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## Aggression in the classroom

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## Aggression in the classroom

### Abstract

This study examined how aggression in the classroom influenced the learning climate. Types of aggression and causal factors were discussed. Guidelines for teachers on the successful management of student aggression were presented. Also, conclusions were drawn from the literature, and recommendations were made to help teachers in the classroom by improving their skills concerning student aggression.

**Aggression in the Classroom**

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**Of the Requirements for the degree**

**Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education**

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**by**

**Heidi Reaman**

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Has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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8/19/02

Date Approved

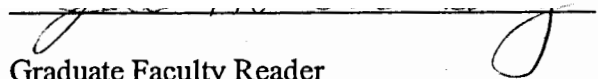


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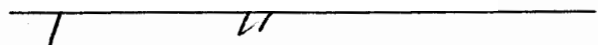


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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Aggression is any behavior that results in physical or mental injury to any person, animal, or destruction of property. There are three forms of aggression. Aggressive actions can be accidental, in which there is no intentionality, or they can be instrumental actions, in which the child deliberately employs aggressive behaviors in pursuit of a goal, where persons, animals, or property can be hurt, or hostile actions, in which the child acts to cause harm to another person. Teachers must assess the situation to determine motive, and then act accordingly.

Peer interactions in their earliest forms emerge from play in which infants treat each other as they would treat a toy (Canter, 1992). Unintentional aggression is a common and natural form of behavior for infants and toddlers. These accidental behaviors can enable young children to achieve desired results and, in time, can easily develop into instrumental forms of aggression. Aggressive behavior is a deterrent to friendships and social success. Aggressive behavior is responsive to environmental influences and can be encouraged or discouraged by experiences in home and school.

Tucker-Ladd (2000) suggested that by the time children are five years they have learned to be kind and caring, or aggressive. There are six factors associated with angry, aggressive children. The first factor involves children with hyperactive, impulsive temperament. The second factor involves parents who have negative, critical attitudes towards their children. The third factor concerns parents who provide poor supervision and permit their children to use aggression as a means of gaining power. The fourth

factor lists parents who use power tactics such as punishment, threats, and violent or loud outbursts to get their way with their children and with others. The fifth factor involves peers and their influence on each other's aggression through modeling. Finally, a sixth factor involves television, as it should be viewed as one of the major socializers of children's aggression. Once children learn how to get their way, this way of behaving tends to remain stable by five years of age (Tucker-Ladd, 2000).

The family has historically had the biggest effect on childhood development. In the family, individuals learn values, morals, problem-solving techniques, and prosocial behaviors that will prepare them for life.

Social learning theory is one branch of general learning theory. Albert Bandura was a major social learning theorist who emphasized the social nature of learning and acknowledged that cognitive factors influence learning, and also advocated that the concept of reinforcement must be reexamined (Canter, 1992). A central component in social learning theory is modeling or observational learning. Bandura demonstrated that children could learn or acquire new behavior by observing another person performing the behavior and that the child need not perform the behavior for learning to occur. Canter (1992) stated that social learning theorists acknowledge that learning is a significant part of development, but they also believe that learning takes place in a social setting. Children are social beings and are heavily influenced by observing the behavior of other people. Bandura held the view that aggression is learned from observing aggressive models and from receiving or expecting payoffs following aggression. Payoffs may be in one of the following forms: a) stopping aggression by others, b) getting praise or status or



some other goal by being aggressive, c) getting self reinforcement and private praise, and d) reducing tension.

Much attention has been directed toward how the family structure influences emotional development, and how children learn to relate to others. Recent research studies by Parke and Ladde (1992), Pettit and Mize (1993), and Putalliz and Heflin (1990) revealed which interactions within the primary social context of the family may influence the development and maintenance of relations with peers. There are three core models of how family interactions may alter peer relations: (a) discipline styles that promote various types of behaviors in the child; (b) parent-child relationships whose quality modifies the development of emotional regulation processes and that serves as representational models of relationships; and (c) parental behaviors that teach or fail to teach children social competence.

Tucker-Ladd (2000) revealed that family interaction patterns and parental discipline practices strongly influenced the development of aggressive child behaviors. I witnessed an example of this effect in a preschool classroom setting. A child, John, who was five years of age, (I have changed his name to protect confidentiality) was painting at the easel. He was out of his favorite color "red" and began to throw a temper tantrum. I approached him and we were able to communicate that he needed more paint. I proceeded to get the paint for him and place it in the container. In order to ease John's tension, another classmate encouraged him to sit in a chair, and finger paint at the table. At this point, John began to hit, spit, scratch, kick, swear and scream at this child and others (adults included) who were in the classroom. In John's earlier years, he was

abused by his step-father, who had attempted to keep John, at age three, quiet by tying him in a chair and placing duct tape over his mouth.

