purposive sampling was the strategy used in the selection of the participants for the study. It was chosen because a small group of individuals were used seeing that they may have experienced the phenomenon or may likely be knowledgeable about it (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001). Having an understanding of what purposive sampling entails lead the researcher to identify the participants for the study, in this case, the teachers.

In addition, sampling through criterion based selection was also employed and took into consideration: number of years teaching, concerns about aggression, types and frequencies of aggression displayed by students and willingness to participate. Initially, a survey was conducted among teachers from three schools in the area to determine how

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concerned they were about aggression, if they had problems with aggression, and their willingness to participate in the study.

The results from this survey assisted the researcher in choosing the particular school for the study. Teachers from two levels of the school – beginners and finishers – participated. A sum of two teachers, female, were chosen. The nature of the survey revealed that the teachers of the school under study experienced the greatest outburst of aggression and were also concerned about it. They were also the most willing to participate in the research. On this basis the particular sample was selected.

The teaching experience of these teachers ranged nine to twenty years. One of these teachers hold a Bachelor's of Early Childhood Care and Education degree and is presently pursuing a Master of Education (Special Education) and the other has no formal training in early childhood care and education.

*Table 1*

*The distribution of teachers' showing gender, teaching experience and qualifications*

| Teacher | Gender | Teaching Experience | Professional Qualifications   |
|---------|--------|---------------------|---|
| Norma   | F      | 9                   | No formal training  |
| Keisha  | F      | 20                  | Bachelor's of Early Childhood Care and Education, pursuing Master of Education (Special Education). |



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### *Data Collection Strategy*

The mode of collection of data was the semi-structured interview. According to Patton (1980) in Merriam (1998), “we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe.....feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meaning they attached to what goes on in the world” (p. 72).

Bateson (1990) in Merriam (1998) notes that the ideal technique to be employed when conducting intensive case studies is interviews because it will be ideal in using a few selected participants. The semi-structured interview method was used for investigating teachers’ concerns with respect to aggression and the effectiveness and challenges of strategies used to handle aggression among preschoolers.

Interviewing the teachers will assist the researcher in gaining a better of their perceptions of aggression, that is, their feelings, beliefs, views and concerns about managing this phenomena. The questions were delineated in advance, so this allowed the collection of the data to be more systematic. The interviews were more of a conversational type which catered for ease and a level of flexibility for probing the various responses. Listening intently to the information the participants were sharing and thinking of ways in which to probe even deeper was at times very challenging to me. These skills of listening, and focusing on the participant throughout the interview were fundamental.

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Guba and Lincoln (1981) cited in Merriam (1998) posit that the good qualitative researcher is both a keen discerner and thinker and it is only by paying careful and purposeful attention to more than one individuals and to various opinions of value can the phenomena be clearly understood and the information be fully justifiably.

The researcher gained a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the participants in listening attentively as they voiced their various concerns. The participants openly shared their feelings and gave their honest opinions on what aggression meant in their particular contexts. The interview protocol was formulated from the research questions (see Appendix B). The interviews lasted for approximately forty-five minutes and was held at the school in the beginner's classroom. All interviews were audio-taped.

To successfully conduct any research, one cannot do it in isolation. To mitigate against the possibility of rendering the research invalid, the researcher sought written permission from the principals of the three preschools in the area to participate in the initial stage of the study, which was intended to gather their thoughts about incidences of aggression experienced at their particular school (see appendix A). The survey sheet was also attached to these letters (see appendix B).

Following the results of the survey, another letter was sent to the principal of the school that was identified for the study (see appendix C) as well as the two teachers (see appendix D & E). Permission was then granted by the principal, and teachers, and the interview dates and venue was organized. Prior to the interviews, each teacher was given a gentle reminder of the date, time and venue for the interview. Each interview had a duration

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of 30 to 45 minutes. The interview protocol (see appendix B), comprised of eleven open ended questions was used in addressing the following research questions;

- What are the experiences of teachers as they deal with aggression among preschool students?
- What specific strategies are used to promote positive behaviour among preschool students?
- What strategies do preschool teachers employ to interrupt and prevent negative behaviours among students?
- What are some of the interventions that have been challenging?
- How do preschool teachers perceive the effectiveness of their intervention strategies?

The participant was first asked the question, followed by probes if there was a delay in response. The interviews were recorded and notes were taken as well by the researcher. At the completion of each interview, the researcher expressed gratitude to the teachers for their time, willingness, and ideas before departing.

### *Data Analysis*

A three stage process has been provided by Miles and Huberman (1984) for effectively analyzing the data- data analysis reduction, data display, conclusion and verification. Data reduction involves the selection, focusing, and abstracting raw data from field notes. Data display is viewed as the organization of the field data for making

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conclusions. Finally, in the last stage, there will be opportunities for comparisons and differences.

Miles and Huberman (1984) have provided a three stage process for qualitative data analysis – data analysis reduction, data display, conclusion and verification. Data reduction according to them, dealt with selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming raw data from field notes. Data display as they saw it was in the context of the organization of field data for making conclusions. Finally in the last stage, opportunities for comparisons and determining differences were explored.

Excerpts from the various individual face-to-face interviews were arranged orderly to reflect the researchers' questions and the responses from the participants (see appendix G). The transcripts on the recorded interviews were then coded.

Data analysis is defined as an ongoing cyclical process, McMillan and Schumacher (2001), and is therefore subsumed into all phases of qualitative research. The following steps were employed by the researcher in analyzing the data;

1. Listening to the interview recording and making notes which was later edited and typed for presentation.
2. The transcript of interviews were then coded (see appendix H).
3. These were then categorized decipher emerging themes and patterns (see appendix I).

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All the categories were then put together to identify links between them. As these became clearer, themes emerged and were merged together.

### *Strategies to ensure trustworthiness*

A strength of qualitative research is validity and was used to determine whether the findings were accurate from the viewpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers of the account (Creswell, 1998). Validity include but is not limited to credibility and trustworthiness. One particular strategy employed by the researcher to ensure trustworthiness is member checking. The data was returned to the participants after it was subscribed to determine its accuracy.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical principles were adhered to by the researcher. These include:

1. Maintaining anonymity of the school and its participants, and
2. Confidentiality of the information received.
3. In addition, participants were allowed to review the results to ensure that there was correct interpretation of their responses by the researcher.

### *Summary*

The qualitative research approach in the tradition of a case study was employed. It was used because it effectively examined the behaviours and perceptions of the participants.

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In immersing oneself in the daily lives of the participants, the researcher was able to gain greater insights through the individual interviews conducted with the various participants.

A popular trend in qualitative educational research is purposive sampling. This study used purposive sampling through criterion based selection: number of years teaching, concerns about aggression, types and frequencies of aggression displayed by students and willingness to participate.

