

**FOSTERING SELF-REGULATION THROUGH POSITIVE DISCIPLINE  
DURING FREE PLAY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

by

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## DECLARATION BY THE STUDENT

I, Zenzile Msipha, declare that ***Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education*** is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

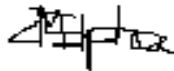
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## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to God Almighty.

I also dedicate this work to my late parents, Mr Ginson Gideon Sibanda and Mrs Lennie Sibanda (Nee Bhebhe), who passed on before seeing this great achievement. I remember my mother's faith in God, the love and support she gave me, as well as her foresight in education.

I further dedicate this work to my dear children, Mbongeni Mzingaye Msipha and Mziwandile Msipha. I cannot forget their love, encouragement and support. Ngiyabonga kakhulu. May God bless you abundantly.

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## ABSTRACT

The fostering of self-regulation is of great importance in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase, because it leads to future self-discipline. The aim of the study was to understand the participants' ways of fostering self-regulation during free play in three primary schools in Zimbabwe. The theoretical frameworks of the study, namely positive psychology and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as well as the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), regarded the learners' support for autonomy, competence and relatedness as key characteristics of positive discipline that support the development of self-regulation. Benner's interpretive phenomenology method was used with the aim of describing and interpreting participants' experiences of the phenomenon under study. The social constructivism paradigm underpinned the study and the approach was qualitative. Data collection and analysis were guided by Benner's interpretive phenomenological method. A paradigm case, themes and exemplars were used in data presentation, discussion and interpretation. Findings showed that free-play activities consisted of, for instance, socio-dramatic play, indoor play in play corners and outdoor play. The common practices used by the participants to foster self-regulation through positive discipline were co-regulation, positive reinforcement, time-out and logical consequences. Teachers and learners often perceived the teachers' use of time-out and logical consequences as punishment rather than positive discipline, because of the rigidity of its application without considering psychosocial needs. The findings, however, were consistent with an understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play by nurturing the learners' psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, as well as mindfulness. Research proposed mindfulness as a possible fourth basic psychological need. In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for achieving a better and sustainable future for all people by 2030, participants perceived the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline as part of gender education for eradicating gender-based violence and to foster resilience.

**KEY TERMS:** Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), Benner's interpretive phenomenology, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), discipline, Early

Childhood Development (ECD) phase, Early Childhood Education (ECE), free play, positive psychology, positive discipline, punishment, self-regulation

## **OPSOMMING**

Selfregulering moet in die vroeë kinderjare reeds by klein kinders gekweek word sodat hulle later in die lewe in staat sal wees om selfdissipline aan die dag te lê. Die doel van hierdie studie was om vas te stel hoe die deelnemers by drie laerskole in Zimbabwe gedurende vrye spel selfregulering by leerders gekweek het. Die drie teoretiese raamwerke waarop hierdie studie berus, is die positiewe sielkunde, Deci en Ryan se selfbeskikkingsteorie (SBT) en die teorie van basiese psigososiale behoeftes (TBSB). Hiervolgens is die bevrediging van kinders se behoefte aan outonomie, bedrewenheid ('competence') en verhoudings ('relatedness') voorvereistes vir die positiewe dissiplinerings waarmee selfregulering by hulle gekweek word. Benner se metode van interpretatiewe fenomenologie is gevolg om deelnemers se beleving van die fenomeen te beskryf en te vertolk. Die sosiale konstruktivisme het die grondslag van hierdie studie gevorm, en die benadering was kwalitatief. Data is volgens Benner se metode van interpretatiewe fenomenologie ingewin en ontleed. 'n Paradigmageval, temas en voorbeelde ('exemplars') is in die aanbieding, bespreking en interpretasie van data gebruik. Volgens die bevindings het vryespelaktiwiteite bestaan uit onder meer sosiaal-dramatiese spel, binnenshuise spel in speelhoekies, en buitelugspel. Die praktyke waarvolgens deelnemers selfregulering deur positiewe dissiplinerings gekweek het, was onderlinge regulering, positiewe versterking, afkoeltyd en logiese gevolge. Onderwysers en leerders het afkoeltyd en logiese gevolge nie as positiewe dissiplinerings nie, maar eerder as straf belewe aangesien dit streng toegepas word en nie met die kind se psigososiale behoeftes rekening hou nie. Die bevindings strook egter met ons siening van die kweek van selfregulering deur positiewe dissiplinerings tydens vrye spel deur leerders se psigososiale behoefte aan outonomie, bedrewenheid ('competence'), verhoudings ('relatedness') en bewustheid ('mindfulness') te bevredig. Navorsers stel bewustheid ('mindfulness') as 'n vierde basiese psigososiale behoefte voor. In ooreenstemming met die Doelwitte vir Volhoubare Ontwikkeling (DVO's) vir 'n beter en volhoubare toekoms vir alle mense teen 2030, het deelnemers gevind dat die kweek van selfregulering deur positiewe



dissiplinerings deel uitmaak van genderopvoeding as teenvoeter vir geslagsgeweld, en vindingrykheid aanwakker.

**KERNBEGDRIPPE:** teorie van basiese psigososiale behoeftes (TBSB), Benner se interpretatiewe fenomenologie, Deci en Ryan se selfbeskikkingsteorie (SBT), dissiplinerings, Vroeëkindersjare-ontwikkeling (VKO), Vroeëkindersjare-onderwys, vrye spel, positiewe sielkunde, positiewe dissiplinerings, straf, selfregulering

### INGQIKITHI YOCWANINGO

Ukukhuthaza ukuzilawula kubaluleke kakhulu esigabeni sokuThuthukiswa Kwabantwana Abasebancane (i-ECD phase), ngoba kuholela ekuzikhalimeni esikhathini esizayo. Inhloso yalolu cwaningo bekuwukuqonda izindlela zababambiqhaza zokukhuthaza ukuzilawula ngesikhathi sokudlala ngokukhululeka ezikoleni ezintathu zamabanga aphansi eZimbabwe. Izinhloso zombono wezinzululwazi zalolu cwaningo, ezaziwa ngokuthi okuhle kwengqondo kanye noMbono Wenzululwazi kaDeci noRyan Wokuzimisela (i-SDT), kanye noMbono Wenzululwazi Wezidingo Eziyisisekelo Zokuphathelene Nengqondo (i-BPNT), zithathe ukwesekwa kwabafundi njengokuzimele, ikhono kanye nokuhlobana njengezim-pawu ezisemqoka zokukwazi ukuzikhalima okuhle okusekela ukuthuthukiswa kokuzilawula. Kusetshenziswe indlela kaBenner yokuhumusha okwenzekile ngenhloso yokuchaza nokuhumusha okwenzekile kubabambiqhaza kulokho okufundwa ngako. Inqubo yokwakhiwa kwezenhlalakahle iyona esekele ucwaningo kanti futhi indlela yokwenza ibibheka amaqiniso. Ukuqoqwa kwemininingo nokuhlaziywa bekuncike endleleni kaBenner yokuhumusha okwenzekile. Kwasetshenziswa izimo semiqondo, izingqikithi kanye nezibonelo ukwethula imininingo, izingxoxo nokuhumusha. Okutholakele kukhombisile ukuthi ukudlala ngokukhululeka kubandakanya, ngokwesibonelo, ukudlala ngokulingisa ezenhlalo, ukudlala endlini emakhoneni okudlala kanye nokudlala ngaphandle. Imikhuba ejwayelekile esetshenziswa ngababambiqhaza ukukhuthaza ukuzilawula ngokusebenzisa ukukhalima okukahle kwakungukulawula ngokubambisana, ukukhuthaza okuhle, ukuqedwa komdlalo kanye nemiphumela eyenza umqondo.

Othisha nabafundi babevame ukubona ukuqedwa komdlalo nemiphumela eyenza umqondo njengento esetshenziswa ngothisha njengesijeziso kunokukhalima okuhle, ngenxa yobukhuni bokusetshenziswa kwako ngaphandle kokubheka izidingo zomqondo. Okutholakele, nokho, bekuhambisana nokuqonda kokukhuthaza ukuzilawula ngokukhalima okukahle ngesikhathi sokudlala ngokukhululeka ngokunakekela izidingo zabafundi zokuphathelene nengqondo ekuzimeleni, ikhono kanye nokuhlobana, kanye nokuqaphela izinto. Ucwangingo luhlongoze ukuqaphela izinto njengesidingo sesine esiyisisekelo kokuphathelene nengqondo. Ngokuhambisanayo neziNjongo Zokuthuthukiswa Okusinokusimama (ama-SDG) ukuze kufezeke ikusasa elingcono nelinokusimama kubantu bonke ngonyaka ka-2030, ababambiqhaza babona ukukhuthaza ukuzilawula ngokuzikhalima okukahle njengengxenye yemfundo yobulili ukuze kuncishiswe udlame oluncike ebulilini futhi kukhuthazwe ukuqina.

**AMAGAMA ASEMQOKA:** Umbono Wenzululwazi Wezidingo Eziyisisekelo Zokuphathelene Nengqondo (i-BPNT), Indlela kaBenner yokuhumusha okwenzekile, Umbono Wenzululwazi waDeci noRyan Wokuzimisela (i-STD), ukukhalima, ISigaba Sokuthuthukiswa Kwabantwana Abasebancane (i-ECD phase), Ukufunda Ngabantwana Abasebancane (i-ECE), ukudlala ngokukhululeka, okuhle kwengqondo, okuhle maqondana nokukhalima, ukujezisa, ukuzilawula

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
APACPSE	American Psychological Association and Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education
BPNT	Basic Psychological Needs Theory
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
CEDU	College of Education
CONNCAN	Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
ECCP	Early Childhood Consultation Partnership
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECDA	Early Childhood Development Grade A
ECDB	Early Childhood Development Grade B
ECE	Early Childhood Education
ICAC	Mauritius Independent Commission Against Corruption and Education Division
NCERT	National Council of Education Research and Training
NIEER	National Institute for Early Education Research
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIT	Organismic Integration Theory
PAN	Parenting in Africa Network
PPPI	Positive Psychology Parenting Intervention

QSR	Qualitative Research Solutions
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDT	Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNISA	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
WCC	World Council of Churches
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZimSEC	Zimbabwe School Examination Council
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
ZMoESAC	Zimbabwean Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture
ZMoPSE	Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education

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# CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Teachers in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase often express a concern about the fostering of self-regulation skills for learners in this phase. There is adequate research evidence that shows that inadequate development of self-regulation in the ECD phase can lead to a decline of academic standards, increased failure to control emotions, fewer social competencies, as well as relational aggression in schools (Botha, 2014:1; Gray, 2013:8; Heartherton, 2011:2; McClelland, Geldhof, Cameron & Wanless, 2015:1; Taole, 2013:256). Acquiring self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase has been considered as a foundation for positive holistic development, because of the physical, social, emotional and cognitive benefits (Baker, Morawska & Mitchell, 2019:52-53; LEGO Foundation, 2019:3; Rao *et al.*, 2014:5). However, most importantly, self-regulation skills assist people in being mindful in order to “bounce back from failure and stay calm under pressure” (Cuncic, 2020a:1). The need for teachers’ improved competencies in fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase has grown stronger because self-regulation is among the early learning areas that are assessed in international assessments by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (see Moss, 2017:1; OECD, 2020:21; Stevens, 2020:1; Urban, 2017:18). Therefore, teachers need training to use effective strategies for fostering self-regulation skills (Cuncic, 2020a:2; McLaughlin, Aspden & Clarke, 2017:23; United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) Headquarters, 2015b:1; Winner, 2019:4).

Lately, a systematic and intentional approach to teaching self-regulation skills with emphasis on cognition and language acquisition has been recommended for ECD learners (Cagiltay, Kara & Aydin, 2013:3; Housman, 2017:4; Sharples, Slavin, Chambers & Sharp, 2011:37). In the positive psychology framework, the learners’ support for autonomy, competence and relatedness are regarded as key characteristics of the discipline that supports the development of self-regulation (Bear, 2011:3). In ECE, understanding the practice of the fostering of self-regulation during free play, through the use of positive discipline, is crucial for the development of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase (Li, 2012:9; Miller, Tichota & White, 2013:7). As

guided by the positive psychology framework, the focus of this study is on the teachers' positive discipline practices that enable learners to experience success in controlling their behaviour and thinking processes or solving problems on their own as teachers fulfil their psychological needs during free play.

Currently, there are curriculum changes which occur at a greater pace than ever before, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for achieving a better and sustainable future for all people by 2030 (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:7; UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:6). The satisfaction of the learners' physiological and psychological needs is important in achieving the SDGs (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:9). According to the Executive Director of UNICEF, Hernletta Fore, "the core of the SDGs is understanding that sustainable future depends on how we meet the needs of children and young people today" (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:6). Thus, the nurturing of learners' needs by teachers during free play contributes to sustainable health and positive development. In line with the SDGs, current research in Early Childhood Education (ECE) suggests that there is an increased focus on addressing socio-economic needs for socially and economically disadvantaged learners at country level (Einloth, 2010:71; The LEGO Foundation, 2019:9; OECD, 2020:10). However, it is also noted that "an affluent but indifferent parent can provide an impoverished early childhood environment" (Elango, Garcia, Heckman & Hojman, 2015:13). Consequently, the fostering of self-regulation and psychosocial skills by teachers is important for all learners in the ECD phase. A competency-based curriculum is recommended for countries with a poor socio-economic status, for instance Zimbabwe, as it enables teachers to foster the learners' holistic development, but with focus on academic skills content (Faas, Wu & Geiger, 2017:82; Makokoro, 2017:2). This curriculum change happens at a time when the debate about the relevance of free play has intensified as other forms of playful learning (guided play and games) are recognised as contexts for developing the learners' self-regulation skills in the ECD phase (Gray, 2013:5; Santer, Griffiths & Goodall, 2007:XVII; Tsai, 2015:1028). The findings of recent research conducted by the researchers at the LEGO Foundation on the efficacy of free play, guided play and games, concluded that "children have different learning interests and needs, and a great facilitator combines practices to meet children where they are and support them to grow" (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:18). Thus, the focus on pre-academic subject competencies should not disregard

the importance of free play as a context for fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase.

In the context of Zimbabwe, the competency-based curriculum is play-based, and this suggests there are no conflicting or competing interests between a competency based-curriculum and free play (Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (ZMoPSE), 2015a:30). Thus, the fostering of self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase remains a valued every-day skilled teaching practice. This balanced approach in curriculum design has been supported by the recent findings of research done by the OECD (2020:75) and Yogman *et al.* (2018:1).

In this interpretive phenomenological study, the understanding of the teachers' skilled experiential practice of fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play is researched. The aim is to highlight pertinent aspects of this phenomenon as described and interpreted by ECD phase teachers who participated in the study. The knowledge that is generated from an interpretive phenomenological study entails the presentation of revealed or unfolded skills, practices as well as practical knowledge that cannot be revealed through quantitative research methods (Benner, 2012:463; Hennessy, 2018:265; Leonard, 1994:58).

Chapter 1 introduces the study to the reader. The background and researcher's pre-understanding of the phenomenon are discussed in line with the stipulations in Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy. The preliminary literature review, as well as the problem statement, research questions and aims are outlined. Also presented in this chapter is the theoretical framework, demarcation, ethical considerations, definition of key terms as well as the chapter outline. In the next section I present the background of the study.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH**

Teachers have an important role to play in providing learners with experiences that promote positive, holistic development by being sensitive to the learners' developmental phase and socio-economic context. Currently, most education systems world-wide plan their curriculum based on learners' current and future needs (UNICEF Headquarters, 2015b:1; Wood, 2014:4). In line with the above, the teachers' role in the new curriculum in Zimbabwe specifies that ECD phase teachers should play the

role of facilitator, co-explorer and coach in the teaching and learning process within a child-centred environment (ZMoPSE, 2015a:41-42, 49). Child centredness means being in a classroom with the focus on the needs and abilities of learners (Williams, 2009:332). In such classrooms, there is mutual respect because teachers share classroom control with the learners (Williams, 2009:332). Teachers are instructed to use a variety of strategies with focus on meeting the learners' needs through providing appropriate learner support, encouraging learners using constructive feedback, guidance and counselling, and ensuring that the learners' learning experiences are positive (ZMoPSE, 2015a:49). However, the specific instructions on how this is done are not yet clarified.

The main problem is the lack of knowledge pertaining to appropriate learner discipline practices to foster self-regulation in the ECD phase, which I established through personal communication with the Human Resources Officers in the Legal and Disciplinary Services in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in June 2017. The view of the Human Resources Officers was that learners in the ECD stage were too young to be subjected to some of the violent/inhumane punishments they have had to endure in schools. They cited teachers' use of corporal punishment and offensive language as recurring disciplinary problems that are reported by parents and principals to the Human Resources Office. They observed that teachers' responses to the learners' misbehaviour are often inappropriate for the developmental stage. Teachers seem to forget that such young children learn mostly through play. They also indicated that culturally and religiously, it is expected from teachers to apply corporal punishment to inculcate self-discipline. There seems to be a need to teach/train teachers to rather apply positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase to teach self-regulation.

Many countries worldwide, including Zimbabwe, are increasingly adopting positive discipline as an appropriate discipline practice in schools because it is regarded as a good child-centred method for school discipline (Li, 2012:9; Miller *et al.*, 2013:7; Parenting in Africa Network, 2016:7). However, in Zimbabwe there are no formalised instructions on how teachers should apply positive discipline in schools (see Section 1.4.3). There are different understandings of discipline and punishment, especially in the Zimbabwean context and the use of corporal punishment is promoted as a parental tool for raising disciplined children (Gudyanga, Mbengo and Wadesango 2014:499-500; Nemukuyu, 2015:1). However, since teachers are no longer allowed to use

corporal punishment in schools in Zimbabwe, school discipline has become a challenge for many teachers. The lack of discipline in schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, in Zimbabwe is described as having reached “an epidemic” level (Chimhenga & Mpofo, 2016:36, Ndlovu, 2014:1). However, as part of the UNICEF-funded ECD phase programmes to support teachers to interpret the new competency-based curriculum, ECD phase teachers have received positive discipline training from an ECD trainer (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2018:58). The focus of the current study is on understanding how the teachers, who received training from the ECD trainer, have fostered self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. I use Benner’s interpretive phenomenology which is informed by Heidegger’s notion of the taken-for-granted background meanings of everyday experiences (Gill, 2014:14), as the research design in this study. According to Benner’s interpretive phenomenological method, researchers need to make explicit their fore structure or pre-understanding of the phenomenon under study.