Foster and Robin (1988) proposed that the normative stresses and challenges associated with adolescence provide fertile ground for the development of conflict in families with one or more of the following risk factors: (a) The family that has poor communication and problem-solving skills, particularly when discussing disagreements; (b) The family in which cognitive distortions are related to family interactions and family members' behavior; and, (c) the family that has structural patterns that include, but are not limited to, couple disharmony, maladaptive coalitions among family members, and failure of parents to work well as a team. Laub and Lauritsen (1998) concluded that child abuse, inadequate child-rearing practices, disruptions in family functioning, antisocial parents, and aggressive interactions between siblings are risk factors that are associated with adolescent aggression at school. Gwartney-Gibbs, Stockard, and Bohmer (1987) stated that perpetrators who have a family history of observing, or experiencing abuse are more likely to inflict abuse, violence, and aggression. As one can clearly see from the earlier illustration, John was affected by the abuse he witnessed in his home and began to inflict abuse on others.

Hamalainen and Pulkkinen (1996) studied prosocial behavior and social skills of young children. Piaget developed the stages of cognitive development which included the preoperational stage. In this stage, children are egocentric because they see the world from their own perspective (Bailey, 1994). Children focus on aspects of situations that are important to them. Adults play an important role in helping children develop

prosocial attitudes and behaviors because children live what they learn (Nelson, Lott, & Glenn, 1997; Wittmer & Honin, 1994).

When teacher intervention is not necessary, students should use conflict resolution steps. This form of resolution involves the following steps: 1) defining the problem, 2) generating solutions, 3) reaching agreements, 4) implementing solutions, and 5) evaluating whether or not the problem was solved (Sloane, 1998). Using these problem-solving steps and taking responsibility for their actions can help students learn to listen, understand other perspectives, recognize problems, and look for alternative solutions (Baily, 1994).

Yoshikawa (1994) noted that early aggressive and antisocial behaviors persist, and often become more serious as time passes. Many children with early aggression grow up to be good citizens when they have learned to control their aggressive behavior. Society, schools, parents, and the children could prevent much of the later aggression if an effort was made to detect the problems early and help was given. It is crucial that we all learn prosocial behavior, starting early in life. Aggressive children often come from aggressive homes; not only are their parents and others within the family physical with each other, but even the child's own aggressiveness has been harshly punished. Physical punishment teaches that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems.

We all frequently face an environment that presents frustrating, unpleasant experiences, as well as cues that suggest there would be certain payoffs for different courses of action. Inside us are a variety of emotional responses, such as anger, numerous motivations and urges to seek certain payoffs, and complex cognitive processes for weighing the pros and cons for different alternative responses, including aggression or

violence, passive withdrawal, depression, increased striving to succeed, reasonable assertive handling of the situation, and other possible responses. Eventually the person chooses a response and acts, then the results of that response are observed and evaluated in terms of their effectiveness. If the response is reinforced, it is likely to be used again. There is no doubt that aggression pays off. Parents who yell and threaten punishment get results. The child who hits the hardest gets the toy. Such a message is a powerful threat and often an effective one, proving once again that unfortunately, aggression pays off. It is not necessary that aggressors be especially mean to get their way. The slightest overt hint of anger can communicate in a large way.

Illustratively, Richman, Stevenson, and Graham (1982) found aggression-related behaviors (e.g., overactivity and restlessness) at three years of age to be associated with antisocial behaviors at eight years of age. Kupersmidt and Patterson (1991) found teacher ratings of acting-out behavior among second and third graders predicted delinquent behaviors two years later.

When students do not take responsibility for their behavior, then schools must take steps to protect others. Schools have made the educational environment safer by the installation of metal detectors and routine locker checks. Some states have adopted zero tolerance laws; others have required school districts to establish alternative centers where students remain until their behavior improves.

