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## The Emotional Experience and Expression of Anger: A Child's Perspective

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Master of Arts  
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THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE AND EXPRESSION OF ANGER: A CHILD'S  
PERSPECTIVE

(Thesis format: Monograph)

By

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Graduate Program in Counselling Psychology

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

Western University

London, Ontario

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify key themes related to a child's experience of anger. The existing literature on children's emotional experiences stems from adult perceptions and interpretations; this study was envisioned to investigate the experience of anger among children using their own words. Participants were male and female students, aged 8-9 and in a general grade three classroom within a community school. Through the use of semi-structured interview focus groups conducted over a span of 10 weeks, participants were invited to disclose their understandings of anger and how they experienced it. Results were analyzed via a content analysis procedure that resulted in five themes. These themes consisted of Understanding Anger, Origins of Anger, Consequences of Anger, Regulation and Resolution of Anger, and finally Relations with Others. Results and implications of the findings were discussed.

*Keywords:* Anger, Emotional Understanding, Behavior, Experience, Regulation, Relationships

## **Dedication**

*For my parents, whom have supported my academic journey and life ambitions in their entirety;  
and for the children, whom deserve to have their voices and opinions cherished and respected.*

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I would like to extend my thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Jason Brown for his continued guidance and support over the past two years. His confidence in my abilities, combined with a relaxed nature helped to keep me grounded throughout this process. I would also like to extend my thanks to Dr. Alan Leschied and Dr. Susan Rodger of the Counselling Psychology Program at Western University for supporting both my academic and vocational pursuits in the counselling field.

I would also like to thank Danielle Aziz, the founder and designer of the Anger Blanket program; without you, my thesis simply would not exist. Furthermore, I would like to thank her for her continued innovation and support of my involvement in the program's second trial run; I was not only able to experience the program first hand, but was also able to witness her immense enthusiasm and encouragement for the emotional well-being of children.

Also deserving of recognition were the teachers and support staff of the public school in which the present study was conducted. Their support enabled the seamless presentation of the program's ideals, morals and the subsequent data collection by my fellow colleague Nicole Hammel. Nicole was responsible for conducting the interviews analyzed in my study; thank you for your dedication and patience.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their everlasting love and support over the course of both my graduate and undergraduate university careers.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Student aggression, stubbornness and disruptive behavioral problems are among the most cited grounds for admission to child mental health services. In 2002, it was estimated that prevalence rates of children in the United States with psychosocial problems were between 10% and 21% (Powell, Fixsen, & Dunlap, 2003), while estimated rates of childhood aggression and delinquency reached as high as 25% (Raver & Knitze, 2002). The experience of anger is a natural emotion that often underlies many aggressive and antisocial patterns of behavior. While there is no dearth of research examining the construct of anger amongst children, much of what has been documented in past findings stems from adult observations and interpretations of children's experiences rather than on what the children themselves would say about the emotional underpinnings and behavioral consequences of anger. The present study illustrates how children experience, interpret and express their anger with others through their own words.

To validate the inclusion of child perspectives and descriptions of emotional experiences as a research tool, one can look to specific arguments favoring this position, including: a) the acknowledgement of legislative-based child rights and privileges; and b) encouraging a consumer-based mindset, whereby children are viewed as consumers of particular goods and services (e.g. emotional regulation programs; curricular policies), and thus should inform the development (and content) of such services (Kellett, 2005; 2010). However, before either one of these arguments can be effectively addressed it is necessary to curb the more traditional mindset of children existing as a mere *tabula rasea*, worthy of only being studied, rather than informing the content of studies themselves (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, & Sinclair, 2003).

## **Curbing the Incompetent Child Mindset**

Historically, children have often been depicted as either an object that is acted upon by others or as a subject responding to external conditions in their environment (Christian & Prout, 2002). The first view (a child as an object) heavily aligns with a dependency model of child development and inherently neglects the freedom and autonomy of the child. The second view (a child as a subject) is somewhat more liberal; albeit traditional literature (e.g. Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963) still often depict children as acting in due accordance with external, consequential and egocentric mindsets that are heavily conditioned by their surrounding environments (Thompson & Newton, 2010).

In their renowned “Bobo-doll” study, Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963) found that children acted more aggressively towards a blowup clown doll if they had been exposed to an aggressive model prior to their interaction compared to children who were not exposed to the aggressive model. While the cognitive learning component of aggressive behavior is well documented in this study, seemingly little attention was directed towards the role of emotion in aggressive behaviors—in particular, anger (De Castro, 2010). Furthermore, the findings from this study stem from adult observations and interpretations of child behaviors, which concomitantly neglect the child’s own input regarding his or her behaviors and the potential emotional precursors to them. While the study as a whole highlights the properties and characteristics of observational learning—which was indeed the intended focus of the study—it grants little insight into the emotional development and regulation techniques of children and how emotions may impact future socio-behavioral interactions with other individuals.

Similar studies and resultant theories concerning child learning patterns and development (i.e. the Piagetian view of child development; Evans, 1973; Piaget, 1986) have been criticized as



viewing healthy, mature adults as a gold standard to which all subpopulations should be compared (Jenks, 2002). This necessarily enforces the notion that children are lesser individuals with a pre-moral mindset lacking in rationality (Tisdall, 2012; Thompson & Newton, 2010). As a result, children's rights and freedoms are often marginalized by society as a means of "protecting their best interests"—an action that is often enclosed in phrases such as "acting paternalistic"—at least until children reach adulthood (Tisdall, 2012). Thus the view of a child's emotional recognition is often negated due to their perceived incompetence and lack of a rational, moral decision-making process that mature adults routinely encompass.

While some may believe children to have inferior or incompetent understandings of their social and emotional environments, recent research suggests that children are able to effectively acknowledge the emotions of others and that this skill increases with age and maturity (Herba, Landau, Russell, Ecker & Phillips, 2006; Thompson & Newton, 2010). Findings indicate that children—even in infantile stages of development—have been shown to recognize and understand how emotions offer a window into the minds and experiences of the people around them (Thompson & Newton, 2010). Augmenting this finding, research from Harris (2010) suggests that as soon as children are able to talk they begin to report on their emotional experiences and the emotional experiences of others as well. Interestingly, once children have reached a developmental stage in which they can interpret and understand various emotions they tend to discuss negative emotions more often than positive ones (Harris, 2010). The frequency in which children engage in emotional discussions with family members have been correlated with an ability to identify initial causes of those emotions and how they may be perceived by other individuals (Harris, 2010). Higher rates of emotional discussion as children are associated

with development into healthier adults, both physically and mentally (Pennebaker, Barger, & Tiebout, 1989).

Thus it seems that society's conceptualization of a child's ability to be competent regarding his/her own emotional wellbeing could be limited by the unwarranted, possibly unconscious tension of accepting different modes of interpretation and understanding by marginalized populations (i.e. children). Indeed the traditional view of children as passive agents of their cultural upbringing has been shown to be inconsistent with recent findings (e.g., Herba, et al, 2006; Thompson & Newton, 2010) suggesting that more practical, efficient and inclusive means relating to a child's ability to contribute to his\her own future socio-emotional development should be seriously considered.

### **Validation of Child Rights and Privileges**

Perhaps the first step toward a more informed research practice via incorporating children into the research process was the establishment of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In particular Article 12 of the UNCRC explains that a child who is "capable of forming his or her own views [has] the right to express these views in all matters affecting the child...those views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (UNCRC, 1989). This article takes the traditional view of children as subjects acting in accordance with constructs of an environment and extends it by incorporating individual experiences, interpretations and understandings of the various social situations in which they are routinely immersed.

In a similar fashion Article 13 reinforces the child's right to freedom of expression and attainment of any and all pertinent information regarding the child's wellbeing (UNCRC, 1989). Together these two articles encourage the notion that children should take part in, effect change,

and become changed by the cultural and social world in which they live. Thus, from a purely legislative standpoint it is essential to foster child participation in child-focused research initiatives as child and adolescent research necessarily involves children and adolescents. Furthermore it has been documented that a child's participation in research initiatives tend to increase his/her self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem by exploring the ways in which their own voice is heard and acknowledged throughout their social community (Bergstrom, Jonsson & Shanahan, 2010; Graham & Fitzgerald, 2008).

Despite the inclusive nature of Articles 12 and 13 of the URNC they are not without caveats. The notion that children's "views should be given due weight" obliges any researcher to ensure that the decisions made throughout any research process respects children's own views. However, respect of children's views must be accomplished in such a way as to not hinder the development or advancement of understanding and knowledge of the issues being examined, thereby leaving room for researcher discretion regarding the competency of the child. Nevertheless the reality is that a child's level of contribution to the research process—ranging from informing qualitative content, to developing research questions and methodological procedures—is inherently subject to the child's own intellect, including, but not limited to his or her vocabulary, literacy and numeracy skills (Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011), which is a paramount reason for the inclusion of the proviso "due weight" in the UNCRC (Lundy et al., 2011).

Indeed many skeptics suggest children are not competent enough to effectively inform the research process. Age, immaturity and lack of intellect are often cited as delineating factors of the child-competence debate, particularly with very young age groups. The skeptical viewpoint is not without support; research conducted in 2001 by Parker and her colleagues found

that child recognitions and reports of anger both experienced and expressed were highly inconsistent with adult-observational measures of these expressions. To a similar extent, findings from Casey (1993) indicated discrepancies between child self-reports of negative emotional facial expressions and the actual observation of these expressions.

### **Benefits of Child Inclusion**

Despite the skeptical view of including children in the research process, additional literature has espoused the benefits of viewing children as experts of their own environment and their ability to contribute effectively to new research studies (Christie, French, Sowden, & West, 1993; Kellett, 2010). Indeed researchers have often used qualitative data obtained from children to develop and amend many child and adolescent measurement instruments and scales. While other studies have acknowledged the limited vocabulary of children to explain their emotions, reservations have often been put to rest via a child's ability to inform content in their own manner—that is, through the use of stories, arts and play (Tsai, 2000). Thus while children may experience difficulty expressing abstract concepts such as emotion and anger, it should not impinge on their ability to effectively communicate their experience to the researchers.

An examination of anger via a child's perspective may open the door for future research opportunities regarding the emotional development and wellbeing of children. Findings from De Castro (2010) suggest that disruptive behavior such as aggressive interactions and extreme stubbornness are multidimensional constructs and may consist of interacting emotional, social, cognitive and behavioral factors. By examining the construct of anger—a natural emotion that often triggers aggression—the formation of additional underlying emotions and cognitions may present themselves through child descriptions of anger and other negative feelings.

In addition to advancing research opportunities the need for accurate and unfiltered descriptions of children's experienced anger is paramount in developing appropriate preventive and emotional coping techniques as well as informing counselors and educators on the most efficient means of communicating these techniques to today's youth. Within a school setting, taking a preventive approach to the externalized experience of childhood anger may reduce the incidence of disruptive behaviors in the classroom; both teacher and student would be made aware of the strategies that can be used to reduce and manage the student's anger in a way that resonates formidably with the student. This in turn would allow the teacher to quickly redirect his/her time, attention and energy to the instruction of the rest of the class (Odle, 2013; Raver & Knitze, 2002).

Indeed numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of anger management and coping strategies among youth (e.g. Fabes & Einsberg, 1992; Smith, Hubbard & Laurenceau, 2011; Wilde, 2001), yet the findings and information attained from this research are based on adult observations and interpretations of how children experience, express and mitigate negative emotions and feelings of anger. What remains to be addressed is an examination of how children experience and understand anger through their own language and terminology. A meta-analytical review of 28 peer reviewed journals published between 1981 and 2007 revealed that school-wide emotional-behavioral interventions focused on affect regulation and anger management techniques yielding a very small, albeit positive effect size of 0.15 (January, Casey, & Paulson, 2011). With the inclusion of child-derived values and levels of understanding, current emotional regulation programs can be augmented by illustrating the constructs of emotion and affect regulation in a manner consistent with a child's own language and intellect, with the intention of driving this minimal effect size up.

Research suggests elevated anger levels among children are linked with increased emotional-behavioral problems (Cole, Zahn—Waxler, Fox, Usher, & Welsh, 1996) and physical health problems (Starner & Peters, 2004), indicating that both psychological and physiological risks posed by anger may begin at an early age. In addition these psychological and physical problems have often been shown to persist well into adulthood (Kerr & Schneider, 2007) and can present as an increased risk for mental illness later in life (Merrell, Guldner, Ross & Isava, 2008). Furthermore, it is well known that young children rely on the adults (ie., parents/caregivers, teachers, counsellors) around them to guide their social and emotional development (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005). Thus it is imperative that these highly influential figures be equipped not only with the ability to teach the appropriate emotional regulation and anger management strategies to their children, but that they are able to do so in a way that resonates with them by communicating in a manner each child is able to relate to.

### **Organization of Thesis**

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on child anger and emotional experiences, including the precipitating causes of anger, how anger is expressed, emotional regulation, the consequences of anger expression and the benefits of effective regulation techniques. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to conduct the present study. Chapter 4 is a presentation of findings of the content analysis of transcribed interviews. Finally, Chapter 5 is a discussion that compares the results of the present study to the literature presented and reviewed in Chapter 2.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

It has been well argued that the experience and expression of anger is often reflective of maladaptive emotions, cognitions and modes of behavior (Cole, Zahn—Waxler, Fox, Usher, & Welsh, 1996; Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Starner & Peters, 2004). The Mental Health Foundation (2013) contends that anger is an emotional state of arousal often resulting from social conditions encompassing threats or frustration. Understanding the emotional experience of anger among children remains a paramount concern in literature given that higher levels of anger and aggressive tendencies have been linked to behavioral-conduct problems (Cole et al., 1996) and physical health concerns (Starner & Peters, 2004) in today's youth. Furthermore, these psychological and physical problems have often been shown to persist well into adulthood (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). It is imperative that paternal figures and educators of today's youth learn to read and appreciate children's emotional signs to better help them identify and regulate their own behaviors (Moore, 1992).

