

**TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF AGGRESSIVE LEARNER  
BEHAVIOUR IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL**

by

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**204516830**

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the academic requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Education in the discipline of Educational Psychology,

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is to explore teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. This study was conducted in an ex-model c school which is in the district of Umlazi. The research approach is qualitative, in which a case study design was employed. Data was generated using two data generation instruments, which are, focus group discussions and collage construction. The findings of this study showed that the majority of the teachers acquired their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour through their experience over the years of teaching, communication with teachers and learners' parents. Teachers explain the rationale for the discipline strategies they adopt to address aggressive learner behaviour in their classrooms and out on the field. The findings also show that besides experience and conversations with other teachers or parents of learners, there is no other meaningful way to acquire knowledge regarding aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.

## DECLARATION

I, Emily Estella Perumal, 204516830 declare that: **Teachers' Understanding of Aggressive Learner Behaviour in a Primary School**, abides by the following rules:

1. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
11. This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
111. This dissertation does not contain text, graphics or tables copied and pasted from the internet unless expressly acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the dissertation and the reference section.
- 1v. This dissertation does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information unless expressly acknowledged as being sourced from another person.
- v. This dissertation does not contain other persons' writing unless acknowledged explicitly as sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
  - a) Their words have been rewritten, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
  - b) Where their exact wording has been used, it has been placed within quotation marks and referenced.



Student's signature



Supervisor's signature

2021 / 08 / 10

Date

2021/08/12

Date

## DEDICATION

**Ella my sunshine...**

You have been my greatest motivation through this academic journey. The completion of this dissertation is done in honour of you, **Ella Grace**.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”**

**Philippians 4:13**

January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2019 was when this journey began and I had placed this study under the banner of Philippians 4:13. It has certainly not been an emotionally easy journey, but Jesus has always granted me renewed strength and hope throughout these past two years.

- I could not have completed this study without the strength and guidance from my King, Jesus.
- To my sister and personal attorney, Eugenie, mom, dad and Milea... your belief in me and my academic potential has gotten me this far in my academic journey. Thank you for your endless support, love and encouragement and never giving up on me, even when I gave up on myself. Thank you for always prioritizing my education and pushing me to reach my highest goals. From hereon I will go further with your support.
- To my current school principal, Dr N. G. Reddy - thank you for your support and guidance towards attaining this degree.
- To my supervisor, Dr Patrick Mwelil - thank you for being the approachable person that you are and going beyond your call of duty to ensure the finalisation of this dissertation. I have always enjoyed studying under your supervision since my Honours degree and I appreciate you.
- To my friends who have been there, motivating and encouraging me until this dissertation was complete, I appreciate you. Thank you.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<b>DBE</b>	Department of Basic Education
<b>SES</b>	Socioeconomic status
<b>SLT</b>	Social Learning Theory
<b>FP</b>	Foundation Phase
<b>IP</b>	Intermediate Phase
<b>SP</b>	Senior Phase
<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
<b>ECD</b>	Early Childhood Development
<b>PGCE</b>	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
<b>B Ed</b>	Bachelor of Education
<b>B Ed Hons</b>	Bachelor of Education Honours

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22 September 2020

Miss Emily Estella Perumal (204516830)  
School Of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear Miss Perumal,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00001900/2020

**Project title:** Teachers' Understanding of Aggressive Learner Behaviour in a Primary School

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 27 August 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.**

This approval is valid until 22 September 2021.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



-----  
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
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Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

All of humanity has to face frustration at some point in their lives, especially when a goal is unable to be reached, and the reaction to this frustration is usually aggression, SA'AD and Saleh (2015). The most common reaction to frustration from school-aged children is aggression SA'AD and Saleh (2015). "... [T]he problem of aggressiveness in primary school children is one of the most important in modern psychology and pedagogy" (Parfilova, 2016, p. 922). Understanding the phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour is crucial because it shapes our way of thinking, approaching and adequately assisting a learner who displays aggressive behaviour. This understanding will also assist teachers in adapting teaching methods that will accommodate learners who display aggression in the classroom.

In practice, it has been noticed that the most common reaction to a learner who displays aggressive behaviour is hostile and authoritative. A teacher's reaction against aggressive behaviour "influences aggressive behaviour in children." (Dias, 2017, p. 1073). Hence the importance of understanding this phenomenon because responding against it can worsen the situation. Considering these facts, this study aims to uncover teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school, and thereafter provide insight to teachers about the possible contributing factors to aggressive learner behaviour.

This chapter sets out the background, statement of the problem and a brief overview of the entire study.

#### 1.2 BACKGROUND

The field of education engulfs multiple perspectives regarding aggressive learner behaviour, and teachers find themselves frustrated regarding the rise of "behavioural problems in South African schools" (de Witt & Lessing, 2013, p.1). Educational role players, which include teachers, department heads and the principal, often find themselves questioning the contributing factors or causes of these behavioural problems (Gasa, 2018) and are left experiencing burnout stress due to disruptive behaviour in the classroom (Jacobsen, 2013; de

Witt & Lessing, 2013). Learner aggression has become an increasing concern to teachers (Dias, 2017; Shechtman & Tutian, 2016).

To understand aggressive learner behaviour, it is necessary to first understand that there are factors which contribute to this behaviour (Govender, 2015). Hence, this study will discuss the factors that contribute to or cause aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school, which includes socioeconomic status, care institutions/orphanages for children and youth, abandonment and culture and society. This will serve to provide some insight for teachers regarding aggressive learner behaviour; understanding it and how to respond to it appropriately.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. By first exploring the teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, it can then emerge why their understanding is framed in a particular way, and it can be further understood how this understanding of aggressive learner behaviour is enacted, meaning, how discipline is enforced based on teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour.

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

With aggressive learner behaviour increasing at schools (Murlidhar & Shastri, 2016) and teachers becoming more helpless with little to no appropriate methods of administering discipline, this problem can escalate to a point where learners may begin to control the education system on their terms. According to an article written by Sullivan (2017), when aggressive behaviour is displayed in the classroom, teachers are left with feelings of disbelief and the inability to help the situation, and because of this, discipline among children with these behavioural issues becomes the most daunting part of a teacher's job.

There are many reasons as to why teachers' have different understandings of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school and therefore teachers administer discipline differently. Sometimes the discipline is punitive (Dias, 2017) and inappropriate and does not address the underlying issues of aggression. Most times, when a learner is acting out aggressively he/she is seeking negative attention and instinctively the teacher reprimands the learner and demands that they stop immediately (University of Minnesota, 2016). This kind of discipline will temporarily cease the aggressive behaviour but does not cease the internal struggles of the learner who displays aggressive behaviour.

A limited understanding of the contributing factors or causes of aggressive learner behavior in a primary school, could lead to inadequate assistance/discipline for the learner; therefore, the behavioural problems may persist and escalate. The supposed lack of adequate information and knowledge regarding an understanding of aggressive learner behavior in a primary school is problematic.

#### 1.4 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In practice, which is from a contextual dimension, I have witnessed learners get into a fist fight. This kind of outburst occurred more than once in my presence. From my experience I knew that I had to do a background check on these learners, and owing to my engagement with further studies, I did have an idea on how to enact my understanding of this behaviour accordingly. It was discovered that one learner lived in an orphanage, while the other came from an impoverished home. Both these learners had psychosocial issues that they were dealing with. The discipline method that I believed to be appropriate in addressing this hostility between the learners was one-on-one conversations with them. I chose to allow them to speak and allow their voices to be heard. Understanding what the learners thought and felt made it possible to assist them regularly by affording them the opportunity to have someone they could speak to. Punitive discipline strategies can have a negative impact on and increase aggressiveness within learners (Dias, 2017), therefore this was not my preferred choice of discipline.

From a professional dimension, many teachers may not possess the necessary skills and knowledge to adequately address the phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour. The inability to handle an aggressive outburst adequately could cause stress on both the teacher and the learner (Jacobsen, 2013; de Witt & Lessing, 2013). Therefore, understanding this type of behaviour is vital for every teacher because it shapes their teaching methods (pedagogy) to accommodate learners who display aggressive behaviour and assist them accordingly (Parfilova, 2016).

This is the reason why I found it appropriate to first explore teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, and then provide them with the necessary knowledge that could assist teachers when responding to and disciplining learners who display aggressive behaviour appropriately.

## 1.5 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study provides information regarding contributing factors or causes of aggressive learner behaviour. It goes beyond the verbal and physical actions of a learner and explains possible reasons as to why learners display aggressive behaviour at school. The data generated in this study enables teachers to realize that there are more than just physical acts of violence or profanities to consider when responding to and disciplining learners who may display aggressive behaviour.

If teachers are unable to further their studying in the field of education, then they can utilise this information and find out how to gather such information in the future. To teachers who are able to further their education, this study may provide motivation, in knowing that there is a lot more information to be unravelled in the field of education than just lived experiences at school and in the classroom.

With the knowledge that aggressive behaviour is on the rise and a growing concern in schools (Murlidhar & Shastri, 2016; Botha, 2014; Singh & Steyn, 2014), this study can also reach out to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to provide workshops regarding aggressive learner behaviour to all teachers at schools. The school ought to be a positive environment for teaching and learning (Botha, 2014). With learners who display aggressive behaviour and frustrated teachers, this positive environment may not be achievable. Therefore, by offering knowledge to teachers, may be a benefit for both teachers and learners.

## 1.6 FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The focus of this study is to explore teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school, in the district of Umlazi, within the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa.

## 1.7 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.
2. To explore why teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school are framed the way they are.

3. To explore how teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school is enacted.

## 1.8 CRITICAL QUESTIONS

In line with the objectives, the main questions of this study are:

1. What are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school?
2. Why are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school framed the way they are?
3. How are the teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school enacted?
  - i. What methods of discipline are considered as appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour?

## 1.9 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 1.9.1 Research Paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen to guide this research. This paradigm makes every attempt to understand the subjective interpretation of the world that the participants of the study have (Kivunja, & Kuyini, 2017). According to the interpretivist paradigm, there is not one single reality that is to be found, but rather there is an existence of multiple realities (truths) because reality is socially constructed (Dean, 2018; Pham, 2018; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Researchers using this paradigm gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study within a specific context, rather than generalising an understanding for the whole population (Pham, 2018; Creswell, 2007). Therefore, this paradigm was the choice, so that teachers will be able to express their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school; how they have attained that knowledge and what are the discipline strategies that they employ.

### 1.9.2 Research Approach

The approach that this research has adopted is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing data that is non-numerical, that means, only texts, videos, audios etc. (Bhandari, 2020; McLeod, 2019). The qualitative approach aims to provide an in-depth understanding of people's behaviour, emotions, experiences and opinions (Bhandari, 2020; Mohajan, 2018). This research approach allows the participants to express themselves through discussions and the use of images thereby generating qualitative data.

### 1.9.3 Research Design

A case study will be the research design for this study. A qualitative case study enables the researcher to explore a phenomenon within the context of its natural setting, through various sources, allowing multiple perspectives of the phenomenon to arise (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir & Waseem 2019; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018; Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017). This gives the participants the freedom to express their subjective beliefs and understandings regarding aggressive learner behaviour. Therefore, this research design was chosen for this study.

### 1.9.4 Sampling Techniques

#### *1.9.4.1 Purposive Sampling*

Purposive sampling had been used in the selection of participants. This technique of sampling involves selecting participants purposefully, who have knowledge and experience with the phenomenon that is being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to handpick participants who will benefit the study because those are the participants who have the necessary experience regarding the phenomenon under study. The teachers who have had enough experience with aggressive learner behaviour were selected for this sample.

#### *1.9.4.2 The Sample*

The sample size consisted of nine teachers. Both phases of the school were included, which are the foundation phase and the intermediate/senior phase. All the teachers at this school indicated that they had experience with aggressive learner behaviour and therefore were viable

candidates for participation in this study. There were five teachers from the foundation phase, three teachers from the intermediate/senior phase and one sports that were purposively selected.

### 1.9.5 Data Generation

Data generation is an arrangement made by the researcher to produce data that would be useful for the subsequent data analysis regarding the interest of the study (Goldkuhl, 2019). The researcher has the responsibility of selecting data generation instruments which are suitable and will produce thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study (Muthusamy, 2015). For this study, two data generation instruments were selected, which are, focus group discussions and collage construction.

#### *1.9.5.1 Focus Group Discussions*

In qualitative research, when in-depth information is required, focus group discussions are used as instruments to generate data (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2018; Flynn, Albrecht, & Scott, 2018). The groups are usually made up of participants who share similar experiences and beliefs and the discussions are initiated by the researcher (Mishra, 2016; Muhammad Dilshad & Latif, 2013). The participants in this study were placed in groups that represented the phase in which they teach, namely, the foundation phase and the intermediate/senior phase. The sports coach opted to join in the intermediate/senior phase group.

#### *1.9.5.2 Collage Construction*

Constructing a collage is an arts-based method for collecting data in qualitative research (van der Vaart, van Hoven & Huigen, 2018; Coemans, 2017; Gerstenblatt, 2013). This method of collecting rich data involves participants selecting images to express their thoughts and feelings about a particular topic when asked questions by the researcher (Soucy, 2012). In essence, questions pertaining to the research are answered through images.

### 1.9.6 Data Analysis

The type of data analysis that will be used for this research is Discourse Analysis. This is a research method that studies written or spoken language in relation to its social context and it aims to understand the use of language in real life situations (Luo, 2020; Shanthi, Wah &

Lajium, 2015). Discourse analysis is a method that will follow the patterns of the participants' language and make meaning of it (Shanthi et al., 2015).

## 1.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study simply asks the question, "Can the findings be trusted?" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). To ensure the credibility of the interpretation of data that has been produced by the participants, more than one data generation instrument had been used. This was to check the data against each other using different methods.

## 1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

This research consists of six chapters which are listed with a brief description below.

### **Chapter One**

Chapter one is an introductory chapter to this dissertation. It sets out the general overview of this study; what the study consists of and how the research will be carried out.

### **Chapter Two**

This chapter consists of the literature regarding aggressive learner behaviour. All the necessary details surrounding this phenomenon are included. Definition of aggressive behaviour, types of aggressive behaviour, contributing factors and causes of aggressive behaviour and discipline strategies are all included in chapter two.

### **Chapter Three**

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is discussed in this chapter. The social learning theory has been identified as the theoretical framework of this study. All the necessary details of this theory has been explored and discussed.

### **Chapter Four**

This chapter is about the research methodology. Chapter four basically describes all the methods used to conduct this study, namely, research paradigm, research approach, research design, selection of participants, instruments that were used to generate data and how the data was analysed.

## **Chapter Five**

Chapter five analysed all the data that has been generated through the focus group discussions and the collage construction and it presents the findings. The analysis was done using discourse analysis in which the language of the participants are interpreted.

## **Chapter Six**

This is the last chapter of the study and it includes the summary of the findings and provides recommendations for each finding.