Two participants, teachers, were purposively chosen from the beginners and finishers classes, and each teacher will be an embedded unit of analysis.

Semi-structured interviews would be used in collecting data and the interviews will be conducted individually. The interviews will be audiotaped as well as field notes will be taken. The instrument to be used for data collection is the interview protocol. These interviews will be transcribed, and categorized. Themes will be identified.

*Analysis of Data and Presentation of Findings*

The findings were based on the following; The overarching question, “What are the teachers’ perceptions of aggression and the effectiveness and challenges of their intervention strategies, and five sub questions; What are the various experiences of the teachers in dealing with aggression among the students, What specific strategies are used to promote positive behaviour among students, What strategies do preschool teachers employ to interrupt and prevent negative behaviours, What are some of the interventions that have been challenging, How do preschool teachers perceive the effectiveness of their intervention strategies?”

Two teachers, Norma and Keisha (pseudonyms) all had concerns about aggression among their students and in keeping with what was outlined by the University, only one research question was used, but, it is important to note that five sub questions were used to guide the interview thus helping to elicit the views from the participants.

These concerns are about experiences of aggression. The findings revealed that both teachers had a clear definition of aggression. They concur that:

*“an unacceptable physical behaviour towards others and normally the child is not sorry for what was done”.*

The teachers had various experiences with regards to displays of aggression in their classrooms. Norma explained this by saying,

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*“In my classroom, especially at free play and group time, some of the students become very aggressive. For example, if a child is playing with the blocks and another child would like to use them, he/she would ask for it but at times do not like to wait for his/her turn. Instead, he/she will begin to push, hit or just pull away the blocks without asking for it. Hitting is normally displayed among the students on a daily basis and most times when asked why, the guilty one would respond by saying, “aunty, I tell him/her sorry”. I have to spend extra time dealing with these outbursts”.*

Keisha echoed the sentiments of Norma by adding;

*“Total madness! Between children... well usually at centre based learning time or early in the morning at large group time when the different personalities clash... yeah that is crazy” “Common aggression ....shouting at first then a build up to a more intense aggressive stage like hitting...striking at each other or even biting ... no I would say kicking.... then biting then the real deal.... fighting.” “Sometimes I see pushing as well...and even spitting... there is a little boy in my class when he gets mad he spits on the person or he will stand or sit and wet his pants”. That is when he gone clear!”*

It is therefore the common view of both teachers that pushing and hitting are most frequently displayed by their students.

Social and emotional development, a lack of space, home influence, a lack of adequate resources and a lack of supervision have been identified separately by both teachers as the possible causes of aggression among the students. In terms of the home influence, Norma stated that;



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*“...children come to our school with those tendencies so perhaps those were learnt at home, so the home influence I would say”.*

She also highlighted the fact that a lack of adequate resources can account for the outburst of aggression among her students. She said that;

*”.....a lack of adequate resources in the classroom at free play time, because most of the outbursts take place during this time. For example, blocks, toys, etc, when most of them want to use the same toy at the same time”.*

Social and emotional development was also highlighted by Norma. She declared;

*“Well, I would say maybe it’s because the children are still developing and may not be able to control their emotions....”*

Keisha differed in her response by saying that lack of space can contribute towards the aggression displayed in her classroom. She justified her opinion by saying that;

*“...Huh... Too many children in one place... Lack of space. Children do not like when you are in their space....”*

Both teachers expressed the fact that waiting in line or taking turns is a problem for their students. This was clearly articulated by Keisha. She said;

*“....Well taking turns as well or line up time ...any form of line... To go outside or even wash hands. Children do not like to line up. Every one want to be in front...then the fight start”.*

In response to concerns about managing aggression, one of the many strategies used by the teachers to encourage positive behaviours among the students is tangible rewards. This was the unanimous belief by both teachers and clearly articulated by Keisha who said:

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*“I praise them and also give incentives such as stars and tokens .Sometimes I have a star for the day where the child that is usually the most aggressive will be my happy helper for the day. This really works because children like to help and do stuff... So they like being a star... But the tokens and stickers work as well.”*

Norma also lamented:

*“I would usually give rewards, for example, a sticker or a little handmade token with the words, “outstanding student” written on it.”*

Although both teachers agreed on the use of rewards to encourage positive behaviours, Norma also added that verbal reassurances were critical. She posits that:

*“...I would use verbal praise, to reaffirm the positive behaviour displayed. Sometimes I would say, “I am so proud of you, or, Wow! That’s great, or even, yes! I knew you could have done it”.*

Another concern by the researcher is how the teachers interrupt and prevent aggression in their classrooms. In terms of preventing aggression, Keisha declared:

*“Simply I separate the aggressive ones and place children together”.*

Norma added:

*“I would usually group the students by putting the less aggressive ones together”.*

It was agreed upon by both teachers that verbal reprimand is used to interrupt aggression among the students. Keisha remarked:

*“.....so lots of talking and talking do the trick”.*

Both teachers also differed in their approaches. Norma declared:

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*“I would also ensure that adequate materials are available for a particular lesson. Additionally, I would change the routine by taking them outdoors .....physical activity”.*

Keisha explained:

*“.....I go back to basic ....do not spare the rod and spoil the child... so a little “pinch” now and then will replace the talking if I am talking too much”. Additionally, I move around seats and seating arrangements in my classroom”.*

Both teachers agreed unanimously on dealing with aggression the moment it occurs by declaring:

*“I deal with aggression the moment it occurs, because if not attended to at once the child may think that the behaviour is acceptable and may continue behaving in an unacceptable manner.....at once... one time!”*

However, both shared mixed concerns on the use of whole class or individual strategies. Norma stated:

*“I use individual strategies to redirect the behaviour of the particular student or students.....sometimes I use whole class strategies when other students are affected”.*

Keisha lamented:

*“... It is unfair when teachers discipline an entire class for two or three children’s aggressive behaviour”.*

When questioned about specific strategies that have been effective in managing aggression, both agreed on the use of time out. Keisha confirmed this and said that:

*“....time out in the naughty corner works”.*

Norma added that:

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*“With time out, the child doesn’t want to be left out of the activity so he/she would say’ “aunty look, I am behaving, or aunty, I wouldn’t do it again”. For the rest of the day, the child would actually behave. I have experienced this with most of them”*

Both teachers also differed in their additional concerns with regards to effective strategies. This was clearly articulated by Keisha:

*“Well I have not tried anything out of the ordinary..... ‘I tried a ‘Good behaviour chart once where the children who were good all week got a pet fish to take home. I brought a few fishes to school... let say the Monday. I told them the plan ...who behave good will take the fish home. I outlined my version of “good” and every one helped feed the fish. Man it was good for them but bad for me... (Laugh)I tell you the class was an ‘A’ class that week”.*