As educators, we must understand aggression and violence in children and youth. Although teachers may not eliminate all inappropriate behavior, they can help children and youth to improve inappropriate behaviors and to become successful. Teachers and school personnel must intervene early in children's development. This is done by using

effective classroom management procedures, by engaging academic instruction, and by giving instruction in prosocial behavior. This negative behavior may be a result of coercive parenting, direct observation, and indirect experience via television, books, movies, and so forth. Whatever the cause, aggressive children have tremendous difficulty interacting effectively with their peers and teachers in school, often resulting in poor educational experiences and under-achievement.

As children enter elementary school they are confronted, many for the first time, with myriad social demands for which they may not be prepared. A number of children will begin to display aggressive behavior in their efforts to solve these social problems and to avoid undesirable academic tasks. Thus, entrance into school has been associated with increased risk for the display of aggressive behavior by some students. For example, in a longitudinal study of aggressive behavior among young children from low-income neighborhoods in Chicago, Van Acker and colleagues (Guerra, N. G., Huesmann, L. R., Tolan, P. H., Van Acker, R., & Eron, L.D., 1990) found a significant increase in the level of teacher-rated aggression in children across the primary grades. In first grade, the percentage of students displaying clinical levels of aggression (4.9%) was roughly equivalent to the expected level (4.5%) based on national averages. By the end of the second grade, however, these same children displayed levels of aggression more than twice that of the national average (10.7%). The trend increased again in grade 3 (12%), and leveled off in grade 4 (11.5%), but it increased again in grade 5 (17.9%), to a level almost 4 times greater than the national average. According to Loeber (1990), the best way to predict that young children will behave aggressively is to observe their early behavior. Children who were prosocial, that is who avoided aggression and were popular

at age eight, were also prosocial twenty-two years later. It is crucial that we learn prosocial behavior starting early in life. Physical punishment teaches that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems. These data argue persuasively for early intervention in our schools to prevent development of aggressive behavior.

When children enter school, they bring with them behaviors they learned earlier in life. Through observation, it is relatively easy for professionals to identify those who are at risk, and who will develop serious problems with aggression. Children's problems include significantly higher rates of noncompliance to teacher directives, increased levels of aggressive behavior and overt rejection by peers (Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995).

Carr, Taylor, and Robinson (1991) examined interactions of preschoolers with student teachers and identified two groups of students. One group, which they labeled "problem children," displayed a variety of challenging behaviors such as hitting, kicking, biting, and throwing objects. The second group of children were generally well behaved and compliant children and were labeled "nonproblem children." Problem children were provided fewer opportunities for instruction and were assigned activities designed to provoke the least resistance from them. Carr and his associates concluded that the students became aggressive to distract the teacher from the learning task, or to escape from instruction and difficult assignments. Gunter, Jack, Depaepe, Reed, and Harrison (1994) wrote that teachers unconsciously promoted aggressive and violent behaviors through the segregation of the challenging behaved students. This segregation placed the problem children in one small area in the classroom. As a result, students fail to master the knowledge and skills necessary to support their success as they progress

through school. The gap between themselves and their successful peers becomes even greater (Gunter et al., 1994).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how aggression in the classroom influences the learning climate. To accomplish this purpose the following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the characteristics of aggressive behavior?
2. What are the causes of aggression?
3. What are the guidelines to reduce aggression?

### Need for the Study

Violence is and always has been a part of the human condition. From war to school yard bullying, violence takes a toll, often with children being the innocent victims. Psychologists, sociologists, family scientists, and educators are guided by the hope that science can provide interventions to prevent violence or mitigate outcomes so that children can lead positive, rewarding lives. Schweinhart (1993) noted that direct observation in the home showed that much aggressive behavior in children is influenced by the way parents behave towards them. In many families with antisocial children, the parents do little to encourage polite or considerate behavior by the children; such behavior is often ignored. Yet, frequently when children yell or have tantrums, parents do not correct them, but rather either ignore or accept the behavior. The child soon learns to adapt. The coexistent unresponsiveness to the child's communications and emotional needs contributes further to the child's disturbance. According to Schweihart (Tucker-Ladd 2000), early preventive educational programs can reduce later antisocial behavior.

Teaching students to employ behaviors other than those previously learned to the level of an automatic response requires conscious instructional planning. Students must be taught new knowledge and skills. Moreover, teachers must provide their students with extensive opportunities to practice newly acquired skills, and to provide feedback on their performance; however teachers must recognize that even with the best instruction, teachers must be prepared occasionally for students to display undesired behaviors.