### **1.12 CONCLUSION**

Chapter one has provided an introduction and brief overview of what this research study is about. Each chapter has been briefly described, and all other elements of this study are briefly included in this chapter. By reading chapter one, the reader will be aware of what to expect in this study. Teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour will be explored and the findings will be presented in the final chapter of this research study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

In a world full of uncertainties, adults as well as children often find themselves frustrated when they have not achieved a specific goal or an end they had wished to reach (SA'AD & Saleh, 2015). With specific regard to primary school learners, (SA'AD, 2015, p. 11) states “a typical reaction to frustration by many children of primary school age is aggression.” According to Parfilova (2016), aggressive behaviour is considered to be an integral part of an individual's life and he claims that “the problem of aggressiveness in primary school children is one of the most important in modern psychology and pedagogy” (Parfilova, 2016, p. 922). This implies that teachers must understand the phenomenon of aggressive behaviour among primary school children, in order to adjust their methods of teaching and to accommodate and respond appropriately to such behaviour. To have an adequate understanding of this phenomenon, aggressive learner behaviour, it is necessary to understand that this is not innate behaviour, but rather there are numerous factors which contribute to learners displaying aggressive behaviour in primary schools (Govender, 2015). The understanding of aggressive learner behaviour and factors which contribute to it, will result in the teachers' appropriate response to this behaviour.

A teacher's response which may display hostility towards aggressive behaviour “influences aggressive behaviour in children.” (Dias, 2017, p. 1073). Therefore, any negative reaction toward a learner who displays aggressive behaviour can ignite the fuel of aggression in that learner to uncontrollable levels. From this, I have discovered that the gaps in literature regarding aggressive learner behaviour are the lack of attaining additional/further education (after the basic degree in education) and training in the provision of appropriate learner support and how the lack of this additional/further knowledge regarding aggressive learner behaviour places teachers at a possible disadvantage in adopting appropriate discipline strategies. Simply put, the insufficient skills and knowledge of teachers, lead to feelings of helplessness in the administration of discipline. Therefore, my study endeavours to unravel; What are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school, why is this understanding framed the way it is, and how is their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour enacted. These are the gaps that my study seeks to address and provide suitable recommendations for.

The aim of this study is therefore to provide insight to teachers about aggressive learner behaviour; the definition and types of it, its prevalence at primary schools and what causes or contributes to aggressive learner behaviour. This information will attempt to guide the teachers' understanding of this phenomenon (aggressive learner behaviour). By understanding this phenomenon within its context, teachers and all other role players within a school, will be able to adopt strategies to adequately address aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school and provide appropriate learner support.

## 2.2 DEFINITION OF AGGRESSIVE LEARNER BEHAVIOUR

Aggressive behaviour is an outward action or behaviour that can be seen and is intended to cause harm to another person or persons, either physically or psychologically (Chetty, 2020; Gabbey & Jewel, 2016; Aggressive Behavior: Definition, 2015; Gray, 2015). As much as aggression is commonly associated with physical actions, such as pushing, pulling, damaging property and the like (McMahon, Peist, Davis, Bare, Martinez, Reddy, Espelage, Anderman, 2019), psychological aggression is just as detrimental, because these verbal attacks (Gray, 2015) cause damage to a person's state of mind (Chetty, 2020).

Violent behaviour is usually equated to aggressive behaviour, however these two behaviours differ, because a person who displays aggressive behaviour does not always engage in acts of violence (Bushman, 2020; GoodTherapy, 2019). Aggression and violence are different (Aggression, 2018; GoodTherapy, 2019; Tarabay, Warburton, 2017), but violence can be present in aggressive outbursts in some cases, and that both aggression and violence can sometimes be driven by anger (Aggression, 2018).

## 2.3 TYPES OF AGGRESSIVE LEARNER BEHAVIOUR

There are various types of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. The types of aggressive behaviour that will be discussed are those that are most common within a school setting. Salimi, Karimi-Shahanjarini, Rezapur-Shahkolai, Hamzeh, Roshanaei & Babamiri (2019), identify two main forms of explicit/direct aggression, namely, physical and verbal aggression. These two types of aggressive behaviour have also been highlighted by (Williams, 2015; Jhangiani & Tarry, 2014) and will be explored further.

### *2.3.1 Physical Aggression*

When referring to physical aggression, it can be explained as any action that can be seen. Examples of such actions include pushing, pulling, throwing of objects, breaking property or causing injury to another person's body (McMahon et al., 2019; Allen & Anderson, 2017; Minnesota, 2016; Williams, 2015; Jhangiani, 2014). It is noted that physical aggression originates in early childhood (Archer, 2012; Cote, Perusse, Wu, Boivin, 2007) and is normal to a certain extent, however, if the aggression is persistent and moves into the next phases of development, these children are likely to face difficulties with their academics, among peers and engage in other forms of delinquent behaviour (Evans, Frazer, Blossom & Fite, 2018; van Adrichem, Huijbregts, van der Heijden, 2020).

According to social theorists, male and female begin to develop into their socially expected characters, and this is made visible through their actions, such as physical aggression (Nivette, Sutherland, Eisner & Murray, 2018). (Chetty, 2020; Nivette et al., 2018; Estevez, Povedano, Jimenez & Musitu, 2012) add that males are more likely to be physically aggressive due to the societal narratives about male dominance. Therefore, they are socialised into these stereotypical, dominant roles in society and the competition to acquire or maintain such roles. It has been stated by Furtuna (2014), that the genetic make-up of a male, their muscle structure, body weight and their hormonal status, namely, testosterone, also contributes to their aggressive nature (Martin, 2017), more specifically, physical aggression. These components drive their instincts to compete for hierarchical status within their communities (Martin, 2017; Furtuna, 2014).

In practice, we find that the young boys do fight for dominant roles within the communities of their schools, and this is the reason why it is relevant and necessary to understand physical aggression within the context of a primary school.

### *2.3.2 Verbal Aggression*

Verbal aggression involves causing intentional harm to someone without making any physical contact, for example, by screaming, swearing, insulting or bullying a person or a child (Salimi, Karimi-Shahanjarini & Babamiri, 2019; Minnesota, 2016; Kulesza, 2015; Jhangiani, 2014). The harm that is caused via verbal aggression is psychological, and the person or child who is the victim, often experiences feelings of depression, rejection, loneliness and the like (Holly, 2019; Jhangiani, 2014). Research indicates that verbal aggression is one of the most prevalent

forms of misbehaviour in schools (Taylor & Smith, 2019; McMahon et al., 2019; Kulesza, 2015).

In a quantitative study conducted by Elmasry, Fouad, Khalil & Sherra (2016), the results indicated that there had been a significant positive correlation between verbal aggression and a personal history of physical abuse. This suggests that if a child/adolescent displays verbal aggression, it is highly probable that the child had endured physical abuse in their younger years, which could possibly be continuing at present. This was also indicated in an article by Verrill (2018) where he stated, “The statistics expressed by Welfare and Hollin (2015) demonstrate a direct relationship between those who were abused in childhood and committing aggressive and violent crimes.” (Verrill, 2018, p. 4).

Salimi et al. (2019) and Archer (2012) found in their study that verbal aggression in males were significantly higher than that of their female counterparts. While in a write up completed by Daljevic (2014), it is explained that verbal aggression exists equally among girls and boys, although in some cases, girls tend to engage in verbal aggression more than boys because they can be more subtle and less physical than boys.

Recent research is limited with regards to whether verbal aggression is dependent on gender. However, we do know from practice, that verbal aggression is present in both male and female learners in a primary school.

#### 2.4 PREVALENCE OF AGGRESSIVE LEARNER BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS

In recent studies, it was found that incidents which involve aggressive learner behaviour have been increasing alarmingly in schools (Dias, 2017; Murlidhar & Shastri, 2016). “In recent years society has been witnessing with concern the increase of aggressive behavior in school, carried out by children and young people.” (Dias, 2017, p. 1068).

Aggression among children is one of the most prevalent forms of problematic behaviour within a school (Salimi et al., 2019; Murlidhar, 2016; Parfilova, 2016). Learners either act out aggressively by banging stationery on their table, pulling in their chair roughly, hitting another learner etc. (physical aggression), or speak aggressively by insulting, swearing, bullying (verbal aggression) another learner or the teacher who might have reprimanded the learner.

Aggressive behaviour towards teachers or in the presence of teachers grows, because the lack of respect for teachers is also increasing. Some believe this is due to the lack of discipline from the home, and parents/caregivers are not instilling the value of a teacher and the respect that is due to them (Children's Lack of Respect for Teachers, 2019; Cassidy, 2017).

Schools are recognized as institutions that contribute to the social, emotional and academic well-being of children (Botha, 2014). Learners, teachers and parents are constantly interacting in this environment and the school develops as a community of its own (Education, 2019). Due to these interactions, learners become aware of their social, emotional and economic status and the competition for hierarchical status increases, especially male dominance among the learners (Chetty, 2020; Nivette et al., 2018; Estevez et al., 2012). This competition is manifested through aggressive behaviour among learners.

The reason why aggressive behaviour is prevalent in a primary school, is because these learners come from various environments which affects their emotional, psychological and social well-being (Erickson Gabbey & Jewell, 2019). These learners' home environment, socioeconomic status, exposure to aggressive and violent behaviour from adults, are the factors that influence their aggressive behaviour at school (Erickson Gabbey & Jewell, 2019; Govender, 2015). Due to the fact that they cannot achieve certain goals, they (the learners) experience a certain degree of frustration and act on or react to this frustration with aggressive behaviour (Chetty, 2020; SA'AD & Saleh, 2015). Learners also use aggression for purposes such as competing with other learners, express their anger, respond to fear and to intimidate or threaten learners who they do not like (Chetty, 2020). Activities such as these occur regularly at schools, hence the rise and prevalence of aggressive learner behaviour.

## 2.5 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO, INFLUENCING OR CAUSING AGGRESSIVE LEARNER BEHAVIOUR

As some researchers believe that aggressive behaviour is influenced by external or psychological factors (Erickson Gabbey, 2019; Gazaille, 2017; Govender, 2015), a few of these factors will be discussed in detail in order to broaden the understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. There are various factors which contribute to, influence or cause aggressive learner behaviour, but a few factors which are relevant to the context will be chosen for discussion.

### *2.5.1 Socioeconomic Status*

In order to discuss how socioeconomic statuses influence aggressive behaviour, it is first necessary to understand what are socioeconomic factors. These are all our social norms such as education, employment, income, health care, housing and the like (Model, 2020; pdhpe.net, 2017) that are dependent on our economic status.

Socioeconomic factors relate to and influence each other, for example, a person's employment will determine their income, and that income determines their children's level of education, such as high-quality schools and extending to tertiary education (Tarver, 2020; Jennifer, 2018; pdhpe.net, 2017). Income also determines a family's lifestyle and their hierarchical status in society.

There exists a human tendency to attach socioeconomic status (SES) to identities (Biazoli Jr, Salum, Gadelha, Rebello, Moura, Pan, Brietzke, Miguel, Rohde, Bressan, Jackowski, & Sato, 2019; Manstead, 2018). The higher the income, the higher their social status in terms of hierarchy and this inflates their feelings of superiority, while the low income households adopt a lower social status and they experience feelings of inferiority. The contexts of home, school and work generate these concepts of the self, which is generally based on their SES (Manstead, 2018).

It is understood through research that SES is a predictor for aggressive behaviour in early childhood and beyond (Baker, Jensen, Moeyaert, & Bordoff, 2018; Holtz, Fox, & Meurer, 2015; Fatima, & Sheikh, 2014). When younger children compare themselves to their peers or neighbours according to their SES, this influences aggression within them (Baker et al., 2018; Flack, 2017; Ma & Grogan-Kaylor, 2017). This possibly arises because the child who comes from a low income family with limited resources experiences internalized inferiority, shame and social inadequacy when compared to the child who is provided with a wealthy lifestyle (Bosma, Brandts, Simons, Groffen & van den Akker, 2014). When the child from the low income household becomes frustrated due to the lack he/she suffers, this usually results in aggressive behaviour (Chetty, 2020; SA'AD & Saleh, 2015).

Researchers explain that the relationship between a family's social status and child aggression is the observation of adult behaviour and children learn to imitate them (Baker et al., 2018; Weyns, Verschueren, Leflot, Onghena, Wouters & Colpin, 2017). Children observe their parents or caregivers respond to social scenarios with aggression. This is internalized as a

solution to solving life problems, which becomes normalized behaviour (Baker et al., 2018; Weyns et al., 2017) and in turn display this behaviour when they find themselves in a stressful situation at school.

### *2.5.2 Care Institutions/Orphanages for Children and Youth*

Over the years many children have been left or abandoned at orphanages/child care institutions. Statistics on these facts show that approximately 8 million children live in orphanages and among these children, 80% of them are not actually orphans (Children, 2019; Batha, 2018; Browne, 2017). These researchers also state that the main reason for children to be left at an orphanage, is the inability of the surviving parent to provide for that child due to poverty.

Being left in an orphanage is not the most pleasant feeling for children to experience. There is no personal care or attention and these children are often left to feel insecure, unloved, rejected, deprived, helpless and entrapped (Boadu, Osei-Tutu, & Osafo, 2020; Services, 2017). Orphanages are said to have a negative impact on a child's social, emotional and cognitive development (Batha, 2018; Santoso, & Zamroni, 2017; Bettmann, Mortensen & Akuoko, 2015). "Studies comparing developmental problems as well as the factors that influence the development of mental and emotional problems with qualitative methods in children reared in orphanages." (Santoso & Zamroni, E., 2017, p. 89). Among many other aspects of social and emotional development in teens, Santoso (2017) observed the commonality of anger, low tolerance towards others and the constant need to win, as well as a high tendency to rebel. In a quantitative study conducted at orphanages in one city, the results showed that more adolescents (20.77%) experienced emotional and behavioural problems as compared to younger children (10.09%), and boys (24.57%) were more affected than girls (5.13%) (Kaur, Vinnakota, Panigrahi, & Manasa, 2018).

"An orphan's life is very critical because of their lacking of care and support. Therefore, there are many kinds of stressful events [that] occur among orphans; such as deprivation in family, aggression, physical and psychological stress and so on." (Dey, Rahman, Hossain, Islam, 2017, p. 3). From this we note that children and adolescents living in orphanages begin to display aggressive behaviour, as they are left neglected and alone for most of the day. A series of insights into cognitive development has shown that institutional care is associated with poor cognitive development (Sherr, Roberts & Gandhi, 2017; Berens & Nelson, 2015).

We have explored the idea that aggressive behaviour is a response to the frustration they (the children) experience (Chetty, 2020; El-Slamoni & Hussien, 2019; SA'AD & Saleh, 2015) and being a resident at an orphanage includes facing frustration on a daily basis. While living in an orphanage, these children are usually exposed to abuse, harsh discipline and beatings (El-Slamoni, & Hussien, 2019; Nihal, Macharapu, Mallepalli & Babu, 2019). Sherr et al. (2017), writes that these orphans are exposed to violence frequently, and violence can be seen as both commission and omission. “Commission refers to abuse, harsh punishments, physical, psychological and sexual violence, whereas omission encompasses neglect and absence of positive experiences.” (Sherr, Roberts & Gandhi, 2017, p. 34).

El-Slamoni (2019), yielded results in a quantitative study that showed the physical aggression score was significantly and positively correlated to the period of stay at the orphanage. The findings also showed that depression was significantly and positively correlated to physical aggression. This implies that, the longer the children stayed at the orphanage, the higher their level of depression rose, which increased their level of physical aggression (El-Slamoni, 2019).