But how is anger actually experienced, interpreted and understood by children today? While there is no shortage of research exploring various answers and interpretations of this question there is a considerable dearth of literature investigating the experience of anger from the child's own perspective. From both pedagogical and clinical standpoints it becomes necessary for an in-depth investigation examining the experience of anger among children via their own vernacular to take place, in order to provide a deeper awareness and appreciation of the subject matter; this approach may either augment or contest the existing literature that stems from adult perceptions and interpretations of child emotions. Additionally, a deeper understanding of children's emotional competence will help to illustrate a consideration for children's own

viewpoints and facilitate encouragement and support during the experience of negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Moore, 1992).

This literature review includes a description of precipitating factors observed to instigate feelings of anger in order to provide a foundational understanding of how anger and other negative emotions originate. Next, an in-depth explanation of how children actually experience anger is included, summarizing both physical and psychological components. Descriptions of the current practices and strategies often used by children to recognize and regulate their own emotions and expression of anger are also included. Finally, a discussion of the various consequences of experienced and expressed anger is provided, including somatic outcomes, the influence of anger on child cognitions, and how the experience and expression of anger impact social relations with other individuals.

### **Precipitating Causes of Anger**

**Peer interactions.** Anger is an emotional condition that is socially instigated often through the perception of threatening or stressful circumstances and environments (Averill, 1982; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992). Analyzing a child's reactions to aversive conditions such as peer provocations can provide insight into the ways in which social perceptions, emotional regulation, and strategic and adaptive coping patterns influence the experience and expression of anger (Baumgartner & Strayer, 2008). Observational research on the influence of social popularity among children found that anger was negatively correlated with popularity in boys and social competencies (i.e. mediating conflicts) in girls (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992). Children who expressed emotional concern over a provocation were more likely to verbalize feelings of sadness and a desire to mitigate the social conflict with their peers than children who had an impulsive instinct to express arousal, dismay and deregulated negative emotions (Fabes &



Eisenberg, 1992). Additional research augments the notion that social competency is negatively correlated with anger expression. Teacher reports of child levels of peer rejection suggest that socially rejected children have higher levels of anger attribution bias than non-rejected children (Schultz, Izard, & Ackerman, 2000). Furthermore, findings from Hubbard (2001) indicate that peer rejected children are more likely to display anger in both facial and verbal expression than average-status children. In addition, rejected children also tend to illustrate higher levels of non-verbal happiness than average children, which may also indirectly contribute to their expressed anger (Hubbard, 2001).

**Parental modeling.** While peer relations among children undeniably contribute to an individual child's felt and expressed emotions, observational learning from authority figures such as parents and educators also play significant roles in shaping a child's socio-emotive environment and the way in which he/she interacts with it. Indeed, research suggests that parental and familial environments are reflected via children's emotions, including anger, as parents, siblings and other family members often act as models for younger children (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). In a widely acknowledged study concerning the observational learning patterns of children, Bandura, Ross and Ross (1963) compared aggression levels in children exposed to aggressive models (either in real life, on video, or in a cartoon) to the aggression levels of children in a control condition. They discovered that children exposed to the aggressive models had nearly double the level of aggression of children in the control group. Interestingly, the specific type of aggression displayed by the model influenced the form of aggression illustrated by the children in the experimental condition (Bandura et al., 1963). Thus strong, positive, and good-natured models are required to instill emotionally sound and competent modes of social interaction in today's youth.

More recent findings reflecting Bandura and colleagues' observational learning study in the parent-child relationship found that a parent's ability to effectively regulate his/her own emotions and negative behaviors were correlated with an increased latency of child expressed anger (Snyder, Stoolmiller, Wilson, & Yamamoto, 2003). Constructive and supportive parenting necessarily incorporates a strong emotional component. Reflecting and validating children's emotional experiences, helping them to label and interpret those experiences, and assisting in the development of collaborative problem solving abilities are all essential emotional tools that parents and other childcare workers must communicate to their children; first however, adults must learn to regulate and modulate their own emotional experiences and expressions, particularly as they relate to child emotional reactions and expressions (Snyder et al., 2003). Recent findings have also supplemented the notion that caregiver emotional regulation may impact a child's felt sense of anger and his/her own social adjustment. Close and supportive relationships act as a protective factor in mental health and are crucial constructs for a child's emotional development; conversely, inappropriate coping skills and strategies modeled by parents are often reflected via inadequate coping and poorer emotional development in the child (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). Findings from Schultz and his colleagues (2000) noted that higher rates of caregiver depression and family instability were correlated with stronger anger bias in children. Furthermore, this anger bias was also found to impact the child's own social adjustment at school. Indeed, parental emotion, (maternal emotion in particular) has been routinely correlated with anger regulation and conduct problems in the classroom, especially among adolescent boys (Cole, Teti, & Zahn-Waxler, 2003). Atypical patterns of emotional regulation have been suggested to play a primary role in the development of child psychopathy. Conversely, positive, mutual emotional regulation patterns between a child and mother were

shown to be characteristic of healthy social adjustment and less behavioral conduct problems at school (Cole et al., 2003).

**Child motivations for anger expression.** Despite the importance of parental modeling of appropriate emotional regulation for children's own social adjustment and coping patterns, children often have their own reasons for experiencing and expressing anger. A study examining children's understanding of the causes of sadness and anger found that children predicted the experience of anger of a protagonist in a hypothetical story most often when they thought he could change undesirable situations; the children predicted sadness most often when they believed that the situation was impossible to change (Levine, 1995). Not surprisingly, anger was chosen more frequently in response to an aversive condition rather than perceiving the condition as a loss. This may be due to the notion that anger can be interpreted as a functionally adaptive emotion used to seek out rewards by energizing and organizing specific behaviors used to attain particular goals (Campos, Campos, & Barrett, 1989).

Children want to feel heard and understood by their parents. In a series of informal play interviews conducted with children between the ages of four to five and their parents, child experienced and expressed anger was precipitated by feelings of disappointment, powerlessness, worry, sadness and frustration (Tsai, 2000). Children explained that angry responses were often a result of the treatment they received from their own parents. Findings from the interviews suggest that the more children experience the fear of losing personal power and autonomy, the more likely he or she will use aggressive strategies to compensate for the feelings of loss. In addition, it was noted that children—like adults—desire a strong sense of personal worth and want their voices to be heard and considered. When requests are denied or ignored, feelings of disappointment and insignificance often ensue which often manifest themselves as expressed

anger (Tsai, 2000).

### **Anger Expression**

Anger expression is a response to the affective (and often negative) arousal an individual experiences (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). A vital aspect of children's emotional knowledge is the understanding of cultural guidelines for the expression of appropriate emotion in social interactions (Parker et al., 2001). In many instances children often do not verbally or visually convey all of their angry affect in fear of damaging their reputation or possible relations with others (Tsai, 2000). The suppression of anger is often referred to in the literature as "Anger-in", and comprises a hesitancy to express anger and instead turn it inward (Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Rivers, Brackett, Katulak, & Salovey, 2007; Tsai, 2000). As a result, the anger may become internalized and directed at the self, which may present with additional emotional-behavioral concerns such as increased frequency and extremity of conduct problems and maladaptive social adjustment (Cole et al., 2003; Schultz et al., 2000). Additionally, the suppression of anger has been routinely linked to an increase in physiological problems such as higher levels of blood pressure, glucose and cortisol, which often manifest themselves via an increased risk of cardiovascular problems (Nichols, 2008; Starner & Peters, 2004).

While anger suppression is a critical concern noted in the literature, "Anger-out", or the external expression of anger is much more common (Harburg, Blakelock, & Roper, 1979; Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Rivers et al., 2007; Tsai, 2000; Von Salisch & Vogelgesang 2005). Research indicates that anger expression is often dependent on the relational context in which it takes place (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). Experiences of child-externalized anger included aggressive facial expressions and noises (i.e. crying, screaming, pouting), hostile verbal phrases (i.e. name-calling), physical gestures (i.e. stamping feet) and aggressive movements (i.e. hitting, kicking;

Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Rivers et al., 2007; Tsai, 2000). Not surprisingly, externalized anger amongst children often elicit negative consequences and can provoke relational instability between a child and his/her peers (Brendgen, Vitaro, Turgeon, & Poulin, 2002) as well as between a child and his/her parents (Tsai, 2000).

**Changes in expression due to maturity.** Evidence abounds that as children mature, both cognitively and emotionally, the expression of anger shifts from an “Anger-out” model to an “Anger-in” model (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). Indeed, studies indicate that when with others children do not typically express all of their angry affect (Parker, et al., 2001). Older children and adolescents may believe that the outward expression of anger is inappropriate, especially with individuals outside their own peer group (Shipman, Zeman, Nesin, & Fitzgerald, 2003; Zeman & Shipman, 1996). Children and adolescents tend to mask their anger expression when with older adults such as teachers but are seemingly less restrictive in their expression when with friends (Underwood, Coie, & Herbsman, 1992). Furthermore, older children tend to use socially acceptable modes of anger expression such as humor, explaining the circumstances surrounding their anger and striving for reconciliation with other individuals perhaps in an effort to preserve their social relationships (Von Salisch & Vogelgesang, 2005). Conversely, younger children are more likely to use confrontational or avoidant methods of anger expression suggesting that their social development may not be as fully developed as older, more emotionally and cognitively mature children (Von Salisch & Vogelgesang, 2005). Problems in socio-emotional development often present in children as challenging and socially disruptive patterns of behavior and may persist and develop into antisocial behaviors such as aggression and bullying later in childhood and adolescence (Center for Evidence-Based Practice [CEBP], 2003).

Kerr and Schneider (2007) suggest that the differences between anger felt and anger expressed by children may reflect social motivations of masking or hiding anger. Additional research indicates that children often believe others will respond negatively to their expressed anger and may impinge on their social relationships (Underwood, 1997). Interestingly, research from Parker and her colleagues (2001) indicates a discrepancy between the levels of anger a child said he/she would express following a hypothetical vignette of an individual who was cheating in a game and the level of anger the child actually expressed in a similar live situation. While children in the study said they would express more anger after realizing an individual was cheating them the actual expressed anger was substantially less, suggesting that children may have a stronger desire to regulate their emotional display when they are involved in the provoking incident themselves (Parker et al., 2001).

In terms of gender differences in the expression of anger, research continually reports that boys tend to use more openly expressive displays of anger compared to girls (Underwood, et al., 1992; Underwood, Hurley, Johnson, & Mosley, 1999). In an observational study of child expressions of anger, Hubbard (2001) noted that boys expressed more anger in their behavior, verbalizations and facial expressions than did girls. However, while girls may appear to be expressing less anger than boys it has been suggested that they merely express it in different ways. Research from Fabes & Eisenberg (2001) indicates that girls were indeed less likely to outwardly express their felt anger in a provoking situation, nevertheless, they were more likely to actively assert themselves. This may be due to an underlying, felt stereotype that it is more socially acceptable for males to express anger and aggression compared to their female counterparts.

## **Emotional Recognition**

The emotional experience of anger is not in itself a purely negative experience. What is paramount in this experience is the understanding, appreciation and regulation of this type of emotion. While suppression (anger-in) and expression (anger-out) are two methods of navigating the construct of anger there is also a third way of mitigating and alleviating this negative emotion. Emotional regulation and coping efficiently with anger often invoke calming techniques or “cool down” strategies to help reduce the impact the experience of anger has on an individual and his/her cognitive, physical and social wellbeing. Often referred to as “anger management” programs this common term is frequently considered a misnomer, as all individuals (not just children) experience the emotion of anger. Instead, the term “anger expression management” may be more appropriate; many of these types of programs seek to regulate and control the intense, negative emotional responses to stressful and threatening circumstances rather than the onset of the emotion itself (Hamel, 2013). Undeniably, there are many aspects of the environment beyond an individual’s control. However, what can be controlled are the reactions and responses to these circumstances and this is often accomplished via the technique of emotional regulation.

**Recognizing the experience of anger.** An important concept in children’s emotional knowledge is the understanding and appreciation of the social guidelines used in expressing and regulating emotions (negative emotions in particular) during social interactions with others (Parker et al., 2001). Emotional regulation is both an intrinsic and extrinsic procedure used to monitor, evaluate and modify emotional responses to facilitate the accomplishment of one’s goals (e.g., maintain friendships, completing work on time; Thompson, 1994). Furthermore, emotional recognition and expression play crucial roles in the conception of social information

processing that convey information to guide and shape social interactions with other people (Denham et al., 2002). Generally, individuals experiencing higher levels of anger arousal tend to endorse a more expressive and less restrictive display of their anger (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). Indeed, anger and hostility have frequently been associated with aggressive behaviors including defiance, temper tantrums and antisocial tendencies, suggesting that an influx of negative emotions and emotional dysregulation may be key constructs and potential indicators of early behavioral problems later in childhood (Denham, et al., 2000). Children and adolescents who display anger via aggressive tendencies often lack the ability to resolve situational and relational conflicts due to problem-solving deficiencies particularly as they relate to the generation of new and creative solutions or the ability to adapt effectively to existing solutions (Lochman, et al., 2013). Conversely, individuals severely restricting their expression of anger may also endorse socially inappropriate behaviors as well (Kerr & Schneider, 2007). Thus it is paramount that children be able to regulate the emotional expression of anger in socially acceptable ways to preserve their relations with others as well as to ensure their emotions are heard and recognized in socially and culturally appropriate fashions.

A study examining the experience of interpersonal anger among preschoolers found that most responses to anger-provoking situations involved the venting of angry feeling (especially for boys) and active resistance (especially for girls) in which the child used non-aggressive strategies to defend her or his position (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992). It may be the case that boys use coping strategies to meet their own needs, while girls may select strategies used to maximize interpersonal harmony and keep social relations intact (Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992). As children mature, they become increasingly able to regulate their experience and expression of negative emotions such as anger as a result of an increase in complexity and adaptability of attention-



directed and inhibitory control systems that evolve as a result of neuropsychological maturation (Lochman et al., 2013; Posner & Rothbart, 2007).