### Limitations

The majority of the research examined for this study investigated the characteristics of aggression and its influence on behavior and development of a child. Although these studies are invaluable for understanding specific aspects of aggression, many of them have tended to overlook the process of adult-child interaction during early development. This study is limited to literature that provides general information on the role of the teacher and parent interaction available at the University of Northern Iowa, from Internet downloads and from the Education Abstracts Full Text Index.

### Definitions

In the literature reviewed for this study, researchers used terms in different ways. For this paper, significant terms will be defined in the following manner:

**Aggression:** The examination of children's aggression divided aggressive behaviors into several sets of categories; for example, a distinction is frequently made between verbal and physical aggression (Parke & Slaby, 1983). More recently, research has dichotomized verbal and physical aggression as either instrumental-proactive (aggressive behavior in response to provocation or goal blockage) (Crick & Dodge, 1996;



Dodge & Coie, 1987; Dodge, Price, Coie & Christopoulos, 1990). “Aggressive behavior refers to those behaviors – verbal or nonverbal, or physical – that injure another indirectly or directly and result in extraneous gains for the aggressor” (Zirpoli & Meloy, 1997, p. 332).

Levels of Aggression: Overt aggression is defined as openly confrontational hostile behavior (threats, physical fighting). Overt aggression encompasses four categories of aggressive behavior including physical assault on others; verbal threats or violence toward others; explosive, impulsive property destruction; and self injurious behaviors. Covert aggression is hidden (stealing and vandalism). Unintentional aggression is common and natural in toddlers (accidental behavior). Instrumental and hostile forms of aggression develop during the preschool years (grabbing a toy from another child) (Canter, 1992).

Maladaptive Coalitions: A temporary union between two or more unsuitable or poorly adapted groups to a particular situation or purpose (Foster & Robin, 1988).

Neurotransmitter: A chemical that carries messages between different nerve cells or between nerve cells and muscles (Zirpoli & Melloy, 1997).

Normative Stresses: Relating to, or conforming to the standard of stress or strain (Foster & Robin, 1988).

Serotonin: A chemical derived from the amino acid tryptophan, and widely distributed in tissues. It constricts blood vessels at injury sites, and may alter emotional states (Zirpoli & Melloy, 1997).

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Characteristics of Aggression

In America, it appears that aggression and violence have become a way of life. Hardly a day goes by that our newspapers do not give accounts of violent acts committed by children and adults; stories of violence often dominate the television newscasts. Many approaches have been tried to reduce violence in our society. Politicians have taken the stance that for our schools and streets to become safer, we should pass more punitive laws and build more institutions that can house offenders; on the surface it may appear to be the most expedient answer to a serious problem, but other options must be examined.

Children who exhibit aggressive behavior are limited in school and in life. Their problems are similar to that of the student who has mistakenly learned that  $2+2=5$ . When  $2+2=5$  is learned and has been incorporated as automatic, learned response to the stimulus of  $2+2=5$  is revealed as correct. Most teachers will quickly realize that teaching this student the desired answer ( $2+2=4$ ) will be complicated by that prior learning. The same is true of students who have incorporated aggressive or violent acts into their methods of solving social problems. These children do not lack a response to the social problems—they have a solution: they use aggressive acts against others. In fact, these students no longer have to think consciously about the possible solutions to social problems; they simply overgeneralize their use of aggression.

The cognitive drive to move into our expected slot in the hierarchy is so strong that many people will do whatever it takes to achieve success. The frustration can

become too intense, a person may act impulsively or recklessly for any possible chance of success, and such risk-taking may on occasion escalate into aggressive and violent acts.

When confronted with a student who displays undesired behavior, teachers often overlook automatic behavioral patterns. For example, when first learning to drive an automobile with a manual transmission, the process of shifting gears while disengaging the clutch and brake is a complex set of synchronized behaviors that requires significant motor planning and conscious effort. As time passes, however, these synchronized movements become automatic and require very little conscious thought. In fact, only when confronted with an unusual situation (e.g., stopped on a steep hill, with another car stopped near the rear of the car) will the typical driver have to think about his or her effort to shift gears and continue up the hill. The same phenomenon characterizes the enactment of aggression by some children. When teachers intervene following an aggressive act, they frequently ask a student to explain why he or she engaged in aggression and whether they can identify a more appropriate response. When the student proves capable of generating alternatives, teachers assume that the student clearly knew better; thus they need only punish the undesired responses. Teachers fail to recognize that many behavioral patterns of aggression required little or no active planning (Huesmann, 1988).