Some orphans engage in bad habits, such as substance abuse, to cope with the stressful environment of the orphanage, while others would lash out in aggressiveness towards other orphans as a way of coping with their fears and stress (Nihal et al., 2019). In their study, Nihal et al. (2019), it was found that stress and aggression were positively correlated among orphans living in orphanages. As stress increased within these orphans, so too did their aggression.

Albert Bandura is known as the father of cognitive theory. In 1961 Bandura conducted the Bobo doll experiment to determine the patterns of behaviour associated with aggression (Nabavi, 2012). In 1977, the completion of this research based on observational learning, resulted in Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, which explains that children watch others and develop social behaviour such as aggression through the process of observational learning (Norfleet, 2020).

The Social Learning Theory makes it clear to understand the behaviour of children living in orphanages. Being exposed to violence, abuse, aggression and much more, these children observe and learn the behaviour as a way to resolve conflict and gain results that they desire. This behaviour becomes their norm when they are among their peers and teachers at school.

### *2.5.3 Abandonment*

Child abandonment is when a parent, guardian or any person who is in charge of a child has an intention of abandoning the child and consequently deserts the child, with no regard for the child's physical, financial and emotional wellbeing (Wolf, 2020; FindLaw, 2018). Abandonment can be defined as physical or emotional (Webb, 2020; Webb, 2018; Sherman, 2017) – physical is when the parent or caregiver physically leaves the child, while emotional abandonment is when the parent is physically present but emotionally distant from the child for various reasons (Wolf, 2020; Leonard, 2020; Jayaraman, 2016).

Some symptoms of abandoned children can include, but are not limited to, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, anger and aggression (Publications, 2020; Gombay, 2017; Web, 2016). “Nearly half of all teenagers investigated for neglect...and exhibiting signs of aggression are abandoned by their parents.” (Gombay, 2017, p. 1).

When a child experiences loss which could be related to a traumatic event, such as death, divorce of parents, being physically or emotionally abandoned, this could lead to a fear of abandonment (Leonard, 2020; GoodTherapy, 2019). The fear of abandonment can lead to the adoption of unhealthy behavioural and thought patterns as a coping mechanism, which could ultimately cause a breakdown of relationships/friendships (Fritscher, 2020; Holland & Cherney, 2020).

Within the context of a primary school, children who have been abandoned and left to live at an orphanage, often act out aggressively towards their peers/friends and end up with no circle of friends. Aggression directed to their peers/friends can include verbal bullying, ridiculing or name calling; they also go to the extent of being physically aggressive when they are overwhelmed by their emotions. Their behaviour is a result of the fear of abandonment (Fritscher, 2020; Holland & Cherney, 2020). Due to the fear of abandonment, these children also fear that abandonment will recur and their behaviour as a result of this fear will alienate friends (GoodTherapy, 2019). It is as though they anticipate being abandoned by their peers/friends so they might as well push them away before their peers/friends abandon them (Fritscher, 2020; Webb, 2020; Holland & Cherney, 2020).

Developing as a healthy human requires physical and emotional care, and the absence of these could result in the feelings and fear of abandonment (Holland & Cherney, 2020; GoodTherapy, 2019; Webb, 2018). Unfortunately, many abandoned children at a primary school cannot

escape this fear, as they have been left behind by their families. Their aggressive behaviour towards peers/friends or teachers is inevitable, therefore, they ought to be accommodated and assisted adequately when these unhealthy behaviour patterns do arise.

#### *2.5.4 Culture and Society*

“Culture can be described as a system of knowledge, beliefs, procedures, attitudes...that is shared in a group. That the cultures with which each of us connects exert a strong influence on our behaviors is beyond dispute.” (Gill, 2013, p. 71).

Culture influences people’s lifestyles, morals and values (Armstrong, 2018). Their behaviour is likely to be influenced by the culture of the society within which they grow up during social interaction (Tomar, 2017; Idang, 2015; Gill, 2013). Attitudes, behaviour, beliefs which are exhibited within a specific culture, is what will be displayed by an individual in their daily lives.

Behaviours, ideas and artifacts of a culture can be learned and passed/shared between individuals which can also evolve over time (Creanza, Kolodny & Feldman, 2017). Culture has played a role in the development of the self for many decades (Creanza et al., 2017; Pogosyan, 2017), this includes behaviour of an individual, as well as aggressive behaviour (Tomar, 2017; Henrich, 2015).

The Social Learning Theory states that children watch others develop social behaviour such as aggression (Norfleet, 2020) and exhibit such behaviour thereafter. Although aggression is universal in nature, children from different cultures may differ in their display of aggression in different situations (Henrich, 2015 ;Yang, Fu, Zhao & Chen, 2013).

If children are born or enter into a culture that encourages aggression, they are likely to be socialised into an aggressive and often violent being (Airth, 2018; Textbooks, 2016). Airth (2018) describes ‘social reinforcement’ as a major cause of aggressive behaviour based on cultural and societal rules. She explains that aggressive behaviour is rewarded, as this is expected of them within that specific society and the culture that it carries. In many cultures, the males are reared to become strong and aggressive, because this is how they show their strength and take whatever they desire to have (Airth, 2018; Textbooks, 2016).

Aggression cannot be seen as a standardized variable, but rather, it varies according to the culture that an individual belongs to, this is referred to as “..cultural variations in aggression” (Fry, 2017, p. 1). “Some societies anticipate and accept a certain amount of aggression,

whereas others have achieved high degrees of social tranquility.” (Fry, 2017, p. 2). Simply put, some individuals will use aggression to resolve conflict, because this is the manner in which their society deals with conflict. On the other hand, some individuals refrain from aggressive behaviour, with the belief that it would not resolve conflict, but rather fuel it.

Through these acts of aggressive behaviour, or a lack of it, the significant role that culture and society plays in aggression, can be noted (Tomar, 2017; Henrich, 2015).

## 2.6 DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS AGGRESSIVE LEARNER BEHAVIOUR AT SCHOOL

As teachers we are aware that learners who display aggressive behaviour do exist in our classrooms and our school as a whole. It is simply impossible to have a perfect class of learners, as these learners come from various backgrounds/environments, with multiple issues that they have to deal with.

With all the literature that is available, we can now understand the various contributors to or causes of aggressive learner behaviour. Based on this knowledge we also need to adapt appropriate strategies for responding to and disciplining learners who may present unhealthy behavioural patterns.

Watson (2019) sets out a few interventions that lead to a healthy relationship between the learner and the teacher:

- Avoid power struggles : Do not ignore the learner who is being aggressive, but do not get drawn into a power struggle with them.
- Be firm, but gentle : It is easier for a learner to listen to a gentle teacher than to a harsh one. So be firm in what you are saying to the learner, but use a gentle tone.
- One-on-one : Learners who display aggressive characteristics usually desire the attention of their teacher. Dealing with them one-on-one will give them the time they want with the teacher and the teacher gets to address the learner’s behaviour during that time.
- Responsibilities & praise : Provide learners with classroom responsibilities. This makes them feel important and they will want to impress the teacher. Make sure to praise the learner whenever the task is complete.

- Search for positive characteristics : Every learner has positive characteristics. Search for these within the learner and highlight these characteristics. They will be motivated to display these positive characteristics more often when they are noticed.

Dr Shore (2016) provides similar interventions when dealing with a learner who displays aggressive characteristics. Responding firmly yet remaining calm, speaking privately with the learner, are relating to the interventions set out by (Watson, 2019). Dr Shore (2016) further adds in his article, that a time out should be considered for the learner. This will send a message to that learner that his/her behaviour is unacceptable in your class, and it also serves as a protection measure for other learners who may be in line of danger from those aggressive outbursts. Having had personal experience with these discipline strategies, I can safely conclude that these interventions do lead to positive changes within learners who display aggressive behaviour.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

Aggressive behaviour among learners in a primary school can commonly be misunderstood for various reasons. Lack of adequate training that may enable teachers to assist learners who experience behavioural and emotional barriers, is one of many reasons (Potgieter-Groot, Visser & Lubbe-De Beer, 2012). Perhaps the teachers do not have extended knowledge on aggressive learner behaviour, or just go with the blanket understanding of a ‘bad upbringing’. Sometimes, a lack of knowledge regarding aggressive behaviour can leave teachers feeling “shocked and vulnerable” (Sullivan, Teachers shouldn't have to manage behaviour issues by themselves - schools need to support them, 2017) when it does happen in the classroom.

Literature from across the globe has brought to light the reality of aggressive behaviour among school going children, with specific regard to primary school learners for the purposes of this study. The reality of aggressive learner behaviour, has been justified by numerous factors which cause, influence or contribute to this type of behaviour. These factors also indicate to us teachers, that learners are not attending school with an innate aggressive nature (Govender, 2015).

Upon realization of the presence of various factors that cause, influence or contribute to aggressive learner behaviour, it becomes necessary for teachers to address the diversity of their teaching styles, methods and discipline strategies in order to adequately accommodate these

learners (Parfilova, 2016). This literature can add to the knowledge of aggressive learner behaviour and enable teachers to adjust their pedagogy and classroom management styles that will include learners who attend school with these behavioural problems.

As I probe deeper into this topic, I hope that the information that emerges can adequately develop, frame and structure a teacher's understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. The eventual goal is to create a learning environment that is inclusive of all learners, with various behavioural patterns, who are a part of a primary school, that they may all benefit equally with regards to academics, sports and all other extra activities that are offered at a primary school. The hope is that no learner may be disadvantaged or left behind due to his or her behavioural issues, with specific regard to aggressive learner behaviour.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The theoretical framework is a necessary component of any research because it is said to guide the study (Collins & Stockton, 2018). When a theory is chosen, it must be relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (USC, 2020). The theory's purpose is to explain the meaning of the phenomenon in order for us to understand it and use that knowledge to respond in effective ways (USC, 2020).

In the case of my current study, an appropriate theory needs to be applied that could adequately address the phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour. Some of the highlighted concerns that need to be understood in the literature were; the observation of a peer's lifestyle which leads to feelings of inferiority within a low income household, observation and experience of violent and aggressive acts are later displayed by the child himself/herself, the development of mental and emotional problems with children living in orphanages, internalizing feelings of fear and abandonment, and simply behaving the way their society constructs as the norm.

These highlighted concerns could be framed by Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. By discussing a few important concepts of this theory, it could assist in the framing and understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is aggressive learner behaviour.

#### 3.2 SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY

##### *3.2.1 A Brief History*

The Social Learning Theory (SLT) was established in 1977 by an American cognitive psychologist, Albert Bandura (Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2016). He was popularly known for his modeling study on aggression that was demonstrated using a 'Bobo doll' (Nolen, 2020; Cherry, 2020; Norfleet, 2020).

The Bobo doll experiment was carried out in 1961 which involved an inflatable toy clown that was physically and verbally abused in the presence of pre-school aged children (Nolen, 2020; Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2014). This led to children imitating that violent behaviour that they

had witnessed the adults doing to the Bobo doll (Nolen, 2020; Cherry, 2020). The bobo doll study was significant because it departed from the Behaviourist approach which states that behaviour is controlled through reinforcement or rewards (Cherry, 2020). Bandura termed this imitating of behaviours ‘observational learning’, where children imitated the behaviour that they had observed (Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2016).

Bandura did not view learning as a direct result of conditioning, reinforcement and punishment, but rather influenced the field of psychology to illustrate that most human behaviour is learned through modeling, observational learning and imitation of the attitudes, behaviours and emotional reactions of other people. (Kurt, 2020; Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2016). Albert Bandura did draw from the classical and operant conditioning theories, which stem from Behaviourism, but prioritized the role of the environment in learning (Sussex, 2020; McLeod, 2016). His theory went beyond the behavioral approach, in that, it explained behaviours were also learned by psychological influences such as attention and memory (Cherry, 2019; Nabavi, 2012). Bandura’s SLT highlighted the continuous interaction between behaviours, cognition and the environment (Cherry, 2020). According to Bandura, cognition played a role in learning, and cognition has become dominant in the interpretation of human learning in the SLT (Nabavi, 2012). From this it can be noted how the SLT built on Behaviourism by adding the cognitive elements to learning.

### *3.2.2 What is the Social Learning Theory?*

The SLT is often described as the bridge between Behaviourism and the cognitive approach (Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012). It consists of three basic principles, which are, observation, imitation and modeling (Nabavi, 2012).

- ***Observation and imitation***

The concept of observational learning originated from the Bobo doll experiment as described and discussed in the brief history of the SLT. Observational learning is when children observe people around them and imitate their various behaviours (Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2016). “After observing the behavior of others, people develop similar behaviors.” (Nabavi, 2012, p. 5). Bandura adds that observation alone is not sufficient for maximum learning to occur, and that cognitive processes (personal motivation, mental state) had to be present (Kurt S., 2020; McLeod S. A., 2016). This means that before the child imitates a behaviour they consider whether or not to imitate what they have observed (McLeod S. A., 2016).

- **Modeling**

The people who are being observed are referred to as models (McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012). Children are surrounded by models in society, examples of such are, parents, siblings, friends in the neighbourhood, friends at a place of worship, friends at school, teachers at school, other children who live in orphanages and their caretakers (McLeod, 2016).

However, behaviour that is observed and imitated from a model is not always learned and learning can occur without an actual behaviour change (Kurt, 2020; Nabavi, 2012). Bandura claims that there are four steps that need to happen in order for learning to take place. These four steps that lead to learning are known as attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012).

- **Attention:** This is when the child pays attention to a specific behaviour. In order for that behaviour to be imitated, it has to first gain the child's attention. Therefore, not all behaviours that are observed will be imitated because it simply did not gain the attention or interest of the child. Even reactions to a violent situation can be learned because this would catch and hold the child's attention. (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016). "The more striking or different something is the more likely it is to gain our attention." (Nabavi, 2012, p. 10).
- **Retention:** This is how well a child can store/remember/retain the behaviours/information that he/she had observed. Sometimes a behaviour is observed but it is not remembered; this prevents imitation of that behaviour. The important point to note is that memory (a mental process) is involved, because without memory of that behaviour it cannot be reproduced. (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016). "The observer must be able to remember the behavior that has been observed." (Nabavi, 2012, p. 10). In some cases, the more the behaviour is practiced, the better they become at it. (Nabavi, 2012).
- **Reproduction:** "The third condition is the ability to replicate the behavior that the model has just demonstrated." (Nabavi, 2012, p. 10). This step is dependent on attention and retention. If a child paid attention to a behaviour and remembered it well, then the child can reproduce that behaviour with ease. (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016).
- **Motivation:** Both punishment and reinforcement impact this step. "Reinforcement and punishment play an important role in motivation." (Nabavi, 2012, p. 10). If it is observed that a certain behaviour is punished, then it is most likely that the behaviour will not be reproduced. Likewise, if they observe that a behaviour earns rewards, this

is motivation for the behaviour to be continued. A child who is observing must be motivated enough to imitate a behaviour that had been modeled (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016).