Norma also explained:

*“I would say talking to the child or verbal reprimand. For example, I would say to the child, “how would you feel if someone hits you, or, look at (name of child), he is sad, would you like anyone to make you sad? Then I would ask that child to apologize”.*

With regards to monitoring and documentation, both participants shared similar views. They shared concerns about the ineffectiveness of the principal in ensuring that documentation and monitoring takes place. Norma lamented;

- *“Well, I don’t usually write down the incidences that occur in the classroom and what was done to handle the particular behaviour. I would usually inform the principal when the behaviour gets out of hand, but I don’t usually write down these outburst of aggression among my students. Sometimes I would inform the parents by word of mouth*

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*about the particular incident and what form of correction I may have administered to the particular child”.*

Keisha added;

*“Normally, I would document these outburst in a little book that I have in my cupboard, but not all the time. I know it is important but because nothing has happened seriously, I don’t usually always document things. I think we can improve as a school in this area but I don’t think the principal is doing enough to ensure that documentation takes place at all levels of the school. At one time there was a note book called a log book in which we will document these incidences but most times nothing isn’t really done to address these problems”.*

The findings also revealed that ongoing training is critical to handling preschool aggression. Both participants shared concerns that this was lacking at their school to effectively handle aggression among their students. Keisha explained:

*“I did not receive formal training but I have done a lot of reading to see what others have been using. When I did my teacher’s training, this was not really a component so I do not have formal training and it would be good if I get some ongoing professional development because times have changed”.*

Comments made about the kind of support received in effectively managing aggression, it was discovered that both teachers had opposing views. Keisha complained:

*“None really...To think of none. We are administrators and teachers as well. In the class room is every man for themselves! It is really hectic in the classroom with 15-18 early childhood children and you going...going... going, so you have to deal with the issues as*

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*they arise and do what is best for the child. If it is really bad I will speak to the parents. But you know parents .... they act as I their child would not get on so ... and then you know that is the accepted behaviour at home” So as teachers we need to set the tone for the classroom and every man have to march to that beat”.*

Norma said:

*“Well, to tell you, I have received support from the principal and some of the teachers. When I complain to the principal about outburst of aggression in my class, she would be quick to suggest strategies that I can try. It is not that I am in it all alone. But more support from the entire staff is needed if aggression would be effectively minimized at our school, because some of them still say that the children are young and that they will eventually grow out of it”.*

### Summary

The findings revealed an overall agreement among the teachers about their general concerns about aggression and its management at the New Start Preschool. Some of their strategies have been both effective and challenging. For example, verbal reprimands, rewards and time-out have been highlighted as the most effective. The perceptions of both teachers also indicated that they were not always united in their efforts in the management of aggression among their students. Teachers expressed concerns about the challenges they face. One example is the paucity of educational resources to allow for choices among the students thereby minimizing aggression. Teachers were also critical, finding that a lack of training, support from parents and principal are other factors that militated against the successful management of aggression at their school. Teachers also felt that the lack of collaboration among teachers

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resulted in the continued ineffectiveness of their management strategies thus making their efforts to deal with aggression an ongoing battle. Teachers also reiterated the fact that in order to sustain and effectively manage aggression, there is a great need for administrative support, which will be achieved through continuous training and professional development of teachers, provision of adequate resources for teaching and learning and that collaboration and a sense of team spiritedness be awakened among staff. In addition, there should be a greater deal of parental education that will heighten awareness and sensitization to the issue of aggression at the New Start Preschool.

Chapter 5

*Summary, Discussion, Conclusion, Recommendation.*

*Summary*

Findings from the data analysis revealed an overall agreement among the teachers about their general concerns about aggression and its management at the New Start Preschool. Some of their strategies have been both effective and challenging. For example, verbal reprimands, rewards and time-out have been highlighted as the most effective. The perceptions of both teachers also indicated that they are not always united in their efforts in the management of aggression among their students. Teachers expressed concerns about the challenges they face. One example is the paucity of educational resources to allow for choices among the students thereby minimizing aggression. Teachers were also critical, finding that a lack of training, support from parents and principal are other factors that militated against the successful management of aggression at their school. Teachers also felt that the lack of collaboration among teachers resulted in the continued ineffectiveness of their management strategies thus making their efforts to deal with aggression an ongoing battle. Teachers also reiterated the fact that in order to sustain and effectively manage aggression, there is a great need for support from the principal, which will be achieved through continuous training and professional development of teachers, provision of adequate resources for teaching and learning and that collaboration and a sense of team spiritedness be awakened among staff. In addition, there should be a greater deal of parental education that will heighten awareness and sensitization to the issue of aggression at the New Start Preschool.



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### *Discussion*

The literature reiterated the fact that aggression can be managed effectively if teachers understand the principles of child development, collaborate with parents and other teachers and are provided with the necessary support. This support must be specifically focused on staff development, behavior management policies and guidelines as well as strong administrative support and greater supervision of schools from the level of the Division of Education in Tobago.

The Division of Education, Youth Affairs and Sport in Tobago is responsible for the supervision of primary and secondary schools but there is no system in place to manage and supervise our preschools. To date, the Ministry of Education in Trinidad is responsible for all government and government assisted preschools in Trinidad and Tobago. For the past twenty years of teaching and administering in the preschool setting, there has always been a concern for the Tobago House of Assembly to put policies in place for the supervision of preschools in Tobago. To date, nothing has been put in place and therefore, schools and principals are left to conduct business as usual at these schools without any supervision.

It is well established that education is the best legacy a nation can give to her citizens and we all know that it is one of the institutions the human race has created to serve certain needs. Even though there is an ambivalent spectre surrounding the ideal, workings and impacts of education as a social institution, the school still remains the vehicle through which the behaviours and aspirations of our children will be powerfully influenced.

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

The government of Trinidad and Tobago is quite cognizant of the importance of development so it expended its resources by constructing schools all over the country to fulfil its goal of Education for All.

With the construction of these schools, systems should be put in place to carefully monitor these social systems so that our nation's most vulnerable children will achieve their highest potential.

The purpose of this study was to find out the various perceptions of teachers with regards to aggression and the challenges and effectiveness of their intervention strategies.

The study's finding revealed that both teachers had varying experiences in their classrooms and had a clear description and definition of aggression and about its escalation. From the researcher's careful observation, it appears as though the teachers have reached saturation level with regards to this phenomena because of the way in which they spoke passionately about it. If it is that they have expressed concerns about aggression it means that they understand its implications and are willing to manage it.

The literature has identified two types of aggression that young children normally display. These are physical and relational aggression. Although the teachers did not mention relational aggression, they were more focused on physical aggression because this was most frequently displayed and posed an immediate concern for them.