Research on child levels of emotional understanding suggest that children—typically before the ages of 6 or 7—have difficulty recognizing and separating various emotions (Reinchenbach & Masters, 1983), and thus may find it difficult to effectively regulate their emotional expression. Indeed, researchers assisting in a study examining 80 kindergarten children’s emotional knowledge found it particularly difficult to ascertain the differences children make between the emotions of anger and sadness (Levine, 1995). What eventually was identified as a potentially distinguishing factor between anger and sadness was whether a specific goal was possible or impossible to achieve. If the goal was unachievable, the children often described the emotion of sadness as a likely response; conversely, if the goal was difficult, but possible, children often described the emotion of anger. This is consistent with other research indicating the facilitative properties of anger in shaping future behaviors to overcome barriers to one’s own goals (Campos, et al., 1989).

### **Fostering Emotional Regulation**

In accordance with a cognitive model of emotional understanding, emotions are influenced based on the assessment of how particular events and relationships impact their own goals (Levine, 1995). By learning how to assess the impact various events and relations have on an individual’s wellbeing, children may be better able to understand and later regulate how they express themselves in relation to those events. Furthermore, it is important for children to learn how to regulate their own emotions at an early age. A longitudinal study conducted by Denham et al. (2002) examined three and four year old children’s emotional knowledge and compared it with behavioral conduct a year later. It was found that the more complex and intricate

understanding of emotions a child had at age 3 and 4, the less likely they were to engage in aggressive behaviors at ages 4 and 5 respectively.

Studies examining the emotional coping patterns of adults found that effective regulation techniques for anger were routinely associated with constructive conflict resolution strategies (Rivers et al., 2007), while coping patterns of children generally involve the use of play activities which seem to help children explore different ideas and meanings and also to develop better social skills and problem solving abilities (Landreth, 2002). Thus there is a need for parents and educators to facilitate the transition from play based strategies to more cognitively mature emotional regulation techniques with their children as they mature into adolescents.

Additional research on child interpretations of anger expression suggest that anger is often an emotion associated with a need or desire for dominance, while sadness and fear may communicate an increased desire for care or comfort (Jenkins & Ball, 2000). An in-depth investigation aimed at highlighting additional distinguishing characteristics of anger and sadness expression and regulation in adults found that effective anger regulation was consistently associated with conflict management strategies and a desire for positive resolutions, while effective sadness regulation was more often connected to a desire to maintain positive social relationships with others (Rivers, et al., 2007). Effective coping techniques used to manage the expression of anger included writing about the provoking event or talking about the emotions with a close friend. Additional techniques included more passive strategies such as cognitively dismissing the event, leaving or avoiding the situation, and waiting for the provoking individual to apologize. The regulation of sadness was associated with a desire to change the situation (e.g. apologizing) or finding other activities to engage in such as playing games or listening to music (Rivers et al., 2007). Based on these results it becomes necessary to communicate these coping

and regulation strategies to children as emotional regulation abilities have been routinely shown to benefit social functioning and adjustment (Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Rivers et al., 2007; Von Salisch & Volegesang, 2005).

**Regulating anger expression.** Historically, methods of encouraging anger expression regulation have been based on a “stress inoculation” process designed to monitor angry outbursts and identify the precipitating events and thoughts leading to that outburst (Novaco, 1977). Intervention strategies suggest that children and adolescents should be taught to recognize the psychological and physiological warning signs that immediately precede the experience of anger (Wilde, 2001). Stemming from this approach, similar emotional regulation methods have been met with high degrees of success. Child researchers Lochman and Wells (2004) evaluated the efficiency of the Coping Power Program (manual recently developed by Lochman, Wells, & Lenhart, 2012) in which a series of activities designed to target and enhance preadolescent male student’s emotional recognition and regulation techniques was delivered via 33 one-hour intervention sessions over the course of two years. Results from a one-year follow up assessment indicated students who were enrolled in the Coping Power Program had better regulated behaviors (according to teacher reports), lower instances of substance abuse (according to parental reports), and lower levels of self-reported covert delinquent behavior. These results are consistent with a similar study based on a program called “In Control”, in which adolescents with severe emotional and behavioral disturbances were taught similar concepts to the Coping Power Program (Salavador, 2002). The success of In Control indicates that these forms of anger intervention may be used with children with a wide range of emotional regulation difficulties.

Parents and adults in childcare positions (i.e. teachers, coaches, child counselors), also offer a means of helping a child to regulate his or her own emotions and control the expression of

anger. Larson (2000) found that more openly communicative and authoritative based parent-child relationships were correlated with decreased levels of aggressive tendencies and other negative externalizing behaviors in adolescents. This theme of open communication is echoed in the literature: a study examining resolution strategies to anger provocation between parent-child dyads found that under most circumstances, both child and parent sought to talk with each other during the experience of anger as a means of resolving their issues (Tsai, 2000). Similar to the Coping Power Program (Lochman & Wells, 2004) and the In Control Program (Slavador, 2000), there exists intervention based programs for parents to better learn how to regulate their own emotions and communicate with their own children. The Systematic Training for Effective Parenting of Teens, or STEPT program, promotes effective, democratic methods of relating to children through an increased understanding of child social and physical behaviors (Larson, 2000). Over the course of 10 sessions parents noticed improvements in their child's externalized behavior while children described their parents as less controlling and restrictive, which is consistent with a more authoritative parenting style.

### **Consequences of Experienced Anger and Anger Expression**

**Psychosocial consequences.** The need for children to effectively regulate their emotions and cope with anger in socially acceptable manners has social, psychological and physical benefits. The literature contends that emotional attribution biases emerge early in a child's social schema and influence his/her social adjustment (Schultz, et al., 2000). Relationship problems, problems in the workplace, legal altercations and property damage have all been associated with the unregulated, externalized expression of anger (Deffenbacher, et al., 1996; Eisenberg et al., 2005). A 2003 study examining child behaviors at school found that the outward expression of anger was predictive of externalizing problem behaviors both at school as well as in the home

(Cole, et al., 2003; Rydell, Berlin & Bohlin, 2003). Conversely, children with better anger regulation strategies were shown to have lower levels of externalizing problematic behavior (Rydell et al., 2003).

**Anger in school.** Studies indicate that angry children who express their emotion via aggressive behaviors are more likely to have academic and learning difficulties in school, are at a higher risk of being held back a grade, and have an increased risk of premature school-drop out (Stiffler, 2008; Risi, Gerhardstein, & Kristner, 2003). In addition, those children who feel rejected due to academic difficulties may further exhibit angry or aggressive behaviors due to feelings of inadequacy, which may contribute to the cyclical nature of experienced anger, conduct problems and academic difficulties (Stiffler, 2008). Furthermore, behavioral conduct problems in the classroom perpetrated by children with socio-emotional regulation difficulties tend to detract from the overall classroom environment and often require an intervention by a teacher which concomitantly reduces the available time for instruction to the rest of the class (Mason, 1996; Raver & Knitze, 2002).

**Somatic consequences.** In addition to the negative psychosocial and academic consequences commonly associated with unregulated anger expression, the experience and expression of anger has also been routinely linked with an increase in somatic complaints and other negative physical health concerns. A physiological analysis of anger expression among female adolescents found that there were significant positive relationships between anger expression and blood pressure levels, and significant inverse relationships between anger control and blood pressure levels (Starnier & Peters, 2004). In a related study, Piko, Keresztes, & Pluhar, (2006) found that externalized expressions of anger were consistent with poorer self-perceived health among girls and included increased tobacco as well as alcohol use and decreased diet

control. This suggests that male and female children and adolescents may experience anger differently. Interestingly, physical aggression—which has been commonly linked with the expression of anger—has been found to act as a predictor of increased substance use and other negative health related behaviors among boys in particular (Piko et al., 2006). It is important to interpret any gender-related differences in anger experience and subsequently related behaviors with caution.

While externalized anger may negatively influence an individual's psychosocial and physical health the suppression of anger has also been associated with psychosomatic symptoms (Nichols, 2008; Piko et al., 2006). Indeed, the suppression of anger has been routinely linked to an increase in physiological problems such as higher levels of blood pressure, glucose and cortisol, which often manifest themselves via an increased risk of cardiovascular difficulties (Nichols, 2008; Starner & Peters, 2004). Thus, there is indeed a high need to effectively regulate the experience and expression of anger least it manifest into externalized or repressed psychological, social or physical health concerns.

### **Rationale for the Present Study**

The need to regulate anger expression (both internal and external) has been well documented in the literature (Brendgen et al., 2002; Harburg et al., 1989; Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Larson, 2000; Nichols, 2008; Tsai, 2000).

Indeed, all children feel angry sometimes (Hamel, 2013) and while previous prevention techniques and anger management strategies target the immediate cognitive and expressive patterns of anger (e.g., Denham et al., 2002; Lochman & Wells; 2004, Salavador, 2000), there has been substantially less focus relating to the underlying emotional causes of anger.

Certainly, there can be little contestation of the notion that the reviewed literature augments the supposition of a cognitive triad, whereby children's cognitions or patterns of thought directly interact with their emotional temperaments and socio-behavioral interactions. Furthermore, several previously reviewed studies (Denham et al., 2002; Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Lochman & Wells; 2004, Levine, 1995; Novaco, 1977; Parker et al., 2001; Rivers, et al., 2007; Salavador, 2000; Stiffler, 2008) highlight the importance of addressing emotional constructs (i.e. anger), with a cognizant mindset aimed at mitigating and alleviating the sometimes adverse and often aggressive behaviors that tend to accompany the outward expression of emotions—in particular the emotion of anger. It is of the utmost importance that emotional constructs of children be considered in addition to the constructs of cognitions and expressed behaviors to augment the realization of a more informed and more accurate construction of a cognitive triad—that is, an approach that considers emotions, cognitions and behaviors equally.

While the literature informs use of adult (i.e. researcher, parent, and teacher) experiences and interpretations of child anger, it remains relatively unknown if adult interpretations are consistent with children's own descriptive experiences and expressions of anger. In the present study the emotional experience of anger amongst children through their own language is explored.

The qualitative results obtained from this study will lend evidenced support to the facilitation of a more informed and efficient approach to emotional recognition and anger expression management techniques for children. By exploring and analyzing a child's felt emotional experience and expression of anger, such techniques can be communicated and demonstrated to children in a manner consistent with their level of social and emotional intellect. Approaching children with familiar language and modes of expression will subsequently

increase the rate at which they are able to encode and apply the techniques learned in anger regulation seminars to their everyday lives, resulting in greater levels of social, psychological, and physical functioning.



### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Qualitative research is an inquiry-based procedure designed to explore a social or human problem or concept occurring in its natural setting (Creswell, 1998). Through extensive study and the development and analysis of patterned interactions and relationships, the application of qualitative research enables a more in depth understanding of particular “lived” experiences of participants. The researcher constructs a holistic and intricate picture of the problem, reports detailed views of the research participants, as well as describes and interprets content for meaning related to the subject matter. The purpose of qualitative research is to increase the depth of understanding of a specific phenomenon. In the present study, qualitative methods were used to explore and identify key themes related to a child’s experience of anger. Following an introduction to qualitative research and a description of its appropriateness for the present study, an overview of a school-based emotional awareness program called the Anger Blanket is provided. It was within the context of this program that research participants were recruited. A description of the research instruments and analysis procedures used in the present research is followed by a brief presentation of measures used to promote trustworthiness in the study’s findings.

Through the process of open-ended questions via semi-structured, group-based interviews children informed the content of the present study. Conducting group-based interviews helps to promote honesty, integrity and a sense of comfort among participants. Group formats for discussion also tend to encourage participant participation and interaction. Through this process individual experiences are identified and explored. Analyses of commonalities that transcend individual experiences are documented and analyzed for meaning (Creswell, 2009). This is often accomplished through the researcher’s efforts to derive an understanding of the data based on the

words and meanings of the participants. While the researcher may strive to be as objective as possible in this analysis via bracketing his or her subjective experiences of the data, his or her perspective is undeniably embedded within the analyses. A written component noting the researcher's own considerations and reflections related to the research is included in the present study following an analysis of collected data (please see page 47).

A qualitative design was chosen for the present study because it enabled an explorative component to possibilities that may not have been considered or identified within existing research (Creswell, 2009). Children's own disclosures of experienced and expressed anger collected through the present study may lend evidence to existing research on the emotional experiences of children, as well as highlighting potential differences that may exist between adult interpretations of child emotions and the emotions children themselves actually experience.

### **The Anger Blanket program**

The Anger Blanket is a 10-session emotional awareness and anger regulation program that informs elementary school children how best to manage their emotions and get along with others. The program is designed to capitalize on the notion that children and adults experience anger differently and thus children need different methods of understanding and interpreting the experience of anger (Hamel, 2013). The present study was conducted with children who have taken part in the "Anger Blanket" program.

The reviewed literature in Chapter Two reveals that children often have difficulty recognizing and separating various emotional experiences before the ages of six or seven (Reichenbach & Masters, 1983). Research suggests that it may be easier for children to initiate newly learned behaviors (i.e. effective emotional and anger regulation techniques) rather than modify more stable and possibly maladaptive behaviors that may be incurred during the more

advanced stages of their emotional development later in childhood (Salvador, 2002). Thus, the Anger Blanket program was delivered to seven and eight year old children in a focus group setting, as most children of that age begin to develop a basic emotional vocabulary and initiate more complex social interactions with their peers (Baumgartner & Strayer, 2008).

The Anger Blanket program first encourages children to define anger as they understand and interpret it. Next, the program invites children to identify and describe various other emotions they are familiar with. They are then taught that anger may often act as a cover or “blanket” that may conceal these other types of emotions and begin to explore what underlying feelings may be “covered” by their own anger. Consistent with Novaco’s (1997) stress inoculation approach, the Anger Blanket program helps children learn to identify physiological warning signs of different emotions. Furthermore, they are informed of the differences between “anger felt” and “anger expressed”, and are taught a coping procedure known as B.A.G. (Bodily warning signs, Always count, Go do something else to remain calm) to help them effectively deal with their anger when it arises. The program includes visual aids, homework activities, interactive activities such as role-plays and a hands on activity where the children create their own Anger Blanket they take home.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

University researchers approached a school board in southern Ontario to implement the Anger Blanket program. Following institutional ethical approval and approval by the school board, the principal of an elementary school was approached to discuss the possibility of having the school participate in the study. Following the principal’s approval, two grade three elementary teachers were approached and invited to have their class participate in the study, with one class being designated as a control condition and the other class as an intervention condition.