### **1.3 MY BACKGROUND EXPERIENCE AND PRE-UNDERSTANDING**

According to Creswell (2007:62) and Lopez and Willis (2004:730), bracketing personal experience is not done in an interpretive phenomenological study but I need to include a statement about the background experience and personal understandings that led to an interest in the research topic. My pre-understanding can direct me in the selection of a research design and methodology that captures the participants’ concerns and actions in practice (Benner *et al.*, 2009:436; Roulston, 2014:301). Thus, the openness and transparent reflections of the nature of knowledge that I bring to the study permits readers to interpret the findings in the light of my pre-understanding.

My interest in the benefits of positive non-violent disciplinary practices has a personal origin dating back to my early childhood experiences in the ECD phase in the early seventies. In retrospect, I realised that our Grade 3 teacher was managing the class without hitting or insulting the learners. Her way of showing love and encouragement also encouraged the learners to please the teacher and to try hard not to misbehave. This was completely different from the former teacher who called us names and could hardly spend a day without hitting the learners. Even if one tried hard not to misbehave, physical punishment was unavoidable, because the teacher would hit the whole class, instead of hitting only those who misbehaved. While some learners behaved well,

because they feared physical punishment, others did not seem to be scared. The experience made me realise that teachers have different ways of maintaining discipline in the classroom, varying from kindness to hostility. I preferred the Grade 3 teacher, because I have a problem with intimidation and violence as disciplinary measures. I became a teacher and during teacher training I was taught to use positive or negative reinforcements. Corporal punishment was regarded as malpractice. However, in practice in the schools where I did my teaching practical attachment, the teachers had conflicting views about the use of corporal punishment. Some supported it strongly while others thought it was not desirable. Personally, I do not believe in corporal punishment, I believe that without punishment, learners can learn self-regulation voluntarily, without the fear that accompanies punishment.

Once the learners move voluntarily in the right direction because of the teachers' use of positive disciplinary methods, the chances are that they will be able to do so in future without any outside influence (Arnall, 2010:15; Bear, 2011:8; Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000:2). Many teachers agree that the information about positive discipline makes sense, but when they attempt to apply positive discipline practically in their daily lives in the schools, it becomes hard to understand (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:46). It is on this basis that I believe that research on how teachers understand their day-to-day experiences of applying positive discipline during free play, can contribute to the knowledge of fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase.

## **1.4 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this section, I present a preliminary review of the literature focusing on the early childhood development phase, self-regulation in the early childhood development phase, free play and development of self-regulation disciplinary violence and finally, punishment and positive discipline in schools.

### **1.4.1 Early Childhood Development (ECD) Phase**

Early childhood development is the period from birth to eight years old (UNESCO, 2014:9). The development of self-regulation and psycho-social skills development through play, where learners experiment a lot, is especially important for the 3 to 5-

year-old group in the ECD phase (Berk, 2018:1; Emen & Aslan, 2019:25-26). Their language, emotional, social and psychological skills are not well developed at this age and as a result, learners' moral skills do not allow them to acknowledge someone else's point of view and they thus often have difficulty in controlling their actions and emotions (Emen & Aslan, 2019:26; Ryan, 2019:24). It is characteristic for learners of this age to be egocentric (see Section 2.3.2). The above characteristics suggest that the learning programmes should focus on developing psychosocial skills, such as empathy, kindness, compassion, sharing, turn-taking and perspective-taking (Yogman *et al.*, 2018:3). Nurturing relationships in the ECD phase is essential for developing good social-emotional functioning and overall well-being (Housman, 2017:2; Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:3; Ryan & Deci, 2017:648). However, decisions on the ECE curriculum are influenced by global socio-economic policies (OECD, 2020:10; UNESCO, 2014:38). Consequently, governments in many countries, including Zimbabwe, have changed the ECD phase curriculum to formal subject learning, rather than programmes for foundational school readiness skills (Elango *et al.*, 2015:72; OECD, 2020:18).

Due to substantial time spent on pre-academic subject teaching, teachers may not adequately address learners' developmental needs in all domains (Shafiq, Devercelli & Valerio, 2018:3, 6; Urban, 2017:20). There is an understanding that development in one domain promotes development in another (Denboba *et al.*, 2014:12). There are thus risks that learners' poor psycho-social development may lead to negative consequences ranging from school failure and lack of self-regulation to poor health and delinquency (Gray, 2013:8; Heartherton, 2011:2; McClelland *et al.*, 2015:1; UNESCO, 2014:12). This suggests addressing the world's problem of ill-disciplined learners in schools is linked to fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase. Self-regulation is a cross cultural phenomenon that is essential for learner discipline (Rae & MacConville, 2015:7; Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT), 2015:218). It is integral in all the areas of development and learning in the ECD phase (McClelland *et al.*, 2015:2; Montroy *et al.*, 2016:2).

In Zimbabwe, the education system provides for four years of ECE comprising of ECD phase pre-academic learning for two years and the following two years for formal primary education, Grade 1 and 2 (ZMoPSE, 2015b:2). Circular No. 14 of 2004, along with subsequent statutory regulations, formalised the provision of ECD services with



the intention that all primary schools would incorporate two levels of ECD, A and B into formal Primary School (ZMoPSE, 2015b:45).

#### **1.4.2 Self-regulation in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Phase**

Currently, the ECD phase is regarded as a critical time or window of opportunity for the development of self-regulation skills because the learners' self-regulation skills develop at a fast rate (Berk, 2018:1; Dereli-Iman, Danisman, Dermircan & Yaya, 2019:1494-1495; Nieminen & Sajaniemi, 2016:2; Ziv, Benita & Sofri, 2018:15). However, self-regulation can continue to develop cumulatively throughout a persons' life (Denboba *et al.*, 2014:12). The evidence of accelerated growth of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase is seen in increased control of emotions and improved moral behaviour that is motivated primarily by intrinsic motivation, not solely by the anticipation of attaining a reward, praise or fear of punishment (Bear, 2008:1; 2011:9). In the ECD phase, self-regulation is described as an array of complex psychosocial skills that include but are not limited to, the control of emotions and impulses, "self-guidance of thought and behaviour, planning, self-reliance and responsible behaviour" (Berk, 2018:1). Consistent with the ECD phase, as described in Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development in the ECD phase, self-regulation involves supporting and teaching learners the skills to control their thoughts and actions during free play and exploration (See Section 2.2.3). In the context of the school, Bear (2008:1) perceives the teaching and fostering of self-regulation skills as a component of school discipline. In this view fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase is a strategy for developing the learners' autonomy and behaviour that contributes to becoming responsible citizens in future (Bear, 2008:1).

The teachers' overuse or misuse of rewards and punishment in schools is a concern because it results in external regulation, yet the aim of discipline should assist learners in developing intrinsic regulation (Bear, 2008:1; Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000:2; Gonzalez-Mena, 2011:115; Kohn, 1999:49; Nziramasanga, 1999:63). This means that every single day in the ECD phase, teachers apply disciplinary methods that may have either positive or negative impact on the learners' development of self-regulation skills. Thus, effective support should prioritise satisfying the psychosocial needs of the learners. From a psychosocial development perspective, learners' development of self-regulation is associated with fostering autonomy, competence and relatedness

(Savina, 2014:1692). Briefly, according to Warburton *et al.* (2020:54), autonomy pertains to “feeling volitional (an act of will or choice)”, competence is associated with “feeling effective”, and relatedness means feeling mutually related with teachers, peers, school and other social groups.

Research on the fostering of self-regulation suggests that self-regulation skills can be learnt and are highly teachable through direct instruction and co-regulation in the ECD phase (Florez, 2011:51; Whitebread & Basilio, 2012:16). Teachers often see and utilise the opportunities for development, learning and teaching self-regulation skills in the ECD phase (Bredenkamp, 2004:171; Gray, 2013:4-5; Stosny, 2011:1; Wigfield, Klauda & Cambria, 2011:33). Florez (2011:49) sees similarities between fostering self-regulation skills and teaching learners to learn to read, write, count or ride a bicycle. Within this perspective, teachers use modelling, scaffolding, hints and cues, gradually withdrawing teacher support (Florez, 2011:49; Widiastuti, 2017:42). This suggests that self-regulation skills can be taught through demonstrations, modelling, direct instructions, giving learners opportunities for practising self-regulation and support. It is thus important that teachers gradually turn over more control to learners as they gain competencies in regulating themselves, while continually monitoring their progress and intervening when necessary (Florez, 2011:49; Whitebread & Basilio, 2012:25). The main challenge is that teaching of self-regulation skills is not well articulated and formalised like the programmes for pre-formal mathematics, reading and writing. As previously highlighted, there are many opportunities for developing self-regulation in the ECD phase, but the focus of this study is on the development that involves the teachers’ use of positive discipline methods during free play, without exposing learners to disciplinary violence (Einloth, 2010:100; McClelland *et al.*, 2015:2).

### **1.4.3 Disciplinary Violence, Punishment and Positive Discipline in Schools**

Violent discipline refers to learners’ experiences of discipline as being violent or excessively punitive or physically and/or emotionally abusive (UNESCO, 2014:33; UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:71). It is also referred to as negative discipline and includes silent treatment, yelling and guilt tripping (Lascala, 2019:2). Disciplinary violence may work temporarily to stop problem behaviour because learners often concentrate on anger shown by teachers and punishment rather than the lessons and

skills that are being taught (Lascala, 2019:2). Disciplinary approaches in many schools is considered as violent because it is based on punishment and rewards (Chemhuru, 2010:182; Siegel & Bryson, 2016:XVI). Thus, there are misunderstandings of what discipline entails in schools.

Due to the misunderstanding of typical behaviour as problem behaviour, ECE has a long history of discipline that is damaging to learners because some teachers apply punishment using their power, threats and aggression (Adler, 1998:125; Skinner, 1979:2; Pinheiro, 2006:151; Plan International, 2009:60). Discipline in schools is violent, even where corporal punishment is excluded and only “mild forms of punishment” are used (Nelsen, 2006:14; Skinner, 1979:2). This suggests that if the focus of discipline is primarily on punishment, it may be difficult for teachers to discipline learners without causing some degree of harm (see Section 3.2.1.3). Currently, the SDGs encourage countries to make sure of ending all forms of disciplinary violence by 2030 (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:71). Concurrently, positive discipline has become a major approach to school discipline at both international and national level (Li, 2012:9; Miller *et al.*, 2013:7). Bear (2010:2) asserts that positive discipline differs from punishment in both core assumptions and applications.

Punishment and rewards are associated with behaviourism. Watson was the first to make people aware of behaviourism (Malone, 2014:1). The early works of Watson and Skinner rejected the notion of psychology as a study of consciousness but endorse the notion of psychology as observable behaviour (Malone, 2014:1). Skinner saw learners’ behaviour as shaped by trial and error through reinforcement and punishment, without any reference to intrinsic motivation or emotional states (Skinner, 1938:21). Thus, Skinner’s Theory conceives discipline as a process of applying reinforcement, to shape learners’ behaviour. When learners’ behaviour is shaped and maintained by positive reinforcement, for instance a reward, learners do not feel coerced and they are able to repeat the behaviour willingly (Baum, 2005:184). Skinner’s theory therefore, suggests that people can only feel autonomous or believe that they are self-controlled when they are externally motivated (Catania, 2003:318; Skinner, 1976:43). Critics of behaviourism see the use of reinforcements as risk to the learning of self-regulation, particularly when teachers use them as the sole means of

fostering discipline, or when the teachers' power is overused, and learners become subordinates in their classroom (Klein, 2015:9-10). In contrast to Skinner's theory of operant conditioning, Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology conceives discipline as an intrinsically motivated educative process (Adler, 1998:125). The foundation of the Adlerian psychology approach is quite different from behaviourism but not strictly the opposite (see Sections 3.4). In the ECD phase, the advantage of using the Adlerian psychology approach in understanding positive discipline is that the teachers can explore the emotional state of the learners and the purpose of behaviour exhibited by the learners to encourage autonomy that can lead to self-regulation (Eist, 1999:1110; Hodder Education, 2013:16).

The issue is that positive discipline is a broad phenomenon that is difficult to define because it is grounded in ethics, philosophy, culture as well as traditional religions (Bronk, King & Matsuba, 2013:8). As a result, there is no universal definition, methods and programmes of positive discipline. There are however several worldwide and local initiatives and programmes that regard positive discipline as a programme of violence prevention and teaching of psychosocial skills (Save the Children United Kingdom, 2016:10; UNESCO, 2012:24). In this study, positive discipline models of some of the proponents of positive discipline, namely Jane Nelsen and associates (United States of America, USA), Joan E Durrant (Bangladesh, Kosovo) and Dipak Naker and Deborah Sekitoleko (Uganda) are discussed (see Section 3.5). Based on the needs of ECD phase learners, positive discipline entails that instead of relying on punishment, teachers should initiate a positive reaction to the discipline problem (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005:103; Sternberg & William, 2010:416).

Currently, there is no research-based positive discipline model in Zimbabwe. Due to the diversity of socio-cultural contexts, economic background and curriculum orientation in different countries, it is necessary to understand what positive discipline means, as well as how teachers can foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Zimbabwean researchers, Mugweni, Mutereri and Ganga, (2012:94) define play as a behaviour that is freely chosen, self-initiated and self-directed. Free play has always been associated with the learning of self-regulation in the ECD phase in the Zimbabwean context (see Section 2.6.4).

#### **1.4.4 Free Play and Development of Self-Regulation**

There is consensus that the process of self-regulation involves all the domains of development (Florez, 2011:47) and is enhanced during playful learning (Widiastuti, 2017:42). Play is a positive desirable activity, which creates joy, positive relationships and self-esteem (Alcock, 2013:19; Whitebread, 2012:3). The word desirable suggests that play is necessary for positive holistic development. On the other hand, play is an activity that satisfies the need for having fun, to create happiness or instant pleasure (Kernan, 2007:10) to support the learners' needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Tobin et al., 2017:92). This suggests that episodes of having fun are necessary in development and learning through play. According to McLaughlin *et al.* (2017:22) "the most effective learning isn't contrived, nor is it left to chance, it occurs when teachers utilise the naturalistic moment-to-moment experiential opportunities for learning". This means that while learners are having fun, teachers should foster positive development through giving learners choices, but not necessarily in a forcible way.

The concept of choice in learners' play does not mean the absence of boundaries but rather imposing limits and boundaries that would still satisfy the learners in experiencing a sense of autonomy during play (Santer *et al.*, 2007:IX). This means that learners learn self-regulation skills when teachers give them the freedom to choose activities, negotiate rules, plan and agree on how they will conduct the free play session (Bodrova, Germeroth & Leong, 2013:113; de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:79; Santer *et al.*, 2007:XI). Consequently, the notion of free play does not go beyond having power to choose to participate or how to participate, because there are safety measures, social factors, as well as school rules that need to be adhered to all the time during play. According to Frost (1992:2) and Gonzalez-Mena (2011:92), free play can be viewed as a positive experience in early childhood when it supports the development of self-regulation and psychosocial skills that can lead to flourishing. This is important because there is an acknowledgment that free play demands a substantial amount of self-restraint and self-regulation which learners in the ECD phase do not yet possess (Whitebread, 2012:23). Teachers' application of positive discipline methods should be age appropriate to provide challenging opportunities for learners to develop advanced self-regulation skills (Florez, 2011:47; Klein, 2015:2). This

encourages learners to make calculated decisions to behave in an appropriate manner, for example, waiting for their turn on the swing rather than cutting the line.

When fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase, teachers often need to use co-regulation and scaffolding to encourage learners to self-regulate (see Section 2.5.1 and 2.5.3). Teachers often use scaffolding because there are skills that learners are unable to master on their own. According to Yogman *et al.*, (2018:3) scaffolding is “a reiterative process in which new skills are built on previous skills and are facilitated by a supportive social environment”. Consequently, without supportive teachers’ intervention during free play activities, learners may not acquire self-regulation skills (Farcaş & Curelaru, 2010:220-221; Kirk & Jay, 2018:476; Panadero, 2017:22). This suggests that learners may have ample time for free play, but they need teachers to notice the learners’ opportunities for developing self-regulation in a positive way. Paradoxically, authentic self-regulation is associated with meaningful playful discovery learning that occurs in the contexts of free play where teacher-explicit instructions and guidance are minimal (Yogman *et al.*, 2018:3). Thus, to foster self-regulation in the ECD phase, teachers need to consider learners in the ECD phase as active participants in their development, demonstrating the intrinsic human drive to explore and master their environment (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:3-4). According to Erikson (1968:107-114), as well as Rood and Hadani (2016:12), learners who feel free to make their own decisions during play without teachers’ commanding control, use trial and error and can learn from their mistakes. Thus, the lack of free play opportunities impedes the learners’ capacity to self-regulate (Ivrendi, 2016:895; Yilmaz, 2016:427).

Based on the above, a more appropriate definition for free play in the ECD phase, in line with the research topic, should include learners’ need for nurturing and boundaries. According to Dube (2013:491), free play is defined as the extended opportunities for learners to guide and direct their own play. This definition accommodates an understanding that learners should make decisions at some point, based on their own initiative as they develop a sense of ‘ownership’ of what takes place during the play, rather than relying on the teachers’ choices and decisions all the time (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:7). The learning of self-regulation during free play is crucial for the learners’ optimal development in the ECD phase (Kochanowski & Carr, 2014:146, Miller *et al.*, 2013:7; Weisberg *et al.*,2016:180). However, the challenge that teachers face is to not take control of the learners’ free play activity.

Teachers' power and control compromise the learners' control of free play and are noted as the "superficial implementation" of learner-centred methods and interventions (Li, 2012:16). In the history of teaching ECD phase internationally, the importance of free play in the development of self-regulation has been well researched and well documented (Bodrova *et al.*, 2013:112; Dereli-Iman *et al.*, 2019:1495). However, research that seeks to understand teachers' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play is scarce.