From the information gathered regarding the SLT, it can be said that this theory covers both observable and unobservable behaviour. This is the theory that could adequately frame the phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour within the context of a primary school. The underlying feelings of a child before an aggressive outburst, can now be analysed and understood, and therefore adequate assistance could be offered to the child.

### *3.2.3 Application of the SLT to aggressive learner behaviour*

Using a step by step approach, each factor contributing to aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school will be discussed in isolation. This will assist in understanding how the SLT can be used for each factor independently.

- **SLT and socioeconomic status**

With regard to the SES of a family, it has been noted that a child who comes from a low income household experiences feelings of inferiority, shame and social inadequacy (Bosma et al., 2014). Internalized inferiority, shame and social inadequacy are unseen feelings that cannot be observed, and can negatively impact a child's psychological well-being. The SLT does not only measure the observable, aggressive behaviour that a child such as this displays, but it goes further to analyse and understand the internal psychological processes (Cherry, 2020; Nabavi, 2012).

When a child responds with aggression, and it is known that a child lives in a low income household, it is not only the behaviour that the child observes and imitates from their parents or other family members that ought to be considered. With observation of those behaviours, comes attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012). The SLT will focus on the environmental circumstance of the child, and find out what aspect of the situation has gained the child's attention, enough to have caused the child to remember it and motivated the reproduction of the behaviours that he/she has observed.

Usually, the child who observes the adult's response to socioeconomic stress with aggression and violent behaviours, internalize this behaviour as a solution to the problem (Baker et al., 2018; Weyns et al., 2017), and in turn displays this behaviour when the child feels stressed and

when met with a conflict that needs to be resolved. Therefore, upon analysing and understanding the negative emotional effects of the SES of a home, the child would be able to receive assistance that may help to improve his/her emotional state and bring about some stabilization in his/her behaviour.

- **SLT and care institutions/orphanages for children and youth**

According to the Observational Learning Theory compiled by Albert Bandura, children watch others and develop social behaviours such as aggression (Norfleet, 2020). Observational learning would answer how and why children become aggressive and behave aggressively within the context of a school. They watch the violent behaviours, which include harsh discipline and beatings, of the caregivers towards them and others at the care institutions, and display this behaviour when they are away from that care institution (El-Slamoni, 2019; Nihal et al., 2019; Sherr et al., 2017).

However, the emotional and cognitive elements that negatively impact the children who live in care institutions and orphanages cannot be left unnoticed. Children who are reared in these institutions are said to experience a negative impact on their emotional and cognitive development (Batha, 2018; Santoso & Zamroni, 2017; Bettmann et al., 2015). Observational learning does not explain beyond what can be observed, but Bandura did go further to accommodate the cognitive processes that occur once the observation has taken place, as explored in the description of the SLT (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012).

Therefore, it is not just the observation of harsh discipline and beatings that the child in question would display, but also having to deal with the emotional strain of feeling unloved, rejected, deprived and helpless (Boadu et al., 2020; Services, 2017). The SLT will assist in explaining that all those negative feelings experienced by the child are also the driving forces behind the aggressive outbursts at school. Once this is understood in context, the child in question has the chance of receiving the help he/she requires to move forward positively, and improve his/her behaviour.

- **SLT and abandonment**

Physical and emotional care leads to a healthy human development, and the absence of such could result in feelings and fear of abandonment (Holland, 2020; GoodTherapy, 2019; Webb, 2018). Children who have been physically or emotionally abandoned by their parents/guardians experience this fear of abandonment. Unhealthy behavioural and thought patterns could arise from the fear of abandonment (Fritscher, 2020; Holland, 2020).

Abandoned children often act out aggressively towards their peers/friends and begin to alienate them with the fear that abandonment will recur (GoodTherapy, 2019). The fear of abandonment can also cause these children to aggressively push away their friends with the anticipation that their friends may abandon them just as their parents/guardian had done, and they would rather be the first to do it this time around (Fritscher, 2020; Webb, 2020; Holland, 2020).

It therefore becomes necessary to understand not just the visible behaviour of the child, but also the internalized feelings that the child could be experiencing, and the current circumstances surrounding the child in question. The SLT explains that there are internal psychological processes at work before a behaviour is executed (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012). Using this theory to understand the behaviour of an abandoned child, it will take into consideration all these feelings and fear of abandonment that is the actual engine behind the aggressive behaviour. By considering those internalized negative feelings and fears, it will allow for those feelings to be addressed, and the child would be adequately assisted over a period of time, which could result in a positive behavioural change.

- **SLT and culture and society**

Culture and society play a significant role in aggressive behaviour (Tomar, 2017; Henrich, 2015). Aggression is accepted as conflict resolution in some cultures, and in many cultures the males are reared to become strong and aggressive because this is how they demonstrate their strength and possess what they desire (Airth, 2018; Fry, 2017; Textbooks, 2016).

As the SLT explains that children watch others develop social behaviour such as aggression, and exhibit the same kind of behaviour (Norfleet, 2020), it also goes further to analyse the internal psychological processes that drives the observable aggressive behaviour.

With regard to culture and society, the SLT will assist in understanding the thought patterns of the child that fuels the aggressive behaviour. A child who grows up in a culture that socializes him into aggression, would have a mindset that he can only show dominance through aggressive acts. Airth (2018) explains that in some cultures aggressive behaviour is rewarded, which is also developed within the mind of the child. It therefore, also becomes important to understand the culture of the child in order to understand the cultural patterns of development of the child. When this understanding is reached, the child who has been acting out aggressively could be guided and taught that not all societies encourage or reward aggressive

behaviour and teach them the consequences of such behaviour. This could result in the beginning of a new mindset for the child and a positive change to his behaviour.

### 3.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has set out all the important aspects of the SLT and how it can be applied to each contributing factor of aggressive learner behaviour. The SLT that was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977 (Cherry, 2020; McLeod, 2016) as a result of the Bobo doll experiment and observational learning (Nolen, 2020; Norfleet, 2020) has been found to adequately frame this study. This theory considers both the observable and unobservable elements of aggressive learner behaviour and explains that the internal psychological processes are necessary for learning to take place (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012). Having chosen an appropriate theory to frame my study, I can now move on to the next chapter in adding further information regarding my study.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Methodology “guides the researcher in deciding what type of data is required for a study and which data collection tools will be most appropriate for the purpose of his/her study.” (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 52). The detailed description of the research methodology used for this study will allow the readers of this dissertation to determine the reliability and validity of this study (McCombes, 2020). This chapter will describe the methodology employed to carry out this study and explain why the specific methods have been selected to gather data for this study. This research was conducted in order to provide a descriptive analysis of teachers’ understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. The focus of this chapter will be the research design and methodology that was employed to conduct the study which ensured the effective answering of the following research questions that were generated in chapter one:

1. What are teachers’ understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school?
2. Why are teachers’ understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school framed the way they are?
3. How are the teachers’ understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school enacted?
  - i. What methods of discipline are considered as appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour?

This chapter also includes a detailed description of the research paradigm, selection of participants and sampling techniques used to select the participants, as well as data generation methods and how the data have been analysed. The ethical considerations will also be discussed in this chapter.

## 4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The importance of having a paradigm as a part of every research, is that it represents the perspective or worldview of the researcher (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The paradigm selected by the researcher is what will inform the interpretation of the data that will be generated for the study, because it is the paradigm that reflects the researcher's beliefs and understanding of the reality of the world (Kivunja, 2017; Rehman, 2016). A paradigm can "clarify and organize the thinking about the research." (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018, p. 9).

The paradigm selected to guide this research is the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm makes every attempt to understand the viewpoint of the participants who are a part of the research process (Kivunja, 2017). There is a great emphasis placed on understanding the participants and their subjective interpretation of the world, especially the phenomenon that is being studied (Kivunja, 2017). According to the interpretivist paradigm, there is not one single reality that is to be found, but rather there is an existence of multiple realities (truths) because reality is socially constructed (Dean, 2018; Pham, 2018; Kivunja, 2017; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Researchers using this paradigm gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study within a specific context, rather than generalising an understanding for the whole population (Pham, 2018; Creswell, 2007). Therefore, data generated within this paradigm is said to be subjective because participants' interpretation of a phenomenon is based on the context of their culture and society, hence multiple truths are accepted (Cohen et al., 2018).

By selecting the interpretivist paradigm, I understand that the phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour does not hold a single truth. Having teachers as participants of the research, it is accepted that each teacher has their own beliefs and knowledge regarding aggressive learner behaviour. Every teacher understands this phenomenon – aggressive learner behaviour – with a different perspective. Their understanding and knowledge is constructed from the society that they live in. It is also constructed within the specific society of the school that the research is being conducted in. Therefore, there will be multiple truths arising during the process of data collection.

A teacher's perspective on aggressive learner behaviour can also be linked to the social learning theory, because their thought processes (unseen/unobservable) will differ from each other according to how they have observed (initial observational learning - input) the approach to aggressive learner behaviour, hence their discipline strategies (observable behaviour – outcome) will be in line with their subjective perspective.

### 4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The approach that this research has adopted is qualitative in nature. “Qualitative researchers are interested in people’s belief, experience, and meaning systems from the perspective of the people.” (Mohajan, 2018, p. 2). Qualitative research involves collecting and analysing data that is non-numerical, that means, no collection of quantities, only texts, videos, audios etc. (Bhandari, 2020; McLeod, 2019). The qualitative approach aims to provide an in-depth understanding of people’s behaviour, emotions, experiences and opinions (Bhandari, 2020; Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and interpret the data according to the meanings which the people from that setting attach to it (McLeod, 2019). Cohen et al., (2018) state that a clear understanding of the phenomenon being researched can only be obtained by being a part of the environment or the natural setting.

The research that I conducted was done within the primary school that I am a part of. Therefore, this ensures that I, the researcher was involved in the natural setting of the phenomenon, aggressive learner behaviour. I am also familiar with all the participants who are teachers at this school which created a comfortable space for them to speak at liberty regarding this phenomenon. Seeking in-depth information regarding aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school, this qualitative research required the participants to express their thoughts, opinions and experiences through discussions and images in an unbiased manner, although qualitative research cannot always guarantee unbiased responses because it is subjective in nature (McLeod, 2019; Kivunja, 2017).

### 4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The qualitative research design that was adopted for this study was in the form of a case study. A case study is considered to be a part of qualitative research (Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017; Starman, 2013). A qualitative case study enables the researcher to explore a phenomenon within the context of its natural setting, through various sources, allowing multiple perspectives of the phenomenon to arise (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir & Waseem, 2019; Cohen et al., 2018; Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017). “Researchers describe how case studies examine complex phenomena in the natural setting to increase understanding of them.” (Heale & Twycross, 2017, p. 7).

The instruments used to generate data using the case study design, helps the researcher to gather in-depth information by making use of the ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions (Muthusamy, 2015). Having to deal with a phenomenon such as aggressive learner behaviour, it becomes necessary to ask open-ended questions to allow participants the opportunity to express their experiences, thoughts, opinions and feelings without restriction. These responses will provide the in-depth information sought for by the researcher. The case study design has been an appropriate selection because this design advocates for a phenomenon to be studied within the context of its natural setting. Given that I, the researcher, am currently a teacher at this primary school, I was within the natural setting of the aggressive learner behaviour phenomenon, and the various sources from whom I gathered data were also a part of this primary school and therefore provided a thick description of the phenomenon under study.

The case study design also allows for multiple perspectives to arise from various sources (Cohen et al., 2018; Harrison et al., 2017). This gives the participants autonomy to express their subjective beliefs and understandings regarding aggressive learner behaviour. A subjective perspective of thoughts and beliefs are encouraged, for the reason that this case study research is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm which promotes the existence of multiple realities (truths) because these thoughts, beliefs and understandings are socially constructed (Dean, 2018; Pham, 2018; Kivunja, 2017; Lincoln et al., 2011).

#### 4.5 STUDY AREA

This study was conducted in an ex model c school, in the district of Umlazi, within the province of KwaZulu-Natal, in the city of Durban in the Republic of South Africa. For the purpose of this study, this school will be referred to as Royal Primary School. The school has an enrollment of approximately 395 learners. There is an intake of learners from two child care institutions which are in the area, and also from a nearby informal settlement. Most of these learners display aggressive behaviour due to their socioeconomic status, child care institutions that they come from, abandonment and culture and society. The reason why it was my preferred choice, is because Royal Primary School contains all the elements of my study.

Royal Primary school comprises of 1 principal, 17 teachers and 1 sports coach.

**Table 4.1: Biographical background of each participant**

Teacher	Phase (Foundation phase or Intermediate/Senior phase)	Gender (M/F)	Years of experience	Highest qualification obtained	Level
Teacher B	FP	F	23	ECD	1
Teacher M	FP	F	13	B Ed	1
Teacher A	FP	F	Not disclosed		1
Teacher N	FP	F	17	PGCE	1
Teacher S	FP	F	3	B Ed Hons.	1
Teacher C	IP/SP	F	12	B Ed	1
Teacher J	IP/SP	F	7	Degree pending	1
Teacher K	IP/SP	F	32	Further Diploma in Education	2
Teacher T	Sports Coach	M	3	Degree pending	1

## 4.6 SAMPLING AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

### 4.6.1 Purposive Sampling

The sampling technique that was used to select participants is referred to as purposive sampling which is commonly used in qualitative research (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015). This technique of sampling involves selecting participants purposefully, who have knowledge and experience with the phenomenon that is being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Simply put, it is the researcher who decides what needs to be explored and sets out to find the individuals who can provide the information required, and who are willing to participate (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

The participants in this study have been selected with a purpose. The purpose being their knowledge and experience with aggressive learner behaviour. Further to their knowledge and experience regarding the phenomenon, the perspectives from their phase and grade was also a requirement for this study.

#### 4.6.2 The Sample

An essential part of a qualitative research is selecting appropriate participants for the study (Solutions, 2017; Lopez & Whitehead, 2013). It is important that the researcher has access to the selected participants and that those participants have enough experience and exposure with the phenomenon under study (Solutions, Participant Selection in Qualitative Research: Part 1, 2017). For the purpose of this research, I required teachers from this primary school, as it is the context of the phenomenon, and who have been here long enough at the school to witness and experience the phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour.

In line with the above requirements, I selected the participants as follows:

The primary school is divided in two phases, which are the foundation phase and the intermediate/senior phase. In order to gather data from both phases and all grades within a primary school, these were my participants:

- One teacher from each grade in the foundation phase - five teachers
- One teacher from each grade in the intermediate/senior phase - three teachers (excluding the grade seven form teacher)
- One sports coach who will represent both phases - one

There was a total of nine participants in this study.

#### 4.7 DATA GENERATION METHODS

Data generation is an arrangement made by the researcher to produce data/information that would be useful for the subsequent data analysis regarding the interest of the study (Goldkuhl, 2019). Qualitative research requires data that has thick descriptions of a phenomenon, therefore, the instruments used to generate data must ensure that it is suitable to generate data that is rich in the field (Cohen et al., 2018).

The researcher has the responsibility of selecting the data generation instruments that will produce thick descriptions regarding the phenomenon under study (Muthusamy, 2015). For this study I selected Focus Group Discussions and an arts-based method, which is a Collage Construction, for the generation of data.