Written consent was obtained from parents/legal guardians of each child wishing to participate in the study. This included a letter of information explaining details about the program as well as what participation would entail. While both intervention and control classes participated in the same larger study (examining the effectiveness of the Anger Blanket program), only students receiving the Anger Blanket program were asked to participate in the current study.

### **Instruments**

Twenty-minute semi-structured interviews were conducted following each Anger Blanket session in the form of focus groups. Each focus group session was audio-recorded. As children tend to have shorter attention spans than most adults, 20 minutes is seen as an appropriate length for each focus group session. The same children were interviewed following each week to create a sense of comfort and familiarity between the children and the researchers in the hope of attaining more honest and accurate disclosures (Hamel, 2013). In addition, the use of multiple focus group interview sessions provided a more comprehensive account of the participating student's experience of anger—subsuming both days where the child behaved appropriately and days where inappropriate behavior was noted—thereby increasing authentic rapport.

The following questions were asked of the participants: 1) What did you learn about dealing with anger this week? 2) What are some good/positive things that happened between you and your classmates this week? 3) What are some not so good/negative things that happened between you and your classmates this week? In addition, follow up questions were used to attain further information about participant disclosures. Each interview session concluded with a final

question asking participants if there is anything else they would like to reveal about their experiences.

### **Content Analysis**

Audio recordings of the focus groups were transcribed word for word and became the data used in the present study. The written transcriptions were assessed via a qualitative content analysis procedure outlined by Creswell (1998; 2009). The following steps were taken to analyze the written transcriptions of the audio content: 1) transcripts were read to get a general sense of content and basic meaning; 2) important phrases/words were noted as meaning units; 3) each meaning unit was assigned a code word (see Appendix B); 4) code words were combined into overarching themes (see appendix C); 5) code words and themes were reviewed for consistency of interpretation and combined into larger groupings based on similarities and differences; 6) the results obtained from the content analysis procedure were compared to the reviewed literature.

### **Trustworthiness**

Creswell and Miller (2000) explain that constructs of reliability, validity and generalizability of qualitative research do not carry the same weight or meaning as they do in quantitative research. These concepts extend only as far as to suggest whether or not the findings are accurate from the perspective of the researcher, participant or potential observers of a phenomenon. Indeed, biases are inherently imbedded in qualitative research processes (Maxwell, 1996). In the present study, trustworthiness of the qualitative content analysis was promoted through the use of prolonged engagement, inclusion of direct quotes, and a description of the authors' experiences doing the research.

Prolonged engagement at a research site helps a researcher to overcome potential distortions and or barriers to authenticity and accurate participant disclosures that may be

invoked by his/her presence. In the present study, the use of repetitive, semi-structured interviews with the same group of participants helped to encourage a sense of comfort with the researcher/interviewer, thereby further encouraging more honest and detailed descriptions of participant experiences of anger.

The use of direct quotations was also used to augment the confidence and authenticity of analyses and findings. The inclusion of direct transcriptions of interview content add substance and meaning to the analysis procedure and helps to enable readers to discern for themselves if the corresponding analysis and interpretations presented by the researcher are accurate.

Finally, a section detailing the researcher's personal observations and reflections are included in a final analysis of the data. This allows readers to establish for themselves the nature of the researcher's influence on the interpretations of the findings as reported.

### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to explore and identify key themes related to a child's experience of anger. Over the course of ten focus group sessions, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with grade three students. The researcher transcribed audio recordings of the sessions verbatim. A content analysis procedure was used to identify and classify common patterns and themes that illustrate how the emotion of anger is experienced and expressed among children.

## Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter includes a description of results from the content analysis procedure performed on the transcribed focus group interview data. In addition, this chapter includes a brief description of the researcher's experience with the research process. While not directly involved in data collection for the present study (i.e. presentation of the Anger Blanket program and subsequent interviews), the researcher participated as a co-facilitator of the Anger Blanket program during a subsequent delivery in another school.

The content analysis procedure led to five descriptive themes concerning a child's experience of anger. The themes included: 1) Understanding Anger, 2) Origins of Anger, 3) Consequences of Anger, 4) Regulation and Resolution of Anger and 5) Relationships with Others. Understanding Anger included definitional interpretations of anger, potential warning signs, means of expression and a description of emotions often confused with anger. Origins of Anger subsumed derivation patterns and rationales of anger expression. The Consequences of Anger illustrated subthemes of cognitive impairments and reactions to anger, as well as experiences anger has on others. Regulation and Resolution of Anger referred to de-escalating conflicts, seeking third-party help and resolving hostile disputes. Finally, Relationships with Others included children's perception of what it means to be a good friend as well as qualities that *are* and *are not* warranted in such a relationship.

### Theme 1: Understanding Anger

A key facet of the Anger Blanket program is the concept that anger is a secondary emotion—that is, anger is an emotion that exists in addition to an underlying emotion.

To make the abstract concept of secondary emotion more tangible, children were taught that anger could be seen as a cover or blanket that hides or masks one's other emotions. They often repeated the terminology presented in each focus group lesson.

*The anger blanket always covers up your real feelings*

*Anger is covering your real feelings*

In some instances the experience of anger was explicitly described as a secondary emotion, presenting itself as a consequence of a prior emotion.

*Anger isn't like a real feeling, it just like sometimes when you're sad, the anger blanket comes over and it just makes you mad, so anger is like not a real feeling*

*It covers you... but that's not actually what covers you, it's when you're mad and angry, it's like what your brain's thinking...it's not actually an invisible anger blanket, It's actually what your brain is thinking*

Children also recognized the conflicting emotional nature of anger with other feelings.

*Umm, you can't be angry and be acting like a happy monkey*

*Anger is, isn't a happy feeling*

Children acknowledged the metaphoric component of the Anger Blanket and displayed insight into its pedagogical objectives. This suggests that some children may not only have a strong grasp of what anger is, but it also infers a degree of insight into the complex concept of emotions more abstractly.

*Umm the anger blanket is just like a way for adults to explain it to kids like [Name] said, earlier like its just like... your brain isn't actually choosing to be mad the anger blanket is just a way for adults to explain it better to kids*

In addition to discerning and presenting their technical (definitional) understanding of anger, children also noted various warning signs and physiological symptoms associated with anger. Among the most cited were facial characteristics such as clenching teeth, reddening of the face, an inability to speak or sore throat and tense muscles.



*Sometimes when you get mad your face starts to get red and there is body warning signs, like umm... clenched teeth, frog in your throat, uhh... tense muscles, heavy breathing*

*Anger gives you warnings signs, its just like your being sick... it gives you warning signs*

*Like heavy breathing, like fast heart, and...and...and frog throat*

*I learned about anger that your face gets mad*

*its hard to smile when your angry*

*Tense muscles, clenched teeth*

*Sweaty palms*

*Fast heart, red face, tight fists*

*It makes you want to uh throw up*

*Sometimes when you get mad you feel like you want to pull off your hair*

*Your face is red*

However, it was noted that one's face could turn red for different reasons.

*There are different reasons for your face to turn red, like when you smile, laugh...angry.*

In addition to these symptoms, a rise in body temperature was noted.

*There is body warning signs...when you get really hot...*

*When you're angry, your temperature kind of goes up*

Many children also described feeling a lack of control when angry and that it was an inescapable feeling.

*Sometimes when you're mad it feels like an earthquake happening inside you*

*It just takes over your body, it its like its controlling your body and you cant really control it yourself*

*And you cant get rid of it cause its like, smothering you*

Children were well aware of the impact anger can have on one's actions. They expressed both physical manifestations of anger as well as verbal manifestations. Physical expression of anger included fighting, punching and kicking, while verbal manifestations included bullying, teasing and yelling or screaming. Some children described their own experiences and physical expression of anger.

*So when you every time you want to, you get mad, and you just want go to someone and punch them*

*Sometimes when you're mad you start hitting somebody*

*Umm it's when you...want to hit someone really bad and you're so angry that you want to hit someone*

Others described physical manifestations of anger from a third-party perspective.

*Well I saw someone kicking someone*

*Some people are fighting today*

*Ohhhhhh...ummm... today umm...someone got really mad and started pushing people and screaming at people*

*One of my classmates pushed someone in the ground*

Bullying and teasing were also noted as expressions of anger.

*Someone in my class got bullied*

*You're a bully and that your acting bad*

*Umm, someone teased someone*

Specific examples of teasing included calling names and making faces at others.

*People make faces*

*Calling names*

As with the physical manifestations of anger, recounts of other children's verbal and non-physical expressions of anger were noted.

*Umm, someone teased someone*

*I saw somebody picking on somebody...*

A rise in the volume of a person's voice was also cited.

*Um a guy was screaming*

*He was almost still yelling*

Interestingly, theft and stealing were included in the expression of anger as well.

*A lot of people were upset and were just taking the ball cause it was getting too aggressive, and he was still upset about that so we were trying to get out*

*He took [Name's] ball*

*Stealing somebody's hairband*

Curiously, one child noted that sometimes anger could arise without noticing any of the previously mentioned warning signs.

*Umm I learned about anger that...that the anger blanket creeps up on you when you're not expecting it*

Another focal premise of the Anger Blanket program is fostering a sense of emotional awareness and understanding. Through the program, various emotions were discussed in relation to the secondary emotion of anger. Emotions that may often be mistaken for anger were noted and differences in emotional affect were also discussed. Many children were able to discern and distinguish anger from other emotional constructs such as disappointment, feelings of sadness, frustration and confusion.

*I learned that there are many different kinds of feelings and that kids usually use sad, happy or mad and forget about all the other feelings*

*There's more different feelings, I mean I learned about anger this week that there's more different feelings than mad, sad and angry*

When asked about recent situations that sparked experiences of anger children were able to delineate several underlying emotions.

*I wasn't really angry, I was just kind of upset*

*Not very happy, not very happy...a bit disappointed*

*Like...uhhhhh...shocked*

*Lonely*

*Lonely, frustrated, disappointed, frazzled*

*Disappointed... it really bothered me*

*Mad*

*Confused*

They also discussed several positive underlying feelings in relation to the secondary emotion of anger.

*I can, I felt kind of uhh... curious of why we had to stop, like he told us why, but I just didn't really know what the specific point was... he (teacher) said that we were having problems*

*Determined*

*Embarrassed... confident...worried*

Differences in behavior were also noted in relation to changes in related feelings of anger.

*umm, when your angry it's not a very nice feeling and if you're not feeling like you want to be nice, you won't be nice...and if you're feeling determined, you'll act determined...and if you're feeling angry you'll act angry*

The theme of Understanding Anger encompassed definitional understandings of anger as well as some of the warning signs and physiological symptoms that often accompany this

secondary emotion. Children also presented several forms of expressing anger, both physically (e.g. hitting) and psychologically (e.g. name-calling). Finally, children were able to illustrate an understanding of related emotional constructs and distinguish them from the construct of anger while concomitantly noting that many different emotional constructs may underlie the experience of anger.

## **Theme 2: Origins of Anger**

Origins of Anger referred to children's understandings of how anger actually transpires and the situations that provoke it. This theme included the various sources children identified as instigating the experience of anger as well as discerning whether or not certain situations warrant the experience and expression of anger. Precursors to the experience of anger included physical as well as both verbal and non-verbal situations.

Interestingly, the only physical provocations noted in the present interviews revolved around aggressive tactics used in sporting games.

*Umm... me and my friend, we got into a little fight like, we, we were playing soccer and were... Were getting over control and we were fights*

*We usually sometimes argue like in soccer when you get, usually when you usually get a goal or not, or you might get too aggressive*

*When I play soccer with her, she...when you have the ball, she sometimes kicks it out, she gets a little out of control*

Verbal provocations included name-calling and disagreements during sporting events.

*And, umm I just got mad at them cause they called them a girl, and he was a boy*

*Umm.. that people were scoring, like people were like thinking that they score, scored a goal and they were saying I scored a goal and they goalie was saying no, and then we got into a big fight*

Also noted was a misinterpretation of intentions.

*He wants to be funny and make (Name) laugh*

Other non-verbal provocations included negative, emotionally laden experiences such as frustration, isolation and sadness.

*Like when you have a problem, a really big problem you can't solve*

*I learned that about anger when you are mad you can't talk or you can't deal with the problem or talk it out ...then you get more angry*

*Umm... when sometimes when you get angry you act like it's a big mountain, but it's actually just a little mole...The mountain is like a, you make it like a big problem even though it's just a small one*

*Anytime you feel like something like lonely, you...the anger blanket comes over you and you kind of like...the feeling that you really are is not even there...its like you really angry*

*Umm at lunch recess my friend left me and went to the book fair and she made me feel a little left out*

*Really angry, but then I realized I was feeling sad cause he was being mean to me*

Discerning a rationale for anger was a common sub-construct of the Origins of Anger theme.

Children had contradictory views of whether anger was or was not appropriate.

*Uh, umm...not good to be mad, but if it's something you should be mad about, ...it's okay to be mad*

*It's never good to be angry unless it's a really bad situation...or you shouldn't be angry*

The theme Origins of Anger described children's acknowledgement and understanding of the types of circumstances that may provoke the experience of anger. Anger was seen as a reaction to physical altercations during sporting events, verbal disputes and miscommunication as well as instances of intentional exclusion. While these scenarios were easily identified as provoking the experience of anger, no real consistency was evident regarding the appropriate use of anger.

### Theme 3: Consequences of Anger

The Consequences of Anger theme referred to the experience of anger and immediate impact it has on cognitive, social, emotional and physical wellbeing. In addition, children also described how other individual's anger negatively affected them personally.