In Zimbabwe, research on the importance of free play in the development of self-regulation in the ECD phase as well as the application of positive discipline is limited. The recent curriculum review process ushered in a competency-based curriculum but the mode of learning in the ECD phase (Grades ECD-A and ECD-B) is playful learning (see section 1.1 and 1.2). This suggests that there is subject teaching and there is no specified stand-alone free play period for fostering self-regulation as in the thematic teaching curriculum. In thematic teaching, the activities of each day are divided between teacher-planned activities and learner-initiated activities (India National Council of Education Research and Training, (INEERT), 2019:22; ZMoESAC, 2012:11). Thus, in the Zimbabwean competency-based curriculum, teachers are supposed to respect that ECD phase learners learn through play and exploration, but teachers should infuse free play in the teaching and learning of academic subject content (for instance, mathematics, English, heritage studies and science) (ZMoPSE, 2015c:2-5). Questions are thus raised on how teachers foster self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in such a situation.

## **1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Teachers face many everyday challenges and successes during teaching and learning in the ECD phase. One of the most challenging tasks for teachers is the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016:10; Pyle, Poliszczuk & Danniels, 2018:2019). Based on the introduction and background of the study, as well as the preliminary literature review, it is argued that the use of positive discipline methods during free play is necessary for the fostering of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase. However, the teachers' understanding of the application of positive discipline during free play has not been widely examined in the context of child-directed learning, during free play. The skill of

meeting the learners' needs for developing self-regulation during free play, while also emphasising the role of positive discipline methods in shaping the learners' behaviour is thus an everyday teaching practice in the ECD phase. This area is often not identified as a gap or challenge that needs to be researched in the ECD phase in Zimbabwe (Dube, 2013:489-491; Shumba, 2003:260; Sibanda & Mpofu, 2017:123-124). There is thus a need to explore how teachers make sense of their actions and practices of the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase. Teachers' descriptions and understandings of their experiences can contribute to existing teaching practice knowledge, extend existing theories and advance methodological diversity in psychology of education (Wood, 2014:4). Consequently, it has become critical to understand how teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play (Li, 2012:9). This suggests that the teachers' experiential knowledge is not only necessary in an empirical study but is a basis for generating knowledge in practical everyday teaching and learning in the ECD phase. In other words, I seek to understand what has become natural or normal in every day practice regarding the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

## **1.6 MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION, SUB-QUESTIONS, AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The main research question and sub-questions are as follows:

### **1.6.1 The Main Research Question**

*How do teachers describe and understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Early Childhood Development phase?*

### **1.6.2 The Sub-Questions**

In the light of the main research question, the sub-questions posed below serve as key foci for the research study. The first two sub-research questions pertain to the literature review:

- i. What are the practices and strategies for fostering self-regulation skills during free play, in line with child development in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase? (Chapter 2)



- ii. What constitutes positive discipline with regards to fostering self-regulation in the Early Childhood Development phase? (Chapter 3)

And the final two sub-questions relate to the empirical study:

- iii. How do Early Childhood Development teachers describe and interpret their day-to-day experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province?
- iv. What practical knowledge is revealed through understanding the participants' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Early Childhood Education phase?

### **1.6.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aims and objectives are outlined below:

#### **1.6.3.1 The Aim**

The general aim is to find out how teachers describe and understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the early Childhood Development Phase.

#### **1.6.3.2 The Objectives**

The following objectives are achieved through a literature review, as well as empirical study, namely:

- i. To provide an overview of development and strategies for the fostering of self-regulation skills during free play in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase.
- ii. To identify, describe and understand the concept of positive discipline with reference to fostering self-regulation in the Early Childhood Development phase.
- iii. To understand the teachers' descriptions and interpretations of their day-to-day experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.
- iv. To establish pertinent practical knowledge embedded in the teachers' experiences of fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free

play in the Early Childhood Development phase and to share the knowledge with other ECD phase teachers as possible guidelines in practise.

As highlighted in the introduction of the study (see Section 1.1), the positive psychology framework captures the aspects of self-regulation that are relevant in the context of the research topic and aims, as will be discussed below.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY**

A theoretical framework refers to the theory that the researcher chooses to guide the research and it is drawn from an established theory that has been tested over time and that was accepted by a community of scholars (Donley, 2012:113; Monaheng, 2018:33). In the following subsections, the rationale for using a theoretical framework and the components making up the theoretical framework for this study are discussed.

### **1.7.1 Rationale for using a Theoretical Framework**

Using a theoretical framework in the study thus enables the researcher to forfeit the requirement to describe and interpret a phenomenon from multiple perspectives, but rather focus on the attributes that relate to the selected theory to guide the discussion in the study (Ryan & Deci, 2017:6). The most appropriate theory for the study can help me explain the phenomenon, illuminate various stages or processes involved in the phenomenon, and focus on aspects of the phenomenon that might otherwise be sidelined (Monaheng, 2018:33; Sclater, 2012:171). On the other hand, a theoretical framework enables a researcher to know where to start investigating complex and puzzling phenomena in education (Sclater 2012:171). In educational research, a theoretical framework is thus a psychological understanding of a phenomenon (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014:2). Consequently, the theoretical framework enables me to contribute psychological knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation to an existing body of knowledge within a specific scientific discipline (Vagle, 2016:59; Willig, 2019:6). In research that uses the qualitative approach, researchers need to use a theoretical framework to give voice to participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2006:7-8). In other words, a theoretical framework provides an established scientific knowledge base that provides structure to guide the literature review, and upon which I can analyse and interpret the findings of the study.

Many of the competencies acquired during the ECD phase are foundational constructs embraced in the positive psychology approach to education which focuses on the optimal functioning of teachers and learners in schools (Baker, Green & Falecki, 2017:1; Holder, 2012:57-59). The focus on optimising human functioning reflects a shift away from understanding the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase as merely a window of opportunity for learning self-regulation skills and related developmental psychosocial skills (McClelland *et al.*, 2015:2; Montroy *et al.*, 2016:1) to understanding how the phenomenon looks in actual everyday practice. In addition to the above, researchers in psychology of education are encouraged to explore complex phenomena in education practice (Bronk *et al.*, 2013:8). Recent findings of research conducted by Pyle, DeLuca, Danniels and Wickstrom (2020:1) and Wood (2014:4) show that there is a complex relationship between the teachers' practices and how learners develop self-regulation during play. Some researchers in ECE (for instance, Hedges & Cooper, 2018:369 and Whitehead, Coltman, Jameson & Lander, 2009:40) and positive psychology (for instance Hefferon *et al.*, 2017:211; Vansteenkiste, Ryan & Soenens, 2020:7) have indicated the need for research aimed at understanding teachers' experiential skilled knowledge that might contribute to understandings of everyday practice and scientific concepts in the ECD phase.

The other rationale for using a theoretical framework is that an interpretive phenomenological research design uses a theoretical or conceptual framework to focus the inquiry where research is needed in terms of specifying the research questions to be addressed, guiding the literature review, and also for making decisions about sampling of participants, to data analysis, presentation and interpretation of the research findings (Lopez & Willis, 2004:730; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014:2). Based on the background of the study that highlighted my interest to explore teachers' understanding of fostering self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase, there was a need to conduct a literature review and empirical study and this begins with a review on positive psychology as a suitable location for studying self-regulation.

### **1.7.2 Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology is a scientifically informed perspective that provides a different view of understanding human experiences by identifying and enhancing human

strengths and virtues (Emmons, 2019:1). It is a branch of psychological practice that in addition to the mainstream psychology practice of identifying and alleviating psychological problems, focuses on the development of strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to flourish (Boniwell, 2017:1; DS Psychology Melbourne, 2017:1; Emmons, 2019:1; Seligman, 2008:4). Positive psychology is commonly referred to as the scientific study of all the factors that contribute to happiness and flourishing on both personal and community levels (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018:1766; Conoley, Conoley, Spaventa-Vancil & Lee, 2014:498; Seligman, 2002:3; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:6; Seligman & Pawelski, 2003:162). Research that examines narratives from participants who have skilled experiences of a phenomenon in actual practice has increased in conjunction with the growth of positive psychology (Bronk, 2012:2-3). The leaders of positive psychology have recognised the need for additional knowledge of research into understanding practical methods to encourage positive development and sustaining inner strengths (Bronk, 2012:3, 7-8; Ryan & Deci, 2017:ix). Using the theoretical framework of positive psychology, teachers need to help the learners to become self-regulated persons if the expectation is to have individuals, communities and societies that flourish.

The term 'positive' signifies the "broadening and building effect of positive emotions" (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018:1777). This may suggest that positive psychology is exclusively oriented to increasing the levels of positive emotions or supporting the growth of strengths and virtues, but it also deals with interventions and programmes that address negative emotions (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:1; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:6, 13).

Positive psychology is not a new idea, because the foundational ideologies of positive psychology were in existence in psychology for many years before World War II (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:6,13). After World War II, psychology mainly focused on reactive practices that involved diagnosing and treating patients with, for instance, depression and anxiety disorders with the medical model (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:6). Consequently, psychology became like a branch of medicine for repairing the biological or psychosocial damage caused by mental health problems (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:7). According to Seligman (2002:3), this exclusive focus on behavioural medicine or medical psychology neglected the preventative and capacitating functions of psychology, particularly the ideas of fulfilled

individuals and thriving communities. As a result, the role of a psychologist is still perceived as exclusively to heal psychological damage and disorders. However, positive psychology has revisited the original aims of psychology, which did not focus only on pathology but also on peoples' wellbeing and optimal development (Lino, 2016:1).

The premise behind positive psychology is that if psychologists wish to improve human conditions, it is not enough to help those who suffer (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:6, 10) but all people must be included. Most "normal" people also need help in developing their strengths to the highest possible levels of excellence (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:10; Seligman & Pawelski, 2003:160). Conclusively, positive psychology deals with strengths as well as addressing the weaknesses at all levels because it allows psychologists to understand and build those factors that allow individuals, communities and societies to flourish (Holder, 2012:57-59; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:13). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000:10) believe that this is one of the strong arguments for positive psychology. When applied to the current study, teachers' application of discipline in schools usually focuses on responding to problems through applying consequences, but the positive discipline framework allows teachers to also think about teaching or promoting acceptable behaviours, as well as other positive aspects of health and wellbeing for everyone in the school. The focus is on the fundamental premise of the positive psychology framework, as it relates to the SDT in the understanding of fostering self-regulation skills through positive discipline to the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:9).

### **1.7.3 The Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) can be situated within positive psychology because it discusses pertinent psychological processes that enhance optimal development (Bronk *et al.*, 2013:4; Riggenbach, Goubert, van Petegem & Amouroux, 2019:3; Tobin *et al.*, 2017:92). The SDT is first and foremost an empirically based psychological theory that deals with the "the nature, structure and functioning of a person in action, including the person's inherent proactive capacities to selectively engage, interpret and act on external environments (Ryan & Deci, 2017:8). According to Deci and Ryan (2008:181-182) and Ryan and Deci (2017:3), the focus of the SDT

is on studying how socio-cultural and biological factors enable or hinder human capacities for psychological development and human flourishing. SDT has multi-disciplinary phenomena with implications for health sciences, sociology, work, environmental studies, philosophy of education, social psychology and behavioural sciences. When using the SDT as a theoretical framework for the current study, the focus is on understanding the contextual aspects and structures that “facilitate or undermine the motivations and satisfactions underlying effective self-regulation and wellness” (Ryan & Deci, 2017:4-5). Therefore, the SDT suggests that the development of self-regulation relies on highly supportive social structures and conditions, as well as the teachers’ support for resilience.

The major similarity between SDT and interpretive phenomenological research is that they both emphasise the importance of understanding lived experience (Ackerman, 2020:1; Ryan & Deci, 2017:8). The major difference is that interpretive phenomenology emphasises the shared contextual knowledge that cannot be derived from scientific experiments whilst the positive psychology framework and SDT emphasise universality and scientifically grounded knowledge. Traditionally the SDT has been used in diplomatic and political contexts to describe the process a country undergoes to assert its independence and to research foundational government documents and speeches from people long dead (Ackerman, 2020:1). However, in terms of fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase, the two can be usefully related in practice to understand the shared lived skilled experiences of the participants, which can add to the body of knowledge on how teachers can foster self-regulation in ECD.

Nurturing the development of self-regulation through positive discipline in the ECD phase is a taken for granted phenomenon. The SDT and Benner’s interpretive phenomenology direct the study to not only focus on the absence of disciplinary violence during learners’ free play when fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase, but also to look deeper to understand the taken-for-granted skilled practical knowledge. In this study, the theory is used to understand the application of positive discipline during free play to foster self-regulation in the ECD phase.

According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000:10), Deci and Ryan (2008:182) as well as Vansteenkiste *et al.*, (2020:4), the SDT is a macro theory of human motivation, development and wellness which has been applied in a wide range of fields, such as

health, sport education, wellbeing and positive psychology. It has numerous sub theories that address personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, energy and vitality, non-conscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, and the impact of social environments on motivation, affect, behaviour and wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2008:182). The assumption is that people are active organisms with natural tendencies to grow but to realise optimal growth, they require ongoing psychosocial support (Self-Determination Theory Organisation, 2019:1-2). According to Deci and Ryan (2008:184), the SDT “posits that whereas controlled motives drain energy, autonomous actions that lead to need satisfaction can actually enhance energy available for self-regulation”. This means that appropriate support is needed to facilitate learners’ development of self-regulation skills, as postulated in the Basic Psychological Needs Theory.

#### **1.7.4 The Basic Psychological Needs Theory**

The Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) is a key building block of the framework of the SDT (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:1). In this study, most of the discussion pertaining to the SDT centres on the BPNT. The BPNT is not only one of the six theories within the SDT but the central theory (Martela & Ryan, 2020:116; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:1). The most central distinctive feature in the BPNT is the three basic needs which are assumed to be innate and universal to human beings (Martela & Ryan, 2020:116; Rogers & Tannock, 2013:1; Tian, Zhang & Huebner, 2018:2). “Psychological need” means a “psychological nutrient that is essential for individuals’ adjustment, integrity and growth” (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:1). The satisfaction of a psychological need is important, because it contributes to people’s wellbeing, while its frustration increases the risk for “passivity, ill-being and defensiveness” (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:1). This suggests that the on-going satisfaction of the three needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence) is crucial for optimal functioning and development that is intrinsically motivated (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:2).

However, if any of the needs are not met in the school environment, learners might experience poor psychological health, which may lead to various forms of psychopathology, and may include externalising behaviours such as violent behaviour (Deci & Ryan 2008:182-184; Self-Determination Theory Organisation, 2019:2).

Findings of research conducted by Longo, Alcaraz-Ibáñez and Sicilia (2018:74, 80) suggest that need frustration does not merely represent a lack of satisfaction but it reflects a distinct concept with different experiences of need deprivation. Within the BPNT, self-regulation implies an “experience of regulation by self” that is linked to the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs, namely, autonomy, competence and relatedness (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:3).

Some cognitive behavioural strategies for fostering self-regulation skills such as “positive re-appraisal, cognitive restructuring, self-talk and planning” are implicated in research that is underpinned by BPNT (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:7). Evidence from studies of well-being and flourishing have repeatedly shown that satisfaction of basic needs is essential for wellbeing and teachers being supportive of the learners’ developmental needs will enhance self-regulation skills (Carlton & Winsler, 1998:165; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:4-5). In their recent book, Ryan and Deci (2017:12) note that specific contextual factors that relate to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs are, for instance, encouragement, rewards, logical consequences and provision of choice.

Play and exploration in ECE are not activities that are consciously done to satisfy basic needs, but are natural activities where integration of values, knowledge and social skills can take place, therefore basic needs satisfaction becomes a requirement for learners to operate optimally during these activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000:230). Feelings of autonomy, competence and relatedness are essential for optimal functioning in a broad range of highly varied cultures (Deci & Ryan, 2008:183). In the next section, I describe the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

#### **1.7.4.1 Autonomy**

In the school context, the need for autonomy is associated with learning skills of coping in different situations that demand self-regulation rather than relying on being controlled by teachers through rewards and punishments (Uzman, 2014:3630). In other words, autonomous actions or behaviours are those that are done outside the auspices of external regulatory processes such as to get rewards or avoid punishment, but cannot mean freedom to disregard school rules, morals and respect for self and others (Williams, 2009:334). In this regard, teachers’ support for learners’ autonomy



includes giving learners choices and fostering self-regulation skills (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:7; Ryan & Deci, 2017:12; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:3), without exposing learners to impositions and coercion (Uzman, 2014:3630). In the absence of autonomy, one may engage in the activity to please others, get approval, avoid feelings of guilt or other controlled forms of regulation (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:4).

#### **1.7.4.2 Competence**

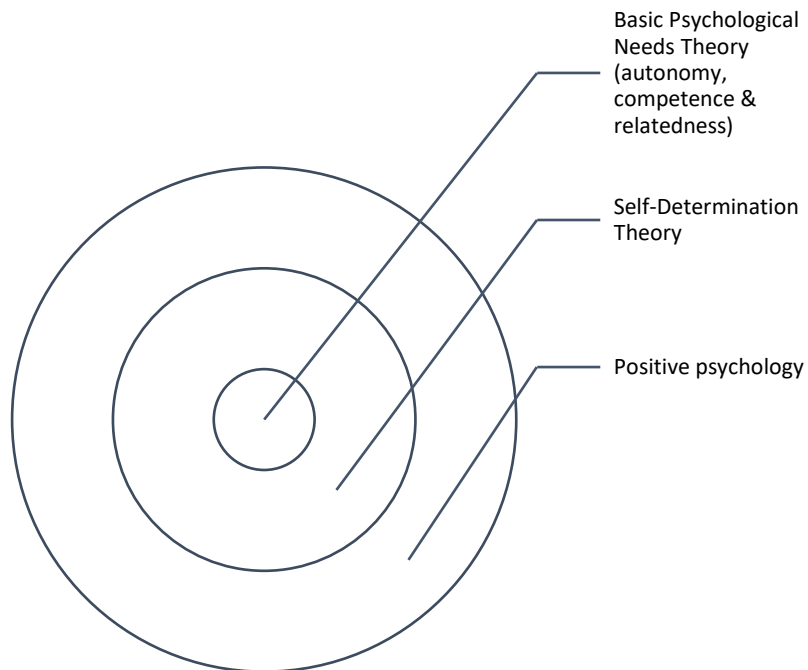
Competence is one's ability to cope or act skilfully and positively in everyday situations (Uzman, 2014:3630; Williams, 2009:332). The need for competence is evident as intrinsic determination that is a product of curiosity, exploration and discovery, as well as a variety of positive interpersonal aspects (Ryan & Deci, 2017:11). Research has demonstrated that self-regulation is closely related to emotional competence since learners use skills of emotional competence to regulate themselves (Carlton & Winsler, 1998:164; Housman, 2017:3). Satisfying the need for competence is associated with providing learning opportunities for gaining and using skills effectively, thus producing feelings of mastering skills independently and efficiently rather than having feelings of failure and discouragement (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:3,7; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:3). Teachers can promote the learners' competences by providing structure and positive informational feedback (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:7-8; Ryan & Deci, 2017:12).