#### *4.7.1 Focus Group Discussions*

Usually, in qualitative research, when in-depth information is required, focus group discussions are used as instruments to generate data (Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick & Mukherjee, 2018; Flynn, Albrecht & Scott, 2018). Participants who have a common or similar background share their experiences and beliefs in the setting provided for them by the researcher (Mishra, 2016). The group is usually made up of a small number of participants who are led by the researcher (Mishra, 2016; Muhammad Dilshad & Latif, 2013).

The discussions are usually guided by the researcher with discussion topics that the participants use as a starting point and then begin to share their collective views (Mishra, 2016; Muhammad Dilshad, 2013). The interactions between the participants during the focus group discussions are the key aspect, because it produces rich descriptive data as the participants converse with each other (Flynn et al., 2018; Mishra, 2016).

#### *4.7.2 Collage Construction*

Constructing a collage is an arts-based method for collecting data in a qualitative research (van der Vaart, van Hoven & Huigen, 2018; Coemans, 2017; Gerstenblatt, 2013). This method of collecting rich data involves participants selecting images to express their thoughts and feelings about a particular topic when asked questions by the researcher (Soucy, 2012).

Using images to answer research questions may add value that cannot be otherwise added when using the traditional research methods, such as interviews (van der Vaart et al., 2018; CohenMiller, 2018). Arts-based methods, which is a collage in this research, can be a useful tool when addressing sensitive topics, as it assists the participants to express themselves without actually using words (CohenMiller, 2018).

In this study, the traditional way of constructing a collage had to be deviated from due to all the health and safety protocols that had to be followed (as discussed in detail below in 4.7.3). The research questions were submitted on the WhatsApp group. I asked the participants to gather their thoughts and feelings concerning each question, then think about a word or words that represents their thoughts. Once they had settled on their thoughts regarding each question, I asked them to attach an image that represented the word/s which displayed their understanding of each question asked. The images gathered from the participants became the data that informed the research once the meanings behind each image has been analysed and interpreted.

#### *4.7.3 Covid-19 Protocols followed during the Data Generation process and the effects it had on this study*

Due to the Coronavirus pandemic we are currently facing, strict health and safety protocols had to be adhered to during the research process. Some of these protocols included, but were not limited to; social distancing, wearing of masks and sanitizing. Following these protocols also meant that the natural setting of the environment of the school as a whole had been altered. More specifically, the classroom setting had been changed to allow for the adherence of these protocols. Taking into account that learners were now apart from each other and had to constantly wear a mask, this altered their behaviour to a large extent. In that, interaction and communication between learners had been limited/restricted.

Initially, observations of the learners and the teachers were supposed to be undertaken, but due to the alteration of their behaviour, this would have negatively impacted on the trustworthiness and validity of the study because it would not have yielded results that were a true reflection of aggressive behaviour. Therefore, observations had been replaced with a collage construction.

The collage had been constructed by the teachers, but here again, due to the altered environmental settings, the traditional way of constructing the collage had to be addressed. The teachers were unable to come together, in one room, with their images and construct the collage. We had to limit/restrict interaction as far as possible and there could not be an exchange of paper. Therefore, the participants were given the opportunity to submit their images via our WhatsApp group that had been created for the purpose of this study.

The focus group discussions had to deviate from its original time frame and be kept at a minimal time frame. Taking into account that the researcher and the participants could not speak for long periods of time with a mask on, discussions were kept brief and to the point. We had to be particular with the social distancing at our meeting space to avoid an overcrowded space and to ensure the safety of all participants during our discussion sessions.

Cohen et al. (2018) states that a qualitative case study allows a researcher to explore a phenomenon within the context of its natural setting. The trustworthiness of this study will become questionable due to the alteration of the natural setting of the phenomenon (aggressive behaviour) being studied. The findings of this study may not be adequate enough to be transferred to another study, with specific regard to a post Covid-19 context. Usually,

contexts/settings which are similar, can apply the findings of a previous study to a current study should it undertake a research of the same phenomenon (Korstjens, 2018). However, if a study of a similar nature and of the same phenomenon is undertaken during Covid-19, then the findings of this study can be trustworthy as it will be suitable enough to be transferred to another context conducting a study of a similar nature. In that, the findings can be credible, dependable, transferable and confirmable.

#### 4.8 DATA ANALYSIS APPROACH/PROCEDURE

The process of data analysis involves the collection of data, organizing it and gaining useful conclusions from it (Import.io, 2019). The type of data analysis that was used for this research is Discourse Analysis which is a common method in qualitative research.

Discourse analysis is a research method that studies written or spoken language in relation to its social context and it aims to understand the use of language in real life situations (Luo, 2020; Shanthi, Wah & Lajium, 2015). It is language that helps us to understand each other, and the meaning of such language is uncovered when used in agreement within a social context.

Discourse analysis is a method that follows the patterns of the participants' language and make meaning of it (Shanthi et al., 2015). This form of data analysis was used for the focus group discussions. The participants' spoken language in the context of the primary school, was analysed, interpreted and given meaning by the researcher.

When analysing the images that constructs the collage, it must be noted that it is not the image that matters, but rather the reason why the participant chose that image to represent his/her feelings (Soucy, 2012). Once the collage had been completed, the participants were given an opportunity to explain why those images where chosen. This gave the researcher an understanding of the participants' expression and feelings regarding aggressive learner behaviour (Rssso-Zimet, 2016).

#### 4.9 ETHICAL ISSUES/CONSIDERATIONS

Following the appropriate ethical principles to protect the prospective participants is important in any and all research studies (Mohd Arifin, 2018). Ethics approval from the head of the organisation and institutions, and from the ethics committee must be obtained before any attempt is made to gather data from prospective participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

Before a prospective participant agrees to participate in the research, they must have a complete understanding of the study and all the processes which involves data generation, what will be required of them and how the data will be used (Mohd Arifin, 2018; Fleming, 2018). When obtaining informed consent it must be noted that the agreement to consent should be free and voluntary (Mohd Arifin, 2018). The participants must be told that they can withdraw consent to participate at any point (Fleming, 2018), and no individual should sign a consent form under duress. The prospective participants must be made aware that their identities will be kept anonymous and all information divulged to the researcher will be treated with strict confidentiality (Mohd Arifin, 2018; Fleming, 2018). “Anonymity and confidentiality is an important step in protecting the participants from potential harm.” (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018, p. 211).

For this study, I was able to follow all the ethical procedures and guidelines and obtained the following:

- Consent was granted from the Department of Basic Education to conduct research at the Royal Primary School.
- Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood.
- A letter was addressed to the principal, informing him about the research and all the details surrounding the study.
- Received approval from Gatekeeper/principal to conduct research at this school.
- Consent forms were designed for the teachers; this included the details of the study, what the study is about, research instruments that would be used to generate data, what would be expected of them and that participation must be voluntary with the option of withdrawing at any point of the research process. It also included that anonymity and confidentiality will be treated with the highest respect.
- Teachers signed the consent forms, thereby volunteering to participate in this study with full knowledge of all aspects of this research study.

**NB:** All these documents have been attached as appendices to this dissertation

Upon receiving consent from the principal and nine teachers, I have called a meeting with them. This was to explain to them details that they may have misunderstood and to assure them that their identities will not be revealed. The school name and the names of participants were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. The principal and the participants were satisfied with these arrangements and were happy to proceed with the research study.

#### 4.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study simply asks the question, “Can the findings be trusted?” (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121). Several definitions of trustworthiness exist, however, it has been noted that the best known criteria are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability (Korstjens, 2018; Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams & Blackman, 2016; Gunawan, 2015).

These concepts of trustworthiness will be briefly explained:

- **Credibility** - This is concerned with internal validity. Emphasis is placed on the research findings and the correct interpretation of the participants’ original data. (Korstjens, 2018; Gunawan, 2015).
- **Dependability** - Here, the question that would arise is – can this study be done by another researcher and obtain similar findings? It also refers to the consistency of the research findings. (Solutions, 2019; Moon et al., 2016).
- **Transferability**- This is where the findings of one study can be applicable/transferred to other contexts and settings. A thick description of the study and participants can allow the reader to determine whether or not these findings can be transferred to their setting. (Korstjens, 2018; Moon et al., 2016).
- **Confirmability**- To ensure that the interpretations of the data are clearly derived from the data and not made up by the researcher. Confirmability verifies that the findings are based purely on the participants’ narratives rather than the qualitative researcher’s biases. (Korstjens, 2018; Solutions, 2017).

I have ensured trustworthiness in this study by providing rich descriptions of the participants, the context of the study and every step of the research process. If another researcher wishes to apply these findings to his/her study, he/she may be able to gather this from the details provided

regarding the context, which was an altered setting due to the covid-19 pandemic, and decide if it can be transferred should they be working within a similar context, under similar circumstances, studying the same phenomenon - aggressive learner behaviour.

#### 4.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

With most research studies comes limitations to the study and it is necessary to highlight those possible limitations that this research study faced.

Due to the fact that this study had only nine participants, it was a small scale study and will probably not be able to generalize these findings to larger populations. From these nine participants, some of them did not provide sufficient data during, either the focus group discussions or the collage construction. This further minimizes the collection of data and the conclusions may become untrustworthy because this will leave gaps and unanswered questions in the research study. The findings may not be able to be transferred to another setting similar to the one in this research study.

The other problematic issue, was that I had to eliminate observations as part of my research instrument to generate data. This was due to the current pandemic we are facing known as the Coronavirus, which has placed us under strict health and safety protocols. All the natural settings of the classrooms and the way teachers move about have been altered due to these new adjustments. It has also altered how learners interact with each other in and out of the classroom and they are now constrained by the use of masks and social distancing. These new settings would not have been a true reflection of how teachers usually address the issue of aggressive learner behaviour and how learners behave aggressively towards each other. Therefore, I had to abandon this method of data collection.

By eliminating the method of observation, I was not able to achieve data triangulation, as I was only able to utilize two data generation methods. This possibly impacted the trustworthiness of the study. Therefore, the sample size and trustworthiness are the only possible limitations to this research study.

#### 4.12 CONCLUSION

The purpose of chapter four was to highlight the methodology employed to conduct this research study. The methodology guides a research study and ensures that all the methods

which are selected for the research will adequately answer the research questions (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

As this is a study that is conducted within the interpretivist paradigm, it engages in multiple truths (Dean, 2018; Pham, 2018) and is therefore a qualitative study, because it gathers information that are non-numerical (Bhandari, 2020; McLeod, 2019). This research will only generate data through dialogue, that is during the focus group discussions, and expressions of feelings through images, that is during the collage construction. The presentation of those images has to be accompanied by dialogue between the participant and the researcher.

The data was then analysed using discourse analysis which interprets the spoken and written words of the participants. Basically, it interprets the language shared between the participants of the study. Having satisfied all the relevant information required for the methodology of this research study, I will now move on to the next chapter which includes the presentation and discussion of the research findings that emerged during the research process.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

As the previous chapter concluded all of the necessary methodologies this study employed to generate data, this chapter will focus on the analysis of the data that have been generated. The analysis of the data will be in line with the theoretical framework, which is the Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura. This theory will be used to cover the four contributing factors, from the literature, associated with aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.

The four central concepts to the Social Learning Theory are: Attention, Retention, Reproduction and Motivation. These concepts will be applied to the four contributing factors of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school, as discussed in the literature, which are: Socioeconomic status, Care institutions/Orphanages for children and youth, Abandonment and, Culture and society. There has been a coherence of the representation of data, to demonstrate the sequence of the data generation and produce a storyline. Participants' actual words were used to ensure authenticity in the responses to each topic for discussion. The use of the participants' actual words also illustrates their personal views and feelings regarding each topic of discussion.

The process of generation of the data was centred around the critical research questions of this study. To serve as a reminder, the research questions are as follows:

1. What are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school?
2. Why are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school framed the way they are?
3. How are the teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school enacted?
  - i. What methods of discipline are considered as appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour?

Both the data generation instruments, focus group discussions and collage construction, used the above research questions to guide each session with the participants. The participants' actual words were documented in italics.

## 5.2 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

### *5.2.1 Focus Group Discussions*

Upon commencement of the focus group discussions, the participants and myself began a casual conversation regarding aggressive behaviour. This was setting the platform to begin a formal discussion regarding Teachers' Understanding of Aggressive Learner Behaviour in a Primary School. It was an opportunity for the participants to gain confidence in the topic and gather their thoughts and feelings regarding aggressive learner behaviour.

This conversation merged into the first topic for discussion:

#### ***1. Tell us about your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.***

Keeping in line with the interpretive paradigm, it is worth noting that there is no single "truth"/"reality" to be found but rather an existence of multiple truths. Therefore, what may seem as aggressive behaviour to one teacher may not necessarily mean the same to another teacher, this depends on how their realities have been constructed. This is illustrated by two of the teachers who express their thoughts of what aggressive behaviour means to them.

Teacher C, who enthusiastically begins the discussion, is an intermediate phase teacher.

*Teacher C: "There's different types of aggressive behaviour, it can be physical, that's the way they would react, or it can even be like verbal reaction".*

From the onset, Teacher C identified two types of aggressive learner behaviour, which are physical and verbal. As described by (Salimi et al., 2019), aggression can be physical and/or verbal. However, Teacher C has not verbally defined the physical or verbal aspects at this point of discussion. She gave off an impression that the physical aspect is what she can see, and the verbal aspect are the words used by the learner.

Teacher C went on to say:

*Aggressive as I said would be the way in which they [the learners] react. It could be something that triggered them like something that was taken from them that could be sentimental or it could be something that was said to them that makes them react in a violent way where they would want to go and shove somebody or they just scream out a word that is not very pleasant.*

Teacher C emphasises on a reaction from a learner that defines aggressive behaviour. Here, she identifies violence as the physical aggression and the use of an unpleasant word that is associated with verbal aggression. Teacher C demonstrated her understanding of the difference in aggression and types of it. It appears that Teacher C's understanding falls in line with the Social Learning Theory, where she mentions triggers. This implies that a learner could have observed a certain type of behaviour from their home that creates an emotion within them. It sticks to their memory and a trigger of that kind is sort of a motivation to reproduce that behaviour at school. This is in line with the SLT and the explanation of how learning occurs through attention, retention, reproduction and motivation (Kurt, 2020; McLeod, 2016; Nabavi, 2012). A trigger is usually an act that is similar to the one they have witnessed at home which unearths the unpleasant feeling that they have initially felt. According to Axelrod (2016), a trigger is an event that brings back a memory which takes a person right back to the original trauma he/she had suffered.

Another teacher goes on to explain her understanding of aggressive learner behaviour. Teacher J is an intermediate phase teacher.

*Teacher J: I agree with Teacher C but there are also emotions that affects them [the learners] and you'll see that coming out in the classroom in terms of emotionally everything would affect them; they would want to cry...they'll just want to break down if they are tested in a oral fashion in the class and let's say that they answered incorrectly...so that would give them a reason to become aggressive in terms of they would get angry but not angry with the teacher but angry with the fact that they dealing with emotions and then you*

*see that aggressiveness coming out in the facial expression and the way they would react to questions being answered...*

Teacher J explains that she identifies aggression in the emotional display of some learners. Here again, a type of aggressive behaviour has been identified, which is, emotional aggression. She expresses that those learners who have to deal with emotional issues also displays these emotional instabilities in the classroom through crying, anger and facial expressions. Teacher J is of the opinion that if an emotionally unstable learner is tasked with work that they are unable to complete, they experience an emotional breakdown. Simply put, she describes emotional aggression that does not involve physical acts of violence such as hitting, or the use of profanities.