In particular, many children noted the impairing quality anger has on their intellect—in particular the ability to make wise decisions—and sense of self-control.

*I learned that when you, I learned that when you like when you, are angry, that, I think it's your intelligence level goes down and you sometimes make, and you often make dumb choices*

*Sometimes, when you're, when I learned that when you're angry, you make poor choices, not the ones that you usually make*

*Umm... when you're mad you can't control your body*

In conjunction with the subtheme of a lack of control, participants explained how they could act when experiencing bouts of intense anger. Common responses to extreme anger included notions of violence and physical altercations.

*Anger can lead...oh yeah, it was anger can lead to danger and it can lead violence*

*Violence...and vandalism*

*I just pushed him back*

Children were very descriptive in delineating examples of how the anger of others negatively impacted their own emotional and physical wellbeing. Emotional transgressions included feelings of sadness and feeling left out.

*Angry, and you're playing a game, sometimes you just feel, you feel like you just want to cry, sad...*

*Someone in my class excluded me today and I did not like it*

*Someone in my class, was excluding me today*

*Somebody was excluding me ...it mad me feel sad*

*When I was just asking if I could play, and then they let me play, and then they excluded me when I was playing and I did not like it*

*They don't want us to play and they don't include*

Also included were descriptions of incidents in which the participants were the victims of name-calling and bullying.

*Someone was bullying me and I didn't like it, and they were saying I couldn't kick it far but I actually could kick it far and they were making fun of me and I didn't really like that*

*When I was walking by someone came up and called me poop...ahhh... I was really really upset*

Physical manifestations of anger included being kicked, pushed or tripped. The taking/unauthorized use of physical objects/property was included as another manifestation of anger.

*uhhh...I got kicked...*

*I got tripped*

*Someone liked at recess, he pushed me at the first day of February that was yesterday and he pushed me and he hurt my back*

*And they just came back from like these girls were at the front and they were like pulling it and we were behind it and then the people at the front fell and then everyone else fell down and me and [Name] were at that bottom of the pile and our legs were like this...and then everyone landed on me*

*Uhh... someone tried to punch me...I felt bad...*



*When I was at afterschool program and morning school program, you see the red chair over there? And the tent, well me and [Name] ...me and someone else were using it and someone other kids just kind of came and took it over, kind of just took it over and I didn't really like that and I was really upset and sad*

*See the red chair again over there? Well someone kept bugging...well I won't say names but I was using the chair, and after snack the person rushed and kind just took the red chair when I was using it and they actually weren't using it they just wanted to make me upset*

The theme Consequences of Anger described the after-effects of experiencing anger.

Children noted that anger could decrease self-control and lead to poor decision-making, potentially leading to acts of violence and bullying. Subsequently, children explained the impact of anger from a victim's perspective and described how another's anger can impinge on their emotional, social and physical wellbeing.

#### **Theme 4: Regulation and Resolution of Anger**

Regulation and Resolution of Anger referred to what could be done to control and /or prevent the escalation of angry outbursts and how to make amends following an angry confrontation. Regulation strategies included calming techniques such as counting or deep breathing exercises. Approaches to resolving an angry conflict included seeking third-party help (i.e. teacher/adult) and problem solving strategies.

Participants were very eager to share their own approaches to de-escalating anger-provoking situations and self-regulating the expression of their own anger. Children expressed the need for self-control and the benefits such regulation could incur.

*If you put the anger blanket away, you have self control...Self control is, like you can control yourself and not get all wild*

*We could try to play uhh.... with good self control*

Counting was an important technique. Children explained that it was difficult or impossible to count while they were angry so the focus of counting detracted from the experience and expression of anger.

*I learned about anger that it's impossible to count when you're angry*

*Umm...I just left...I have something, when you're angry, you, you like count to 10, when you're mad or angry, you can't like count, like when you're angry you can't count, you can't like count at the same time....like when you're angry...I don't know how to explain it*

*When you're mad you count to 10 or 25 or 100 and it makes you cool down*

*You can, you can count to 10, and or you can't count while you're angry*

*I know when you get angry, you can count to ten and or 100 or 25*

*That you have to count to 10 when you're angry, and you go oooooonnnneeee, twooooo, you have to count slow...to calm yourself down if you're really angry*

Another de-escalation technique was to get away from the situation provoking the experience of anger. Children noted that they could take a break from their activity or engagements and/or seek the companionship of another friend.

*You go an take a drink or walk away from something...you have a break...you have a nap at home*

*You can get away from the problem and go with somebody else, umm there was bad, yeah... the one that got pushed he had to calm down, and he ran in the hallways just to calm down*

*We ran away*

One child suggested pretending to show an alternative emotion.

*When you're, say when you're under pressure, and your friends are daring you to do something and your don't want to do it, but they're like forcing you to do it...pretend your frustrated because they're like telling you to do what you don't want to do*

It is interesting to note the child suggested “pretending” to display frustration, as opposed to genuinely indicating the emotion of frustration, which could be the initial cause of anger (a secondary emotion) in the first place. This could suggest an attempt by the child to *cover* the emotion of anger with the primary emotion of frustration, rather than *uncovering* anger to illustrate his frustration.

Resolving anger-related conflicts included talk-based strategies such as requesting an individual to politely stop antagonizing them or apologizing.

*Just ask him, can you please not do that again, that you hurt my back*

*We just say, to her you’re being a little aggressive, can you please you not use hands on*

*I actually said, can you please stop and then he yelled but he said, and then I said can you please stop punching at Jamal? And be quieter... and he was quieter after that*

*They apologized*

If direct confrontation failed, children suggested seeking third party help from a teacher.

They indicated a teacher or adult might be better able to resolve an anger-provoking dispute.

*Maybe just ask him to stop and if he doesn’t tell a teacher.*

*The teacher... because they can umm... can talk to him. (Re: Who would you tell?)*

*The teacher helped...was when one person went to a teacher but she did nothing with us*

*Umm... uh... you have to get a teacher sometimes*

Parents of respective children involved in a dispute resolved an “at-school” conflict could be involved.

*My mom talked to her mom*

The theme Regulation and Resolution Techniques included the types of strategies children used to control and combat the onset of an angry experience in their own anger-provoking situations. While counting and deep breathing were commonly cited as controlling techniques, more direct methods of confrontation such as verbally addressing the situation/individual or seeking the assistance of an adult were included. However, it is worthy to note that some participants suggested seeking an adult only as a last resort, indicating that they wanted to resolve conflicts via more independent means.

### **Theme 5: Relations with Others**

Relations with Others referred to how children perceived and experienced the various social interactions they encountered on a day-to day-basis. An absence of anger-related conflicts was explicitly noted. Qualities of good friendship were also described; positive qualities included being nice, cooperating, including others and enjoying each other's company.

*Well a bunch of people were playing soccer with me and we were having fun and sometimes I play with my friend and they make me feel really good*

*Umm well they're really nice to me and they talk nice to me and they include me.*

*Umm... well, I sort of tried to tell [Name] a nice compliment ha ha ha.*

*We were playing together though*

*We were having fun laughing*

*All...all of my friends were playing really fun games together and at the end we were all having so much fun*

*Umm... my best friend and I we were jumping and we were jumping on and off of the climbers and we were having fun and it was funny cause this little kid wanted to do it and she couldn't do it so we said you can be a judge so me and you can do it and I went to the last bar and jumped off and it wasn't even far but I could go away*

Sharing and helping others were also characterized as qualities of good friendship.

*Someone let me borrow their pencil*

*Like, we were like hanging out together and like sharing*

*We were having fun laughing, no put downs, sharing laughing*

*Umm... Today, this morning I helped one of my friends with their work*

*You can help your friend clean up*

In addition to positive characteristics of a good friend such as general enjoyment of each other's company and mutual engagement in fun activities, children noted an absence of "put downs" (i.e. teasing and/or bullying) as an essential feature of good friendship.

*Umm.. me and my friend like [Name] and [Name] we were playing, we were skipping together, and playing this fan game, thing and I don't know we were having fun and laughing and no putdowns*

*My friends and I both, well both of my friends were playing soccer, they were seeing who's a better player, well not really, I was the judge and if it went beside a the post I would say if it was a goal or not, and we were having fun laughing, no putdowns*

*Me... my friend, my friend, and I were playing hockey most soccer, and we were having fun, laughing and no put downs*

The theme Relations with Others described children's understanding of what constituted a good friend. Characteristics and qualities subsuming cooperation, complements and inclusion were common themes identified in such relationships. Also evident was the absence of anger provoking behaviors such as bullying or teasing.

### **Summary of Themes**

Based on a qualitative content analysis of transcripts from the focus group interviews with children, five themes emerged. Understanding Anger referred to children's definitional comprehension of anger and the metaphoric utility of the Anger Blanket as a cover of true emotions. This theme also included physiological warning signs and symptoms consistent with the experience of anger. Origins of Anger described children's perception of how anger actually

transpired, the social situations that provoked its emergence and whether or not anger was ever warranted. Consequences of Anger described the impact that anger-related behaviors (physical, verbal, and non-verbal) had on children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical wellbeing. Regulation and Resolution of Anger referred to the steps children took to control the escalation of angry outbursts and how best to resolve anger-related conflicts with peers. Finally, Relations with Others described the characteristics of good-friendship, with a focus on cooperation, inclusion, mutual enjoyment and the absence of bullying or teasing.

### **Researcher Reflections**

In this section I describe my own experience with the Anger Blanket program in order to promote transparency in the organization, analysis and interpretation of the data. While not directly involved with the collection of the data obtained in the present study, I was a co-facilitator of the Anger Blanket program during a subsequent offering of the program. As my research is part of a larger study evaluating the overall success of the first trial of Anger Blanket program, I was assigned data collected at the same intervals as the counterpart study (see Hamel, 2013) examining the emotional understanding and experiences of children whom did not take part in the Anger Blanket program. I was not able to use the data I collected during the second trial of the program for my own study.

Before delving into the intricacies of the Anger Blanket program, I would like to take this opportunity to briefly outline my interests and experiences working with children. I have always been drawn to the emotional, social and behavioral interactions children share with their peers and other individuals within their social environment. I have had the opportunity to work with children in various settings—including mainstream school, mental health, behavioral, developmental disabilities, and sporting/active environments. In addition, I also worked as a

research assistant for a larger graduate research team examining the display of emotions in children. Throughout these experiences, I have noticed young children often have trouble interpreting and verbalizing their emotions—in particular anger—and often resort to physical manifestations such as hitting, kicking and throwing objects; other times however I noticed children would suppress their feelings and sit with a very negative affect (displayed via facial expressions). Thus, I became interested in discerning the various mechanisms in place that allow children to interact with one another and if/how they are able to regulate their own emotions.

When presented with the opportunity to conduct my thesis as part of a larger study examining the overall effectiveness of the Anger Blanket program, I was quick to confirm my interest. The notion that anger could be interpreted as a cover or “blanket” that conceals other emotions struck me as something that could be easily presented to and interpreted by children. It was the hope of the program coordinator that this program could help children to better understand and regulate their emotional experiences—in particular, the emotion of anger. The Anger Blanket program instructs children that anger is a secondary emotion (top of the blanket) that is provoked or instigated by a primary emotion (under the blanket); children must pull back the anger blanket to discern the underlying emotional constructs hidden beneath.

The raw data from the present study was collected prior to my involvement with the Anger Blanket program. A research assistant conducted and audio recorded interviews with focus groups of children in the Anger Blanket program; my data consisted of the audio content from these interviews. Transcribing the audio recorded content proved somewhat difficult, as children often interrupted or talked over one another in an effort to voice their opinions and answers to the questions the research assistant was asking. Nevertheless, I was able to discern phrases and small stories relating to the experience of anger; this formed the content of my study.

My involvement with the Anger Blanket program itself commenced during the inauguration of a replica study examining the program's effectiveness. As a co-facilitator, I was charged with helping deliver the Anger Blanket program, administering pre and post measures of children's emotional knowledge and assisting children with group and individual learning activities. It was important to develop a good working relation with both the children as well as the teachers present in the classroom in order to promote an integrated learning environment in which the children felt comfortable asking questions and requesting assistance with more difficult tasks. This helped to ensure each child was in a position to maximize his/her learning through the Anger Blanket program. Over the course of the program, I noticed children became more vocal and detailed in their responses to the questions being asked in each session. I also noticed the development of a stronger and more diverse emotional vocabulary held by many of the children as the sessions progressed. It is the hope of the program that with a stronger appreciation and understanding of their own feelings, children will be better able to regulate the experience and expression of their emotions, subsequently resulting in less frequent and less intense bouts of anger and aggressive behaviors.

Helping facilitate the second trial run of the Anger Blanket program provided me with new insights into the emotional understandings and experiences of children; however, the analysis process and coding of my own data collected during the program's initial presentation undeniably shed light on my own appreciation of how children interpret abstract concepts such as emotions and various cognitive states of being. Through coding and assembling the various themes presented in my study, the benefit of making the abstract more concrete and tangible (for children) became an underlying notion I began to pay close attention to. Indeed, this was a key component of the Anger Blanket program; reviewing transcripts and organizing them into the



presented themes enabled me to understand how important and impactful age-appropriate language and concepts can truly be.

In particular, I noted that many children were able to take the symbolic concept of an “Anger Blanket”—as a cover of one’s true emotions—internalize it, and reflect it back through their own symbolic and metaphoric explanations. For example, in explaining his/her interpretation of the “Anger Blanket” one child noted that that anger blanket was not actually an invisible blanket that physically covers you, but rather that it was a particular (angry) state of mind that can occur under various circumstances. Later in the analysis, I found children were able to describe their experiences of anger with similar levels of veracity; for example one child noted that anger was like an earthquake erupting inside of him/her. The use of symbolic and metaphoric language in communicating with children—both in transmitting, and receiving/interpreting information—is a crucial message I picked up from conducting my analysis. Not only does it allow for open waves of communication between children and adults, but it also encourages and helps facilitate the transition of young minds from concrete and tangible concepts to more abstract and intangible cognitions.