#### **1.7.4.3 Relatedness**

Relatedness concerns feelings of being socially connected and cared for by others (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:3,7; Ryan & Deci, 2017:11, 648). Satisfying the need for relatedness involves providing activities and support strategies to experience feelings of significance and connectedness to teachers and peers. Examples of teachers' positive methods for supporting relatedness are exhibiting kindness and respect towards learners, as well as acknowledging the learners' positive and negative feelings (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:7). Frustrating the need for relatedness is associated with feelings of loneliness and a feeling of being ignored (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:3).

### 1.7.5 The Diagrammatic Illustration of the Study's Framework

Based on the discussion in this section, I provide a diagrammatic illustration of the theoretical framework of the study (see Figure 1.1).



**Figure 1.1: Illustration of the study's theoretical framework**

Figure 1.1 above shows the body of knowledge within which the study is framed is positive psychology. From the discussion in Section 1.7.2. positive psychology is a branch of psychology that includes self-regulation and positive discipline extensively. Within positive psychology there are many theories, but I selected the SDT (see Section 1.7.3) as it addresses basic psychology issues such as “personality development, self-regulation, universal psychological needs, life goals and aspirations, energy and vitality, non-conscious processes, the relations of culture to motivation, affect, behaviour, and wellbeing” (Deci & Ryan, 2008:182). As previously mentioned, the SDT is a macro-theory of human development and health which has been applied in many fields of practice such as sports, education and psychotherapy. The BPNT is a sub-theory of the SDT and is the theory that guides the literature review in this study. For more details and explanation see Section 1.7.4. The use of SDT as a theoretical framework is recommended as a resource to meet learners' needs in schools (Holt *et al.*, 2019:656).

## **1.8 DEMARCATION**

The study is limited to studying the teachers' application of positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase to foster self-regulation. There are ten provinces in Zimbabwe. The study was done only in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. In this province, ten teachers were selected from three different types of primary schools. The participants were qualified teachers having received positive discipline training from the ECD trainer.

## **1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

For an empirical study to be conducted, the researcher needs to make informed choices about the design and methodology, all of which is briefly discussed in the subsequent sections.

### **1.9.1 Interpretive Phenomenological Research Design**

In the current phenomenological study, I will describe and interpret the teachers' lived experiences of fostering self-regulation as they apply positive discipline during free play in ECE. Phenomenological research generally studies the experiences of people through the descriptions provided by those who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007:58; Lin, 2013:470-471; Santos, Neves & Carnevale, 2018:179; Vagle, 2016:59). Since the aim of the study is to understand the teachers' lived experiences of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, the interpretive phenomenological research strategy of Patricia Benner (Benner, 1994:99-128; 2012:462-464) is selected to guide the research design and methodology. Benner incorporated Heidegger's philosophical writings in her interpretive phenomenological research method (Brykczynski & Benner, 2010:122; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar & Dowling, 2016:1). When using Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy in research, I seek to understand "poorly articulated areas of knowledge, skill and self-interpretations in education" (Brykczynski & Benner, 2010:122).

Benner's interpretive phenomenology thus has the capacity to assist me in understanding the teachers' understandings of their practical knowledge, expertise, concerns and everyday experiences of practice that are effective in the ECD phase.

Since the interpretive phenomenological research design will be used, to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, the research approach will be a qualitative research approach.

### **1.9.2 Qualitative Research Approach**

The qualitative research approach is selected because the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon that is being studied. The central phenomenon is the key idea or concept being explored in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2014:241; Davidsen, 2013:319; Gobo, 2018:80). The qualitative researchers seek to understand the context by collecting data personally. The process of qualitative research is largely inductive, in other words, the researcher generates meaning from the data in the field (Creswell, 2014:9; Grix, 2010:20; Pistrang & Baker, 2012:6). In positive psychology research, qualitative research has added value by revealing the contextualised lived experiences of participants (Hefferon, Ashfield, Waters & Synard, 2017:211). Using the qualitative research approach to conduct this study will help me to illuminate the descriptions and interpretations of how ECD phase teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. There is thus a logical connection between the interpretive phenomenological design, qualitative approach and the social constructivist paradigm.

### **1.9.3 Social Constructivist Paradigm**

Constructivism in general, but social constructivism specifically is a paradigm that corresponds well with the qualitative approach (Adom, Yeboah & Ankrah, 2016:5; Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:143; Creswell, 2014:8). Tenets of social constructivism believe that there is no fixed body of knowledge because knowledge is socially constructed, thus dynamic because social contexts are constantly evolving (Alphonso, Durrani & Sood, 2019; Yin, 2016:334:7). This means that the social constructivist paradigm is appropriate for interpreting a dynamic and complex psychosocial phenomenon, namely, the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Social constructivism also acknowledges how the researcher's own background, experiences and prior knowledge influence their interpretation (Creswell, 2009:8). However, the researcher should not impose assumptions about the phenomenon being studied on the participants (Mertens,

2018:61; Santos *et al.*, 2018:180). The focus will be on constructing meanings from the participants' interpretations of their experiences of the phenomenon under study. For more details on the research design, paradigm, approach and Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy see Section 4.3.

#### **1.9.4 Sampling and Sample**

I used the purposive sampling method and the strategies that were applied were maximum variation sampling and criterion sampling. According to Beaudry and Miller (2016:41), purposive sampling means a "deliberate process of selecting an appropriate setting and people for inquiry." It is thus a broad term referring to selecting samples for specific purposes, therefore there are many strategies which can fall under purposive sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018:219; Patton, 2002:243-244). In this study, purposive sampling means selecting three different schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province on the list of schools where an ECD trainer conducted workshops on positive discipline. Maximum variation sampling is used in selecting the choice of schools. It involves selecting cases which are diverse to ensure richness of data, in connection with the phenomenon under study (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:219). The variety of schools are Christian, special needs and disadvantaged schools. Criterion sampling is used in selecting the participants. It refers to selecting all cases that fit a criterion in a defined context (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:219). Achieving diversity in the sample by using multiple research sites of different types of schools will provide a broader range of contexts from which the participants' lived experience can be described and interpreted. For more details on the ethical clearance procedures, selection of participants, sample and sampling methods applied in the study see Sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2.

#### **1.9.5 Data Collection**

As suggested by Benner (1994:118-119) and Gill (2014:14-15), I can access the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon through using semi-structured interviews at the participants' natural settings. During the interviews, I will ask the participants to describe and interpret their involvement in actual situations of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. An interview guide, with open ended questions and probes will be used to collect the data

that will answer the research questions (see Appendix F). All interviews will be audio recorded with the permission from the participants (see Appendix E). The audio recorded interviews will be self-transcribed. The data will consist of details and specific descriptions of the participants' experiences and their perspectives of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline in the ECD phase. For more details on the data collection methods applied in the study see Section 4.4.2 and 4.4.3.

#### **1.9.6 Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation**

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological study is to reveal the meanings that come out of the lived experiences in a way that create new possibilities for understanding the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase for other teachers as well (even if qualitative research is not generalisable). All the activities in the data analysis steps will be in accordance with Benner's data analysis method which advocates for the use of paradigm cases and themes which are supported by exemplars extracted from the interview transcripts (Benner, 1985:10; 1994:116-123). In the paradigm case analysis phase, I will pay considerable attention to the narratives of SB8 as the paradigm case but all narratives of the other participants will contribute to the further articulation and understanding of the aspects of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

I will take care in the interpretation of the participants' narratives in the thematic analysis phase by having multiple readings of transcripts, ensuring that different descriptions and interpretations from the participants are addressed, as well as having consensual validation of themes, as suggested in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method. The process of consensual validation entails that the methodological expert and I read the transcripts, and each generate codes and themes independently, followed by a face-to-face consultative meeting to consensually validate the codes and themes. I will use the NVivo 12 Pro software programme to augment Benner's data analysis method in facilitating data analysis, presentation and interpretation (Dollah & Abduh, 2017:61). For more details on the descriptions of the steps from Benner (1994:116-123) and the explanation of how the NVivo 12 Pro programme augments the steps in Benner's interpretive phenomenological design see Sections 4.4.5.2 and 4.4.5.3.

### **1.9.7 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are crucial because they guard against harm to the participating individuals and institutions (Kumar, 2011:220; Marczyk, DeMatteo & Festinger, 2015:245; Roulston & Choi, 2018b:238). Before conducting the empirical research, I sought permission to conduct the research from the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Bulawayo Metropolitan Province and the University of South Africa (UNISA). I also sought written consent from the principals and teachers in the participating schools. I maintained the principles of anonymity, confidentiality as well as the other guidelines spelt out by UNISA and the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Most importantly, I emphasised that participation in the study was voluntary and participants were under no obligation to consent to participation. Upon making the decision to take part in the study, participants were asked to sign the consent form but also told that they were free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, even after having agreed to participate. For more details on the ethical considerations applied in this study see Section 4.6.

### **1.9.8 Trustworthiness**

Benner does not prescribe a rigid method for trustworthiness but states that producing a consensually validated interpretation that is agreed on by multiple researchers is very important (Benner Tanner & Chesla, 2009:436). Since Benner does not prescribe measures for trustworthiness, I opted for the general approach of addressing trustworthiness for qualitative approach. This refers to the ways in which the research may be judged to be credible, transferrable, dependable and confirmable (Garvis, 2015:20; Merriam, 2009:217). For details on how I addressed the consensual validation process, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability see Section 4.5.

## **1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

**Discipline** in general society, deals with how people behave, as well as how negative behaviours are corrected (Bear, 2011:9; Walters & Frei 2007:13). It also means teaching the learners appropriate behaviour (McTague, 2016:37; Save the Children Fiji, 2015:13). When considering the framework of positive psychology, discipline

refers to assisting the learners in developing self-regulation to enhance their autonomy, competence and sense of belonging (Bear, 2010:2; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017:1-5). In this study, discipline will refer to teaching, coaching and training children to be well-behaved as well as to attain self-regulation skills.

**Early Childhood Development phase** refers to the fastest period of growth and development during the first eight years of life (OECD, 2020:18; UNICEF Headquarters, 2006:2; UNICEF Headquarters, 2015b:1). However, in this study the ECD phase refers to the preschool years, particularly the learners who are between 3 to 5 years of age in line with the Zimbabwean context in ECE (ZMoPSE, 2015b:2). During this phase the learners start to interact with peers in the context of the pre-primary school. It refers to the learners who are in the grades that are below the first grade in the infant grades, ECD A and ECD B. During this period, learners develop self-regulation skills as well as the foundational skills for formal learning.

The conceptualisation **Early Childhood Education (ECE)** is comprehensive in representing the development of the whole child (Russell, Lee, Spieker & Oxford, 2016:153-154). In developing countries, like Zimbabwe, the term Early Childhood Education (ECE) is synonymous with the ECD phase because it refers to school grades and learning programmes prior to Grade 1 (Shafiq *et al.*, 2018:5). These programmes are not only focused on pre-academic skills but also on enhancing the development of self-regulation skills and related psychosocial skills, which include the ability to express thoughts and feelings, gaining control over impulsivity, adapting behaviour to situational demands and maintaining concentration (UNESCO, 2014:38).

**Free play** as defined by Santer *et al.* (2007:IX), is an activity where learners are given the opportunity to “choose what they want to do, how they want to do it and when to stop and try something else”. Teachers organise the play area and avail the necessary resources, and might take part in the free play, but it is essential that free play should remain learner directed.

**Positive discipline** In the ECD phase, is not simply the absence of physical punishment, but rather a concerted effort to encourage learners to develop self-regulation. It is a very broad phenomenon and there are various definitions of positive discipline. Klein (2015:2) defines positive discipline as guidance “which involves



setting clear, consistent limits ..... striving to foster self-esteem and independence”. In this study, positive discipline is a non-punitive age-appropriate method of teaching learners to regulate their social and emotional behaviour intrinsically rather than externally.

**Psychosocial development** is a key area of development in the ECD phase. The term psychosocial in this study refers to the interrelationship between psychological aspects of the learners’ experiences (thoughts, emotions and behaviour) and the social experiences within the school context (ZMoPSE, 2018:2).

**Self-regulation** refers to the learners’ ability to inhibit inappropriate behaviour and exhibit prosocial behaviour voluntarily, while demonstrating understanding of values, standards, beliefs and attitudes of their parents and teachers, peers and others in society (Bear, 2011:8). Thus, self-regulation can be described as learners’ voluntary compliance to rules, inhibition of irritability/arousal, as well as regulation of emotions and behaviour (Karreman, van Tuijl, van Aken & Đekoić, 2006:561,571; Ziv *et al.*, 2018:14). Klein (2015:2) views self-regulation as an outcome of positive discipline because self-regulation requires the learners to develop skills to maintain focus and attention, as well as to demonstrate behavioural regulation and emotional regulation (Dereli-Iman *et al.*, 2019:1494-1495). In this study, self-regulation refers to the learners’ ability to demonstrate focus and control of their behaviour and emotions during free play. The teachers’ role is to encourage and support the learners’ development of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

## 1.11 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study is organised into seven chapters as follows:

**CHAPTER 1**, the orientation to the study, introduced the reader to the study. It presented an introduction, the background, personal involvement, the statement of the problem, research questions and the aim and objectives. In addition, it discussed the positive psychology framework, SDT and the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) as theoretical insights that guide the study and key concepts to be discussed. Finally, I highlighted pertinent issues in research design and methodology before giving the definitions of the key terms used in the study, as well as the division of chapters and summary.

**CHAPTER 2** uses the positive psychology theoretical framework, SDT and BPNT to review literature pertaining to understanding the notions and strategies of fostering self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase. It discusses key concepts, knowledge and strategies that are relevant for understanding the fostering of self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase. These include forms of self-regulation, learning through play, types of play as well as, development in the ECD phase. Furthermore, the teachers' support strategies and the learners' psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence) are described and discussed within the theoretical framework.

**CHAPTER 3** reviews relevant literature in line with the research sub-question that seeks to understand the teachers' application of positive discipline as an ally of the teaching and learning of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase. Pertinent literature for understanding positive discipline in the ECD phase is the focus of this chapter. I discuss discipline and punishment in schools, the branches of psychological practice that can assist readers in understanding discipline and punishment, theories and models for understanding self-regulation and positive discipline, and practices in the selected countries of the United States of America, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

**CHAPTER 4** gives a comprehensive account of the research methodology and design. The research design that deals with the paradigm, research approach and research strategy is guided by Patricia Benner's interpretive phenomenological research approach. Research methods that are discussed in this chapter include sampling techniques, data collection tools and data analysis procedures. Measures taken for trustworthiness are explained. Also presented are ethical considerations for the study.

**CHAPTER 5** presents the analysis and interpretation of the empirical data using the paradigm case analysis method. This is a phase in Benner's interpretive phenomenology strategy. I combine presentation, discussion and interpretation of the data using paradigm case and exemplars.

**CHAPTER 6** presents themes from the thematic analysis phase. Themes are inductively defined from raw data (transcripts) in line with Benner's interpretive phenomenology. I seek to present and interpret the meaning of the data using interpretive themes that also relate to the findings from the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) and the theoretical framework.

**CHAPTER 7** gives a summary of the study and draws conclusions based on findings from the literature review and the empirical research. It presents a summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations. It also gives methodological significance and contribution to ECD phase research. Recommendations for various stake holders are presented. Avenues for further research and a reflection on the limitations of the study are provided. Lastly, concluding remarks are stated.

## **1.12 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I provided an orientation to the study and the demarcation of the research problem. Teachers in the ECD phase are faced with the challenge of coming up with child-centred, positive, non-violent disciplinary actions that can be effective for fostering self-regulation during free play. The teachers' fostering of self-regulation skills during free play and application of positive discipline are perceived as addressing the learners' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, in line with the theoretical framework of the study. The subsequent chapter reviews literature in line with the sub-research question that seeks to understand the meaning and process of nurturing self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase.

# **CHAPTER 2: EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING SELF-REGULATION DURING FREE PLAY**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Teaching self-regulation skills during free play is a common practice in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase. However, not much research has focused on understanding the teachers' practices for the fostering of self-regulation in line with the recent global developments that have necessitated curriculum changes in many countries, including Zimbabwe. In Chapter 1, I oriented the reader to the study, highlighting pertinent information regarding the study such as the research questions and aims, research design, the background and the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 2 discusses key concepts, knowledge and strategies that are relevant for understanding the fostering of self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase. Forms of self-regulation, learning through play, types of play as well as, development in the ECD phase are discussed. Teachers' support and learners' needs are described and discussed within the positive psychology framework and the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), as well as the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), focusing on satisfying the learners' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Strategies for fostering self-regulation are also discussed. In the next section, various concepts that are related to the development of self-regulation in the ECD phase are discussed.

## **2.2 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

It is important to give meaning and understanding to concepts within this study such as self-regulation, learning through play and Early Childhood Development phase.