Teacher J went on to describe another type of behaviour that she identifies as aggressive behaviour:

*...[and] in their work in terms of how they write also...maybe its not so physical...like their writing in English, the way they would word their language structure...it comes across as using aggressive words and a lot of anger issues come out in that...in their writing I picked that up...*

A unique view of aggressive behaviour has emerged in this description where Teacher J explains the use of written text as a display of aggression. Teacher J places great emphasis on the learners' emotional instability which is also asserted by Erickson & Jewell (2019), who explain that the emotions of a child becomes unstable due to the living environment the child comes from. Most children at this school do come from impoverished and troubled environments. This can be linked to the socioeconomic status (Baker et al., 2018), children from child care institutions (Batha, 2018) or children who have been abandoned (Gombay, 2017). As indicated in the literature of this study, these are the factors which can contribute to, influence or cause aggressive behaviour within learners.

The sports coach, who represents both phases, made an input on what he regards as aggressive learner behaviour. This is a perspective of learners when they are out on the field. He is referred to as Teacher T.

*Teacher T: I found that the aggressive behaviour differs from their environment which the learners are in...so you find your more posh schools where there's more financial backing from the parents, that the homes are more stable, there's a lot more respect, there's a lot more understanding, the learners kind of have the respect for each other...so in terms of their problems its more aggressive as to the hormones they are going through...but I havent't experienced much [aggressive behaviour] in your posh schools...*

Teacher T identifies the environment as a predictor of aggressive learner behaviour. He adds that the financial status of a child's family determines their behaviour. (Baker et al., 2018; Holtz et al., 2015; Fatima, & Sheikh, 2014), noted in their research, that socioeconomic status is a predictor of aggressive behaviour in children, and that if they are from a low income household their aggressive behaviour is displayed. Here, Teacher T explains how the children who come from financially stable homes do not display aggressive behaviour at school. He states that these financially stable learners' problems are their hormones rather than any other issue that occurs at other schools. However, he did not specify what his understanding of aggressive learner behaviour was, just what a predictor to this behaviour is.

Teacher T goes on to explain the different financial rankings of schools and what he has witnessed as aggressive learner behaviour.

*Teacher T: ...as soon as you start coming down lower to areas that have more poverty and financial problems, I've noticed that there's a lot of anger problems with the learners and them being really aggressive to each other...and I think that comes down to not having parents or not having parents who were brought up in term of the right way to treat...*

At this point he continued with the socioeconomic predictor and goes on to link this aggressive behaviour, which was displayed in anger, to yet another predictor of aggressive learner behaviour. The issue that he had tried to explain was abandonment, as discussed in the literature review. He mentioned that he noticed aggressive behaviour with children who have no parents or have parents who did not teach them right from wrong. In articles published by Publications (2020), Gombay (2017) and Web (2016), it is stated that some symptoms which indicate abandonment issues are anger and aggression. It should be noted that abandonment can be physical or emotional, as discussed in the literature. Therefore, even if a parent is physically present, they can emotionally neglect the child, leaving him/her to feel abandoned and alone, which leads to aggressive behaviour outbursts.

Teacher T is convinced that environmental factors are the cause of this aggressive behaviour and he wished to go on explaining another belief of his that contributes to aggressive learner behaviour.

*Teacher T... 'coz I noticed that currently at this school boys find it okay and acceptable to hit girls. There is no...they don't find it a problem, and when you ask them, you reprimand them and say what you're doing is wrong, it's illegal, they say no that's fine because of their cultural background...I do find that plays a massive role and obviously having role models as parents...that's where it comes down to I think...I have noticed kids hitting each other on the field, physically hitting each other and kicking each other. I've watched boys hit girls and be okay with it and tell me that it's fine because it happens at home.*

On this account, Teacher T did specify a type of aggressive behaviour, which was the physical type that involved hitting . He linked this type of aggression to culture. Culture and society do play a significant role in aggressive behaviour (Tomar, 2017; Henrich, 2015), as noted in the literature review. He further states that parents are the learners' role models. This encapsulates the social learning theory. The parents, usually the male, of a certain culture, models aggressive behaviour (Airth, 2018) which is perceived as the socially expected behaviour of all males, and in turn reproduces this behaviour when a situation warrants it. An

example of this is what Teacher T spoke about; boys hitting girls, which was acceptable to them because in their culture it is okay for a male to hit a female.

To end his account, Teacher T wanted to add the following:

*I've noticed some verbal abuse from learners who are a little bit rough around the edges, they kind of pick on the learners who are doing quite well and the ones who tend to listen and behave, they try and sidetrack them...*

Teacher T closed by identifying verbal bullying as a type of aggressive behaviour. He has experienced both physical and verbal aggression while out on the field with learners from the foundation phase, right through to the senior phase. In his discussions, Teacher T was able to identify the two types of aggressive behaviour and at least three factors which contribute to aggressive learner behaviour which are; socioeconomic status, abandonment and culture and society.

Upon Teacher T's conclusion of his understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, Teacher C joined in and agreed to the culture as being a predictor of aggressive learner behaviour because she had an experience with a learner who got physically violent with her.

*Teacher C: ...he refused to listen to me on that day and I kept asking him to sit down. He came to the front of the class and took the stick that I use to point at charts and the board and he aimed it at me and it hit my arm...so he was just angry that day because he was being told what to do and he didn't like being told all the time... like sit in your place or whatever it is, and I think it was because of the culture...when I did meet the parents they said he does the same at home because the boys of the family are rulers over the home...I also noticed this with his dad, he couldn't look me in the eye so that told me it was because of the culture issue...*

*Teacher T: " ...it's as if they go into defense mode and they just want to hit and punch and kick".*

The point made by Teacher T, that the aggressive behaviour is a type of a defense mechanism, all the participants in that room have agreed with him. They all identify the aggression as a way the learner uses to defend himself/herself.

As Teacher T concludes his thoughts, Teacher M expresses her understanding of aggressive learner behaviour. Teacher M is a foundation phase teacher.

*Teacher M: For me, I think aggressive learner behaviour, well from my experience with this school will be a child's body language, because lots of children do act out violently; they hit each other out on the field and in the classroom, but there are some children that show aggression like just with what they are doing like with their stationery. They get so frustrated, they take their book and just fling it on the floor, or they just take their chair and drop it on the floor...so to me that shows aggression, besides the other point where they use their hands, physical touching to hurt someone else.*

What Teacher M actually explains here is physical aggression. Any action that can be seen, that includes throwing things, can be classified as physical aggression (McMahon et al., 2019; Allen & Anderson, 2017). Teacher M perceives physical aggression as physical contact with another child. She identified a type of aggressive behaviour, which is, physical aggression.

The Grade R teacher joins in to share her thoughts on aggressive learner behaviour.

*Teacher B: I think for them coming to school and sitting in groups for the first time, they start to hit each other, they bite each other and that is part of the learner aggressive behaviour... and some of them just sit and break their roll-ups...and this is nothing new to me so I have to explain to their parents. When they are outside to play, they fight for toys.*

From this explanation, it seems that much of the grade R aggression is physical because Teacher B explains that she experiences this type of behaviour every year.

While on the issue for fighting over toys that Teacher B mentions, Teacher A, who is also a foundation phase teacher, joins in the discussion and agrees that aggression is physical but adds onto this point.

*Teacher A: ...but for me aggression is also not just physical but also verbal...we've seen it during playtime and even sometimes in class, you know they become aggressive in their speech...if they being bullied, you know vulgarity, those types of words will flow from their mouth to each other...that's with the grade threes.*

*Teacher M: "If they [the grade one learners] are standing in a line they will use words like get out..."*

*Teacher A: ...I did hear a swear word or two but I assume the grade ones hear it from someone else, probably they have seen an altercation, probably between their parents or their siblings...so when they come to school and when they in a situation where they fight or in disagreement they'll tend to use that word.*

Teacher A brings in the concept of observation and modeling of parents or siblings and the use of profanities. This refers to the social learning theory. The learners observe their models, internalize the behaviour and reproduce it – as discussed in the literature.

*Teacher M: It also depends on the situation of the child and what they experience at home. I had a child who hit me once while he was fighting with another learner...it's because he's from the homes, so he's bringing that frustration to school.*

Literature states that a child who lives in an orphanage will be aggressive (Dey et al., 2017). Therefore, this child's aggression can be attributed to where he lives. According to Teacher M it is a matter of bringing their home problems to school.

Another Foundation phase teacher expresses her agreement with learners who live in an orphanage.

*Teacher N: With regards to my kids I can also relate to the children who live in the homes, because they are coming with their own problems and they don't know how to handle it, so it's coming out in an aggressive way. I have a child in my class who just shuts down emotionally and when he can't take it that's when he throws the things down, he wants to be rebellious, he would also go to the extent of hitting other learners...*

From these teachers experiences and understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, it emerges that most of the learners who they are referring to are learners who live in an orphanage or come from an impoverished home. This explains a lot of the learners' behaviours. These teachers identified a contributing factor to aggressive learner behaviour, which is, children who live in a child care institution are prone to displaying aggressive behaviour, as discussed in detail in the literature.

The literature which defines the contributing factors, influences and causes of aggressive learner behaviour, and the theoretical framework, social learning theory, assisted in understanding and separating issues that the participants regard as aggressive learner behaviour. They all have their own ideas about this phenomenon but were sometimes unable

to categorise the behaviours that they have experience with. With the extended knowledge that emerges from literature and theory, it becomes easier to categorise elements and causes of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.

Concluding our first topic, we gradually merged into the next topic:

***2. Elaborate on why your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school is framed the way it is.***

As teachers, we consciously and unconsciously gather information about our learners on a daily basis. The information that we gather frames our understanding of our learners, in this instance, the information will frame our understanding of aggressive learner behaviour. This topic focuses on how the teachers gained their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour which explains why their understanding is framed the way it is.

*Teacher M: My experience with the child itself, that's how I observe it or seen it...also in the news when you listen to other schools about the bullying and how they hurt the other children.*

*Teacher A: ...also from communication with other educators as well...We basically get our knowledge from the environment we in 'coz we are in it for practically most of the day.*

*Teacher N: Even through learners who are aggressive in class, we speak to their parents to find out what's the problem...so you get the information from the parent as well...*

A teacher who is an intermediate and senior phase teacher also adds that she acquires her knowledge from experience as well, she says:

*Teacher K: ...I think it's more through experience of having interaction with the learners, and you meet different learners from various backgrounds and what they bringing with them, and how they are actually reacting and that's how I've learnt.*

The above four teachers seem to share the belief that they acquire knowledge through personal experience with the learners and shared information between colleagues, and between the teacher and parents. It was also mentioned that they gain information through the media. Teachers seem to have this common knowledge that learners “bring” the aggressive behaviour from where they live.

*Teacher J: I think it's more to do with a personal relationship, developing that relationship one-on-one with the learner, and then you are able to identify from your class as a whole who the learners are that are emotionally, some physically and they have issues that they are dealing with...and you are able to pick that up immediately at the beginning of the year when they come into your class due to the way they would answer, the way they would talk.*

*Teacher C: “ [engaging with Teacher J] some of them are silent, they won't even answer...the ones who won't even answer, you know that something is wrong.”*

*Teacher J: The troubled learners just wouldn't speak...then that's how you discover that there's something deeper than just what the child is showing you, you know, after speaking to them and actually getting them to open up to you on a one-on-one level, what it is that is troubling them...that's how you are able to decide, identify whether it's emotional or something like stemming from home.*

Both these teachers have agreed that by getting to know their learners and developing a relationship with them, they are able to tell when something is wrong. However, this can be easily misunderstood because usually at the beginning of a school year there are many learners who may arrive nervous to school. This does not necessarily mean that there is something wrong or something is troubling them. We must be careful not to make conclusions too early in the year without spending more time with the learner and gathering some background information. This also comes down to experience with learners, as the other teachers have

mentioned. Having one-on-one communication with learners is essential as described by (Watson, 2019; Dr Shore, 2016).

*Teacher T: I've had a bit of help from teachers. A couple teachers have helped me before and told me which learners are problem children and kind of done a little bit of background reading on them to find that obviously some of them are in homes, they've lost parents and previous schools as well...I try to take some time to find out about a learner before I'm too hard on a learner...if they're either just being selfish or being a fool then you can kind of like sort that out, but some of them do have bigger problems and they actually need a bit of help...that's how I try to find the time to get to know them.*

When the participants stopped engaging with each other, out of curiosity I've asked if any of them read literature regarding aggressive learner behaviour to increase/expand their knowledge, this was the response.

*Teacher C: Only when we were studying [the initial teaching qualification] we would do that, because we got experience now knowing this is how you handle a certain situation...so basically for me I haven't done any research.*

*Teacher J: I have done some research in terms of ADHD 'coz I had one learner in my class who during discussion and stuff he would just lie flat on the floor and he would do star jumps while I'm teaching... and so I had to go further into actually researching why is this child doing this and I found that upon doing research it was a piece of him paying attention in that manner. He had to do physical exercise in order for him to think 'coz he would answer questions while I'm doing my lesson but he's lying flat on the floor.*

While Teacher C believes that experience is enough to understand and assist learners who display aggressive behaviour, Teacher J did take her understanding one step further by

searching for a deeper truth in reading about one specific aspect, ADHD. This illustrates that knowledge can unravel an element that could have otherwise been overlooked. Aside from this one topic of ADHD being briefly read about, there was no other teacher who indicated that they had attempted furthering their knowledge regarding aggressive learner behaviour through literature.

Once all the participants were satisfied with sharing their views and beliefs about how they have acquired knowledge regarding aggressive learner behaviour, this session was closed and we moved on to the next topic in the next session.

### ***3. Could you discuss in depth how is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school enacted?***

When teachers are faced with aggressive learner behaviour there is always a response. This topic for discussion aims to find out how do teachers enact their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour should they face this type of behaviour. Based on their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, they will respond, thereby enacting their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour.

*Teacher M: Based on my experience, when you call them aside and talk to them in a soft tone they tend to calm down and I think that for me worked quite well. I think that as moms and teachers our job is to display that positiveness so they can give that back to us.*

Teacher A joined in and she said:

*Teacher A: ...two negatives is not going to help the situation so we can't respond in a negative manner as well. I think also our bodily gestures is very important when approaching a situation if the child has become aggressive whether the child is being physical or even verbally abusive. I think also maintaining a good eye contact with the child and as mam did say, how we speak, the levels, the tones that we use...we should take this into consideration when we are trying to stabilise a situation.*

These teachers would prefer the soft approach when faced with learners who display aggressive behaviour. They believe that it is the soft approach of the teacher that will calm down a learner who may be displaying aggressive behaviour. They prefer to take on the one-on-one approach as described by (Watson, 2019).