### **Summary**

Five themes emerged during the content analysis procedure of the transcribed interview sessions. The first theme, Understanding Anger included child’s interpretations of what anger looks like and subsumed concepts and means of expression, potential warning signs, and additional emotions that may often be confused with anger. The second theme, Origins of Anger, illustrated the genesis and rationale behind verbal and physical manifestations of anger. The third theme, Consequences of Anger, subsumed concepts such as cognitive impairments, reactions to expressed anger, as well as the perceived influence anger has on other individuals.

The fourth theme, Regulation and Resolution of Anger included the means by which children sought to de-escalate conflicts and resolve interpersonal disputes. Finally, the fifth theme, Relationships with Others illustrated children's perception of qualities of good friendship.

The premise of the Anger Blanket program immediately grabbed my attention, and I knew it was where I wanted to direct and conduct my thesis research. I have always found myself drawn to working with children, and my experiences with them have covered a wide range of settings and contexts ranging from physical/active engagements to discerning and understanding issues related to mental health. The need to be able to communicate effectively with children is a theme that resonated throughout each setting; the need to communicate information and interpret responses concerning the emotional experiences of children is a concept that resonated with me personally. Children are able to offer a wealth of knowledge—particularly when that knowledge concerns them. I believe it is my responsibility as a researcher to seek to understand that knowledge and reflect it towards improving and refining communicative and educative strategies designed to enhance children's social, emotional and cognitive development.

It is essential that the present findings be compared and contrasted with findings in existent literature; such a comparison can serve to augment existing concepts in current research, as well as illuminate potential discrepancies between adult interpretations of children's experiences and the actual experiences of children themselves. This may serve as a means of elucidating new possibilities to be explored by researchers, counsellors and educators in their pursuit of understanding and working with children.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and identify key themes related to a child's experience of anger. A content analysis procedure was performed on transcripts from semi-structured focus groups with third grade children. Five resulting themes included: Understanding Anger, Origins of Anger, Consequences of Anger, Regulation and Resolution of Anger and finally Relations with Others. Understanding Anger described children's comprehension of the emotion including physiological warning signs and symptoms as well as the symbolic use of the Anger Blanket as a cover of underlying feelings. Origins of Anger referred to children's perception of how anger emerged—particularly as a result of negative social experiences—and whether or not anger was ever appropriate. Consequences of Anger described the impact that anger-related behaviors (physical, verbal, and non-verbal) had on children's cognitive, social, emotional and physical wellbeing. Regulation and Resolution of Anger described the strategies children used to control the escalation of angry outbursts as well as how best to resolve and mend anger-related conflicts with peers. Relations with Others outlined the characteristics of good friendship. Particular attention was paid to the use of cooperation, inclusion, mutual enjoyment and the absence of bullying and/or teasing.

Anger is often associated with other emotions, as well as a range of cognitions and behaviors (Cole, Zahn—Waxler, Fox, Usher, & Welsh, 1996; Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Starner & Peters, 2004). It is an emotional state of arousal often due to threatening or frustrating social conditions (Mental Health Foundation, 2013). Higher levels with aggressive tendencies among children have been correlated with an increase in conduct problems (Cole et al., 1996) as well as physical health concerns (Starner & Peters, 2004) that often persist into adulthood (Kerr &

Schneider, 2007). Examining the construct of anger from a child's perspective—that is, through his/her own experiences detailed via his/her own vernacular—is an invaluable tool for addressing potential negative effects of experienced and expressed anger among children. There are both similarities and differences between the existing literature, largely based on adults' perceptions of children's experiences, and the present data from qualitative interviews with children.

Similarities between the existing literature and experiences of children in the present study lend credibility and support to current findings in the literature on the topic of children's anger.

Differences imply the need for focused attention in areas where there may be further exploration and development of concepts and research constructs for use in theory and clinical settings.

### **Similarities Between Present Study and the Literature**

Consistent with the literature, children in the present study described several sources of anger. In addition, the display and expression of anger reported by participants was routinely echoed throughout research based on adult observations and interpretations. In the present study, children's understanding of basic feelings such as sadness and fear were consistent with existing works examining the emotional comprehension of children. Children in the present study were also able, as noted in the literature (Campos, et al., 1989; Levine, 1995; Parker et al., 2001) to discern and appreciate underlying causes of anger-related behaviors including the role of primary emotions and intentions. The discussion of regulation and calming techniques by children in the present study was consistent with existing research on child abilities to mitigate anger-based behaviors. Finally, it is noteworthy that the influence of anger on social relationships presented in the literature was indirectly related to how children experienced social interactions in the present study.

**Roots of anger.** Children in the present study provided situational examples of how anger developed as a result of interactions with peers and other individuals within their social networks. Research from Levine (1995) and Campos et al. (1989) noted that for children, anger often originated from aversive social conditions. Children in the present study noted several instances in which they found themselves becoming angry due to deleterious social interactions such as experiencing a peer's intentional provocations such as taking desired objects, a peer's loss of behavioral control during sporting events and witnessing aggressive tendencies of a classmate. Additionally aversive conditions were noted to have arisen amongst children in the present study due to miscommunication and misinterpretation of intentions. Research from Tsai (2000) suggested that feeling heard, understood and receiving acknowledgement for one's actions, intentions and/or questions/comments were common goals. In the present study, children noted they became upset during verbal disputes over trust (e.g., if a goal was actually scored during a soccer game), and misunderstood jokes or attempts to be humorous that were misconstrued as offensive or hurtful. Indeed, results of the present study lend support to the claim that anger may transpire among children during social transgressions and infractions such as a breach of trust or skewed interpretations of verbal statements (Levine, 1995; Tsai, 2000).

The concept of self-worth was also noted in the literature on children's anger (Tsai, 2000). Results of the present study augment the notion that anger amongst children was often precipitated by damages incurred to their self-esteem. In particular, feelings of isolation and rejection (i.e. being left out) were described by children in the present study as emotional triggers to the experience and expression of anger.

**Emotional underpinnings.** Children in the present study displayed an increase in emotional knowledge over the course of the Anger Blanket program. This increase was

consistent with research presented by Widen and Russell (2008), who suggested that children's lexicon of emotions developed alongside cognitive maturation. Indeed, a key focus of the Anger Blanket program was to increase the depth and scope of children's emotional vocabulary (and understanding) by suggesting that anger was often a secondary emotion predicated on the experience of a primary emotion such as disappointment, loss or frustration. Consistent with previous research (Tsai, 2000), children in the present study explained that they could feel angry after experiencing emotions of disappointment, sadness, confusion, loneliness and shock. In addition, children in the present study began to recognize these emotions as instigating feelings of anger.

**The experience of anger.** Previous literature on children's experience of anger suggested there were two focal modalities by which anger was experienced and expressed: "Anger In" or suppressed anger, and "Anger Out" or externalized anger (Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Harburg et al., 1979; Rivers et al., 2007; Tsai, 2000; Von Salisch & Vogelgesang, 2005). While children in the present study did not draw formal distinctions between suppressed and externalized anger, they did note instances of behaviors consistent with each respective mode of anger expression.

**Suppressed anger.** Previous research noted that suppressed anger often resulted in an internalization of negative feelings that present via maladaptive patterns of social adjustment and interpersonal interactions (Cole et al., 2003; Schultz et al., 2000). These findings were consistent with the findings of the present study given that children noted either experiencing or witnessing instances of teasing, bullying and even theft. Additionally, the suppression of anger was linked to increased physiological problems such as higher blood pressure levels and cardiovascular difficulties (Nichols, 2008; Starner & Peters, 2004). While quantitative physiological measures

were not collected in the present study, several children noted having a sore throat, an increase in heart rate and an increase in heavy breathing or panting when experiencing anger, which have been correlated with a higher risk of cardiovascular difficulties (Mayo Clinic, 2014).

***Externalized anger.*** Abundant in the literature were means by which anger became externalized and realized via aggressive behaviors and verbal threats (Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Rivers et al., 2007; Tsai, 2000). Children in the present study discussed physical and often violent manifestations of anger such as fighting, punching and kicking as well as making rude or obscene faces or gestures as non-verbal expressions of anger. Verbal expressions of anger included name-calling and a rise in the volume of one's voice (i.e. shouting or screaming). Furthermore, research from Jenkins and Ball (2000) suggested that many children believed anger was associated with expressions of desire or dominance. This was also consistent with the present study, as children described instances of annexation over favorite seating arrangements and play areas.

**Consequences of anger.** Prior research indicated that individuals experiencing higher levels of arousal due to anger and frustration endorsed a less restrictive display of anger, including temper tantrums and both defiant and antisocial behaviors (Denham et al., 2000; Kerr & Schneider, 2007), suggesting a lack of behavioral regulation and control. Children in the present study noted that one could easily lose control over rational thoughts, behaviors and language when influenced by anger and aggression. Also present in the literature was the notion that children believe others will respond negatively to their expressed anger and that expression would adversely impact their social relationships with friends and peers (Underwood, 1997). Findings from the present study were consistent with the notion that anger negatively influenced

social relationships. Indeed, many children described feelings of exclusion after an angry exchange in their peer group both in the classroom and also during free play.

**Positive emotions associated with anger.** There are also potentially facilitative qualities associated with anger. Research from Campos et al. (1989) and Levine (1995) contended that anger was a means by which children organized and executed certain behaviors to achieve particular goals. Findings from a study examining children's emotional-situational knowledge suggested that anger may transpire when a particular objective appears difficult, but possible to achieve (Levine, 1995). While anger is often displayed and interpreted as a negative emotion, research findings in the present study also contend that many children believe positive emotions, including determination and confidence could potentially underlie the expression of anger as well.

**Recognizing anger expression.** There was evidence in the literature that a major focus of regulating anger expression stemmed from principles and practices established by anger management programs such as the Coping Power Program (Lochman & Wells, 2004) and In Control (Salvador, 2002). These programs are based on a "stress inoculation" approach designed to help monitor angry outbursts and identify precipitating events, cognitions and physiological feelings that may trigger an outburst (Novaco, 1977; Wilde, 2001). Children in the present study were able to identify many warning signs that could signal oncoming feelings of anger and aggression. Noted in the present study were physiological signs such as clenched teeth and fists, a rise in body temperature and in some instances a desire to vomit. Also identified were more metaphoric descriptions of warning signs such as feeling smothered by anger or feeling like "an earthquake is happening inside you".



**Coping techniques.** Research from Rivers and her colleagues (2007) suggested that the use of anger regulation strategies was consistently associated with positive conflict management techniques and a desire for positive resolutions. This was found to be consistent with the results of the present study given that children in the focus groups indicated a need for regulatory behaviors and self-control to resolve disputes and arguments. Effective coping techniques noted in the literature and by children in the present study that could be used to reduce and/or manage the expression of anger included talking about emotions with a close friend, cognitively dismissing the event, leaving or avoiding the situation, engaging in alternative play activities and waiting for the provoking individual to apologize (Kerr & Schneider, 2007; Landreth, 2002; Rivers et al., 2007). Talking through the altercation, hanging out with close friends, taking a break from the situation (i.e. getting a drink of water, having a nap) and cognitively absconding the event (i.e. through means like counting) were common techniques cited by children during the focus group interviews. Children in the present study also noted that an apology by a provoking individual could help resolve anger-related transgressions. If unable to resolve the issue themselves, several children in the present study recommended telling an adult such as a parent or a teacher.

**Relations with others.** Findings in the present study concerning how anger influenced social relationships with others were found to be somewhat consistent with previous research findings. It was apparent in the literature that children try to mend and resolve anger-related conflicts in an effort to maintain strong social relations with their friends and peers (Rivers, et al., 2007). Findings in the present study indicated that strong social relationships were built on mutual enjoyment of each other's company, mutual enjoyment of activities and a strict absence of characteristics associated with bullying and/or teasing (i.e. "no put downs"). It would be

interesting to discern how children perceived the experience of anger relative to their social relationships, and whether or not it had any temporary or lasting influence on the establishment or maintenance of friendship. Future research examining children's socio-emotional experiences following angry feelings and exchanges may explore this topic.

### **Differences Between Present Study and the Literature**

There were differences between the results of present study and the literature. These differences may be attributed to a dearth of available research stemming from the perspectives of children. Differences included how anger was modeled in the community (i.e. by parents and teachers), where to seek help to mediate anger-related conflicts and whether or not the use and expression of anger was ever justified.

**Modeling.** The notion that modeling behavior inspired the future actions of others was one of the most renowned findings in child psychological literature (Bandura et al., 1963). The famous "Bobo-doll" study conducted by Bandura and his colleagues in 1963 found that children acted more aggressively towards a blowup clown doll if they had been exposed to an aggressive model prior to their interaction compared to children who had not been exposed to the aggressive model. Parental and care-giving figures often set the stage for a child's behavioral development (Cole et al., 2003). While the notion of adult or parental modeling and emotional regulation has been well documented in the literature, there was no mention of where anger-related behaviors were originally learned from the children in the present study. Albeit initially sustained, children in the present study noted that they could become aggressive if another peer was behaving aggressively towards them. It could be interpreted that children are able to model and influence the behavior of their classmates and peers. Nevertheless, there was no indication of how or

where any of the children in the present study learned some of the more common—particularly physical—ways of expressing their anger (i.e., kicking, punching, issuing verbal threats).

**Seeking help.** Interestingly, the literature was very sparse concerning resolving anger-related conflicts via third party help such as from a parent or teacher. In particular, this is an area of research that may be lacking due to shortage of conducted child-perspective studies focused on emotional expression and experiences. Children in the present study voiced the notion that they could seek the assistance or help of a teacher or another adult if they could not resolve an anger-related dispute themselves or if the behavior of one or more individuals was getting out of control.

**Is anger justified?** Also absent in the literature was the discernment of whether or not the use and expression of anger was ever warranted. Present in the documented research was the idea that an understanding and appreciation of social and cultural guidelines helped children to express negative emotions such as anger in socially appropriate ways (Parker et al., 2001).