Engaging academic instruction benefits all students; it is absolutely necessary for aggressive students, or for those at risk for developing aggressive and violent behavior. Aggression and low achievement go hand in hand; aggressive behavior can lead to low achievement and vice versa (Talbot & Coe, 1997). Low achievement can lead to

aggression in this way: Children enter school without pre-academic skills, such as literacy experiences which are necessary to be successful. When schools fail to provide the necessary academic and social supports, children often cease to be engaged in school. They no longer volunteer to participate; they lose motivation; they refuse to complete assigned tasks, and they demonstrate aggressive behavior to escape activities or to mask skill deficits. For students who are poor achievers, aggression can follow from frustration with performance, poor instruction and feedback from teachers, and poor academic self-competence (Huesmann, Eron, & Yarmel, 1987).

Aggressive acts like hitting, kicking, and assaults are not the norm in social interactions. Since impulsive behavior can lead to reckless or violently aggressive behavior, we also seek to understand impulsivity. Many personal and social problems begin with impulsive acts. These acts can be triggered by the aggressor's low level of self-esteem. Impulsivity, recklessness, and aggression can negatively alter educational processes. Greenspan (1995) noted that brain chemistry revealed that the neurotransmitter and serotonin have influence on educational practices.

Evolutionary psychologists argue that each success enhances the level of the neurotransmitter and serotonin in the brain, as well as our motor coordination and self-esteem. When young people see no hope to rise within society, they may create their own gang culture that provides them with opportunities to succeed within their counterculture's morals. People in both mainstream cultures and countercultures have the same biological need to succeed; they all need a positive self-concept and self-esteem.

Windell (1996) noted that children who were at the bottom of a hierarchy group, those who had little control over events, experienced far more stress and stress-related

illness than those at the top. When there are fewer opportunities for young people to succeed in mainstream society, more social instability can be expected. Thus inclusionary policies that promote social goals and that enhance the students' powerful roles in school are needed to encourage students to seek their dreams.

### Causes for Aggression

Symptoms of Full-blown Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), similar to those found in combat veterans, have been reported (Fisher, 1999) among young children who are exposed to violence and to other critical incidents respond in the same way. Such symptoms will frequently include recurrent nightmares, flashbacks, and serious emotional and behavioral problems. Exposure to critical incidents in early childhood is correlative to later maladaptive or problem adolescent behaviors, including drug and alcohol abuse; violent, aggressive, and antisocial behavior; adjustment and interpersonal problems in school; and poor academic performance. Because problem behaviors are frequently delayed several years and may only become evident in adolescence, normally a period of turmoil anyway, there sometimes has been a failure to connect the emotional and behavioral problems with the early childhood trauma.

When one talks about students at risk for the development of aggression, the term at risk implies that a child displays or has been exposed to a condition or an event that will increase the likelihood that he or she will engage in serious aggressive and violent behavior. Although a risk factor may predict a particular outcome, the causal relationship between a given risk factor and the outcome is far from clear. In the case of violence and aggression, a number of important risk factors have been identified. (Van-Acker & Talbott, 1999).

The first risk factor was identified as individual influences, such as neurological, hormonal, or other physiological abnormalities stemming from genetics. Impaired cognitive functioning and low academic achievement were included. Disturbance in the development of impulse control, poor peer relations and poor social problem-solving skills, in addition to biases and deficits in cognitive processing, are areas of concern.

The second risk factor was identified as family influences. Poor parenting and child management practices are the focal point. Low emotional cohesion among family members and lack of family problem-solving and coping skills are influential.

The third risk factor identified was peer influences, such as associations with a deviant peer. Bullying and other forms of victimization at the hands of peers were addressed. Exposure to classrooms or social network groups with normative beliefs supporting aggressive and violent behavior were also included.

The fourth risk factor addressed school influences such as classroom management procedures. Schoolwide discipline policies and the nature of teacher interaction with aggressive and antisocial youth are important. Instructional practices of teachers and classroom instruction in prosocial behavior, or lack thereof were addressed.

The final risk factor associated with violence and aggression was the community. Influences such as poverty, neighborhood violence, and social disorganization were included. A community's collective success or failure to maintain social order were considered.

Considerable research has explored each of these factors. No factor by itself can explain the extent or intensity of aggressive behavior, much less predict who will engage in such behavior. When aggression and violence are such common occurrences, is it any

wonder that our children and youth incorporate so many of these actions into their behavioral repertoires, or that school-based violence has not only increased dramatically, but become more lethal?