### **2.2.1 Self-regulation**

As previously mentioned, the development of self-regulation skills begins in the ECD phase, and as this study aimed to find out how teachers describe and understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, it is crucial to understand the concept.

### **2.2.1.1 General understandings of self-regulation**

Self-regulation generally refers to self-management (Widiastuti, 2017:39) of “intentional or purposeful acts that are directed from within the person” (Heartherton, 2011:2). It is an intrinsic process of learning to control emotions, thoughts and feelings (Bear, 2009:312; Widiastuti, 2017:39; Winner, 2019:3). In the ECD phase, self-regulation indicates the learners’ ability to gain control of physical functions, manage powerful emotions and maintain focus and attention (Dereli-Iman *et al.*, 2019:1494-1495; Gillespie & Seibel, 2006:1; Murray, Rosanbalm & Christopolous, 2016:7). In the ECD phase, self-regulation is defined as “the child’s ability to modulate behaviour according to the cognitive (attentional), emotional, and social demands of a particular situation” (Dan, 2016:190). From the definitions, the ECD phase seems to be specifically geared for assisting learners in understanding and controlling their emotions in various situations that demand learners to self-regulate (Murray *et al.*, 2016:34; Russell *et al.*, 2016:153; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:26). The definition that is appropriate for this study would be “a deep internal mechanism that underlies mindful, intentional and thoughtful behaviours of children which allows the capacity to both stop the behaviour or start something new” (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:71). According to the SDT, the process of acquiring self-regulation involves many types of regulation, as will be discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.1.2 Types of regulation in Self-Determination Theory: Organismic Integration Theory**

As already mentioned in Section 1.7.4, the SDT comprises six mini-theories (Martela & Ryan, 2020:116; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:1). The Organismic Integration Theory (OIT), is one of them and views the development of self-regulation as an on-going process (Brown & Ryan, 2015:141). The main assumption of the OIT, with respect to this current study, is that the type of regulation depends on the extent to which autonomy is present (Ackerman, 2020:4; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:4). The focus on these forms of regulation is pertinent in this study to understand the various forms of regulation presented by the learners in the ECD phase. It is only by the end of the ECD phase that teachers should expect learners to have developed adequate self-regulation skills for functioning efficiently in formal education (Li, 2012:20; Nelsen, Erwin & Duffy, 2007:4; Nelsen, Lott & Glen, 2013:9). The types of regulation in the OIT

are respectively nonregulation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation integrated regulation and intrinsic regulation.

Quality of Behavior	Nonautonomous ..... Autonomous					
Type of Motivation	Amotivation	Extrinsic Motivation				Intrinsic Motivation
Type of Regulation	Nonregulation	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Integrated Regulation	Intrinsic Regulation
Locus of Causality	Impersonal	External	Somewhat External	Somewhat Internal	Internal	Internal
Regulatory Processes	Nonintentional, Nonvaluing, Incompetence, Lack of Control	Compliance, External Rewards and Punishments	Self-Control, Ego-Involvement, Internal Rewards and Punishments	Personal Importance, Conscious Valuing	Congruence, Conscious Synthesis with Self	Interest, Enjoyment, Inherent Satisfaction

Source: Brown & Ryan (2015:141)

### Figure 2.1: Organismic Integration Theory

Figure 2.1 above shows that the types of motivation are amotivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. The types of motivation and the corresponding types of regulation are discussed below.

#### i. Amotivation

According to Figure 2.1, the regulatory processes that are associated with amotivation are nonintentional, non-valuing, incompetence and lack of control. The type of regulation that comes from amotivation is nonregulation. Amotivation represents a state where behaviour is not self-regulated, which means that the behaviour is performed without intent or will, or the person is not engaged in the behaviour at all (Brown & Ryan, 2015:140; Deci & Ryan, 2000:237). In other words, a person does not assign any meaning or value to the behaviour. Some of the learners in the ECD phase may be in a state of amotivation, because they may give up trying to be engaged in any play or exploration activity because of fear of ridicule or punishment. Amotivation is caused by need frustration that leads to a state of helplessness and complete lack of intention to act (Warburton *et al.*, 2020:55).

## **ii. Extrinsic regulation**

Figure 2.1 shows that there are four types of regulation in extrinsic motivation, respectively external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation.

### **a. External regulation**

Based on Figure 2.1, external regulation is the most popular and most controlled type of extrinsically motivated regulation. The regulatory processes that are involved in external regulation are compliance, external rewards and punishment. A classic example of externally controlled and non-autonomous regulation is behaviour that is done to gain rewards or avoid punishments (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236; Deci, Ryan, Schultz & Niemiec, 2015:118). There are some learners who find it difficult to self-regulate without teachers' use of praise and rewards. Teachers need to reinforce or encourage positive behaviour (for instance sharing toys with peers) using praise or rewards (Widiastuti, 2017:41). Teachers use punishment to discourage negative behaviour.

### **b. Introjected regulation**

Introjected regulation refers to an external form of regulation where learners attain feelings of self-value rather than avoiding or escaping actions that may lead to experiencing feelings of guilt or shame (Warburton *et al.*, 2020:55). Introjected regulation is different to external regulation where the focus is on compliance that comes from the use of rewards and punishment. It is associated with the development of learners' self-esteem and the goal is to meet self-approval-based self-control (Brown & Ryan, 2015:140; Deci & Ryan, 2000:236). It is characterised by inner conflict between ownership of behaviour and following rules (Deci & Ryan, 2000:237). Based on Figure 2.1, introjected regulations are partially external and thus are a relatively unstable form of regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236). Pride, shame and guilt, as well as false self-ascriptions are some of the examples of behaviour that are outcomes of introjection (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236). In the ECD phase, initiative versus guilt is the basic conflict in Erikson's stage theory (see section 2.2.3.1). The learners who display too much false ascriptions of power or pride in the ECD phase often experience

disciplinary actions that involve humiliation and shaming (Dreikurs, Grunwald & Pepper, 1998:13). Teachers' use of shame and guilt to gain the learners' cooperation was mentioned in Section 1.4.3 as disciplinary methods that can become negative childhood experiences that hinder positive development. Thus, learners with introjected regulation can perceive themselves as powerful or helpless and then act in misguided ways that will hinder the attainment of intrinsically motivated regulation.

#### **c. Identified regulation**

Identification refers to external regulation where people recognise and accept the value of their behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236). According to Ryan and Deci (2000:72-73) "Identification reflects a conscious valuing of a behavioural goal or regulation, such that the action is accepted as personally important". Identified regulation lacks autonomy because it is caused by some internal factors, but not totally, as shown in Figure 2.1. Therefore, it may not be regarded as intrinsically motivated self-regulation.

#### **d. Integrated regulation**

According to Figure 2.1, integrated regulation is the only form of extrinsically motivated regulation whose locus of causality is internal. It occurs when identified aspects of the self "have been evaluated and brought into congruence with one's other values and needs" (Brown & Ryan, 2015:141; Ryan & Deci, 2000:73). The more learners accept and identify with a value of a behaviour, the more that behaviour become autonomous, but still extrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236). Integrated regulation is thus the highest level or most complete form of internalisation of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236; Vansteenkiste, et al., 2020:4). It is facilitated by a sense of choice, volition and freedom from coercion (Ryan & Deci, 2000:74). As the learners become more autonomous in their actions, what was initially externally regulated behaviour could be fully transformed to become integrated, and later into self-regulation behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236; Deci *et al.*, 2015:118).

### **iii. Intrinsic regulation**

According to Figure 2.1, intrinsic regulation is the only form of regulation that is motivated by intrinsic motivation. Learners with high levels of autonomy, relatedness and competence are intrinsically motivated and are self-regulated (Temple & Emmet,



2013:70). Intrinsic motivation, as defined by Ryan and Deci (2008: 655), is “behaviour done for its inherent satisfaction, and it is assessed behaviourally in terms of freely pursued behaviours.... and feelings of interest”. In short, intrinsic motivation in the ECD phase is defined as a “natural activity and curiosity” (Ryan & Deci, 2000:76). Intrinsically motivated behaviours originate from either personal characteristics or are inherent in the task being performed naturally, for instance free play in the ECD phase (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2014:568; Warburton *et al.*, 2020:55). Thus, learners enjoy free play because they value the activity. The SDT proposes that when the social environment supports these three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) learners will experience need satisfaction, optimal functioning and psychological growth (Warburton *et al.*, 2020:54; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:4). On the other hand, the teachers’ use of direct instructions is often regarded as controlling and thus associated with external regulation rather than intrinsically motivated regulation (Bear, 2008:1; 2011:9). It may thus not be compatible with learner-directed activities such as free play. However, teachers’ direct instructions may be fundamental in the application of some forms of learner-centred support for behavioural and emotional self-regulation in positive psychology (Ackerman, 2019:1). Behavioural regulation and emotional regulation are thus discussed next.

### **2.2.1.3 Behavioural regulation**

Behaviour or social regulation is the ability to control one’s actions and includes compliance with adult demands and directives (Widiastuti, 2017:41). It is also the ability to control impulsive responses, delay in engagement in specific activities and persistence (Ludwig, Haindl, Laufs & Rauch, 2016:109; Murray, Rosanbalm, Christopolous & Hamoudi, 2015:6; Widiastuti, 2017:41). In the ECD phase, behavioural regulation is a critical component of self-regulation that is associated with sustaining positive social relationships (Ludwig *et al.*, 2016:109). Later in life, such skills enable learners to be able to self-regulate in ways that utilise enhanced attention, organisation, planning and self-control (American Psychological Association and Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education, 2015:13). There are many strategies that teachers can use to foster self-regulation skills in the ECD phase, as discussed in section 2.5.

#### **2.2.1.4 Emotional regulation**

Emotional self-regulation entails the process that enables people to actively manage disruptive emotions and impulses in emotionally arousing situations (Brockman, Ciarrochi, Parker & Kashdan, 2016:1; Cuncic, 2020b:1). It involves awareness and understanding of feelings and tolerance, and thus supports the development of empathy and compassion of self and others (Dereli-Iman *et al.*, 2019:1494-1495; Murray *et al.*, 2015:6; Rogowski, 2011:1-2). It is thus the core component of self-regulation that enables learning and development to take place (Housman, 2017:3). Emotional regulation includes both external and internal strategies for managing emotional situations (Widiastuti, 2017:40). There are controlling situations that cause learners and teachers to feel a lack of personal responsibility for their actions (Carlton & Winsler, 1998:160). It is thus important that teachers and learners should avoid exerting power over others but rather focus on controlling their own emotions (Schüler *et al.*, 2019:42).

#### **2.2.1.5 The concept of self-regulation in the Early Childhood Development phase**

The kind of self-regulation with an emphasis on autonomy, competency and relatedness acquired during the ECD phase is discussed in numerous branches of psychological practice that discuss the development of self-regulation in the ECD phase (Dan, 2016:189-190, 198; Emmons, 2019:1-4; Holt *et al.*, 2019:640-643). It is a foundational construct embraced in the positive psychology approach to education which focuses on the optimal functioning of teachers and learners in schools, as highlighted in section 1.7.1. The fields of positive psychology (Linkins, Niemiec, Gilham & Mayerson, 2015:64-65) and socio-economics (Elango *et al.*, 2015:72) concur that self-regulation is a more reliable predictor of academic success than intelligence quotient (IQ). Martin Seligman, who is credited as the founder of positive psychology, describes self-regulation as the “queen of all virtues, the strength that enables the rest of the strengths” (Rae & MacConville, 2015:7). In the ECD phase, self-regulation is particularly important for school readiness and success in school. In this context, self-regulation is reflected in learners’ demonstrating compliance to rules on turn-taking or the ability to wait for the teacher to finish talking without interruptions (Ludwig *et al.*, 2016:109; Farçaş & Curelaru, 2010:220). In summary, self-regulation

in the ECD phase is the learner's ability to take responsibility for his or her actions and direct his or her own choices as he or she behaves in an acceptable manner (Williams, 2009:335). Play is developmentally appropriate practice and may allow learners to function at their highest level of self-regulation as discussed in the OIT above. The concept of learning through play will be discussed in the next section.

## **2.2.2 Learning through Play**

Play in the ECD phase is necessary for positive holistic development and as previously mentioned, play is an activity that satisfies the need for having fun, to create happiness or instant pleasure (Kernan, 2007).

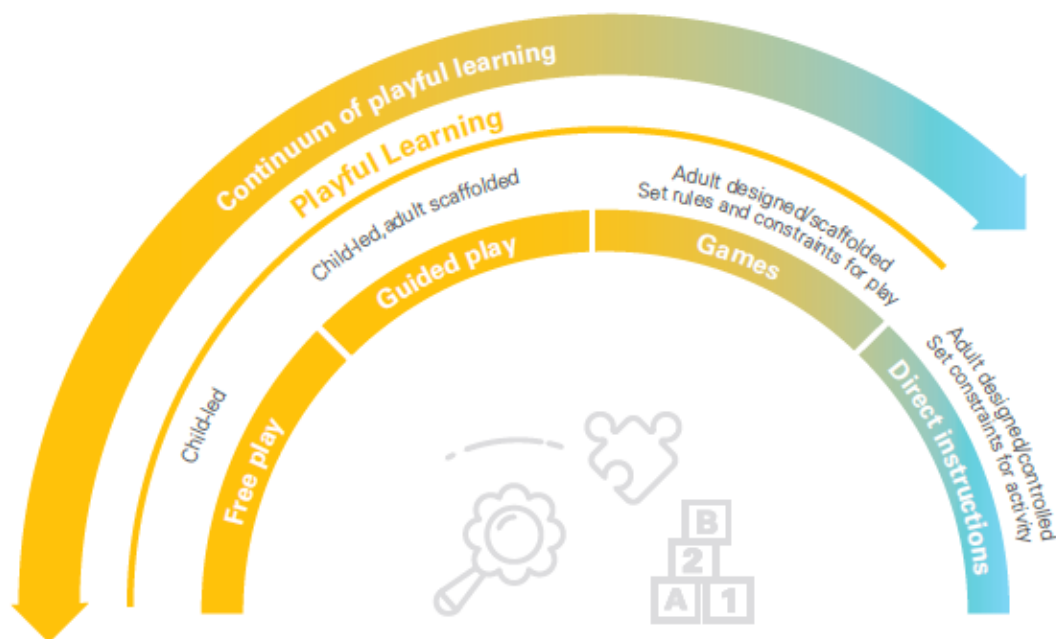
### **2.2.2.1 General understanding of play and learning through play**

In the ECD phase, it is important to define play as an activity that is child centred and supportive of children's learning and overall development (Hassinger-Das, Hirsh-Pasek & Gollinkof, 2017:49; Peterson, Portier & Murray, 2017:2). In a child-centred activity, the focus is on the needs and interests of the learners (Parker & Thomsen, 2019:67). Play is thus defined as the "children's work" which allows them to experiment, concentrate and productively engage in learning activities (Stebbing, 1999:295), "and results in joyful discovery" (Yogman *et al.*, 2018:2). Learning through play is based on the philosophy of Jean Piaget, which posits that play meets the physical, cognitive, language, emotional and social needs (Bulliet & Llwellyn, 2014:10; Hodgson, 2017:20; Wallerstedt & Pramling, 2012:5).

There are multiple pedagogical approaches that are used in the ECD phase. Learning through play is a fundamental practice in the ECD phase in Zimbabwe. The concept of learning through play is ambiguous because, play is regarded as a learner-initiated activity while learning is perceived as a teacher-led activity. Although free play is central to the quality of ECD pedagogy (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:1), one of the challenges of curriculum planning is to incorporate free play in subject teaching in a competency-based curriculum (see Sections 1.4.4 and 1.5). In line with current trends in the ECD phase, the UNICEF Headquarters (2018a:11) suggests forms of play other than free play, namely, guided play and games. It is currently believed, although still debatable, that learners can learn self-regulation skills through other forms of playful learning, such as guided play and teacher-directed games if learners are given

opportunities to make some choices. If an activity is regarded as being child-centred it means that it takes into consideration the capabilities, developmental phase and interest of the learners (Paes & Eberhart, 2019:2; Pyle & Erica, 2017:274).

Recent studies by Pyle and Erica (2017:274) show that teachers who perceived play and learning as separate constructs reported challenges in meeting the academic demands using play-based learning because the learners mostly engaged in free play (Pyle & Erica, 2017:274). The other group of teachers who believed that play could support academic learning engaged in five different types of play, situated along the continuum of play-based learning (Pyle & Erica, 2017:274). It is pertinent to discuss the continuum to get a better understanding of the levels of teacher-learner involvement during various forms of play.



Source: UNICEF Headquarters (2018a:11)

**Figure 2.2: Levels of teacher-learner involvement in playful experiences**

Figure 2.2 above shows the different levels of teacher-learner involvement in playful experiences (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:11). At one end of the continuum is the free play level during which learners in the ECD phase seem to have the freedom to lead or direct the play activities they freely choose to engage in. Thus, in pure free

play learners explore with the learning materials and make discoveries without the teachers' interference. These discoveries could enhance both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Free play is thus broadly defined as unstructured play that is child focused, led and directed, and has many opportunities for experiential learning opportunities, including practising autonomy (NCERT, 2019:22; Jensen *et al.*, 2019:12; Whitebread & Basilio, 2012:20). Therefore, the most pertinent elements of free play are freedom to explore, pleasurable activities, voluntary and flexible active engagement, discovery and pretence (Niemic & Ryan, 2009:134; Peterson, *et al.*, 2017:2; Weisberg *et al.*, 2013:105; Yogman *et al.*, 2018:2). As the learners engage in activities autonomously, they develop self-regulation and psychosocial skills which make them feel in control of the environment, activities or their learning.