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

With regards to factors that cause aggression, although the literature highlighted developmental, family and school related factors, the teachers also perceived that these factors were the main cause of the frequent displays of aggression among their students.

They contended that the paucity of teaching and learning resources during play and learning activities, coupled with the home influence are the possible cause of aggression among students.

The teachers reported that documentation and recording was not always practiced at the school. In order to manage aggression and to chart the success or failure of intervention strategies, continuous reporting and recording is critical. The teachers had an idea of documenting and reporting but based on the findings, this was not the particular culture of the school. Regular outburst of aggression among students demands a consistent and purposeful documentation and recording by teachers so that they can effectively plan intervention strategies and chart their successes.

Dealing with aggression the moment it occurs was shared by the teachers as one of the strategies used in preventing aggression among the students. They are of the view that this can effectively manage aggression, but, this was at variance with what the literature has to say. It was Allen and Cowdery, (2010) who observed that the attention never should be directed toward the child the moment they are hurting others. The teacher should find an appropriate or suitable time to encourage the child to express their feelings about the situation and to agree on what is the best thing to do next.

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

Time out has been agreed upon by both teachers as one of their most effective strategies. The literature supports this but also suggest that a child who is frequently and severely aggressive may need to be removed from the group temporarily for each aggressive episode. This step is taken when other forms of working with the child are not having the desired effect. When more positive methods have failed, time-out is a non-aggressive way to help a child learn that he or she absolutely cannot hurt other children (Allen & Cowdery, 2009).

This form of management strategy has been supported by the literature and has been used quite frequently by the teachers. However, it must be noted that one of the teachers also misused it as punishment which is more like a punitive approach. When used wisely and after all other strategies have been exhausted, time-out can be effectively used in managing aggression.

An additional strategy that was viewed as been effective is verbal praise. The teachers agreed unanimously about the effectiveness of this strategy in managing aggressive students. They stressed that the goal of verbal praise is to motivate, encourage and support behaviours among the students that are positive. For example, taking turns, cooperating and sharing. When praise is administered at the right time and is tailored towards the particular child, it will increase the likelihood that the behavior will be repeated again.

Although this was not mentioned as one of the effective strategies used by teachers in managing aggression at the New Start preschool, throughout the literature, it was the view by most teachers that it is critical to involve students in the formulation of classroom rules.

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

When students are involved in setting limits within their classrooms they become active participants and fosters self-discipline which can consequently allow the students to take ownership of their own behaviours thus empowering them to make the necessary changes.

The impact of support from teachers and principal cannot be overemphasized with any discussion of managing aggression. Indeed, this was one of the major challenges identified by the teachers at the New Start preschool.

Gordon and Browne, (2008), views the family as been important. The partnership that should exist among teachers and parents is critical to the overall development and management of aggression. A firsthand knowledge of the medical history, physical development and the cultural contexts of the home are important information that parents have and are willing to share with teachers. Therefore, it is important that a mutual relationship is fostered at all times among teachers and parents because one of the positive effects of good collaboration and parental involvement is diminishing aggressive and disruptive behaviours of children.

### *Conclusion*

To effectively manage aggression, teachers must have a knowledge of child development and the factors that cause or trigger aggression among students. Most of the strategies employed by teachers have been preventive strategies and an example of one such strategy is positive reinforcement. It is highlighted within the literature that teacher perceptions is critical to successfully manage aggression at the New Start preschool and can be adopted by other schools in Tobago facing similar situations.

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

The researcher firmly believes that strategies to engage all stakeholders at the level of the school, specifically parents, teachers and principals, will assist in effectively managing aggression. It can be concluded that from the findings and the discussions emanating from the study, planned and careful focus should be placed on the formulation of policies and procedures to treat with behaviour problems, and training of teachers and principals seeing that they directly influence the effective management of aggression at the New Start preschool.

### *Recommendations*

On the basis of the findings disclosed in this research the following recommendations have been provided to assist in the effective management of aggression at the New Start preschool.

Teacher perceptions about aggression and the effectiveness and challenges of their intervention strategies was defined in terms of availability of resources, collegiality, training and professional development, policies, monitoring and documenting, parental involvement and support from the principal.

#### a. Availability of Adequate Resources

The findings in the study revealed that aggression among the students is caused by the non-availability of adequate resources for the teaching and learning process. For this to be attained, it is recommended that there be greater classroom management to ensure that all

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

the students are not involved in the same activity all together. This will curb the outbursts among the students when they try to use the same resources at the same time.

### b. Collegiality

It can be concluded from the study that the teachers are not united in their efforts to manage aggression among the students. Their strategies differ across classrooms. Schools should be seen as professional learning communities and if teachers do not collaborate in managing aggression then it will continually spiral out of control at the New Start Preschool. In order for collegiality to be realized, it is recommended that the principal encourage peer tutoring by assigning teachers to work with each other. This will act as a mentorship approach where trained teachers can work with and coach the untrained ones.

### c. Policies

From this study, it is clear that there is no evidence of policies in place to address aggression or other conduct problems. It is recommended that the various stakeholders meet to put in place a discipline or behaviour management plan which will outline various strategies or chain of events when handling these behaviours. It should include a step-by-step outline of the procedures to follow whenever there are outbursts in the classroom.

### d. Training and Professional Development

From the perceptions shared by teachers in the study it seemed that training and professional development is not paid particular attention. In realizing this possibility, it is

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

recommended that ongoing training and professional development in child psychology and alternative behaviour management techniques and classroom management skills be operationalized and identified on the school's calendar of events. This can be conducted from the level of the school or the Division of Education, Youth Affairs and Sport in Tobago.

### e. Monitoring and Documentation

A lack of monitoring students and documenting aggressive behaviours displayed will help in planning effective intervention strategies. Monitoring and evaluating student's aggression and improvement is lacking at this school, therefore it is recommended that the principal collaborate with the teachers in implementing the log book and make it mandatory that teachers document any outbursts of conduct behaviours in their classrooms. In addition, the principal as the educational leader should carefully monitor teachers as they interact with their students to ensure that they are complying with the policies and procedures.

### f. Parental Involvement

Families have been viewed as been critical in assisting in ensuring that children achieve overall success at school. The findings from the study revealed that greater parental involvement and support is needed at the New Start preschool. The involvement of the parents in the education system has been promoted and highlighted over decades and can be viewed as one of the vehicles through which students can achieve their fullest potential.



## Addressing Preschool Aggression

It is therefore recommended that the principal can boost greater parental involvement in the school by including them in the formulation of policies and a behaviour management plan to deal with the issue of aggression. In addition, parental involvement can be enhanced at the New Start preschool through regular parenting seminars to alert parents on the issues of child development and management of aggression so that the home and school compact can be strengthened.