## CHAPTER 3

### GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVEMENT IN THE LEARNING CLIMATE

#### Developing Guidelines

Classroom management is one of the most perplexing problems facing experienced teachers all over the country. Perennially, the Gallup Poll indicates that discipline is viewed nationally as the number one concern (Chernow & Chernow, 1981). As teachers, it is important to compile a comprehensive collection of ready-to-use, successful guidelines that prevent discipline problems before they start, and it will also help teachers take control when trouble erupts in spite of their best efforts.

Teachers favor ideas that work for other teachers. Clearly, educators must have skills necessary to deal with the rising incidents of aggression in children. The following suggestions can be utilized as comprehensive intervention guidelines for reducing aggression.

1. Build a good relationship.

If teachers want their students to become responsible for their own actions, teachers must build an attitude of sincerity for their students. Teachers must be kind but firm. Firmness without a touch of kindness is not the answer. The pupils must feel that they are liked. Teachers should assure them that it is because of the teacher's concern for their welfare that the teacher insists on certain things (safe, orderly, and positive learning environment).

Chernow and Chernow (1981) identified five wants by students. If teachers



deny most of the items, the result will be a class united against the teacher. Students basically want: (a) to be heard, where teachers allow time for individual attention, to discuss things one-on-one with the students, (b) to have a piece of the action, students feel they want to be involved, (c) to be free to choose, choices that students could make might include books to read, questions to ask, experiments to do, (d) to have an opportunity to do their thing, students want to be themselves, and teachers must help them, and (e) to be accepted, students want to be cared about. Students will gain attention by breaking the rules. If they don't receive positive attention, they will seek out negative attention. If teachers remember to respect the dignity and worth of their students, they will develop a stronger more positive relationship with their students.

## 2. Develop mutual respect.

Very often the aggressive, disrupting student acts that way because respect for others has greatly diminished in society and in classrooms. It is important that students understand that no one human being in the classroom is worth more than another. That means teachers respecting students, students respecting teachers, and hardest of all, students respecting each other. It must begin with the teacher, who then hopes that it will transcend the classroom and reach out to the family and community. Teachers need to recognize student improvement and lavish praise. Teachers need to show trust and respect and belief in mutual respect.

## 3. Have a responsible classroom.

Teachers need to set the tone for responsibility and set up goals for the year early. This is a system that allows the teacher to clarify the behaviors they expect from students and what the students can expect from the teacher in return. To successfully manage the

classroom, teachers must be very clear about the classroom expectations or classroom rules. Rules are items that address student behavior and must be followed at all times; rules need to be observable, applicable and reinforceable throughout the entire day. It is important for teachers to get students thinking on how the goals can be achieved. The rules will allow the teacher to integrate effective behavioral management into their teaching routine that will recognize individual needs. Above all, classroom rules stress positive recognition as the most powerful tool at the teacher's disposal for encouraging responsible behavior and raising student self-esteem.

Chernow and Chernow (1981) identified six things a disruptive student needs. Why are those kids in the classroom so disruptive? What teachers do not always see is the fear that completely controls these acting-out, aggressive students. Underneath that cool exterior is usually a frightened little child. These troublemakers who pose a real threat to teacher's authority in the classroom are really afraid. Most of all they are afraid of themselves. In planning for and handling such a class teachers must recognize six needs: (a) students need to feel that someone is in charge, they must have the structure that is missing elsewhere in their lives, (b) students need to feel that this someone will set and maintain limits for them, as they fear their own sense of power and destructiveness, (c) students must be shown how to separate the emotion they feel from the action they use to express the emotion, (d) students need to continually feel that someone is providing an appropriate role model, this helps them cope with frustration in a rational way, and (e) students need to be instructed repeatedly in how to deal with life's everyday frustrations. Students need to have their little successes in self-control recognized and

rewarded. This will provide some assurance that they are beginning to maintain control over their inner destructiveness.

4. Promote decision-making skills.

Responsibility and decision-making are dependent upon each other. Most children feel that they make few decisions for themselves. Children who act out or disturbed children feel even more strongly that they are often led to anti-social behavior. They rationalize away their own responsibility for their behavior with: You made me do it. Children need to feel that they are involved in the decision-making process. Teachers should point out to them how many decisions they make for themselves each day. This will enable them to realize that they do have choices in their daily lives; and, that they must bear the responsibilities for the choices they make. By including students in the selection of rules, teachers will give them ownership and a sense of responsibility in the classroom plan.