According to Figure 2.2, the next form of play is also child-led but teachers can provide guidance, hence the name guided play. Guided play refers to play in which adults scaffold children's play activities in the direction of learning goals while ensuring substantial play autonomy to direct their actions (Berk, 2018:3; Jensen *et al.*, 2019:14; Parker & Thomsen, 2019:53; UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:11). Guided play has been defined as learner-directed pleasurable activities in which adults design and equip the environment to enhance learning and development (Yogman *et al.*, 2018:4). According to the India National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) (2019:22) guided play is initiated, guided and structured by teachers to fulfil the specific aims and objectives in their lesson plans, hence substantial teacher supervision is necessary. The proponents of guided play perceive self-regulation as having two functions, namely, the development of cognitive skills associated with pre-academic subject skills (mathematics, science, English) and the development of non-cognitive skills (social and emotional skills) (Einloth, 2010:73-74; Yogman *et al.*, 2018:4; Rood & Hadani, 2016:4). Currently, there are understandings that guided play promotes the development of self-regulation, literacy and pre-formal mathematical skills more effectively than the exclusive use of free play (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:14; Samuelsson & Carlsson, 2008:623). Some proponents of guided play, for instance Samuelsson and Carlsson (2008: 623), suggest that the notion of free play should be abolished, because any teachers' intervention during free play is perceived as guidance, and it means that teachers have taken over the learner's free play. This means that instead of free play, some researchers have suggested play models that

incorporate both learner-initiated as well as teacher-initiated play. This also comes with notions that free play is not possible in the ECD phase because teachers need to support the learners for meaningful development to take place.

The last form of play is games where teachers set rules, scaffold and lead the play activity (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:11). Playing games is an instructional approach for global competence that require the teachers to provide initial framing, introduce specific rules and give explicit instruction when needed (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:16; OECD, 2019b:2; Parker & Thomsen, 2019:53). Teachers can thus add or reduce the number of rules to make the game appropriately challenging for the learners or assist learners in selecting appropriate games (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:17). Engagement in challenging experiences enhances the development of self-regulation skills and psychosocial skills, such as turn-taking (OECD/Asia Society, 2018:6). Thus, games encourage team work that allow learners to experience choosing a game together and being directed by the rules of the game.

At the extreme end of the continuum is direct instructions where teachers design and control the activities. According to Figure 2.2, learners cannot be involved as leaders or initiators of play at this level. The concepts of teacher-controlled activity which excludes learner involvement describes the traditional understandings of direct instruction where teachers stood in front of the learners and lectured while the learners' role was to memorise the content without understanding (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:11). Current understandings are that teaching and learning is interactive (see Section 2.5.1). The forms of free play for ECD phase are discussed in the next section.

#### **2.2.2.2 Notion and forms of free play in the Early Childhood Development phase**

In the context of the school, giving learners choices and voice in learning is critical in understanding the notion of free play (Parker & Thomsen, 2019:53). Learners perceive freely chosen activities as play rather than classwork, but the freedom to choose their activities is limited by environmental, institutional and social boundaries (Barrable & Arvañitis, 2019:44). Teachers need to control how learners utilise resources, time and the indoor and outdoor environment (Barrable & Arvañitis, 2019:44; Mugweni *et al.*, 2012:94).

According to de la Riva and Ryan (2015:76), learners have the opportunity and freedom to devise their own strategies for solving problems. This suggests that learners can for example, find their own ways of delaying gratification as they wait for their turn, without teachers telling them what to do or not to do (Britz, 1993:3; Shrestha, 2017:2). The corresponding teachers' role is complex because being a conscious observer who is non-obtrusive but simultaneously responsible for maintaining discipline and provide support can be challenging (Aras, 2016:1173; Pyle *et al.*, 2020:1; Jensen *et al.*, 2019:20). Most of the challenges can emanate from this situation rather than the inadequate play materials and time constraints. This suggests that the purpose of providing learners with free play time is more about developing self-regulation and cognitive functions, for instance planning, problem solving skills, and motivation, more than engagement for physical and social benefits (Densmore & Bauman, 2011:190; Erikson, 1968:49-50; Parker & Thomsen, 2019:53). During free play, the learners can utilise the trial-and-error method of learning, imagination as well as problem solving skills (Bulliet & Llwellyn, 2014:10; Santer *et al.*, 2007:8). When the focus is on the learners' use of their psychological processes, the learning of self-regulation becomes much easier, more practical and lasts longer than in adult led play (Mugweni *et al.*, 2012:94).

Although complete freedom during play may not exist practically in the school context, there are two views that can describe what is supposedly meant by free play in ECE. On the one hand, free play is unofficial play that learners do in their own time during break time on the playground, after school or at home, often without adult supervision and not linked to any educational outcome (King & Howard, 2016:57). This notion of free play suggests that teachers are detached from what is happening during free play (Lillilard, 2013:157-158; Weisberg *et al.*, 2013:105). As such, teachers are not obliged to monitor whether free play is promoting learners' development or any form of learning. On the other hand, free play is a specific period, which is allocated for playing with materials or ideas, alone or with others, with adult support, only if needed by learners involved in the activity (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2015:9; ZMoESAC, 2012:11). This notion of free play suggests that the free play period on the class time table is not synonymous with, for instance, the physical education lesson, or art and craft lesson. However, teaching of self-regulation skills and practising of the

skills happens during free play, even though learners do not primarily rely on teachers' instructions.

According to Fox (2007:3) and McGolerick (2013:3), a classroom where free play can take place is typically divided into several play areas. The play areas are for instance blocks, kitchen, science, art, music and reading areas. During free play, learners can play indoors in the areas or outdoors on the playground. Since participating in free play is supposed to make the learners feel as if they are participating freely, it is crucial that teachers limit the learners' choices to only those that ensure active participation in play, because educational goals need to be achieved during that time. Nelsen *et al.*, (2007:6) indicate that learners in the ECD phase are not yet mature enough to make informed choices, because they have not gained the skills of self-regulation that the older learners and adults have. Recent studies by Miranda, Larrea, Muela & Barandiaran (2017:533) explain that teachers often mistake free play time as a period of rest from the syllabus-based learning. Consequently, teachers would intervene to make sure that learners do not get injuries, to provide sympathy, or when the learners ask for the teachers' help (McClintic & Petty, 2015:35; Miranda *et al.*, 2017:533). Currently, in a competency-based curriculum, the free play period may be scarce because of numerous academic subjects that need to be accommodated in the ECD phase time-table (see section 2.6). In this regard, it is necessary to explore how teachers understand the everyday fostering of self-regulation during free play in different contexts.

In line with the developments in technology, it may also be practical to consider virtual play. Digital or virtual play pertains to the use of virtual tools and resources usually referred to as smart toys (Parker & Thomsen, 2019:64). Smart toys play an important role in learners' free play because they support learning and development. The reason for considering virtual free play is supported by the definition of toys as objects that encourage learners' expression, fantasy, interest, exploration, construction, education and cognitive development (Cagiltay *et al.*, 2013:2). In line with advancements in technological knowledge, there are age appropriate technologically-enhanced forms of physical toys for learners in the ECD phase. In many countries, including Zimbabwe, ECD phase curricula currently include Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Research has shown that smart toys have been used by teachers to enhance self-regulation skills through story-telling and socio-dramatic play (Kara & Cagiltary,



2020:10). Smart toys can provide teachers and learners with a virtual interactive environment for the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills (Cagiltay *et al.*, 2013:6; Ekin, Cagiltay & Karasu, 2018:42). They have been used to enhance psychosocial skills for learners with disabilities and findings of a study by Ekin *et al.*, (2018:48) reveal that learners are able to gain emotional, behavioural and cognitive regulation. This effective use of smart toys broadens the teachers' perspectives and strategies for meeting the learners' needs for competence and autonomy. However, there are concerns with meeting the learners' needs for relatedness (sense of belonging) (Kara & Cagiltary, 2020:10). There is thus much research work that needs to be done to develop ways of meeting all the learners' needs for developing adequate self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase.

### **2.2.3 Early Childhood Development Phase**

In cognisance of the theories of human development, child development is defined as the "gradual, natural unfolding of a child's emotional, social, mental creative and physical being" (Stebbing, 1999:317). Kivnick and Well (2014:49) explain that the stages of development are separate, time related but also universal. Preschool, pre-primary, pre-kindergarten or the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase are terms used to refer to the period of between 3 to 5 years of age (Housman, 2017:4; Woodhead, 2014:66, 69). The terms refer to interventions and programmes that provide learners with opportunities to interact with peers as well as interact with teachers who can equip learners with school readiness skills (Russell *et al.*, 2016:153; Sayre, Devercelli, Neuman & Wodon, 2015:6). In the current study the term ECD phase will be used.

Erik Homburger Erikson made an important illustration of the co-existence of the biological, psychological and the socio-cultural factors in influencing human development across the person's life span, using the epigenetic principle (Erikson, 1968:23, 91-92; 1997:25-26). The principle entails that humans develop through predetermined sequential stages each with a characteristic psychosocial skill to be achieved at each stage of development (Boeree, 2006:6; Erikson, 1997:2).

**Table 2.1: Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development**

stage (age)	psychosocial crisis	significant relations	psychosocial modalities	psychosocial virtues	maladaptations & malignancies
I (0-1) – infant	trust vs mistrust	mother	to get, to give in return	hope, faith	sensory distortion – withdrawal
II (2-3) – toddler	autonomy vs shame and doubt	parents	to hold on, to let go	will, determination	impulsivity – compulsion
III (3-6) – preschooler	initiative vs guilt	family	to go after, to play	purpose, courage	ruthlessness – inhibition
IV (7-12 or so) – school-age child	industry vs inferiority	neighborhood and school	to complete, to make things together	competence	narrow virtuosity – inertia
V (12-18 or so) – adolescence	ego-identity vs role-confusion	peer groups, role models	to be oneself, to share oneself	fidelity, loyalty	fanaticism – repudiation
VI (the 20’s) – young adult	intimacy vs isolation	partners, friends	to lose and find oneself in a another	love	promiscuity – exclusivity
VII (late 20’s to 50’s) – middle adult	generativity vs self-absorption	household, workmates	to make be, to take care of	care	overextension – reactivity
VIII (50’s and beyond) – old adult	integrity vs despair	mankind or “my kind”	to be, through having been, to face not being	wisdom	presumption – despair

Source: Boeree (2006:6)

Table 2.1 above presents Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development taken from Boeree (2006:6). It shows that each stage involves developmental tasks that are psychosocial in nature. According to Erikson (1968:91-92; 96), ‘crisis’ means a crucial period of increased vulnerability and potential, as well as the assumption that each stage can be resolved either successfully or unsuccessfully (Boeree, 2006:6; Kivnick & Well, 2014:42). The positive personality traits or positive character strengths that result from the successful resolution of the crisis in the eight stages are respectively trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity and integrity. The positive personality traits are correspondingly related to the virtues of hope (faith), will power, purpose, competence, fidelity, love, care and wisdom. The negative personality traits that result from the unsuccessful resolution of crisis in the eight stages are respectively mistrust, shame, guilt, inferiority, identity confusion, isolation, stagnation and despair (Erikson, 1968:91-92; 96; Wilson & Conyers, 2013:96). In this study the focus is on the initiative versus guilt stage.

According to Erikson, learners who are between 3½ to 6 years of age are in the initiative versus guilt stage, which he also calls the play stage (Erikson, 1968:49-50). Through play and exploration, learners learn that they can control themselves and the environment (Cherry, 2019:1; Russell *et al.*, 2016:153). Disruptive or problem behaviours are associated with negative psychosocial development and low levels of self-regulation skills (Widiastuti, 2017:42). Initiative refers to explorative purposeful play that encourages the development of self-regulation and psycho-social skills (Boeree, 2006:9; Cherry, 2019:1). The behaviours that are associated with ‘initiative’ in Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development are, for instance, enjoyment of competition (Capps, 2012:280), as well as extreme curiosity (Durrant, 2013:146). Curiosity refers to the enthusiasm to learn new things (Garcia, 2015:11). On the contrary, “guilt” means the feeling that learners are afraid to try new things because they feel they are “bad” (Cherry, 2019:1). Such learners do not understand that mistakes are inevitable and instead interpret mistakes as a sign of incompetence (Palethorpe, 2014:72; Zhou & Brown, 2017:71). They are over controlled and withdrawn because they do not have anything to feel guilty about as they do not venture into any activity. Eriksson (as cited in Boeree, 2006:9) refers to the emotional state as inhibition. In the context of free play “inhibition” is demonstrated when a learner does not want to engage in play due to understanding their previous failures as permanent personal shortcomings, rather than gathering the courage to try new ideas.

Table 2.1 also shows that the ECD phase is the time for the development of purpose and courage through exploration and play. Courage refers to the learners’ capacity for exploration and play, despite a clear understanding of past failures, because mistakes are taken as opportunity to learn. With appropriate support and intervention (for instance, positive discipline) learners gain courage that will help them with life challenges for the rest of their lives (Boeree, 2006:6-7; Emmons, 2019:1-4). However, if the psychological crisis, “initiative-guilt” is not resolved properly, the “maladaptation and malignancies” patterns of behaviour that show up are ruthlessness and inhibition. According to Boeree (2006:9), ruthlessness can refer to learners who take an initiative to play, but do not care when others get hurt during the play. If they are in control of the game or happy, they do not care if other learners are satisfied or happy. In other words, such developmental characteristics may be interpreted as ill-discipline because

learners are not yet capable of demonstrating acts of kindness, compassion, fairness and empathy towards peers and teachers. The term egocentric has been used to describe the learners' developmental characteristic of not being able to demonstrate empathy and kindness towards teachers and peers (Kalyan-Masih, 1973:35; Ryan, 2019:25). Learners need help "to de-center" and be considerate of the feelings of peers before acting (Ryan, 2019:25). Dealing with egocentrism is challenging because egocentrism manifests itself in varied forms which may be aligned with the different areas of child development (Kesselring & Müller, 2011:328-329). An example of egocentrism during free play could be learners who do not consider that other learners also want to play leading roles during socio-dramatic play.

Also associated with child development and the development of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase, is perspective taking. Perspective taking is also called the theory of the mind (Cigala, Mori & Fangareggi, 2015:1199). The term "perspective taking" comes from a Latin word *per-spicere* and it describes a person's ability to see through something or see something clearly (Emen & Aslan, 2019:26). In the ECD phase, perspective taking means that learners begin to deal with emotions in a regulated manner that demonstrates understanding and discernment of the feelings of others (Emen & Aslan, 2019:26; Housman, 2017:5; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017:4). Although learners still confuse their perspective with that of others, they start to demonstrate concern for a peer who is crying or try to help others.

Erikson perceived the learners in the ECD phase as being able to regulate their behaviour (Erikson, 1968:49-50) because as they engage in learner-directed activities, they make choices, plan, develop ambition to accomplish tasks, and deal with challenges (Cherry, 2019:1). However, being too extreme on the learners' ability to develop on their own during free play undermines the teachers' much needed support to foster self-regulation as well as to manage and control problem behaviour during that time. It is only at the end of the ECD phase that learners have acquired some forms of self-regulation. Li (2012:20), Nelsen *et al.*, (2007:4), Nelsen *et al.* (2013:9) as well as Ngaujah and Dirks (2003:6), suggest that the learners have not fully developed self-regulation, hence there is need to foster self-regulation at this stage of development.

Since learners in the ECD phase have inadequate self-regulation, teachers are often faced with challenging classroom behavioural problems from learners, no matter how competent the teachers may be (Nicholson, 2017:228). Some problems are associated with the transition from a home environment to a school environment (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:71). However, most of what people conceive as behavioural problems in the ECD phase, for instance using hurtful language, hitting other learners, as well as bullying (Densmore & Bauman, 2011:190; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:4; McTague, 2015:20-21), have to do with emotional, physical and cognitive development and age-appropriate behaviour (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:5). Learners in the ECD phase find it difficult to follow instructions, suppress inappropriate behaviours and actions, as well as maintaining sustainable focused attention (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:71). Due to the problems highlighted above, the teacher-learner interactions could become intense, characterised by conflicts and reactions that demonstrate lack of understanding what the ECD stage entails. Self-regulation skills are highly connected with the areas of child development (Banerjee, Aslman & Alaafari, 2016:301; Puskás, 2016:30; OECD, 2020:66). Self-regulation skills thus influence acquisition of skills and competencies in all the domains of development (Russell *et al.*, 2016:153-154; Winner, 2019:4). Understanding of child development is thus necessary if the goal is to help learners to become self-regulated human beings.

### **2.3 DEVELOPMENT IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PHASE**

The learners in the ECD phase experience a rapid growth in areas of the brain, which makes them more prepared to learn and use self-regulation (Baker *et al.*, 2017:4; Dreikurs & Cassel, 1991:32; Murray *et al.*, 2016:7; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017:5). Recent research findings by Edossa, Schroeders, Weinert and Artelt (2017:199) confirm that the ECD phase is important for the enhancement of self-regulation skills. Also echoing the same sentiments is the statement “the growth of self-regulation is a cornerstone of early childhood development and cuts across all domains of behaviour” (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:3, 26). The ECD phase is thus recognised as an important period for fostering of self-regulation (Bandy & Moore, 2010:1). Play encourages and enhances sustainable development across all domains such as cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual (Mugweni *et al.*, 2012:94). The section below discusses child

development in the ECD phase with much focus on self-regulation as a developmental outcome.

### **2.3.1 Physical Development**

Physical development refers to the way in which learners develop biological and physical functions, including eye sight and motor skills (Hodgson, 2017:21). According to the Mauritius Independent Commission Against Corruption and Education Division (ICAC) (2007:13) physical development concerns the muscular and skeletal or bones development as well as psychomotor coordination. Learners in the ECD phase want to explore the environment but are still perfecting their fine and gross motor skills. Advances in physical development make it possible for learners to fulfil their physical needs such as taking the initiative to feed themselves when they are hungry and to put on warm clothes when they are feeling cold (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:26). According to Erikson (1968:49) and Nelsen *et al.* (2007:4) learners in the ECD phase have an inborn drive for physical development and they are very active. Consequently, learners may get confused and not know how to respond to their natural drive for experimenting if they are told to sit still or listen to the teachers for very long periods of time. Learners in the ECD phase get satisfaction and happiness from successfully accomplishing physical tasks (Bulliet & Llwellyn, 2014:10). It is also important to understand that it is a mistake to emphasise that play is always a pleasant experience for the learners, because sometimes it can generate unhappiness and conflicts (Santer *et al.*, 2007:35). Thus, teachers may have to intervene.