### g. Support from the principal

The sustained management of aggression at the New Start preschool would not be possible if the principal do not support teachers. Teachers cannot work in isolation, therefore, it is imperative that principals take up their responsibilities as effective leaders by ensuring that teachers get all the support needed to manage aggression in their classrooms.

It is therefore recommended that at the level of the Division of Education, ongoing training and professional development should be sought by principals to gain newer insights, to share strategies as to trends in behaviour management so that this information can be disseminated to teachers thus empowering them to be more effective in managing aggressive outburst among their students.

The successful implementation and further institutionalization of these recommendations demand that teachers, principals, parents and the Division of Education work harmoniously in developing policies to manage aggression and to ensure that all

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

schools are carefully monitored, thus ensuring that our students achieve their maximum potential.

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## Appendix A

### SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT SURVEY AT SCHOOL

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**KATHLEEN QUASHIE**

Belmont Local Road, Mason Hall, Tobago. Email:quashiek@ymail.com. Contact: 493-1469

Dear Madam,

I am presently reading for the M.Ed. (concentration in curriculum) programme at the University of the West Indies where I am in the process of completing the Course EDRS 6900 research report.

To satisfy the University's requirements for this course, I am required to conduct a research into a matter of concern and write a report. In this regard, I would like to conduct a survey among teachers of the three schools in your area to determine whether aggression is a particular concern and whether or not they will be willing to participate in a study should the results reveal that there are serious concerns with regards to this phenomena.

The reason for the choice is that I have heard concerns been expressed by teachers both in the media and at different levels in the society concerning aggression among students and it is my belief that other teachers may also be having similar concerns which they too may need to have addressed. Therefore, I feel feedback from this exercise will assist teachers as well as school administration to deal with this issue.

I am therefore seeking your permission and assistance in distributing these survey sheets among your teachers. Your support will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

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Kathleen Quashie

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Principal

## Appendix B

### SAMPLE TEACHER SURVEY

Dear Participant,

Kindly answer all questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge.

1. Age:  15-25     25-30     30-45     over 45
2. How long have you been teaching?  
 10 years and over     7-10yrs     5-7yrs     1-5yrs
3. Are you a trained teacher?  
 yes     no
4. Is problem behaviour a particular concern?  
 not all concerned     slightly concerned  
 moderately concerned     extremely concerned
5. What kinds of problem behaviours are usually displayed by your students?  
 kicking     biting     cuffing  
 pushing     talking out of turn     other \_\_\_\_\_
6. What percentage of students' exhibit problem behaviours?  
 over 75%  
 between 50% and 70%  
 at least 50%  
 under 50%
7. How often do students display problem behaviours?  
 daily     once per week     twice per week  
other \_\_\_\_\_
8. Would you be willing to participate in a study by sharing your experiences in handling problems behaviours in your classroom that would be useful to others?  
 yes     no

*Thank You*



## Appendix C

### SAMPLE LETTER REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT STUDY AT SCHOOL

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#### **KATHLEEN QUASHIE**

Belmont Local Road, Mason Hall, Tobago. Email:quashiek@ymail.com. Contact: 493-1469

Dear Madam,

I am pleased to inform you that as a result of the survey conducted among the schools in the area, your school has been identified to participate in the particular study.

Two of your teachers have voiced their willingness to participate in this study based on their encounters with aggression in their classrooms which has become a serious concern.

I would like to inform you that the identity of your teachers as well as the school will be protected and at no time during the study, the name of the school and the teachers would not be mentioned. To mitigate against this possibility, pseudonyms will be used throughout.

I am therefore seeking your permission to interview your teachers and support will be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

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Kathleen Quashie  
(M.Ed. Student)

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Principal

## Appendix D

### SAMPLE LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

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**KATHLEEN QUASHIE**

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Belmont Local Road, Mason Hall, Tobago. Email:quashiek@ymail.com. Contact: 493-1469

Dear Participant,

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study.

I am interested in your general perceptions about aggression, the intervention strategies you have used and your overall challenges in managing it among your students.

Your participation will entail one interview lasting about thirty to forty five minutes and will be tape-recorded. I will protect your identity through the use of pseudonyms in this study and any future publications or presentations.

You will be quoted directly at some times but your name will not be used in any part of the report. I would also like you to know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I am therefore looking forward to meeting with you tomorrow, Monday 30th May, at 3.30pm. Your support will be greatly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully,

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Kathleen Quashie  
(M.Ed. Student)

I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and agree to participate.

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Norma (pseudonym)

## Appendix E

### SAMPLE LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

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**KATHLEEN QUASHIE**

Belmont Local Road, Mason Hall, Tobago. Email:quashiek@ymail.com. Contact: 493-1469

Dear Participant,

Thank you for consenting to participate in this study.

I am interested in your general perceptions about aggression, the intervention strategies you have used and your overall challenges in managing it among your students.

Your participation will entail one interview lasting about thirty to forty five minutes and will be tape-recorded. I will protect your identity through the use of pseudonyms in this study and any future publications or presentations.

You will be quoted directly at some times but your name will not be used in any part of the report. I would also like you to know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I am therefore looking forward to meeting with you tomorrow, Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May, at 3.30pm. Your support will be greatly appreciated.

Yours Faithfully,

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Kathleen Quashie  
(M.Ed. Student)

I have read the above and discussed it with the researcher. I understand the study and agree to participate.

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Keisha (pseudonym)

## Appendix F

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Overarching Question:** What are the teachers' perceptions of aggression and the effectiveness and challenges of their intervention strategies?

**Sub Questions:**

- a. What are the experiences of teachers as they deal with aggression among the students?
- b. What specific strategies are used to promote positive behaviour among students?
- c. What strategies do preschool teachers employ to interrupt and prevent negative behaviours?
- d. What are some of the interventions that have been challenging?
- e. How do preschool teachers perceive the effectiveness of their intervention strategies?

**Interview Questions**

- 1. How would you define aggression?

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- 2. Can you give a description, including the types and forms of aggression as it relates to your particular classroom?

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

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3. In your opinion, what are some things that cause the development of aggression among your students?

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4. Tell me, how do you support the students when they display positive behaviours in the classroom?

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5. Well, seeing that you experience negative behaviours most of the time, how do you interrupt and prevent these negative behaviours displayed? Or should I say, “nip it in its bud?”

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6. Do you deal with negative behaviours the moment they occur and do you target the individual student or the entire classroom?

Addressing Preschool Aggression

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7. In your opinion, which specific intervention strategy have been challenging to implement?

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8. Which specific intervention strategy or strategies have proven to be effective in your classroom?

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9. What strategy do you use to monitor the effectiveness and challenges of your intervention strategies?

