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Physical Aggression in Early Childhood:
Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Master of Educational Psychology at Massey University

Sarah Jones

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Abstract

Literature reviewed in this study suggested there is a gap between recommendations made in research for supporting children with physically aggressive behaviour and the actual experiences of early childhood teachers working with these children. The aim of this study was to identify how early childhood teachers can be provided with greater knowledge and resources to effectively support young children with physically aggressive behaviour. A mixed methods design was chosen for this study. Data collection included interviews with five head teachers from early childhood centres across Taranaki and survey responses from a random sample of four centres across the region. Interview and survey data was subjected to thematic and content analysis and revealed a number of early childhood teachers would like access to greater knowledge and resources to support children with physically aggressive behaviour and their families. Early childhood teachers expressed an interest in access to guidelines to inform their practice and greater awareness of what support is currently available. Teachers also made explicit the need for relevant professional development which provides specific strategies for managing physically aggressive behaviour. The findings of this study suggest early childhood teachers need increased education and knowledge to effectively meet best practice for these children and their families.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of contents.....	iv
List of tables and figures.....	vi
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Rationale for the study.....	1
How the journey began.....	1
Research Objective.....	2
Definitions and terminology used in this study.....	2
Summary of thesis chapters.....	4
Chapter Two: Literature review.....	6
Search terms.....	6
Early childhood pedagogies.....	7
New Zealand early childhood curriculum.....	11
Development of physically aggressive behaviour and predictors.....	12
Identification of children needing further support.....	15
Interventions for children with aggressive behaviour.....	21
Future directions: Research influencing government policy.....	28
Conclusion.....	32
Research questions.....	32
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	34
Research design.....	34
Methods.....	35
Ethical considerations.....	40
Data analysis.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
Chapter Four: Interviews with Head Teachers.....	43
The sample of teachers.....	43
Guidelines informing practice.....	45
Identification of children needing additional support.....	50

Equipping teachers to help children.....	56
Partnership between educators and parents/whānau.....	58
What teachers say is working well.....	61
Conclusion.....	64
Chapter Five: Results of Survey.....	65
Demographic information.....	66
Policies.....	68
Assessment.....	71
Helping teachers help children.....	76
Partnership.....	82
Concluding teacher thoughts.....	85
Conclusion.....	86
Chapter Six: Discussion and Conclusion.....	88
Research questions.....	89
What teachers say is working well.....	101
Implications of the Present Study.....	102
Recommendations.....	105
Limitations.....	106
Future directions.....	107
Conclusion.....	107
References.....	108
Appendix A: Interview framework.....	116
Appendix B: Survey.....	117
Appendix C: Human ethics application.....	123
Appendix D: Information sheet – interviews.....	124
Appendix E: Consent form – interviews.....	126
Appendix F: Information sheet – survey.....	127
Appendix G: Sample interview transcript – Teacher A.....	129

Tables

Table 2.1	Comparison of Evidence-Based Parent and Teacher Interventions.....	25
Table 4.1	Summary of Teachers' Qualifications and Experience.....	44
Table 4.2	Centre Structure and Understandings Around Behaviour Management Policies.....	46
Table 5.1	Highest Early Childhood Qualification of Teachers.....	66
Table 5.2	Experience Levels of Early Childhood Centre teachers.....	67
Table 5.3	Time Teachers Have Taught at Their Current Centre.....	67
Table 5.4	Understandings Around Centre Policies.....	69
Table 5.5	Strengths of Behaviour Management Polices: Teacher Reported.....	70
Table 5.6	Weaknesses of Behaviour Management Polices: Teacher Reported.....	71
Table 5.7	Outside Support Childcare Teachers are Aware of.....	74
Table 5.8	Teacher Responses to what is Working Well with Assessment Practices.....	75
Table 5.9	Teacher Report of what Could be Better in Assessment of Physically Aggressive Children.....	76
Table 5.10	Strategies Used by Childcare Centres to Manage Physically Aggressive Behaviour.....	78
Table 5.11	Teacher Access to Knowledge for Managing Challenging Behaviour.....	80
Table 5.12	Teacher Experiences of Working Collaboratively With Families.....	83
Table 5.13	Teacher Reported Strengths Working Collaboratively With Parent.....	84
Table 5.14	Teachers Reported Weaknesses Working Collaboratively With Parents.....	85

Figures

Figure 5.1	Awareness of Help Available From Outside Agencies for Children with Physically Aggressive Behaviour.....	73
Figure 5.2	Teacher Access to Professional Development in the Area of Behaviour Management.....	81