### **2.3.2 Cognitive Development**

The positive psychology perspective recognises the importance of cognitive and academic growth at ECD level (Baker *et al.*, 2017:3). Cognitive development refers to the way in which a child organises the information to focus on important aspects (Hodgson, 2017:22), which concerns “advances in mental processes associated with perception, memory, reasoning, problem solving, language learning and other aspects of the brain that occur with increasing age” (Rao *et al.*, 2014:5). “Focus” in relation to fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase means the ability to pay attention, follow classroom rules and to concentrate on a task and ignore distractions (Garcia, 2015:11-12). At this phase of development, “the learners’ cognitive skills vacillate

between fantasy and reality and are highly malleable to adult socialisation processes” (Hodgson, 2017: 21). Ziv *et al.*, (2018:10-12) believe that between 3 to 5 years of age learners do not use mental strategies (memorising, constant rehearsal and use of categorisation) but instead use simple strategies for remembering (verbally naming and visually inspecting) because they rarely use memory consistently. Learners in the ECD phase have marked limitations in differentiating “between the symbol and the things symbolised, between the inner psychological world and the outer physical world and between self and the social world of people” (Kalyan-Masih, 1973:38). Learners also have difficulties in viewing a situation from any perspective other than their own (Kalyan-Masih, 1973:39-40). Thus, learners’ cognitive skills, which include problem solving, creativity, imagination and memory may not be adequately developed (Hodgson, 2017: 21). In this regard, from the positive psychology framework, mindfulness is recommended as an “excellent way to build certain attentional skills, which are part of a larger set of vital skills that allow us to plan, focus, remember important things and multitask more effectively” (Ackerman, 2019:5). These skills are known as executive function skills, and they involve three key types of brain functions such as working memory, mental flexibility and inhibitory control.

Cognitive flexibility refers to “the learners’ ability to shift attention between competing tasks in the most efficient way” (Ziv *et al.*, 2018:10). Cognitive flexibility thus enables learners to shift focus from one stimulus to another, adapt flexibly to the situation and apply context appropriate rules (APACPSE, 2015:11; Pandey *et al.*, 2018:566). Learners demonstrate cognitive flexibility when they can adapt to different roles and understand rules during play (Garcia, 2015:11). Working memory refers to “the learners’ ability to recall and operate distinct pieces of information over a very short period of time” (Ziv *et al.*, 2018:10), hence the use of the other term, short term memory (APACPSE, 2015:11). Working memory allows learners to retain and repeat an increasing list of rules and school regulations when presented orally (Garcia, 2015:11). Inhibitory control refers to “a skill which enables learners to select a less desired but more appropriate response over a desired but less appropriate response” (Ziv *et al.*, 2018:10). Inhibitory control thus assists learners in suppressing automatic or impulsive responses that may prevent them in engaging meaningfully during play (Pandey *et al.*, 2018:566). An example of inhibitory control is for instance, with learners who may suppress impulsive behaviour of hitting others by sitting on their hands. From the

above meanings, the executive function assists learners to focus on what is important, which makes it easier to respond to the demands of everyday situations during learning, play and other school activities (Cuncic, 2020:2b; OECD, 2020:32).

The “executive function” improves rapidly between 2 and 6 years (Berk, 2018:2). Ziv *et al.* (2018:11) observes that at four years of age, the learners are more able to control their emotions and cognitions because they feel capable when they use their imagination and initiative to plan play activities (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2014:28; Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:10). Ziv *et al.* (2018:11) assert that “from four years of age onwards, there is a linear increase of working memory capacity that continues throughout childhood.” This capacity assists learners in cooperating with other learners to engage in meaningful play activities (Capps, 2012:278). Thus, the learners’ acquisition of cognitive skills enhances the learners’ development of self-regulation and social development (Cuncic, 2020:2b; OECD, 2020:32; Pandey *et al.*, 2018:566).

### **2.3.3 Social Development**

Social development can generally be defined as the way in which learners adapt to interact properly with peers, teachers and other people (Hodgson, 2017: 21). Positive psychology emphasises civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward virtues for better citizenship, such as responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, as well as work ethics (Positive Psychology UK, 2004:1; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:5). People and experiences are embedded in the social context (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:8), therefore the understanding from the positive psychology framework is that it is important to help learners have positive relationships with family members, peers as well with teachers and other adults. Social interaction amongst ECD phase learners is perceived as the key to learning and development of age-appropriate skills and knowledge (Heartherton, 2011:1; LEGO Foundation, 2019:15). Social interaction means the ease through which learners join, participate, positively interact and make friends during free play (Schüler *et al.*, 2019:44; Garcia, 2015:12; Silkenbeumer, Schiller, Holodynski & Kärtner, 2016:17-18). Although self-regulation skills may increase over time, they are not subject only to maturation but to many other factors which include how teachers discipline the learners (APACPSE, 2015:13; Silkenbeumer *et al.*, 2016:18; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:94). The key social development in the ECD phase is the learners’ ability



to “suppress or promote responses based on their appropriateness to the environment, and more specifically, to stop an on-going thought or behaviour in a sudden and complete manner” (Ziv *et al.*, 2018:12). The learners also start demonstrating an empathetic attitude towards peers as well as recognising other learners’ views (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017:4). At four years of age, learners can follow rules and switch between tasks based on the environmental demands (Ziv *et al.*, 2018:12, 14). Children develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities as members of the school community (Hodgson, 2017:21). If the learners are given the opportunity to initiate and plan activities, make up games and play with other learners, they can develop friendship, empathy and belongingness through their initiatives (Bulliet & Llwellyn, 2014:10; Capps, 2012:273; Erikson, 1985:90-91; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005:99). Socio-dramatic play supports social development and orients learners to social roles and rules (OECD, 2019b:3). This suggests that learners’ poor social skills deprive them of the social benefits of positive interactions that can foster positive peer relationships (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:85). Poor social development may also affect speech and language acquisition, as will be discussed in the next section.

#### **2.3.4 Language and Speech Development**

Language development refers to the way in which children communicate, including how they present their feelings and emotions, both to other people and to themselves (Hodgson, 2017: 21; Jensen *et al.*, 2019:). According to Kalyan-Masih (1973:40) and Carlton & Winsler, 1998:164; Wigfield *et al.* (2011:34) learners in the ECD phase have acquired substantial language skills to engage in conversations with peers but surprisingly learners’ spontaneous language is egocentric speech. Piaget (cited in Kalyan-Masih, 1973:40) found that when learners are between 3 to 5 years of age, their private speech is 54-60% of their language use. Private speech is the spontaneous self-directed talk that learners often engage in during play and when applying problem solving techniques. It thus becomes a means for self-regulatory activity (Carlton & Winsler, 1998:164; Kalyan-Masih, 1973:41; Wigfield *et al.*, 2011:34). Various forms of play encourage language development such as conversations that occur when learners are playing with toys and during pretend play (OECD, 2019b:3). Poor language development may suggest that there are problems in execution of cognitive and emotional processes (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2014:28).

### 2.3.5 Emotional Development

Developments in neuroscience have shown that the neural circuits involved in the regulation of emotions overlap with those associated with cognitive processing (OECD, 2020:48). Cognitive development can thus be impeded when emotions are not well regulated. Learners who are not in control of their emotions are prone to temper tantrums, inattention and giving up easily rather than persevering with a task until it is completed (OECD, 2020:48; Warburton et al., 2020:55). On the other hand, failure to regulate emotions disrupts the learners' cognitive system and can affect other areas of development (Cuncic, 2020b:2). What is often regarded as lack of self-discipline or hopelessness is having too many emotions simultaneously in the brain making it almost impossible to stay focused and productive (Cuncic, 2020b:2).

In general, emotional development refers to the learners' ability to be competent in identifying feelings of self and others such as feelings of fear, pride, empathy, shame, guilt, happiness and anger, as well as managing strong emotions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:105-107). In the ECD phase, learners demonstrate a gradual increase in their ability to control their emotions (Edossa et al., 2017:192) but some often have temper tantrums (Durrant, 2016:1-3). Aggressive behaviour such as throwing objects, hitting other learners, as well as yelling are typical examples of observable behaviour during this phase (Murray *et al.*, 2015:6; Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:5). Garcia (2015:11) and Shonkoff and Phillips (2000:113) indicate that it is mostly learners who have not acquired adequate self-regulation skills who show the inability to control their emotions through temper tantrums and attention seeking behaviour. The learners may display negative behaviours that seem aggressive, ruthless, as well as excessively self-possessed (Zhou & Brown 2017:7). These negative behaviours are a result of a sense of frustration for not being able to accomplish what they had planned. Boys demonstrate less competencies of controlling their emotions than girls (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:89).

Learners are not able to learn self-regulation when teachers humiliate them (Durrant, 2016:1-3). Some learners may display a state of helplessness or inadequacy which can be either real or imagined (Dreikurs *et al.*, 1998:11; Nelsen et al., 2001:7-8). Instead of using humiliation or punishment, teachers must help the learners to articulate their feelings and to realise how their behaviour may make others feel.

Various forms of play that occur during free play, for instance socio-dramatic play, support emotional development (OECD, 2019b:3). However, there is a need to understand how teachers foster self-regulation using positive discipline during free play.

### **2.3.6 Moral Development**

In the ECD phase, moral development stems from the learners' direct social interactions with adults and peers (Augustine & Stifter, 2015:285-286; OECD, 2019a:51) but it is linked to cognitive, social and emotional development (Ryan, 2019:24). According to the ICAC (2007:6), morality means "customs, manners or patterns of behaviour that conform to the standards of the group," particularly the group of peers. The learners are at a phase where they are figuring out appropriate ways of behaving in school and in society (Durrant, 2013:66-69; Li, 2012:9; Miller *et al.*, 2013:7). Learners need to be pointed towards the relevant dimensions of a problem if they are to learn how to behave in an appropriate manner (Stebbing, 1999:297; Weisberg *et al.*, 2016:180). They are in the stage of moral development called "heteronomous morality or punishment and obedience stage" (ICAC, 2007:6). Learners' moral behaviour is thus associated with avoidance of any action that they may regard as incorrect but display actions that are consistent with expectations from adults such as parents and teachers (Augustine & Stifter, 2015:285-286). This suggests that learners are controlled by adult authority but there is a need to gradually reduce dependence on adult authority to encourage mutual respect and cooperation which are essential for moral development (Kalyan-Masih, 1973:39-40). However, according to Augustine and Stifter (2015:285-286) and Ryan (2019:25), authentic morality goes beyond power assertions because it entails an intrinsic desire to follow the golden rule of "treat others as you would want to be treated." Moral behaviours and principles that need to be developed in the ECD phase involve skills for making choices and decisions that are based on fairness, honesty and empathy (Dereli-Iman, 2014:262; Kohn, 1996:1-5, 17; OECD, 2019a:51). It is during this phase where teachers should assist learners to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, as well as encourage learners to be responsible for their behaviour (Assali, 2015:5; Erikson, 1997:77-82; Miranda *et al.*, 2017:527). Games have been associated with moral development because learners are able to distinguish the right actions from the

wrong ones based on rules (ICAC, 2007:6). During games, teachers simply tell learners what is right or wrong hence there is a need to also use the natural opportunities for learning that are presented during learner directed free play (Ryan, 2019:24). Learners can eventually internalise acceptable behaviour (Florez, 2011:46) but literature in moral development suggests the use of positive discipline methods (Augustine & Stifter, 2015:285-286). During free play, teacher-regulated activities need to be minimised for learners to get opportunities for practising self-regulation (Kirk & Jay, 2018:476). Pinheiro (2006:111) contends that teachers have a duty to make sure that they prepare learners for life as responsible adults who are guided by the values of non-violence, tolerance, gender, equality and mutual respect. Teaching mindfulness can assist learners in acquiring moral skills (Kristjánsson, 2012:96). Therefore, teachers' support and learners' cooperation and intentional effort are required for learners to practise behaving in morally accepted ways.

## **2.4 TEACHERS' SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING THE LEARNERS' SELF-REGULATION SKILLS DURING FREE PLAY**

Although fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase mostly has to do with management of behaviour and emotions, the SDT posits that self-regulation entails the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs namely autonomy, competence and relatedness (Niemic & Ryan, 2009:135; Ryan & Deci, 2000:68, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:10) during free play (Bear, 2009:313). The section below discusses age-appropriate support for learners' optimal development through satisfying the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness.

### **2.4.1 Support for Autonomy**

Free play is particularly appealing for learners and teachers can capitalise on the context to support the learners' development of autonomy (Barrable & Arvañitis, 2019:45; Ryan & Deci, 2008:658). Autonomy is based on the understanding that learners are empowered when they feel a sense of choice and self-endorsement in an activity or action (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991:327; Rogers & Tannock, 2013:1). Learners value free play as an activity that is very important in their lives (Fox, 2007:1; Whitebread, 2012:24). To assist learners in developing autonomy, teachers need to view free play as valuable and central to children's wellbeing (Gleave & Cole-

Hamilton, 2012:3; Holt *et al.*, 2019:640-643). In this regard, attaining autonomy is an indication of positive psychosocial development.

Strategies for enhancing autonomy include providing effective choice and meaningful rationales for learning activities, minimising pressure and control (Niemi & Ryan, 2009:141; Wolfgang, 2009:173). Choices encourage the learners to move beyond defiance to really think about the decisions they are being allowed to make (Holt *et al.*, 2019:656). This does not mean that teachers force learners to make a choice between two activities which make the learners feel punished. Teachers' responses that should be avoided because of their harmful effects are for instance punishment, criticism, rejection or humiliation (Prusso, 2016:29; Uzman, 2014:3630). Encouraging learners to find their own solutions to problems supports autonomy because learners feel supported or taught how to behave better next time (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019:44; Klein, 2015:4-5). In this way, teachers encourage the learners to develop intrinsic regulation rather than external regulation. It is important that teachers do not control learners "remotely" or micro-manage learners or enforce bureaucratic rules. Findings of recent studies show that ECD phase teachers understand the importance of play in positive holistic child development and believe that their role is to supervise the learners' play to ensure that positive social interactions take place (Loizou, Michaelides & Georgiou, 2019:600-612; McClintic & Petty, 2015:38).

#### **2.4.2 Support for Competence**

The concept of competence entails an experience of feeling in control over the environment or mastery of a task or skill (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019:46; Carlton & Winsler, 1998:164; Ryan & Deci, 2017:12). It involves understanding that when learners become more independent, they feel proficient in accomplishing the required skills (Deci *et al.*, 1991:327; Klein, 2015:2; Ryan & Deci, 2008:658). In the school context, the need for competence refers to a child's desire to feel skilful and effective in their school-related activities (Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:7-8; Rogers & Tannock, 2013:1). During free play, teachers can encourage learners to develop initiative, persistence, cooperation, collaboration, problem solving skills, as well as recognise that mistakes are part of the learning process (Rood & Hadani, 2016:12; Palethorpe, 2014:72). As learners learn to self-regulate, they also develop skills such as

concentration, sharing, taking turns and moving from depending on teachers and peers to beginning to manage themselves (Widiastuti, 2017:42; Yogman *et al.*, 2018:3). Besides intervening when there are problems, teachers need to fulfil the learners' need for competence by giving positive feedback (Niemic & Ryan, 2009:141; Ryan & Deci, 2008:658). Negative feedback decreases intrinsic motivation and might discourage learners and cause them to withdraw and not take part in the activities (Lasca, 2019:2; Uzman, 2014:3630). Subsequently, the feeling of competency can be thwarted through negative, irrelevant or negative comments that communicate failure or incapacity to perform a task well.

### **2.4.3 Support for Relatedness**

The basic need to belong or relate is one of the essential components of self-regulation. Relatedness/belongingness involves the development of safe satisfying relationships with others in social groups (Deci *et al.*, 1991:327; Warburton *et al.*, 2020:54). Individuals become more effective members of a group by embracing the norms and values of that group (Ryan & Deci, 2008:659; Heartherton, 2011:1). This requires all people to align their behaviour to what is accepted by group members through altering, inhibiting and/or suppressing behaviours that put them at risk of being excluded as group members (Heartherton, 2011:1). In the ECD phase, learners feel related when they feel happy about the value, respect and care they get from teachers and peers, as well as the care they give others (Rogers & Tannock, 2013:2; Ryan & Deci, 2008:658; Schöler *et al.*, 2019:44).

In the ECD phase, play is the primary means by which learners learn to relate to one another. McTague (2016:39) asserts that teachers should make the classroom environment appropriate for play and learning. The positive impact of playful engagement may lead to better control of emotions, less stress, as well as a decrease in problem behaviour in the ECD classrooms (Banerjee *et al.*, 2016:301; Weisberg, Kitteredge, Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2013:107). The teachers' support for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring and respect for learners (Emmons, 2019:1-4; Niemic & Ryan, 2009:141). In other words, what ECD phase teachers can do entails being mindful to anticipate unacceptable behaviour and redirect it positively to offer learners meaningful opportunities for choice, creativity and play (McLaughlin

*et al.*, 2017:23; Widiastuti, 2017:42). Some of the practices that teachers use are discussed below.

## **2.5 INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND STRATEGIES**

This section looks at strategies for teaching emotional and behavioural regulation. There are some debates on whether some strategies are characteristically consistent with the development of self-regulation in the ECD phase. When using the positive psychology framework, the strategies that have worked before need not be discarded. In the next section, I discuss some instructional practices and strategies for fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase.