5. Use positive recognition.

Canter (1992) identified positive recognition as the key to motivating students to succeed. Consistent positive recognition motivates students to choose appropriate behavior and creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom. It is the sincere and meaningful attention teachers give students for behaving according to their expectations. Positive recognition reinforces those students who usually behave with a well-deserved pat on the back while, at the same time, prompting those students with behavior problems to change their behavior. Offering praise to students is the most effective positive recognition a teacher can give (Canter, 1992).

Everyone likes positive recognition. If the majority of the teacher's responses are negative, it tears down the self-esteem of the students. A successful classroom means that teachers have to reach out beyond the classroom. Letting students know that positive notes to parents will be sent home is a great motivator, and it also serves to establish a positive rapport with the parents. Teachers should not make the mistake of waiting until a problem arises to reach out to parents. They should contact parents with good news and establish a working relationship to lean on when problems arise.

6. Use logical consequences.

Canter (1992) distinguished the difference between punishment and logical consequences. Punishment demands compliance with rules. Punishment conveys the threat of disrespect or loss of love. Logical consequences give the student a choice: If they do this action and the teacher finds out then this will occur... The logical consequence of stealing, cheating on a test, or hitting, are known to the children before they commit the action. If the students are caught they must face the logical consequences. In this way students know it is the action and not the person who must face the music. The child is still accepted as a worthwhile person; the act is wrong and what follows is a logical and fair consequence.

As was discussed earlier, it is the teacher's responsibility to make the students aware of how they are expected to behave at all times in the classroom. There will be times when students will choose not to follow the rules and may thus keep other students from learning. When this disruptive behavior occurs, teachers must be prepared to deal with it calmly and quickly. Preparation is the key. Consequences must be consistent, and something that students do not like. They must be presented as a choice for the student.

## CHAPTER 4

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore how aggression in the classroom influences the learning climate. This study also gives guidelines designed to help educators with behavior management. The paper addressed the following questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What are the characteristics of aggressive behavior?

Bandura (1973) defined aggression as any behavior that results in injury to another person or an animal or in damage to or destruction of property. Accidental aggression occurs because one person did not intend to hurt the other. Young children have difficulty distinguishing between accidental and intentional acts of aggression. Children are less likely to retaliate when they understand that the damage was accidental (Canter, 1992).

Instrumental aggression is aggression aimed at getting back or obtaining some object, territory or privilege. The child wants something, a goal, and does something aggressive to achieve the goal (Canter, 1992).

Hostile aggression is person oriented aggression. People who show hostile aggression injure someone because they are angry with the person as a person. The aggressor believes that the other person has done something to them on purpose and has threatened their ego (Canter, 1992).

Instrumental aggression is more common among preschool children, while hostile aggression increases as children get older. Older children exhibit retaliatory, personally directed, hostile aggression. As children move through the preschool years, the change in modes of expressing aggression parallels a more general change in cognitive structures.

Aggression and low achievement go hand in hand; aggressive behavior can lead to low achievement and vice versa (Talbot & Coe, 1997). Children enter school without pre-academic skills that are necessary to be successful. When schools fail to supply the necessary academic and social support, children's productivity decreases.

## 2. What are the causes of aggression?

Exposure to critical incidents in early childhood is correlative to later maladaptive or problem adolescent behaviors, including drug and alcohol abuse; violent, aggressive, and antisocial behavior; adjustment and interpersonal problems in school; and poor academic performance. Because problem behaviors are frequently delayed several years and may only become evident in adolescence, normally a period of turmoil anyway, there sometimes has been a failure to connect the emotional and behavioral problems with the early childhood trauma.

Although a risk factor may predict a particular outcome, the causal relationship between a given risk factor and the outcome is far from clear. In the case of violence and aggression, a number of important risk factors have been identified. (Van-Acker & Talbot, 1999): (a) individual influences, such as neurological, hormonal, or other physiological abnormalities stemming from genetics, (b) family influences, poor parenting and child management practices are the focal point, low emotional cohesion among family members and lack of family problem-solving and coping skills are

influential, (c) peer influences, such as associations with deviant peer, bullying and other forms of victimization at the hands of peers, (d) classroom management procedures, schoolwide discipline policies and the nature of teacher interaction with aggressive and antisocial youth are important. Instructional practices of teachers and classroom instruction in prosocial behavior, or lack thereof, and (e) community, influences such as poverty, neighborhood violence, and social disorganization were included, as well as a community's collective success or failure to maintain social order.