*Teacher B: “ I would also say involving the parent in a very severe instance...I noticed that when parents know the situation you see a vast difference in the classroom ”*

Teacher B has experienced a positive side of getting parents involved. She notes that by informing the learners’ parents or grandparents it helps the situation because the learner calms down and there is a difference in behaviour.

*Teacher T: I think it differs with who you dealing with, you have an understanding with the kids’ background and why they are like that, I think you can choose which route you are going to use...but I do think that there are some kids who you come hard at...they need to understand that if they’ve done something wrong there is a consequence...like that one time when the boy hit a girl I couldn’t exactly call him aside and speak to him softly and say no it’s okay...*

Teacher T has the belief that a teacher’s response to a learner should be based on who that child is and what they have done.

*Teacher A: ... in response to Teacher T...I think probably our approaches might differ in terms of the ages of the children and the situation because we deal with the lower grades...we find with the smaller children, even if we do tell them no they do tend to listen, but depending again as you said on the situation.*

Teacher A highlighted that a response from a teacher towards a learner would depend on the child's age. While the soft tones may work for the younger learners, it may not work the same for the older ones, and Teacher T has agreed with this view.

Teacher S is also a foundation phase teacher and she added,

*Teacher S: "...it would be different on how you deal with it [respond] in the foundation phase and the senior phase"*

*Teacher N: " I think that each child is different, you will have to handle it in different ways. One solution will not work for all kids".*

'A response from a teacher should not be a blanket rule', is the belief of Teacher N. She explains that each learner has their own personality and has to be treated according to who they are because what could work for one learner would not necessarily work for another. So I've asked Teacher N what response works for her in her classroom, she replied:

*Teacher N: The first thing I do is to try and calm the child down and if that doesn't work give the child a time out and try again and if that doesn't work then I'd contact the parents to try and understand what's the problem or speak to other teachers who may have experienced this problem and then take it from there.*

A clear distinction can be seen between the foundation phase and the intermediate/senior phase. Being calm with the little learners helps the situation, while the older ones begin to display behaviours that could lead to criminal offences . Therefore, the response from teachers in the higher grades are much more firm than the foundation phase.

There is a difference of opinion from an intermediate phase teacher, she says:

*Teacher J: Well I look at it as the approach of a motherly instinct as well, in terms of foundation phase and senior because these children we must remember, school is a home away from home as well for some children. They look to the teacher for security and they not getting that attention at home. If they find that another child in the class is getting more attention that could bring about aggressive behaviour...*

Teacher J feels that all children ought to be treated in a calm manner, the way in which a mother would treat a child because they need this love that they do not get at home, especially with the learners at this school who live in orphanages. A lot of them are neglected and require that extra attention from their teacher. Teacher J believes that this response towards them could help them feel loved and would probably alter their aggressive characteristics. She finds being approachable to the learner makes it easier for the learner to go to the teacher if he/she knows that an incident will upset him/her and may lead to an aggressive outburst.

*Teacher J: Say for example there is an issue of theft and I know who the learner is, I won't just confront him/her in front of the whole class. I will use a lesson and a story to include the topic of theft and try to give out a message to that learner in this manner.*

*Teacher M: I agree with that...because relating that to a story has a greater impact, especially if its a moral story and you ask them, what did you learn from that story...and if you keep instilling that, that child will remember that story.*

*Teacher B: It's actually not good to expose the learner and cause embarrassment because you don't know what the child's situation is at home, so like Teacher J said, the child looks to the teacher for security and the child trusts the teacher*

Based on the fragile lives of learners at this school, these teachers find it more appropriate to respond with care rather than a harsh response.

*Teacher J: ...on the same note, the tone of voice is important so that if there is an aggressive outburst in class the child will know when the teacher means business. The tone of voice will tell the child – you need to hold on –*

*Teacher M: I think also the teacher's facial expression plays a part in the response at the time that an incident happens which will give a message to the child that this now needs to stop...*

*Teacher S: You will also have to stick to your threats, for example if you tell the child you are sending them to the principal's office; stick to it otherwise that child is going to take advantage of you.*

Teacher J, M and S are of the opinion, that while they should care for and love their learners, there also has to be an indicator to the learner that the aggressive behaviour has to stop. They agree that the tone of voice and facial expressions do play a role in halting an aggressive outburst.

*Teacher T: "Out on the field I will immediately isolate the aggressive learner or else the other learners will think that behaviour is accepted and they will do the same".*

According to Teacher T, by immediately isolating that one learner, it eliminates a trail of other aggressive behaviours that could arise from other learners. Considering a time out for the learner is also suggested by Dr Shore (2016). Teacher T believes that this will make them realize that their behaviour will not be accepted and the other learners will get a message through this as well.

The participants had nothing further to add to this topic of discussion, we therefore moved forward to the last topic of discussion, which was:

**3(i). Tell us more about methods of discipline that you believe are appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour and why.**

During the discussion regarding a teacher's response to learners in their classrooms, most of the teachers used discipline strategies to explain how they respond to learners who display aggressive behaviour.

When I began this session I asked them to specifically describe the discipline method that they use to address aggressive behaviour in their classrooms and out on the field.

*Teacher M: Well one of the methods that I do use for the smaller ones is break detention, but depending on the offence I'll use that method...but they would get to eat their lunch in class. I think every child wants to go out on the field during break, so yes it would have an impact on them so the next time they will consider...so for me break detention works.*

Little learners look forward to the lunch break as it is also their time to play with their friends. Teacher M uses this knowledge to enforce discipline with learners. She believes that if she takes away this break time from the learner, then he/she will know not to behave in a certain way in future because he/she will not want to lose out on his/her break time again. Teacher M states that this method of discipline does work for her because she has seen that the learners try not to repeat a behaviour that gets them break detention. However, according to (Dias, 2017), punitive discipline can have a negative impact on and increase aggressiveness within learners.

*Teacher C: For me I feel like punishment is not always good...I believe that if they do something for example, if they misbehave at a game, you will tell them that they will not participate in the next match...an incentive also works and tell them that if they behave throughout this game then in the next game you will be that captain...so I feel like you must also offer incentives...I feel that incentives work because they lack encouragement so they need that encouragement, that's why they behave in that way, so for me that approach has always worked...*

With Teacher C's point of view, a quite different stance can be noted. She would rather offer incentives to limit aggressive behaviour, and through her years of teaching experience she has seen this method work for her. It is a method where a teacher already knows the learners who display aggressive behaviour, and before they act up the teacher knows what to do to avoid aggressive outbursts. In this way the learner/s have something to look forward to and this incentive restricts their behaviour.

*Teacher A: I think based on the type of misconduct that has taken place...in my class I have the merit and demerit system used on a chart and colours that demonstrate the severity of the misconduct. So if the child was very aggressive that constitutes for a red dot...I agree with mam [Teacher C] as well about motivating and encouraging them, but at the same time disciplining, so I would say...time out in the naughty corner during class time, no play time...as mam [Teacher M] said as well, they want to spend time with their friends...taking that time away from them will make them think that next time they must not do that offence.*

Teacher A uses the merit and demerit system, so when the learner attains a colour that depicts a very bad behaviour, that learner will get the time out or break detention. She has a system that would lead to the time out, which is the “naughty corner”, or the break detention discipline method and says that these methods also work for her because the learners do not want to spend their break in the classroom but rather want to be out playing with their friends, or they do not want to sit in the naughty corner and learn their spelling or their mathematics. The “naughty corner” and break detention can be punitive in nature, which has the potential to lead to further aggressive outbursts in the future (Dias, 2017).

*Teacher M: I also do give certificates for good behaviour and I found that this also works because the few learners who don't get will try to work for it the next time...so therefore it does depend on the offence.*

*Teacher S: I had a child in my class who was on Ritalin and he had major behavioural problems but he was so scared of making his mom upset, so*

*whenever he did something in class, all we had to do was give his mom a call and make his mom speak to...from thereon after he was the best behaved child...so discipline works for different children in different ways.*

In some instances getting a parent involved does work, depending on the level of interest the parent has in the learner's school activities. With Teacher S's account, parent involvement worked well as it got one learner in particular to transform from a learner who displayed aggressive behaviour, to an obedient learner. It must be noted though, that this method of discipline will not work for all learners because many learners live in an orphanage and they do not get that personal care or attention from their house mothers.

*Teacher T: " With some kids you would have to isolate and embarrass them for them to stop that behaviour".*

Teacher T is of the opinion that harsh discipline such as embarrassment will stop aggressive behaviour instantly with the older learners. Here again, (Dias, 2017) does advise about the negative impact that punitive discipline carries long term.

*Teacher B: " I believe the royal ingredient for discipline is love".*

The ingredient of love works with majority of the school learners as we have experienced, and this is how Teacher B decided to end this session, by adding this royal ingredient of love. It is not a preferred method by some, but to those who do believe in it and use it, it does work well for them.

On the note of love, the focus group discussion came to an end.

### *5.2.2 Collage Construction*

Usually, during the process of constructing a collage, a group of participants would meet with the researcher, and bring in their images which are related to the research questions. However, due to the pandemic we are currently facing, we are obliged to adhere to all the health and safety protocols which involves no gathering and no exchange of paper. Therefore, I have addressed my participants on our Whatsapp platform that I have created for the purpose of this study. I did manage to engage with them regarding the collage construction. I sent them the questions, and their response to each question was submitted using an image.

Each image that has been submitted for each question will be briefly discussed below and the collage will be attached as an appendix.

There were three questions that had to be answered.

#### ***1. What is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school?***

**Teacher S** has submitted an image that depicts one child who has a fist ready to punch another child. The interpretation of this, is that Teacher S understands aggressive behaviour as physical aggression.

**Teacher N** has submitted an image of a child who looks angry because he is being pulled by another child. The concept of physical aggression arose here again.

**Teacher M** has submitted an image of two little boys who are engaging in a fist fight. It is clear that physical aggression is understood as aggressive learner behaviour here in this image.

**Teacher C** has submitted an image that includes multiple depictions of bullying on one image. She perceives aggressive behaviour as bullying. Bullying falls within both the physical and verbal category of aggression.

**Teacher K** submitted an image that depicts an angry learner. For her, aggression is displayed in anger. Outbursts in anger can be physical or verbal aggression.

With the images submitted for the first question, it can be noted that all the participants regard aggression as physical and/or verbal. This is in line with the literature as described by (Salimi, 2019; Williams, 2015). The concepts that has been described through these images are types of aggressive learner behaviour.

***2. Why is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school framed the way it is?***

**Teacher S** chose an image that shows a teacher holding a child and talking to him. This depicts a relationship that is being developed and this is perhaps the method Teacher S uses to frame her understanding of aggressive learner behaviour.

**Teacher N** made a similar choice of image where a teacher is seen going down to the level of the child and talking to him. For Teacher N, I believe it is also a development of a relationship with the child and her experience with learners that gives her an understanding of aggressive learner behaviour.

**Teacher M** has submitted an image that shows a teacher who is gently separating two boys from a fight. From the discussions, it was clear that Teacher M gains her understanding of aggressive learner behaviour through her experience with the learners and through communication with them.

**Teacher C** chose to explain that she acquired her understanding of aggressive learner behaviour through an image that shows a teacher in front of her class and speaking to those learners. Going back to our discussions, I am reminded that Teacher C gains her understanding by talking to her learners and listening to their tone that tells her if something is wrong with them. She also gathers her understanding through experience with the learners.

**Teacher K** depicts her understanding through an image that shows a teacher speaking to her learner. Experience and communication with the learners are the answers for Teacher K.

From the images submitted for question two, it can be noted that the participants frame their understanding via experience and communication with the learners. There was no indication of additional knowledge or further education and training that has been used to frame their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour.

**3. *How is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school enacted? In your response, include methods of discipline that you believe are appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour.***

**Teacher S** used an image that includes four types of discipline strategies. She believes that time out, taking away privileges, creating a reward system and establishing a daily routine for a learner who displays aggressive behaviour, will assist that learner to improve his/her behaviour.

**Teacher N** found five methods of discipline that works for her. This image includes having a positive approach, keeping a gentle persona, setting boundaries, modify the aggressive behaviour and offer emotional coaching to the learner. Teacher N believes that the discipline strategy would depend on the situation and how severe the aggressive outburst has been.

**Teacher M** has submitted the same image as Teacher S. She also believes that time out, taking away privileges, creating a reward system and establishing a daily routine would positively assist in improving the behaviour of a learner.

**Teacher C**'s choice for discipline is talking gently to her learner. Her image shows a teacher who is speaking to a learner and calming him down.

**Teacher K** explained that taking away privileges would be the discipline strategy that she would employ. Her image shows a teacher talking to a learner and holding on to his school bag.

That brings the collage construction to an end. Unfortunately, not all the participants have submitted their images that could be analysed, interpreted and added to the collage.

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

Chapter five presented the data that had been generated for this study and the analysis of it. The data had been generated from focus group discussions and a collage construction. The focus was aggressive learner behaviour; what were the teachers understanding of it, why is their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school framed the way it is, and how is their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour enacted, this will include discipline methods that teachers find appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour.

Qualitative data had been gathered during the research process and rich descriptions of each topic were produced by the participants. Upon finalising the participants' accounts of aggressive learner behaviour, it can be noted that from both the focus group discussions and the collage construction there was no evidence of knowledge and skills arising from further education and training relating to the provision of appropriate learner support.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study was to explore teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. In attempting to answer the research questions, I have set out the data generation instruments that would have gathered the data that was needed to fulfil the objectives of this study.

This chapter will include the summary of the findings and provide the necessary recommendations.

#### 6.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

There were three major topics for discussion with the third topic having a sub-topic that provided rich data for this study. This section will outline the summaries for those discussions.

##### ***1. Tell us about your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.***

During this topic of discussion, it has emerged that teachers understood aggressive learner behaviour as physical acts of violence and angry verbal outbursts. One teacher added that she noticed emotional aggression that is displayed in the learner's writing. Some of the teachers shared that they believe the learners display aggressive behaviour because of the circumstances that they live in. The conditions that were spoken of were children who live in the homes and their emotional instability. Most of the teachers are of the opinion that they "bring" their home conditions and frustrations to school. It is perceived that this behaviour is optional at times. Others added that the learners watch and learn - they watch what happens at home and then learn that behaviour which is repeated at school (Nabavi, 2012) - which is part of what the social learning theory states. However, there seems to be a lack of a deeper understanding regarding aggressive learner behaviour and how this behaviour is caused or influenced among learners at a primary school. All the teachers who participated were aware that the learners who live in orphanages and informal settlements do display various behavioural problems.

***2. Elaborate on why your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school is framed the way it is.***

When the teachers were presented with this topic for discussion, they have all asserted that their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour is framed with the knowledge they gain through experience with the learners, communication with the learners' parents and other teachers. Their experience entails the number of years in the profession and exposure to aggressive behaviour over the years they have taught. They also gather information from other teachers who may know a learner on a personal level and can assist in understanding that learner and the problems that are faced by that learner. There was one teacher who noted that she also gains her knowledge of aggressive learner behaviour from the news (media) which frames her understanding of this phenomenon.