While socially appropriate expression was a concept noted in previous studies, missing was the social justification for that particular expression. Children in the present study noted that it was okay to be angry or mad if it was “a very bad situation”, or if the situation was one in which you should be angry. While these descriptions and circumstances remained vague, they did suggest that there were instances in which children believed the expression of anger was justified. Future research may benefit by expanding on the construct of anger expression justification among children to obtain a more in depth understanding of how children perceive anger transpiration, and whether or not the various cognitive, social and emotional underpinnings for its expression would ever be warranted.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

Descriptions of the experience and expression of anger among children in the present study were found to be largely consistent with existing literature. As noted in the literature, children in the present study were aware of how anger typically originated—typically, via social altercations with peers. Children in the present study had a strong understanding and appreciation of the symbolic use of an “Anger Blanket” that was metaphorically hiding one’s true feelings. While the “Anger Blanket” was primarily understood as a cover of negative feelings (i.e., frustration, sadness, fear), positive emotions (i.e., determination, confidence) were also related to the experience of anger as well. This distinction was consistent with previous research noting both maladaptive and facilitative qualities commonly associated with the experience of anger.

Noted in the present study was the means by which children experience anger. Concepts of anger suppression and anger externalization among children have been routinely noted in previous research and with participants in the present study as having an aversive impact on cognitive, social emotional and physical facets of life. Regulation techniques such as monitoring physical warning signs and coping strategies such as counting and cognitively dismissing the anger-provoking event discussed by children in the present study were also found to be well acknowledged in the literature. Children in the present study were somewhat aware of how anger impacted their social relationships with others. They described an absence of anger related experiences amongst close friends and peers while previous research has focused more on the need to quickly resolve anger related disputes in the interest of maintaining strong social ties.

There were also differences between the results obtained in the present study and findings documented in the existing literature. Of particular note in the present study was an absence of where physical anger-related behaviors—such as hitting or kicking—were originally learned.

Previous research noted the influence of parental modeling in a child's emotional development. Children in the present study made no mention of how or where such behaviors originated in their experience. However, children in the present study did mention that they often mirrored aggressive behaviors used by their peers, lending support to the influencing nature of peer relationships.

Children in the present study also discussed the possibility of seeking third party help to resolve unmanageable anger related disputes or altercations. Seeking adult assistance was absent in the reviewed literature, potentially as a result of the shortage of child-perspective studies concerning emotional experiences and expression. Also absent in the literature were discussions relating to the use and justification of anger. The present study has sought to help fill this void, as children in this study discussed (albeit vaguely) instances where they believed anger expression to be an acceptable reaction to certain social stimuli. Indeed, anger is a very common emotion displayed throughout today's traditional and social media outlets. Research from Fan, Zhao, Chen and Xu (2013) contend that anger is the fastest spreading emotion in social media. It could very well be the case that today's younger generations are seamlessly enmeshed in a culture that both condones and also encourages anger expression.

It is important to note that the emotion of anger in and of itself is not bad. Each of us experiences anger and it is important that children learn ways of effectively regulating its experience and expression in socially appropriate ways. The "Anger Blanket" program has sought to instill social values and emotional recognition abilities in children to prevent aggressive outbursts and increase the depth, scope and appreciation of the role of emotions in everyday life. There is evidence through the present study that the program's aims of promoting

emotional awareness for children has been realized at a cognitive level. Observational methods used in future studies would be able to generate evidence of behavioral effects as well.

Throughout the entirety of this study, components of cognitive, socio-behavioral and emotional constructs have been interwoven into a tapestry that represents and reflects how children are able to interpret and navigate the (often unfamiliar and awe-inspiring) world around them. The objective of the present research was to map out these constructs with a particular focus devoted to the emotional experience and expression of anger; this was accomplished through both an academic—and therefore somewhat sophisticated and complex—perspective, and also a more practical perspective that reflects the complexities embedded in this research (i.e. constructs of emotions) in a manner consistent with a child's level of cognitive and emotional intellect. Children in the present study are indeed deserving of explicit recognition, not only for participating in the research process, but also for informing the actual research content on which the study was based. The cognitive, socio-behavioral and emotional foundations of a child's exploration necessarily require the guidance and expertise of their mentors; the present study took a considerably large, first step towards a more child-informed and child-focused approach of validating and disseminating information regarding their children's own emotional experiences.

### **Implications**

The results of the present study have implications for professionals working with children in a helping capacity as well as future research. Teachers, counsellors and parents seeking to provide social and emotional support for children may benefit from the increased knowledge stemming from children's perspectives of anger and emotional appreciation this study provided.

Furthermore, the present study opened a wealth of possibilities for future research examining the emotional knowledge and related socio-emotional constructs experienced by children.

Indeed, the experience of anger is a natural emotion that often underlies many aggressive and antisocial patterns of behavior. While research examining children's experience of anger abounds throughout the literature, an extremely wide majority of studies stem from adult observations and interpretations, rather than on what the children themselves would say—particularly regarding the emotional underpinnings, regulation strategies and consequences connected to the experience and expression of anger. A different approach was taken in the present study by qualitatively investigating children's experience of anger from their own perspective with particular weight given to children's emotional knowledge and vocabulary.

Research examining anger and the various side effects of its expression—both external and internal in nature—suggest a wide milieu of associated negative cognitive, social, physiological and emotional consequences. The development of appropriate and adaptive coping strategies used to combat these negative consequences presented via anger expression regulation programs such as the Anger Blanket provide children with a foundational understanding of how anger originates and the myriad of influencing emotions that may fuel its onset. It is imperative that helping professionals are able to deconstruct, explain and discuss the experience of anger with children in a vernacular that resonates with a level of understanding consistent with their cognitive abilities. Previous research notes that failing to instill adaptive mechanisms to regulate and mitigate the negative effects of experienced and expressed anger among children can have detrimental consequences not only in terms of immediate experiences—with the development of antisocial behaviors, emotional problems and academic difficulties to name a few—but also in how they may carry those characteristics into adulthood. Thus, the need to establish a strong

emotional vocabulary, endowed with attention devoted to emotional regulation and adaptive coping abilities is paramount for today's children, least maladaptive experiences and expressions of anger become a replicated status quo that follow children throughout their adult lives.

Children in the present study acknowledged the importance of social relationships amongst their peers. While mutual enjoyment of each other's company and talking through one's emotional experiences with a close friend were noted in the present study, children also were aware that feelings of being left out or rejected by their peers could potentially be anger-provoking. Helping professionals may benefit children of this nature by assisting them in relating underlying emotional constructs to the onset and warning signs consistent with the experience of anger. Such understanding provides emotional support as well as psychoeducational emotional teachings and techniques (in a relatable language) that children can utilize at their own discretion during future confrontations and the experience of emotions such as anger.

From a research perspective, the present study provides a strong foundation for further exploration into the developing emotional, social and cognitive abilities of children. Observational studies examining child interactions may lend further evidence to the results obtained in this research. Alternatively, observations may contest the present findings, as children in the current study may have downplayed their own emotional transgressions and experiences with anger in the interest of appearing more favorable to the program facilitators.

Additional research may benefit by conducting longitudinal investigations on the emotional developments of children. It would be interesting to note how a child's emotional knowledge and means of expression (of anger in particular) mature with age, and what, if any differences in emotional expression arise as a result of that maturation. Additionally, a child's



emotional development could be compared with his/her cognitive and social developments as well, in order to discern the means by which anger is understood from both intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives—that is, how anger is cognitively (as opposed to emotionally) processed, and how other individuals relate to its verbal and physical manifestation. Research of this nature could potentially illuminate a shift in pedagogy and the means by which the principles subsumed within the Anger Blanket (e.g. anger is a secondary emotion) are communicated to older children and adolescents.

It is also important for future researchers to not only understand how younger children experience and express anger, but also how it may be regulated and resolved in a language consistent with their own cognitive abilities. Indeed, there is a considerable dearth of literature examining the emotional understandings of children from their own perspective. The present study was designed to narrow the gap between the myriad of adult observations and interpretations and a child's actual documented experience. Indeed, future research may be able to expand on the emotional knowledge of children by delving into additional social and cognitive constructs experienced by children that guide both externalized behaviors as well as internalized feelings. Children themselves are potentially the most invaluable resource in child-related studies; to neglect their inclusion and their perspective is to dismiss the notion that they too have a voice deserving of our recognition and appreciation.

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**Appendix A: Interview Questions**

1. What did you learn about dealing with anger this week?
2. What are some good/positive things that happened between you and your classmates this week?
3. What are some not so good/negative things that happened between you and your classmates this week?

## Appendix B: Meaning Units by Code

Phrases by code:

### Understanding Anger

#### Definitions of Anger

*The anger blanket always covers up your real feelings*

*Anger is covering your real feelings*

*That anger is, isn't a happy feeling*

*Umm you can't be angry and be acting like a happy monkey*

*Anger is also very ugly*

*Anger isn't like a real feeling, it just like sometimes when your sad, the anger blanket comes over and it just makes you mad, so anger is like not a real feeling*

*It covers you... but that's not actually what covers you, its when your mad and angry, its like what your brain's thinking...its not actually and invisible anger blanket, its actually what your brain is thinking*

*Umm the anger blanket is just like a way for adults to explain it to kids like [Name] said, earlier like its just like... your brain isn't actually choosing to be mad the anger blanket is just a way for adults to explain it better to kids*

#### Warning Signs & Physiological Symptoms

*Sometimes when you get mad your face starts to get red and there is body warning signs, like umm... clenched teeth, frog in your throat, uhh...tense muscles, heavy breathing*

*There are different reasons for your face to turn red, like when you smile, laugh...angry.*

*Sometimes when you're mad it feels like an earthquake happening inside you*

*I learned about anger that your face gets mad*

*Like...you, you're so angry...like breaking something*

*When your angry, your temperature kind of goes up*

*Anger give you warnings signs, its just like your being sick... it gives you warning signs*

*Like heavy breathing, like fast heart, and...and and frog throat and*

*Your face is red*

*It's hard to smile when you're angry*

*Umm you can't be angry and be acting like a happy monkey*

*There is body warning signs...when you get really hot...heavy breathing, fast heart, ...frog in your throat*

*Tense muscles, clenched teeth*

*Sweaty palms*

*Fast heart, red face, tight fists*

*It makes you want to uh throw up*

*It just takes over your body, it its like its controlling your body and you cant really control it yourself,*

*And you cant get rid of it cause its like, smothering you*

### **Anger Expression**

*So when you every time you want to, you get mad, and you just want go to someone and punch them*

*Well I saw someone kicking someone*

*Sometimes when you're mad you start hitting somebody*

*I learned that when you get mad sometimes you like to pick on other people*

*Some people are fighting today*

*Calling names*

*Um a guy was screaming*

*He was almost still yelling*

*Umm, someone teased someone*

*Umm it's when you...want to hit someone really bad and your so angry that you want to hit someone*

*I saw somebody picking on somebody...*

*He took [Name]'s ball*

*Stealing somebodies hairband and you just like take a flower*

*Ohhhhhh....ummm... today umm.. someone got really mad and started pushing people and screaming at people*

*Yeah it was at recess, a lot of people were upset and were just taking the ball cause it was getting too aggressive, and he was still upset about that so we were trying to get out,*

*one of my classmates pushed someone in the ground*

*Someone in my class got bullied*

*Sometimes when you get mad you feel like you want to pull off your hair*

*Sometimes they want to break stuff...and then they blame it on the...the other person*

*People make faces...*

*You're a bully and that your acting bad*

### **Feelings/Emotions Related to Anger**

*I learned that there are many different kinds of feelings and that kids usually use sad, happy or mad and forget about all the other feelings*

*Determined*

*Embarrassed... confident...worried*

*A little bit angry...and upset*

*...not very happy, not very happy...a bit disappointed*

*Like...uhhhhh...shocked*

*Surprised*

*Frustrated is like you don't know what's happening with something like that and mad is like...*

*Frustration*

*I felt disappointed because it was actually like everyone I thought till then I heard ransom voices coming in and arguing with each other...so I wanted to continue but everyone just kept arguing*

*I felt upset*

*I can, I felt kind of uhh, curious of why we had to stop, like he told us why, but I just didnt really know what the specific point was... he said that we were having problems but he didn't really....*

*Have that bad of problems*

*Lonely*

*Lonely, frustrated, disappointed, frazzled*

*Disappointed... cause it really bothered me*

*That when you're mad—angry, you use angry, mad or sad or bad or happy  
Really upset*

*Mad**Confused*

*Umm...I didn't react, I just felt mad that he umm punched me*

*Bad*

*There's more different feelings, I mean I learned about anger this week that there's more different feelings than mad, sad and angry*

*There's disappointed, determined, puzzled, withdrawn, frightened, amazed, frustrated...umm  
glad*

*Sad*

*Umm, when your angry its not a very nice feeling and if you're not feeling like you want to be nice, you wont be nice...and if you're feeling determined, you'll act determined...and if you're feeling angry you'll act angry*

*Umm at lunch recess my friend left me and went to the book fair and she mad me feel a little left out*

*I wasn't really angry, I was just kind of upset*

*Really angry, but then I realized I was feeling sad cause he was being mean to me*



## Consequences of Anger

### **Cognitive Impairments**

*I learned that when you, I learned that when you like when you, are angry, that, I think it's your intelligence level goes down and you sometimes make, and you often make dumb choices*

*Umm... when you're mad you can't control your body*

*Sometimes, when you're, when I learned that when you're angry, you make poor choices, not the ones that you usually make*

### **Consequences & Reactions of Anger**

*Anger can lead...oh yeah, it was anger can lead to danger and it can lead violence*

*Violence, [inaudible] and vandalism*

*He got like mad and then he started doing it by purpose, than he's...yeah*

*I just pushed him back*

### **Receiving Hostilities (the effect of anger on others)**

*Uhhh...I got kicked...*

*I got tripped*

*And they just came back from like these girls were at the front and they wwere like pulling it and we were behind it and then the people at the front fell and then everyone else fell down and me and Conrad were at that bottom of the pile and our legs were like this and then everyone landed on me*