### 3. What are the guidelines for improvement?

The first guidelines for teachers is to build a good relationship with the students. If teachers want their students to become responsible for their own actions, teachers must build an attitude of mutual respect. Teachers must be kind but firm. Firmness without a touch of kindness is not the answer. If students don't receive positive attention, they will seek out negative attention. If teachers remember to respect the dignity and worth of their students they will develop a stronger, more positive relationship.

The second guideline for teachers is to build an attitude of mutual respect with students. It is important that students understand that no one human being in the classroom is worth more than another. That means teachers respecting students, students respecting teachers, and hardest of all, students respecting each other.

The third guideline for teachers is to have a responsible classroom. This is a system that allows the teacher to clarify the behaviors they expect from students and what the students can expect from the teacher in return. Above all, classroom rules stress positive recognition as the most powerful tool at the teacher's disposal for encouraging responsible behavior and raising student self-esteem.

The fourth guideline for teachers is to promote decision-making skills.

Responsibility and decision-making are dependent upon each other. Most children feel that they make few decisions for themselves. Children who act out or disturbed children feel even more strongly that they are often led to anti-social behavior. They rationalize away their own responsibility for their behavior with: You made me do it. By including students in the selection of rules, teachers will give them ownership and a sense of responsibility in the classroom plan.

The fifth guideline for teachers is positive recognition. Canter (1992) identified positive recognition as the key to motivating students to succeed. Consistent positive recognition motivates students to choose appropriate behavior and creates a positive atmosphere in the classroom. It is the sincere and meaningful attention teachers give students for behaving according to their expectations. Teachers should not make the mistake of waiting until a problem arises to reach out to parents. Rather, they should contact parents with good news and establish a working relationship to lean on when problems arise.

The final guideline for teachers is to use logical consequences. The logical consequences of stealing, cheating on a test, or hitting, are known to the children before they commit the action. In this way students know it is the action and not the person who must face the music. The children are still accepted as worthwhile people; the act is wrong and what follows are logical and fair consequences. Consequences must be consistent, and something that students do not like.



## Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that to address the growing concern about problem behavior in school, teachers and other personnel must focus not only on the behavioral characteristics of aggressive and disruptive students. For some children, aggressive acts have become a ready tool for coping with daily living. The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. In order to maintain safe schools, at both the classroom and building levels, educational personnel must have the knowledge and skills to halt aggression before it takes hold.
2. Teachers have the right and the responsibility to establish rules and directions that clearly define the limits of acceptable and unacceptable student behavior, and administer consistent logical consequences.
3. Aggression is learned in two basic ways: from observing aggressive models, and from receiving and expecting payoffs following aggression.
4. The payoffs for using aggression may be in the form of: (a) stopping aggression by others, (b) getting praise or status or some other goal by being aggressive, (c) getting self-reinforcement and private praise, and (d) reducing tension.
5. By the time children are five years of age, they have learned to be kind and caring or aggressive. The best way to predict that young children will behave aggressively is to observe their early behavior.

## Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Society, schools, parents, and the children could prevent much of the later aggression if they made the effort to detect the problems early and offered assistance. It is crucial that we learn prosocial behavior starting early in life.
2. Physical punishment teaches that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems. Aggressive children often come from aggressive homes. In addition, children learn more hostile ways of responding to frustration, from school, from friends, and especially from television, movies and books.
3. Schools are but one context that can either contribute to or prevent the development of aggressive behavior. To prevent such behavior, teachers and school personnel must intervene early in the child's development and implement effective classroom management procedures, engaging academic instruction, and instruction in prosocial behavior.
4. Schoolwide aggression prevention and response plans need to be developed. Training for staff in recognizing the early warning signs of aggressive behavior are necessary. Procedures that encourage staff, parents, and students to share their concerns about aggression can be helpful.
5. Productive staff-student relationships enhance the school learning climate and help decrease the probability that student aggression will occur and promote prosocial behavior. All educators must model socially acceptable behaviors that they expect from students. Many students lack appropriate adult and peer role models upon which to base their own behaviors.

6. Approximately five to eight percent of children display high rates of aggressive behavior prior to age nine; students in this group should be identified and should be provided help. Aggression by these students has been found to be a persistent and increasingly problematic behavior pattern that likely will be displayed throughout their lives.

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