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## Addressing Preschool Aggression

10. What kind of training or ongoing professional development have you received in handling aggression?

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11. What kind of support, if any, have you received in managing aggression among your students?

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## Appendix G

### EXCERPTS FROM INDIVIDUAL FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

#### **Patty (Interviewer)**

##### **Patty – Question 1**

How would you define aggression?

Norma:

- Well, I would define aggression as any behaviour that a child exhibits, an unacceptable behaviour towards others and the child is not sorry for what was done.

Keisha:

- “How ...well aggressive behaviour or a form of aggression or simply no behaviour”.  
Something that is negative, most times it can be seen or physical.

##### **Patty – Question 2**

Can you give a description, including the types and forms of aggression, as it relates to your particular classroom?

Norma:

- “In my classroom, especially at free play and group time, some of the students become very aggressive. For example, if a child is playing with the blocks and another child would like to use them, he/she would ask for it but at times do not like to wait for his/her turn. Instead, he/she will begin to push, hit or just pull away the blocks without asking for it. Hitting is normally displayed among the students on a daily basis and most times when asked why, the



## Addressing Preschool Aggression

guilty one would respond by saying, “aunty, I tell him/her sorry”. I have to spend extra time dealing with these outbursts”.

Keisha:

- “Total madness! Between children... well usually at centre base learning time or early in the morning at large group time when the different personalities clash... yeah that is crazy”  
“Common aggression ....shouting at first then a build up to a more intense aggressive stage like hitting...striking at each other or even biting ... no I would say kicking.... then biting then the real deal.... fighting.” “Sometimes I see pushing as well...and even spitting... there is a little boy in my class when he gets mad he spits on the person or he will stand or sit and wet his pants”. That is when he gone clear!”

### **Patty – Question 3**

In your opinion, what are some things that cause the development of aggression among your students?

Norma:

- Well, I would say maybe it’s because the children are still developing and may not be able to control their emotions like waiting and taking turns. Another thing is that most of these children come to our school with those tendencies so perhaps those were learnt at home, so the home influence I would say. Also I would say lack of adequate resources in the classroom at free play time, because most of the outbursts take place during this time. For example, blocks, toys, etc, when most of them want to use the same toy at the same time.

Keisha:

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- “Huh... Too many children in one place... Lack of space. Children do not like when you are in their space....Well at this centre it is hot and the heat raise a ‘madness’ in the place and the shouting starts and the noise and fighting! It can get crazy. But if you take them outside they calm right down. Let me see... Lack of supervision as well ...mostly during free play time. Otherwise it is O.K...Well taking turns as well or line up time ...any form of line... To go outside or even wash hands. Children do not like to line up. Every one want to be in front...then the fight start”.

### **Patty – Question 4**

Tell me, how do you support the students when they display positive behaviours in the classroom?

Norma:

- I would usually give rewards, for example, a sticker or a little handmade token with the words, “outstanding student” written on it. Also I would use verbal praise, to reaffirm the positive behaviour displayed. Sometimes I would say, “I am so proud of you, or, Wow! That’s great, or even, yes! I knew you could have done it”. I would like to add that giving rewards is not always good but hugging and complimenting the positive behaviour is always better.

Keisha:

- “I praise them and also give incentives such as stars and tokens .Sometimes I have a star for the day where the child that is usually the most aggressive will be my happy helper for the day. This really works because children like to help and do stuff... So they like being a star... But the tokens and stickers work as well.”

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### **Patty – Question 5**

Well, seeing that you experience negative behaviours most of the time, how do you interrupt and prevent these negative behaviours displayed? Or should I say, “nip it in its bud?”

Norma:

- To be honest, these aggressive behaviours happen in the twinkling of an eye or so quickly that I do not always see them..... Only when a child complains. But in terms of preventing and interrupting, I would usually group the students by putting the less aggressive one together, I would also ensure that adequate materials are available for a particular lesson. If a child is aggressive, I will interrupt by removing him/her from the activity and talk to the child. Sometimes I would give greater supervision in order to minimize and prevent it. Additionally, I would change the routine by taking them outdoors.....physical activity.

Keisha:

- “Many. I do not beat... well at this age we should not... so lots of talking and talking do the trick. Sometimes a child might be a bit difficult or just rude ...that could be a real challenge because I go back to basic ....do not spare the rod and spoil the child... so a little “pinch” now and then will replace the talking if I am talking too much” “Simply I separate the aggressive ones and place children together... Move around seats and seating arrangements in my classroom”

### **Patty – Question 6**

Do you deal with negative behaviours the moment they occur and do you target the individual student or the entire classroom?

Norma:

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- Most of the times I deal with aggression the moment it occurs, because if not attended to at once the child may think that the behaviour is acceptable and may continue behaving in an unacceptable manner. Also, sometimes I use whole class strategies when other students are affected. Otherwise, I use individual strategies to redirect the behaviour of the particular student or students.

Keisha:

- “At once... one time! And I deal with the issue or cause of the aggression and the individual as well ... It is unfair when teachers discipline an entire class for two or three children’s aggressive behaviour”

### **Patty – Question 7**

In your opinion, what specific intervention strategies have been challenging to implement?

Norma:

- When parents are informed about the particular behaviour and I share with them the strategies I have been using at school, for example, talking with the child and giving incentives, and recommend that they do the same at home, some of them would say, “ beat him/her, cause I grow up with licks and it did not kill me”. It is very challenging when there isn’t any continuity in the home, so most times there is conflict between the home and school.

Keisha:

- “Can’t think now ...but I will let you if anything comes before we finish this session” Ah! I think that the outdoor sessions work well. Children like to be outside so if as teachers we

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

can have an area outside where we can take the class at least once a day to do painting or blocks I think that is a good intervention”.

### **Patty – Question 8**

Which specific intervention strategy or strategies have proven to be effective in your classroom?

Norma:

- I would say talking to the child or verbal reprimand. For example, I would say to the child, “how would you feel if someone hits you, or, look at (name of child), he is sad, would you like anyone to make you sad? Then I would ask that child to apologize. Time out has also been used and the students have shown a little improvement. With time out, the child doesn’t want to be left out of the activity so he/she would say’ “aunty look, I am behaving, or aunty, I wouldn’t do it again”. For the rest of the day, the child would actually behave. I have experienced this with most of them.

Keisha:

- Well I have not tried anything out of the ordinary but ‘time out works’ and the naughty corner as well... Some of them like the naughty chair or corner and they behave badly all the time to go and sit there. Because it is not a bad place to sit and make more mischief’. ‘I tried a ‘Good behaviour chart once where the children who were good all week got a pet fish to take home. I brought a few fishes to school... let say the Monday. I told them the plan ...who behave good will take the fish home. I outlined my version of “good” and every one helped feed the fish. Man it was good for them but bad for me... (Laugh)I tell you the class was an ‘A’ class that week. But I was the one in trouble. I had to buy about ten more

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

fishes... which the pet shop did not have....because everyone was so Good! Laugh you should try that...it works well!”

