Formative study of aggression prevention and reduction in junior primary school: final report presented to the Western Australian Health Promotion Foundation: book 1 of 2

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Abstract
This one year formative study aimed to conduct a feasibility trial of current evidence-based practice to reduce and prevent aggression among junior primary school age children. The project comprised three stages: assessing the types of direct and indirect aggression among junior primary school students and the current practices of teachers and schools to address this behaviour and linking successful current practices to evidence-based research to inform the development of a classroom teaching and behaviour management intervention.

Aggression is broadly defined as negative acts which are used intentionally to harm others, and may be classified as proactive, reactive or instrumental aggression. (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefooghe, 2002). Whilst interventions to reduce aggression in junior primary school are limited, much research has described the risk and protective factors of aggression. Risk factors of aggressive behaviour include familial, school, and individual. Familial risk factors include: parents not providing clear rules, use of corporal punishment, setting poor examples, displaying conflict or violence and providing poor supervision. School risk factors comprise a lack of school structure and adult supervision, indifferent attitudes of school staff toward aggression; and few consequences of negative behaviours. Individual risk factors such as an impulsive and dominant personality, positive attitudes toward school violence and negative self concept also contribute to aggressive behaviours in young children.

Conversely, research has also identified protective factors that are likely to reduce a child's use of aggressive behaviours. These can also be classified as familial, school and individual factors and comprise: parental involvement, attitudes and beliefs not supportive of aggression, emotional and social support from teachers and peers at school; high self esteem; positive outlook and pro-social skills.

This study aimed to combine a thorough review of available literature with consultation with stakeholders and teachers to develop and test principles for best practice to reduce
aggression and improve social skills. Outcomes of this study have provided an insight into current practice in Western Australian schools as well as stakeholders opinions on this current practice and their ideas for future directions in this field.

Most importantly, this research has presented an evidence-based summary of best practice in reducing aggression and improving social skills of junior primary school children. Further, this model has been validated by experts and summarised according to the Health Promoting Schools model for ease of future implementation. This best practice model will be used in future research to inform the development of a large scale aggression reduction and social skill development intervention trial for Western Australian primary schools.