***3. Could you discuss in depth how is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school enacted?***

In this regard, majority of the teachers placed on record that they would respond calmly to aggressive learner behaviour, try to calm down the learner with a soft toned voice and ease up the current situation. Others believed that it depends on who the learner is, what grade the learner is in, and the severity of the situation. It was noted that a harsh response may be used on a learner in the intermediate/senior phase, but the foundation phase learners should have a more calm response from the teacher. Certain circumstances would warrant a firm, no nonsense tone to send a strong message to the learner that his/her behaviour will not be accepted (Dr Shore, 2016). However, if the situation is mild, the teacher should isolate the learner and speak to him/her on-on-one. This would avoid causing embarrassment to the learner and provoke the situation any further. Ultimately, a teacher's understanding of aggressive learner behaviour would bring out a specific response which corresponds to that understanding.

***3(i). Tell us more about methods of discipline that you believe are appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour and why.***

There was no blanket rule discussed for discipline that could work for aggressive learner behaviour. All teachers have agreed that the discipline measure would depend on the misdemeanor of the learner, however, a few methods which are used have been discussed. A few foundation phase teachers use break detention and the naughty corner as a way to discipline a learner who displays aggressive behaviour. It has been explained that this works because the little learners look forward to going out and playing with their friends during break. This makes

them avoid a certain type of behaviour so that they do not have to spend their lunch break in the classroom while all their friends are out playing. An intermediate phase teacher indicated that offering incentives has worked well for her and she will continue using this method. She explained that this method works well because the learner feels like he/she has something to work towards and actually achieve if they do display good behaviour. Another method that emerged was isolation and embarrassment. This came with an explanation that the older learners do not like to be embarrassed in front of other learners. They therefore try to avoid the aggressive behaviour in future, so that they do not receive that punishment. However, it must be noted that we ought to be careful when employing punitive discipline methods, as this may have long term negative effects on the learner (Dias, 2017).

### 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDY

The phenomenon of aggressive learner behaviour is not one that is new in the field of education. There are a variety of resources which are available that would enhance teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. The recommendations offered below can be considered by teachers to address concerns regarding aggressive learner behaviour and ultimately enhance the quality of teaching and learning in and out of the classroom.

#### ***1. Teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school***

Aggressive learner behaviour should not only be understood with regard to the physical or verbal activities of a learner. Factors contributing to this behaviour ought to be understood first, as described by (Govender, 2015), in order to understand the behaviour itself and then adequately assist a learner who displays aggressive behaviour. I have noted that a teacher's understanding is very limited in this regard, so here are a few points that could help expand the understanding that a teacher has:

- If you notice that the aggressive behaviour is constant and shows a specific pattern, do a background check on the learner before making conclusions regarding a learner.
- Patterns in a behaviour would mean that there are certain situations that the learner would react to. Pay attention to these situations or events because that would be an indicator of what is the trigger to the learner's aggressive behaviour.
- If the learner's parents are involved and shows interest in the learner's school activities, meet with them. This would reveal issues that you may not be aware of, and once you

have knowledge of it, you will be able to handle the situation appropriately and provide adequate assistance for the learner.

- If the learner lives in an orphanage, make an attempt to meet with the person/s who are in charge of the learner so that they can make you aware of what goes on after school hours with that learner.
- In the event a learner has no adult supervision outside of school who can be trusted, then build a trust relationship with that learner, and eventually he/she will confide in you and you will gather all the necessary information to adequately assist the learner.

## ***2. Ways in which a teacher's understanding of aggressive learner behaviour is framed***

It is a general and common conception that experience is the greatest teacher. Added to a teacher's experience with learners, they have gained knowledge via communication with learners, parents and other teachers, that they have used to frame their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. However, there are a lot of in-depth information that experience itself is unable to cover. There are various authentic and reliable sources from which a teacher can acquire knowledge regarding aggressive learner behaviour, or any other school related issue that will frame our understanding of these issues. Here are a few ideas:

- The DBE could employ academics in the field of education to provide workshops at schools, in order for every teacher to benefit, as aggressive learner behaviour is a rising concern in all schools (Dias, 2017).
- If it is your interest, and you can afford it, further your study in education. This expands your knowledge and allows you to have multiple perspectives on school related issues.
- If you are unable to further your study in education, then consult with colleagues who have studied further and possess the necessary tools, skills and knowledge to access reliable and trustworthy academic sources that you can gain knowledge from.

## ***3. Responses towards aggressive learner behaviour based on an understanding of this phenomenon.***

A response to certain kinds of behaviours can either worsen or calm the situation at hand. Therefore, understanding aggressive learner behaviour is the first step in understanding how to

handle the situation as a whole. The teacher's immediate response toward a learner is essential for taking control of a current situation, then all other procedures can follow afterwards. Here are a few ways in which you can respond appropriately:

- Avoid causing embarrassment to the learner who is displaying aggressive behaviour. Speak in a firm yet calm tone to separate the learner from the situation (Dr Shore, 2016).
- After you have managed to separate the learner from the situation, speak to him/her one-on-one (Watson, 2019).
- Thereafter you can follow the necessary disciplinary protocols, depending on the offence.

***3(i). Methods of discipline that are believed to be appropriate in addressing aggressive learner behaviour and why.***

Enforcing discipline measures are one of the most important steps in addressing aggressive learner behaviour. Should discipline be administered inappropriately it would not help the learner but rather, increase the aggressive tendencies within that learner. What could seem to help the situation for that moment could cause long term damage for the learner. For example, if a learner struggles with a fear of abandonment and he/she is left alone in a classroom during the lunch break, or in a naughty corner, this could deepen his/her fear because he/she is now also feeling abandoned at school, by the person he/she was supposed to trust the most – their teacher. Maybe a few tips which are listed below could assist:

- If you do choose to use a time out, let the learner know that you are around and you haven't completely left him/her alone.
- As mentioned earlier, the tone of voice must be firm yet calm, giving the learner a message that his/her behaviour is not accepted.
- If you know that a certain learner regularly displays aggressive behaviour, provide responsibilities for him/her (Watson, 2019). This gives them a sense of importance and a feeling of being needed. It will also motivate them to start portraying positive behavioural patterns.
- Find the positive characteristics of a learner who displays aggression and highlight those. The learner would want to display more of the behaviour that you praise.
- Search in further trustworthy literature on how to discipline a learner who displays aggressive behaviour.

Some helpful tips on administering discipline are shared by Watson (2019) and Dr Shore (2016) in the literature review of this study. Their studies on discipline strategies can be further explored which would enhance our discipline methods adopted in our classrooms and out on the field.

#### 6.4 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The journey through teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school has been a tough and complicated one. However, it has brought to the surface that as much as teachers are dedicated to their work, their understanding beyond the classroom is limited. Teachers need to be motivated and encouraged to develop and expand their knowledge beyond their everyday lesson planning and teaching in the classroom. The field of education has proven to be a field that encapsulates other fields, such as the field of psychology. With limited knowledge of other aspects that surround learners, our tools and skills are limited in this field and unfortunately we may not be making much of a difference. Knowledge is power and power can be used for positive change.

*“A good head and a good heart are always a formidable combination. But when you add to that a literate tongue or pen, then you have something very special.”*

**- Nelson Mandela**

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## education

Department:  
Education  
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma/Buyi Ntuli

Tel: 033 392 1063/51

Ref.:2/4/8/4160

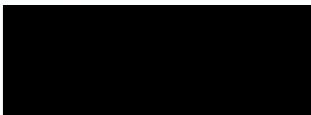
Ms Emily Estella Perumal  
P.O. Box 562086  
**CHARTSWORTH**  
4030

Dear Ms Perumal

### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: "**TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF AGGRESSIVE LEARNER BEHAVIOUR IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL**";, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 06 July 2020 to 10 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma/Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.



Dr. EV Nzama  
Head of Department: Education  
Date: 06 July 2020

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Through a Revolutionary Education for all...

#### KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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PERMISSION LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL

08 July 2020

ATTENTION: THE PRINCIPAL, DR. N. G. REDDY - QUEENSBURGH PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dear Sir

**Request for Gate-keeper permission**

I, Emily Estella Perumal, am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education, Edgewood campus. As part of my Master of Education degree, I am conducting research that requires teachers' participation.

The title of my research project is: Teachers' Understanding of Aggressive Learner Behaviour in a Primary School.

The focus of my study is the teachers' understanding of aggressive behaviour among learners, within the context of a primary school. As teachers' understanding of this phenomenon (aggressive learner behaviour) varies, so too does their actions and response to this phenomenon, and consequences of such action based on their individual understanding.

Therefore, this study aims to uncover, what are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, why is this understanding framed the way that it is, and how is this understanding enacted. Right after the unpacking of these truths, participants will be empowered with academic tools that may assist them with the moulding, development or re-shaping of their understanding (only if it is required) of this phenomenon.

In order to facilitate this research project, your permission is required to gather the desired data at your institution.

All participants will be given consent letters and will be provided with the option to decline participation at any point during the research process, without suffering any prejudice. The participants' responses will be treated with confidentiality and no actual names will be documented. Pseudonyms will be used to represent the names of the participant and of your school.

Should you require further information regarding this research project, please contact me without hesitation using the following contact details:

Mobile number : 060 5038 818  
Email address : [emilyperumal@gmail.com](mailto:emilyperumal@gmail.com)  
Supervisor : Dr. Patrick Mveli  
Supervisor's number : (031) 260 3549  
Supervisor's email : [Mwelip@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mwelip@ukzn.ac.za)

UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**  
Research Office, Westville Campus  
Govan Mbeki Building  
Private Bag X 54001  
Durban  
4000  
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA  
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609  
Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Yours Sincerely

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Miss E. E. Perumal

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Dr. N. G. Reddy (Principal)

### Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

August 21, 2020

Dear Colleague

My name is Emily Estella Perumal, a Master of Education student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Edgewood. My mobile number is 060 5038 818, and my e-mail address is emilyperumal@ymail.com

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research regarding teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school. The aim and purpose of this research is to determine what are teachers' understanding of aggressive learner behaviour, why is this understanding framed the way that it is and how is this understanding enacted with regards to discipline techniques. The study is expected to enroll 9 participants, one teacher from each grade, that is, four teachers from the foundation phase, four teachers from the intermediate phase/senior phase and one sports coach who represents both phases from the school. It will involve the following procedures: two data generation instruments, viz, Focus Group Interviews and Collage Construction. The Focus Group Interviews will require discussions to be audio-recorded so that they may be analyzed at a later time. The Collage Construction will need teachers to gather images/pictures that best represents/describes their understanding of the phenomenon, aggressive learner behaviour. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to last approximately two weeks.

We hope that the study will create the following benefits: An in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, aggressive learner behaviour. Attaining this understanding through research can assist teachers to alter their pedagogy that will accommodate learners who come from various backgrounds that influence their aggressive behaviour, and this could further assist teachers in choosing appropriate discipline measures.

Considering the regulations due to Covid-19, these interactive sessions may take place via social media, such as WhatsApp video group calls or Zoom (depending on which is better suited for participants). Submitting images to construct the collage will also take place over social media platforms and you will be given notice in advance about these online sessions.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at:

Mobile number : 060 5038 818  
Email address : [emilyperumal@ymail.com](mailto:emilyperumal@ymail.com)  
Supervisor : Dr. Patrick Mwel  
Supervisor's number : (031) 260 3549  
Supervisor's email : [Mwelip@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mwelip@ukzn.ac.za)

or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participation is voluntary and the participant will be free to withdraw from the research process at any time, without suffering any prejudice. Any information that the participant may divulge will be treated with strict confidentiality as stipulated in the ethics application, that had been approved by the DOE KZN.

Should a participant wish to withdraw from the research process, that participant may send me a private message and this as well will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Costs that may be incurred during the research process will be data for the use of social media. Unfortunately, there will not be any reimbursements for these costs incurred.

Your identity will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used to represent your name and the name of your school.

As soon as the desired data for the study has been gathered, analyzed and utilized to compile the dissertation, it will be discarded off. The researcher will delete all information that may be stored on social media and a USB.

---

## CONSENT

I \_\_\_\_\_ have been informed about the study entitled 'Teachers' Understanding of Aggressive Learner Behaviour in a Primary School' by Emily Estella Perumal.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study which will include Focus Group Interviews and a Collage Construction.

I have been given an opportunity to ask questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at:

Mobile number : 060 5038 818  
Email address : [emilyperumal@ymail.com](mailto:emilyperumal@ymail.com)  
Supervisor : Dr. Patrick Mveli  
Supervisor's number : (031) 260 3549  
Supervisor's email : [Mwelip@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Mwelip@ukzn.ac.za)

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researcher then I may contact:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE**

**INTRODUCTION**

- All group discussion sessions will be audio recorded and later transcribed.
- Participants' identity will be anonymous; they will be given pseudonyms.
- Discussion will take place on Zoom online platform due to the occurrence of covid-19.

**QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION TOPICS**

1. Tell us about your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in your classroom and out on the field.
2. Elaborate on how you have acquired this understanding of aggressive learner behaviour.
3. Could you discuss in depth how you would respond when faced with these types of behaviours?
4. Tell us more about methods of discipline you believe are appropriate to rectify aggressive learner behaviour and why?

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION SCHEDULE**

TOPIC	WEEK OF DATA GENERATION	PARTICIPANT	PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSE
		Participant	
		Participant	

NB: Copies will be made to accommodate 9 participants and as discussions move forward.

### COLLAGE CONSTRUCTION

#### A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THIS INSTRUMENT:

- This is an arts-based method for collecting data in a qualitative research study.
- Participants will be allowed to express their understanding of aggressive learner behaviour using images.
- Their tacit thoughts and feelings regarding aggressive learner behaviour can be unfolded through images from the internet, magazines, newspaper or any source that highlights aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school.
- These images can be used to supplement spoken words that will be attained during the focus group discussions.
- Participants' identities will be kept anonymous during the process by not revealing their correct names when attaching their images to the collage.
- Due to the restrictions that Covid-19 has placed on schools, I will use this method of data collection to replace observations, in the event we do not return to school in time or circumstances that could alter practical field work.
- Images can be collected via social media, such as WhatsApp, if schools are not reopened, or if we are not allowed to meet and exchange these images due to the restriction on gatherings and exchange of paper.

#### THE RESEARCH PROCESS:

- Questions will be asked to the participants. These questions will be based on the main research questions of the study.
- These questions will be answered through the use of images.
- Images will be sent to the researcher.
- These images will be used to create a collage and will then be interpreted to inform the research study

#### THE QUESTIONS:

1. What is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school?
2. How have you attained this understanding?
3. What form of discipline do you think is best suited to address aggressive learner behaviour?

COLLAGE CONSTRUCTION

1. What is your understanding of aggressive learner behaviour in a primary school?



COLLAGE CONSTRUCTION

2. How have you attained this understanding?

*Teacher S*



*Teacher N*



*Teacher M*

*Teacher C*



*Teacher K*



COLLAGE CONSTRUCTION

3. What form of discipline do you think is best suited for aggressive learner behaviour?



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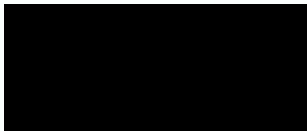
### **LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

**TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF AGGRESSIVE LEARNER  
BEHAVIOUR IN A PRIMARY SCHOOL** by Emily Estella Perumal.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



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