### **Patty – Question 9**

What strategy do you use to monitor the effectiveness and challenges of your intervention strategies?

Norma:

- Well, I don't usually write down the incidences that occur in the classroom and what was done to handle the particular behaviour. I would usually inform the principal when the behaviour gets out of hand, but I don't usually write down these outburst of aggression among my students. Sometimes I would inform the parents by word of mouth about the particular incident and what form of correction I may have administered to the particular child.

Keisha:

- Normally, I would document these outburst in a little book that I have in my cupboard, but not all the time. I know it is important but because nothing has happened seriously, I don't usually always document things. I think we can improve as a school in this area but I don't think the principal is doing enough to ensure that documentation takes place at all levels of the school. At one time there was a note book called a log book in which we will document these incidences but most times nothing isn't really done to address these problems

### **Patty – Question 10**

What kind of training or ongoing professional development have you received in handling aggression?

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

Norma:

- Hmm! No kind of formal training was received. I was assigned to this class and most of my strategies have been through trial and error. It would be good if I can meet with other teachers from other schools and share..... this may help in using additional strategies in curbing aggression among my students.

Keisha:

- I did not receive formal training but I have done a lot of reading to see what others have been using. When I did my teacher's training, this was not really a component so I do not have formal training and it would be good if I get some ongoing professional development because times have changed.

### **Patty – Question 11**

What kind of support, if any, have you received in managing aggression among your students?

Norma:

- Well, to tell you, I have received support from the principal and some of the teachers. When I complain to the principal about outburst of aggression in my class, she would be quick to suggest strategies that I can try. It is not that I am in it all alone. But more support from the entire staff is needed if aggression would be effectively minimized at our school, because some of them still say that the children are young and that they will eventually grow out of it.

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

Keisha:

- “None really...To think of none. We are administrators and teachers as well. In the classroom is every man for themselves! It is really hectic in the classroom with 15-18 early childhood children and you going...going... going, so you have to deal the issues as they arise and do what is best for the child. If it is really bad I will speak to the parents. But you know parents.... they act as I their child would not get on so ... and then you know that is the accepted behaviour at home” So as teachers we need to set the tone for the classroom and every man have to march to that beat”.



## APPENDIX H

### SAMPLE OF CODED TRANSCRIPT DONE BY RESEARCHER

| Codes  | Verbatim Report of Interview   |
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| Unacceptable<br><br>Negative<br><br>Physically harm  | 1. How would you define aggression?<br>Norma: Well, I would define aggression as any behaviour that a child exhibits, an unacceptable behaviour towards others and the child is not sorry for what was done.<br>Keisha:<br>“How ...well aggressive behaviour or a form of aggression or simply no behaviour”. Something that is negative, most times it can be seen or physical.   |
| Behavioural types,<br><br>Pushing,<br><br>Hitting<br><br>Biting<br><br>Shouting<br><br>Frequency<br><br>Time consuming | 2. Can you give a description, including the types and forms of aggression, as it relates to your particular classroom?<br>Norma:<br>“In my classroom, especially at free play and group time, some of the students become very aggressive. For example, if a child is playing with the blocks and another child would like to use them, he/she would ask for it but at times do not like to wait for his/her turn. Instead, he/she will begin to push, hit or just pull away the blocks without asking for it. Hitting is normally displayed among the students on a daily basis and most times when asked why, the guilty one would respond by saying, “aunty, I tell him/her sorry”. I have to spend extra time dealing with these outbursts”.<br>Keisha:<br>“Total madness! Between children... well usually at centre base learning time or early in the morning at large group time when the different personalities clash... yeah that is crazy”<br>“Common aggression ...shouting at first then a build up to a more intense aggressive stage like hitting...striking at each other or even biting ... no I would say kicking.... then biting then the real deal.... fighting.” “Sometimes I see pushing as well...and even spitting... there is a little boy in my class when |

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

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|  | <p>he gets mad he spits on the person or he will stand or sit and wet his pants”. That is when he gone clear!”</p>   |
| <p>Developmental milestone</p> <p>A lack of social skills</p> <p>A lack of resources</p> <p>A lack of space</p> <p>A lack of supervision</p> | <p>3. In your opinion, what are some things that cause the development of aggression among your students?</p> <p>Norma:</p> <p>Well, I would say maybe it’s because the children are still developing and may not be able to control their emotions like waiting and taking turns. Another thing is that most of these children come to our school with those tendencies so perhaps those were learnt at home, so the home influence I would say. Also I would say lack of adequate resources in the classroom at free play time, because most of the outbursts take place during this time. For example, blocks, toys, etc, when most of them want to use the same toy at the same time.</p> <p>Keisha:</p> <p>“Huh... Too many children in one place... Lack of space. Children do not like when you are in their space....Well at this centre it is hot and the heat raise a ‘madness’ in the place and the shouting starts and the noise and fighting! It can get crazy. But if you take them out side they calm right down. Let me see... Lack of supervision as well ...mostly during free play time. Otherwise it is O.K...Well taking turns as well or line up time ...any form of line... To go outside or even wash hands. Children do not like to line up. Every one want to be in front...then the fight start”.</p> |
| <p>Tangible rewards-stickers</p> <p>Verbal praise</p> <p>Hugging</p> <p>Delegating responsibilities</p>                                      | <p>4. Tell me, how do you support the students when they display positive behaviours in the classroom?</p> <p>Norma:</p> <p>I would usually give rewards, for example, a sticker or a little handmade token with the words, “outstanding student” written on it. Also I would use verbal praise, to reaffirm the positive behaviour displayed. Sometimes I would say, “I am so proud of you, or, Wow! That’s great, or even, Yes! I knew you could have done it”. I would like to add that giving rewards is not always good but hugging and complimenting the positive behaviour is always better.</p> <p>Keisha:</p> <p>“I praise them and also give incentives such as stars and tokens .Sometimes I have a star for the day where the child that is usually the most aggressive will be my happy helper for the day. This really works because children like to help and do</p>  |