*Someone liked at recess, he pushed me at the first day of February that was yesterday and he pushed me and he hurt my back*

*Angry, and your playing a game, sometimes you just feel, you feel like you just want to cry, sad...*

*Umm... that we... that we fight and we don't...they don't want us to play and they don't include*

*Someone was bullying me and I didn't like it, and they were saying I couldn't kick it far but I actually could kick it far and they were making fun of me and I didn't really like that*

*When I was at afterschool program and morning school program, you see the red chair over there? And the tent, well me and [Name] ...me and someone else were using it and someone*

*other kids just kind of came and took it over, kind of just took it over and I didn't really like that and I was really upset and sad*

*See the red chair again over there? Well someone kept bugging...well I wont say names but I weas using the chair, and after snack the person rushed and kind just took the red chair when I was using it and they actually weren't using it they just wanted to make me upset  
Yeah, but it didn't listen so we had to the supervisor*

*Someone in my class excluded me today and I did not like it*

*Someone in my class, was excluding me today*

*[Name] was yelling at me when I was just asking if I could play, and then they let me play, and then they excluded me when I was playing and I did not like it*

*When I was walking by someone came up can called me poop...ahhh... I was really really upset*

*Uh... someone tried to punch me...I felt bad...*

*Somebody was excluding me ...it mad me feel sad*

## **Regulation & Resolution of Anger**

### **Getting Help**

*The teacher helped...was when one person went to a teacher but she did nothing with us umm... uh... you have to get a teacher sometimes*

*Maybe just ask him to stop and if he doesn't tell a teacher,*

*The teacher... because they can umm...can talk to him*

*My mom talked to her mom*

### **De-escalation Techniques**

*I learned that you can uh, calm yourself down, like by breathing in and breathing out*

*You can, you can count to 10, and or you can't count while your angry*

*Umm...I just left...I have something, when you're angry, you, you like count to 10, when you're mad or angry, you can't like count, like when you're angry you cant count, you can't like count at the same time....like when you're angry...I don't know how to explain it*

*When you're mad you count to 10 or 25 or 100 and it makes you cool down*

*Umm...when you're mad you can go somewhere else or go and take a drink*

*Oh I have something: A stands for always count, B stands for body warning signs, and I don't remember the last one.... Oh go to, G stands go...go do something else*

*I learned about anger that its impossible to count when you're angry*

*Umm we tell...we ran away*

*You go and take a drink or walk away from something...you have a break...you have a nap at home*

*When you're, say when you're under pressure, and your friends are daring you to do something and your don't want to do it, but they're like forcing you to do it...pretend your frustrated because they're like telling you to do what you don't want to do*

*I actually said, can you please stop and then he yelled but he said, and then I said can you please stop punching at Jamal? And be quieter... and he was quieter after that*

*If you put the anger blanket away, you have self control...Self control is, like you can control yourself and not get all wild*

*Umm there was bad, yeah... the one that got pushed he had to calm down, and he ran in the hallways just to calm down*

*I know when you get angry, you can count to ten and or 100 or 25*

*We could try to play uhh.. with good self control*

*You can get away from the problem and go with somebody else,*

*That you have to count to ten when you're angry, and you go oooooonnnneeee, twooooo, you have to count slow...to calm yourself down if you're really angry*

*And I told him to count to 10*

## **Resolving Conflicts**

*They apologized*

*We just say, to her you're being a little aggressive, can you please you not use hands on*

*Just ask him, can you please not do that again, that you hurt my back*

*You have to solve it*

## Origins of Anger

### **How Anger originates**

*Anytime you feel like something like lonely, you...the anger blanket comes over you and you kind of like...the feeling that you really are is not even there...its like you really angry*

*He wants to be funny and make jasmine laugh*

*Like when you have a problem, a really big problem you cant solve like that*

*We usually sometimes argue like in soccer when you get, usually when you usually get a goal or not, or you might get too aggressive*

*Kind of a little upset because or angry because I would, I already told them to umm they we would touch the ball before they do, and they touched the ball before we do, so*

*Umm I learned about anger that...that the anger blanket creeps up on you when your not expecting it*

*Umm...me and my friend, we got into a little fight like, we, we were playing soccer and were were getting over control and we were getting fights*

*Umm...that people were scoring, like people were like thinking that they score, scored a goal and they were saying I scored a goal and they goalie was saying no, and then we got into a big fight*

*And, umm I just got mad at them cause they called them a girl, and he was a boy*

*When I play soccer with her, she when you have the ball, she sometimes kicks it out, she gets a little out of control*

### **Rational for Anger**

*I learned that about anger when you are mad you can't talk or you cant deal with the problem or talk it out ...then you get more angry*

*It's never good to be angry unless it's a really bad situation...or you shouldn't be angry*

*Umm...when sometimes when you get angry you act like it's a big mountain, but its actually just a little mole...The mountain is like a, you make it like a big problem even though it's just a small one*

*Uhh, umm...not good to be mad, but its something you should be mad about, ...its okay to be mad*

## Relations With others

### **Perceptions of Other's Anger**

Kids usually say just words... I'm so mad...that's it

### **What Makes a Good Friend?**

*Someone let me borrow their pencil*

*All...all of my friends were playing really fun games together and at the end we were all having so much fun*

*Umm...today , this morning I helped one of my friends with their work*

*You can help your friend clean up*

*Um... well, I sort of tried to tell heather a nice complement haha... I tried to tell her but she wouldn't just listen...*

*Well a bunch of people were playing soccer with me and we were having fun and sometimes I play with my friend and they make me feel really good*

*Umm well they're really nice to me and they talk nice to me and they include me*

*We played together*

*We were playing together though*

*We were having fun laughing*

*Umm... me and my friend like [Name] and [Name] we were playing, we were skipping together, and playing this fan game, thing and I don't know we were having fun and laughing and no putdowns*

*My friends and I both, well both of my friends were playing soccer, they were seeing who's a better player, well not really, I was the judge and if it went beside a the post I would say if it was a goal or not, and we were having fun laughing, no putdowns*

*Umm.. my best friend and I we were jumping and we were jumping on and off of the climbers and we were having fun and it was funny cause this little kid wanted to do it and she couldn't do it so we said you can be a judge so me and you can do it and I went to the last bar and jumped off and it wasn't even far but I could go away*

*Like, were like hanging out together and like sharing and*

*We were having fun laughing, no put downs, sharing laughing*

*Me... my friend, my friend, and I were playing hockey most soccer, and we were having fun,  
laughing and no put downs*

## **Appendix C: Codes by Theme**

### **Theme 1: Understanding Anger**

- Definitions of Anger
- Warning Signs and Physiological Symptoms
- Anger Expression
- Related Feelings/Emotions

### **Theme 2: Origins of Anger**

- How Anger Originates
- Rational for Anger

### **Theme 3: Consequences of Anger**

- Cognitive & Physical Impairments
- Reactions to Anger
- Receiving Hostilities (the effect of anger on others)

### **Theme 4: Regulation and Resolution of Anger**

- De-escalation Techniques
- Getting Help
- Resolving Conflicts

### **Theme 5: Relationships with Others**

- Perceptions of Other's Anger
- What makes a Good Friend

**Appendix D: The Anger Blanket Program**

Designed by Danielle Aziz, the Anger Blanket program is a 10-week psychoeducational program focused on addressing interpersonal communication problems among grade three children. Children are taught how to identify the emotions “underneath” or preceding the experience of anger, and are informed on methods used to detect the emotional onset of anger itself. In addition, they are informed of methods to regulate its expression through socially appropriate means. In the pilot study of this program Ms. Aziz delivered the program with the assistance of co-facilitators; teachers took a supportive role, and assisted with group activities (i.e. role-plays) included in the program.



# CRAIG OOLUP

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### EDUCATION

#### **Master of Arts, Counselling Psychology**

(anticipated completion: April, 2015)

Western University, London, Ontario

- Western Graduate Research Scholarship – Honour (\$5 000; 2013)
- Western Graduate Research Scholarship—Honour (\$5 000; 2014)

#### **Bachelor of Arts, Honours Specialization in Psychology**

(April, 2013)

King's University College, Western University, London, Ontario

- Academic Dean's Honour List (2011-2013)

#### **Bachelor of Arts, Honours, Double Major in Political Science & Philosophy**

(June, 2009)

King's University College, Western University, London, Ontario

### RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

#### **Master of Arts, Counselling Psychology**

(September, 2013—anticipated completion: April, 2015)

*Graduate Thesis*

- Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Jason Brown (Faculty of Education, Psychology Department)
- Qualitative study examining the emotional experience of anger among grade three children
- Data based on qualitative interviews from anger management seminars termed collectively as the “Anger Blanket Pilot Project”

#### **Onward: The Anger Blanket Pilot Project (2<sup>nd</sup> Seminar Series)**

(January, 2014-May, 2014)

*Program Co-Facilitator*

- Assist director of program in explaining the emotional constructs of anger to a grade three class over the course of six 1.5 hour seminar sessions
- Encourage the use of positive conflict resolution strategies by discerning related emotional experiences
- Assist with post-program measures evaluating program effectiveness

#### **Bachelor of Arts, Honours Specialization**

(September, 2012- April, 2013)

*Undergraduate Thesis*

- Thesis Supervisor: Katrina Craig, M.Ed, Counselling Psychology; Canadian Certified Counsellor

- Quantitative study examining the role of social support in the process of making moral decisions

*Presentation*

- King's University College, Western University; Undergraduate Psychology Poster Conference: The Influence of Perceived Social Support on Interpersonal Morality

**Research Assistant**

(January, 2012-April, 2012)

- Research Assistant for Lisa Boyko (Ph.D Candidate)
- Western University Psychology Lab
- Assist graduate research team in positive affect coding of children via recorded video files (included gauging child behaviours and interactions in a free-time activity)

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**COUNSELLING & ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCE** (*selected*)

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**Student Success Centre: University of Western Ontario**

(December, 2014-Present)

*Career Counsellor (M.A. Counselling Psychology Program)*

- Placement Supervisor: Snjezana Linkes (M.Ed, Counselling Psychology; Canadian Certified Counsellor)
- Provide counselling and career support to Western University students
  - Mental health impediments to learning/education
  - Graduate/professional school applications
  - Mock interview preparations
  - Interest, skill and career assessments and interpretation

**Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Center: Student Intern**

(September, 2014-Present)

*Therapist (M.A. Counselling Psychology Program)*

- Placement Supervisor: Susan Abercromby (M.Ed, Counselling Psychology; Canadian Certified Counsellor)
- Facilitate multiple parent, child and family support and counselling groups
  - Parenting Preschoolers—provide and co-facilitate psychoeducational seminars and counselling sessions to parents struggling with meeting their child(ren)'s needs in a group setting
  - Temper Tricking—facilitate group counselling sessions with children (and their families) experiencing anger and behavioral issues at home or in the school
  - Mom's House/Dad's House—co-facilitate group counselling session with children experiencing difficulties coping with parental divorce or separation
  - On Your Own—co-facilitate group counselling sessions with adults new to divorce and separation
  - Circle of Security—co-facilitate group counselling sessions with parents seeking assistance in developing and maintaining strong attachment bonds with their children
- Provide individual counselling to children and their families

- Assessment of traumatic child and family situations
- Develop and implement treatment plans and strategies
- Provide community resources when required
- Student Case Management Sessions
  - Discuss current presenting issues of past or potential clients with colleagues
  - Includes identifying potential barriers/problems, formulating assessment strategies, and discussing potential therapeutic treatment techniques

### **London Region Assessment Clinic**

(January, 2014—Present)

*Therapist/Co-facilitator (Volunteer)*

- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder—A Night Out
  - Interact with children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
  - Facilitate and mediate peer-to-peer social and physical interactions such as sporting activities
  - Assist program director in facilitating group member lessons such as explaining and discussing the components of good friendship and the importance of self-control

### **Canadian Mental Health Association (London-Middlesex)**

(September, 2013-December, 2013)

*Therapist, Wait List Clinic (Volunteer)*

- Provide therapeutic assistance for clients waiting for further mental health treatments
- Assessment of client based needs and goals
- Person-centered approach to counselling
- Provide feedback to other therapists conducting sessions from audio/video recordings
- Participate in weekly discussion based seminars on counselling and therapeutic techniques

### **Vanier Children's Services**

(September, 2012-April, 2013)

*Therapist, Focused Family Therapy Program (Volunteer)*

- Assessment of traumatic child and family situations
- Develop and implement treatment plans and strategies
- Provide community resources when required
- Gauge client progress and report to supervisors during weekly supervision hours
- Participate in and co-facilitate weekly educational seminars with other therapists

### **Pilowsky Psychology Professional Corporation**

(May, 2012-July, 2012)

*Triage Counsellor (Paid Position)*

- Intake Assessment Therapist (Triage Counsellor) and Formal Report Writer
- Gather information regarding patient levels of cognitive and emotional functioning following a personally traumatic event
- Administer Assessments (Beck Depression Inventory II, Beck Anxiety Inventory, Multidimensional Pain Inventory) to patient

- Report assessment findings and test results to Dr. Pilowsky, Clinical Psychologist
- Interpret and convert findings, test results and formal diagnosis into a formal report for medical and legal practices, and insurance companies

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**TEACHING & SCHOOL-BASED EXPERIENCES** (*selected*)

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**Teaching Assistant, Psychology**

(September, 2011-April, 2013)

*Multiple Courses taught by Professor Katrina Craig (Volunteer)*

- King's University College, Western University; Fanshawe College
- Grade tests, assignments and exams; invigilate final examinations

**London Track 3 Ski Instructor**

(January, 2010-March, 2010)

*Ski-School Instructor (Volunteer)*

- Instruct and encourage children with autism in learning how to ski in a fun and safe environment
- Assess capabilities and performance in order to adapt program to better suit student needs

**Ryerson Public School, Thames Valley District School Board**

(September, 2009-April, 2010)

*Teacher Assistant (Volunteer)*

- Grade 7/8 split class
- Assist teacher and students with academic and organizational responsibilities
- Facilitate student organization of academic-related projects