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

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|  | <p>stuff... So they like being a star... But the tokens and stickers work as well.”</p>   |
| <p>Student grouping</p> <p>Adequate materials</p> <p>Removing the child</p> <p>Greater supervision</p> <p>Changing the activity</p> <p>Verbal reprimands</p> <p>Corporal punishment</p> <p>Classroom arrangement</p> | <p>5. Well, seeing that you experience negative behaviours most of the time, how do you interrupt and prevent these negative behaviours displayed? Or should I say, “nip it in its bud?”</p> <p>Norma:</p> <p>To be honest, these aggressive behaviours happen in the twinkling of an eye or so quickly that I do not always see them..... Only when a child complains. But in terms of preventing and interrupting, I would usually group the students by putting the less aggressive one together, I would also ensure that adequate materials are available for a particular lesson. If a child is aggressive, I will interrupt by removing him/her from the activity and talk to the child. Sometimes I would give greater supervision in order to minimize and prevent it. Additionally, I would change the routine by taking them outdoors.....physical activity.</p> <p>Keisha:</p> <p>“Many. I do not beat... well at this age we should not... so lots of talking and talking do the trick. Sometimes a child might be a bit difficult or just rude ...that could be a real challenge because I go back to basic ....do not spare the rod and spoil the child... so a little “pinch” now and then will replace the talking if I am talking too much” “Simply I separate the aggressive ones and place children together... Move around seats and seating arrangements in my classroom”</p> |

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

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| <p>At once</p> <p>Individually</p> <p>Whole class</p>   | <p>6. Do you deal with negative behaviours the moment they occur and do you target the individual student or the entire classroom?</p> <p>Norma:<br/>Most of the times I deal with aggression the moment it occurs, because if not attended to at once the child may think that the behaviour is acceptable and may continue behaving in an unacceptable manner. Also, sometimes I use whole class strategies when other students are affected. Otherwise, I use individual strategies to redirect the behaviour of the particular student or students.</p> <p>Keisha:<br/>“At once... one time! And I deal with the issue or cause of the aggression and the individual as well ... It is unfair when teachers discipline an entire class for two or three children’s aggressive behaviour”</p>   |
| <p>Verbal reprimands</p> <p>Tangible incentives</p> <p>Working with parents</p> <p>Outdoor sessions</p> | <p>7. In your opinion, what specific intervention strategies have been challenging to implement?</p> <p>Norma:<br/>When parents are informed about the particular behaviour and I share with them the strategies I have been using at school, for example, talking with the child and giving incentives, and recommend that they do the same at home, some of them would say, “beat him/her, cause I grow up with licks and it did not kill me”. It is very challenging when there isn’t any continuity in the home, so most times there is conflict between the home and school.</p> <p>Keisha:<br/>“Can’t think now ...but I will let you if anything comes before we finish this session” Ah! I think that the outdoor sessions work well. Children like to be outside so if as teachers we can have an area outside where we can take the class at least once a day to do painting or blocks I think that is a good intervention”.</p> |
| <p>Verbal reprimand</p> <p>Time out</p> <p>Good behaviour chart</p>                                     | <p>8. Which specific intervention strategy or strategies have proven to be effective in your classroom?</p> <p>Norma:<br/>I would say talking to the child or verbal reprimand. For example, I would say to the child, “how would you feel if someone hits you, or, look at (name of child), he is sad, would</p>  |

## Addressing Preschool Aggression

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|   | <p>you like anyone to make you sad? Then I would ask that child to apologize. Time out has also been used and the students have shown a little improvement. With time out, the child doesn't want to be left out of the activity so he/she would say 'aunty look, I am behaving, or aunty, I wouldn't do it again'. For the rest of the day, the child would actually behave. I have experienced this with most of them.</p> <p><b>Keisha:</b></p> <p>Well I have not tried anything out of the ordinary but 'time out works' and the naughty corner as well... Some of them like the naughty chair or corner and they behave badly all the time to go and sit there. Because it is not a bad place to sit and make more mischief'. 'I tried a 'Good behaviour chart once where the children who were good all week got a pet fish to take home. I brought a few fishes to school... let say the Monday. I told them the plan ...who behave good will take the fish home. I outlined my version of "good" and every one helped feed the fish. Man it was good for them but bad for me... (Laugh)I tell you the class was an 'A' class that week. But I was the one in trouble. I had to buy about ten more fishes... which the pet shop did not have...because everyone was so Good! Laugh you should try that...it works well!"</p> |
| <p>No recording</p> <p>Inconsistent recording</p> <p>Inform principal</p> | <p>9. What strategy do you use to monitor the effectiveness and challenges of your intervention strategies?</p> <p><b>Norma:</b></p> <p>Well, I don't usually write down the incidences that occur in the classroom and what was done to handle the particular behaviour. I would usually inform the principal when the behaviour gets out of hand, but I don't usually write down these outburst of aggression among my students. Sometimes I would inform the parents by word of mouth about the particular incident and what form of correction I may have administered to the particular child.</p> <p><b>Keisha:</b></p> <p>Normally, I would document these outburst in a little book that I have in my cupboard, but not all the time. I know it is important but because nothing has happened seriously, I don't usually always document things. I think we can improve as a school in this area but I don't think the principal is doing enough to ensure that documentation takes place at all levels of the school. At one time there was a note book called a log book</p>   |

Addressing Preschool Aggression

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|  | <p>in which we will document these incidences but most times nothing isn't really done to address these problems so I have discontinued its use.</p>  |
| <p>No formal training</p> <p>Reading</p> <p>No collaboration</p>                               | <p>10. What kind of training or ongoing professional development have you received in handling aggression?</p> <p>Norma:<br/>         Hmm! No kind of formal training was received. I was assigned to this class and most of my strategies have been through trial and error. It would be good if I can meet with other teachers from other schools and share..... this may help in using additional strategies in curbing aggression among my students.</p> <p>Keisha:<br/>         I did not receive formal training but I have done a lot of reading to see what others have been using. When I did my teacher's training, this was not really a component so I do not have formal training and it would be good if I get some ongoing professional development because times have changed.</p>  |
| <p>Administrative support</p> <p>Low support from teachers</p> <p>Low support from parents</p> | <p>11. What kind of support, if any, have you received in managing aggression among your students?</p> <p>Norma:<br/>         Well, to tell you, I have received support from the principal and some of the teachers. When I complain to the principal about outburst of aggression in my class, she would be quick to suggest strategies that I can try. It is not that I am in it all alone. But more support from the entire staff is needed if aggression would be effectively minimized at our school, because some of them still say that the children are young and that they will eventually grow out of it.</p> <p>Keisha:<br/>         "None really...To think of none. We are administrators and teachers as well. In the class room is every man for themselves! It is really hectic in the classroom with 15-18 early childhood children and you going...going... going, so you have to deal the issues as they arise and do what is best for the child. If it is really bad I will speak to the parents. But you know parents.... they act as I their child would not get on so ... and then you know that is the accepted behaviour at home" So as teachers we need to set the tone for the classroom and every man have to march to that beat".</p> |

## **Appendix I**

### **LIST OF EMERGING THEMES**

- Professional Development and Training
- Parental Involvement
- Greater Collaboration among Teachers
- Support from Principal
- Monitoring and Documentation
- Resources