### **2.5.1 Direct Instruction and Co-Regulation**

Direct instruction refers to explicit instruction or structured instruction that is teacher led rather than teacher-centred (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:9). It involves the explicit instructions that teachers give to learners when teaching self-regulation skills such as inter-personal awareness, decision-making and problem-solving skills that assist learners in dealing with conflicts amicably (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020:100). Classroom rules and expectations can be taught and retaught using the same principles as those used in academic instruction, including clear presentation of goal, task or behaviour, opportunities for practice, with timely and specific feedback, reinforcement of desired behaviour and behavioural correction as needed (APACPSE, 2015:25; Sawyer, Graham & Harris, 1992:344). When teachers support learners' development in the ECD phase, they regard each learner as "capable rather than a blank slate to be filled" (Zosh *et al.*, 2017:14). In direct instruction teachers observe a child-centred approach and follow a structure which may be prescriptive (for example teaching decision-making) but developing learners' skills towards becoming a child-led activity later on (Westbrook, *et al.*, 2013:9). However, there are definitions that define direct instruction as activities where the teacher is both initiating as well as directing an activity while learners act as passive recipients (Paes & Eberhart, 2019:2, 5). In Zimbabwe for instance, teachers are instructed not to use direct instruction but to use play (see section 2.6.4 for more details). On the other hand, assumptions in child-centred learning are that teachers "accept a more democratic and less authoritative role and know how to set up effective group work and tasks, and to offer

skilful supported instruction at the point it is needed by the learners” (Paes & Eberhart, 2019:2; Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:11). As such eliminating the use of direct instruction may not fully represent the everyday occurrence in schools, especially where the teachers are supposed to foster self-regulation and pertinent psychosocial skills.

Direct instruction and co-regulation are instructional practices that can be used to systematically teach self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase. Self-regulation skills, such as “attention, organisation, self-control, planning, and memory strategies” can be taught through direct instruction (APACPSE, 2015:13). In a meta-analysis study that examined the relationship between parenting and self-regulation in ECD phase learners by Karreman *et al.* (2006:571), findings revealed that the use of explicit instructions whilst directing the learners was positively associated with the development of self-regulation skills. In this study on the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase, co-regulation is regarded as direct instruction. Co-regulation is a process in which parents and teachers facilitate a child’s ability to understand, express and modulate their thoughts, behaviours and feelings through support, coaching and modelling in warm, responsive interactions (Housman, 2017:4; Widiastuti, 2017:41). With time, most learners begin to use self-regulation skills without being prompted or needing assistance. When children routinely self-regulate without teachers’ assistance, they have internalised self-regulation (Florez, 2011:48; Widiastuti, 2017:41). Internalisation is a process in which learners shift from co-regulating behaviour with the support from teachers to doing so autonomously. Even then it does not mean that they have mastered all there is to know about self-regulation because it is an on-going life-long process (Brown & Ryan, 2015:141). The repeated use of scaffolding and reinforcement during direct instruction and co-regulation are techniques that assist learners in systematically acquiring cognitive, problem solving, self-regulation and psychosocial skills (Housman, 2017:5; Diamond, 2017:220-223; Paes & Eberhart, 2019:12).

During free play learners can put knowledge gained from training and teaching into real-life practice (Farcaş & Curelaru, 2010:221; LEGO Foundation, 2019:13). It is thus recommended that having a small number of between 8 to 20 learners per class can promote the chances that teachers will be able to use co-regulation and direct instructions to meet the learners’ needs (Neuman, 2019:11). However, the concept of “direct instruction” is controversial as the description of free play may suggest absence



of teachers' direct instructions and leadership (LEGO Foundation, 2019:9). There are concerns about the use of direct instruction during free play "because the playful part vanishes as soon as children's sense of ownership is stifled" (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:20). Thus, teachers need to be skilful when giving learners instructions during free play.

During free play, teachers need to teach learners explicitly what behaviours are considered inappropriate. They also clarify and maintain rules, and enforce them consistently, but taking into consideration the individual needs of the learners. Examples of explicit direct instructions during free play to help learners improve attention skills are saying, "look here, look at me, or look at where I am pointing" (Florez, 2011:49). Direct instructions also assist learners in interpreting cues from adults such as "your turn is next" into regulation that helps them inhibit behaviours of grabbing toys from peers (Florez, 2011:47). In addition, free play is the time where teachers can directly teach learners to express themselves in non-violent ways, for instance using drawing. This stance is supported by an understanding that play is a "fertile ground for learning and developing new skills" (Carlton & Winsler, 1998:160; LEGO Foundation, 2019:9). Thus, free play should be the context where teachers give important instructions rather than external rewards (Carlton & Winsler, 1998:160). However, most of the instructions need to be done prior to free play so that teachers can monitor how learners use the skills practically during free play.

Storytelling is an example of direct instruction practice that is done prior to the free play session. Teachers can read stories from books or tell stories during story time and reinforce the moral lessons from the story (for example, sharing and turn taking) during free play. Storytelling is a socio-cultural activity that is used as a method of teaching values and socio-cultural norms (Hodgson, 2017:101; Paes & Eberhart, 2019:2). The direct instruction involving teachers reading or telling stories during story time, gives learners opportunities to identify and understand what socially and emotionally acceptable behaviour entails (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:80). Stories also assist learners in interpreting their own behaviours as well as the corresponding consequences of their behaviour (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:84).

Direct instruction is an inclusive teaching strategy and is responsive to individual needs (Lee & Anderson, 2013; Sawyer *et al.*, 1992:345). In classes for learners with disabilities, self-regulation skills are "explicitly and overtly modelled" (Sawyer *et al.*,

1992:344). The examples that have been highlighted above imply that direct instruction may not be considered as the opposite of child-centred learning. The use of direct instruction thus does not imply that teachers are indoctrinating or dictating but can be used as a developmentally appropriate strategy to support learning and development. If learners' have new toys to play with, giving instructions on how learners should play with the toy, may or may not be appropriate depending on the situation. Giving support when it is needed most may have positive effect on the development of self-regulation skills. However, giving support where it is not needed or prematurely, may have a negative impact on the learners' capacities to experience autonomy and competence. Jensen *et al.* (2019:20) believe when teachers give direct instructions and demonstrate how learners should play with a new toy, learners' thrill of discovering how the toy works is taken away. Thus, teachers may delay giving direct instructions to give learners the opportunity to explore the toy and make their own discoveries. According to Santer *et al.* (2007:63) teachers are advised against premature intervention in the learners' free play as this robs them of the opportunity to make mistakes, learn from their mistakes, learn to solve problems independently, as well as gain skills for conflict management. On the other hand, lack of teachers' direct instructions on how to use play equipment, for instance, using a pair of scissors, can pose physical and health risks to the learners (Rabella, 2020:1; Tsai, 2015:1032). A learner who refuses to take instructions on how to use a pair of scissors properly during play can easily injure himself or herself and others. There are risks that are associated with play that is unstructured and completely child-led, such as wrestling or climbing and jumping from great heights (OECD, 2019b:2). Thus, interacting with learners who are engaged in free play is a challenge for many ECD phase teachers.

In the ECD phase, the teachers can communicate direct instructions affectionately using gestures and looks in a positive way rather than in a commanding manner (Housman, 2017:5). This suggests that teachers may also use signs and cues to sustain the learners' attention rather than verbal instructions. Learners can learn self-regulation through understanding the teachers' cues or signs of basic facial expressions, social situations and actions (APACPSE, 2015:13; Florez, 2011:47; de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:84). However, if teachers' cues and signs are dismissive, threatening or commanding, learners may not learn self-regulation.

### **2.5.2 Modelling**

Self-regulation can be fostered through appropriate guidance, modelling of effective strategies, creating supportive and challenging contexts and making decisions on their own (Loizou *et al.*, 2019:600-612; UNICEF Headquarters, 2006:48). Modelling is a strategy that is consistent with developing positive teacher-learner interaction and positive learner-peer relationships (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:9). At around 3 to 4 years of age, learners start following rules and routines even though they may not have complete understanding of the implications of the rules. Teachers can model appropriate socially accepted behaviour, control of emotions and ways of handling disputes (APACPSE, 2015:13; de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:77). Learners learn that they can choose to solve problems amicably or violently. Subsequently, a behaviour that is learnt through modelling becomes internalised. The social skills that teachers can model when fostering self-regulation are for instance, turn taking, sharing and handling disappointments (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23). Eventually, learners become mindful and intrinsically motivated to control their own actions (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:77).

### **2.5.3 Behavioural Technique and Scaffolding**

Behaviours conducive to learning and appropriate social interactions are best taught at the beginning of the academic year and reinforced throughout the year (APACPSE, 2015:25). These can be taught using proven behavioural principles (APACPSE, 2015:25). Behavioural techniques and scaffolding are practices that are common in the ECD phase. Scaffolding refers to guided support and requires teachers to use direct instruction and the use of behavioural techniques such as charts reminding learners of key classroom rules and responsibilities, praise and rewards (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020:101-102; Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:11). The use of rewards and punishment has received criticism from many scholars (Gonzalez-Mena, 2011:115; Kohn, 1999:49; Skinner, 1979:3). There are harmful connotations surrounding the term extrinsic motivation, because it is defined as “the desire of people to participate in activities in order to gain something different from the task itself” (Theodotou, 2014:18). Rewards and punishment negatively impact self-regulation, undermine intrinsic motivation and thus affect mutual teacher-learner relationships (Nelsen, Tamborski & Ainge, 2016:2; McDevitt & Ormrod, 2014:568). An example of extrinsically motivated behaviours would be giving a learner a gold star, a sweet or

extra time to play with a favourite toy as a reward for playing well with peers during free play. McDevitt and Ormrod (2014:28) note that when young learners engage in play, it is mainly because they value the activity. In this way, the rewards of giving learners gold stars, sweets or extra time to play can undermine intrinsic motivation for engaging in play. It is also believed that there is poor maintenance of regulated behaviour once the rewards or punishment is withdrawn. Despite criticism, rewards and punishment are the most common form of motivation used in the ECD phase. Theodotou (2014:20) and Bear (2011:9) believe that rewards and punishment may not be the main problem, instead the way in which they are used may have detrimental effects on the learners' intrinsic motivation, such as the example given above of a learner who is rewarded for playing well with peers. Thus, rewards and praise can be used in ways which are least likely to harm the learners' intrinsic motivation (Bear, 2011:9) but this aspect has not yet been discussed openly in research pertaining to the fostering of self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase.

What is known is that rewards add interest and excitement in the classroom, thus influence a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom (Evertson & Emmer, 2013:153; Tsai, 2015:1029). In recent studies on effective classroom management, Moberly, Waddle and Duff, (2005:359) as well as Sak, Sak and Çiçek (2016:60) confirm that teachers commonly use rewards and punishment as means to motivate and discipline children in the ECD classrooms. As already stated above, the challenge in using extrinsic reinforcement for learners who do not need it, is that rewards can undermine their sense of self-regulation. However, there are some learners who cannot do without external rewards to participate meaningfully in regular teaching and learning (Winner, 2019:2). The appropriate positive feedback for the development of self-regulation during free play can thus involve only visual and verbal cues rather than tangible rewards and punishment (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2020:3-4; Winner, 2019:2).

#### **2.5.4 Problem-Solving**

Problem solving is a skill and an approach to learning and development that is critical in the development of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase (Diamond, 2017:220-221 Gray, 2013:5; Kim & Mariani, 2019:99). Problem solving is defined as cognitive processing directed at achieving a goal when the problem solver does not initially know a solution method (Kaya *et al.*, 2017:507; Mayer, 2013:1). It thus refers to “a mental

process or a phenomenon dedicated towards solving problems by discovering and analysing the problem” (Shrestha, 2017:1). It is a skill that can be taught in the ECD phase and opportunities for solving problems are there in the day-to-day experiences in schools (Britz, 1993:3). However, many ECD teachers do not provide adequate direct instructions for learners to be competent in problem solving (Diamond, 2017:220-221). The solutions to real life problems do not come out automatically, but through negotiations, effort and trial and error (Kaya *et al.*, 2017:507; Ryan, 2019:25). The key cognitive processes in problem solving are thus planning and freedom to make decisions (Britz, 1993:2; Kaya *et al.*, 2017:507; Housman, 2017:9). Teachers need to provide adequate space, time and resources for learners to make plans and choices, as well as instruct learners on how to make decisions that could lead to solving the problem at hand patiently (Britz, 1993:3; Kim & Mariani, 2019:99; Shrestha, 2017:2). Teachers can also teach problem solving through modelling by controlling their temper, articulating their own problems, using appropriate language and discussing the solutions with the learners (Britz, 1993:2; Diamond, 2017:220-222; Housman, 2017:9). Teachers are thus expected to give learners choices which will train them in decision making skills and empower them with negotiation skills.

### **2.5.5 Cognitive Reappraisal**

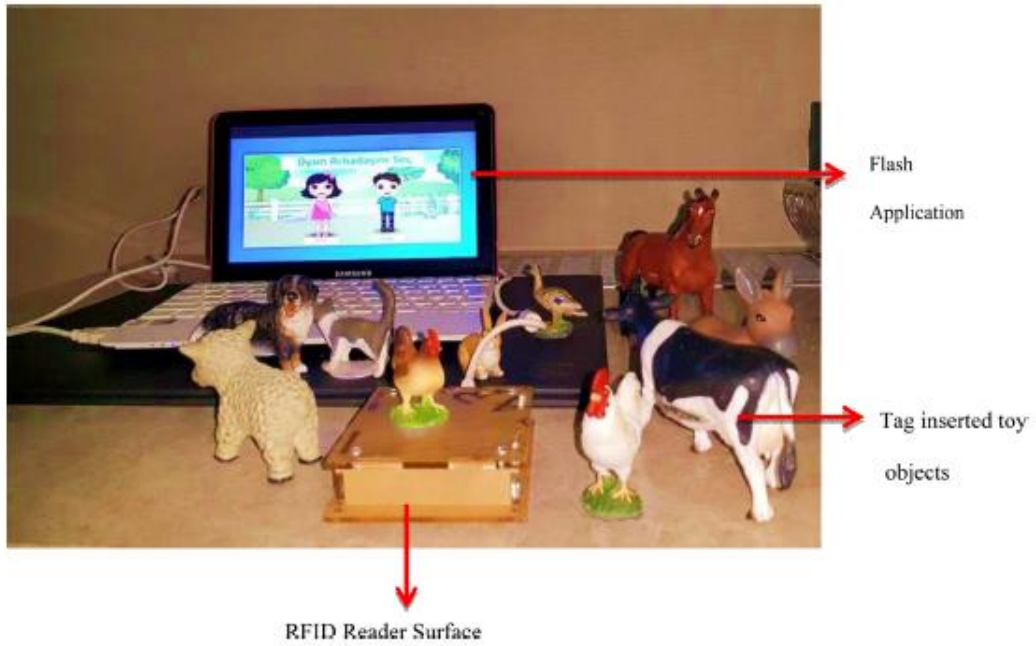
Reappraisal is a cognitive strategy that helps learners to interpret bad experiences, actions and feelings less negatively (Grecucci *et al.*, 2015:4; Hua, Han & Zhou, 2015:2). Cognitive reappraisal is defined as “the new meaning given by an individual to emotional events that consequently changes the understanding of emotional events” (Liu *et al.*, 2019:2). It is associated with reducing or adjusting the negative impact of negative situations or actions through interpreting them less negatively (Brockman *et al.*, 2016:2; Liu *et al.*, 2019:2). Teachers can teach ECD learners cognitive reappraisal strategies as ways to effectively decrease the physiological arousal of negative emotions (Hua *et al.*, 2015:2). An example of a cognitive reappraisal situation in the ECD phase would be to think of a learner who bullies peers as someone who has not yet mastered the skill of playing with friends properly. Since cognitive reappraisal is a teacher directed approach, there is need for teachers to encourage learners to internalise the strategy and consequently become intrinsically motivated to use it competently (Hua *et al.*, 2015:2).

### **2.5.6 Calming Down**

Learners also need to learn emotion suppression strategies to help them calm down. Calming down is a key aspect of emotional regulation and the focus when using this strategy is on creating a supportive environment and giving relational support before or after an upsetting event (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23; Housman, 2017:9; Rabella, 2020:2). Calming down refers to activities that facilitate “the active inhibition of on-going emotion-expressive behaviour” (Brockman *et al.*, 2016:2). Calming can be facilitated through mindful breathing and exercises that encourage the learners to concentrate on controlling their emotions (Alphonso *et al.*, 2019:13; Brown, 2019:1-2; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23). Other activities that encourage calming down are for instance, beading, pouring water from pitcher into cups and dusting furniture (Alphonso *et al.*, 2019:13). Providing a quiet comfortable physical area where learners can go to for calming down is suggested even for the ECD phase learners. The other suggested practice for calming down is teaching learners to take deep breaths or to take a walk when upset (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23).

### **2.5.7 Use of Technology: Smart Toys**

The concept of smart toys or intelligent toys covers a wide range of toys which have been referred to as internet toys, computationally augmented toys and digitally enhanced physical spaces (Kara & Cagiltary, 2020:2; OECD, 2019b:10; Red Chimpz, 2019:1). It refers to technologically developed physical toys constructed with an educational purpose (Ekin *et al.*, 2018:441-42; Kara & Cagiltary, 2020:1). The way the learners use the toys is key in determining the fostering of meaningful learning and development (OECD, 2019b:10; Parker & Thomsen, 2019:64; Red Chimpz, 2019:1). A recent study by Kara and Cagiltary (2020:2) focused on designing and developing a smart toy that is sensitive to the needs of learners and teachers in the ECD phase.



1. User Login and Register



2. Play Character Choosing



3. "Learning Animals"



4. Teaching Screen (Cow)

Source: Ekin *et al.* (2018:44- 45).

**Figure 2.3: Example of choices and interaction provided in virtual play**

Figure 2.3 is an example of how the smart toy enable learners to have choices during virtual play. It shows a computer and physical toys that are technologically augmented.

It also shows screens with choices that learners make. Making choices has been associated with free play and the fostering of self-regulation skills (see section 2.2.2).

## **2.6 CURRICULUM SUPPORT FOR THE FOSTERING OF SELF-REGULATION DURING FREE PLAY**

This section investigates global trends of ECD involving the role of curriculum support in developing self-regulation during free play. Included in this section are discussions of what is happening in the United States of America, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

### **2.6.1 Global Trends**

At global level, ECD entails policies and programmes that ensure that learners' rights to protection from all forms of harm and violence, health, nutrition, intellectual development, as well as ensuring that psychosocial developmental needs are met (Fenwick-Smith, Dahlberg & Thompson, 2018:1-3; UNICEF Headquarters, 2006:3). The fundamental policy that supports this notion of ECD is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 29(a) which deals with prioritising optimal positive development of all learners. Also pertinent in this study is Article 29(d) of the CRC, "[t]he preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin."

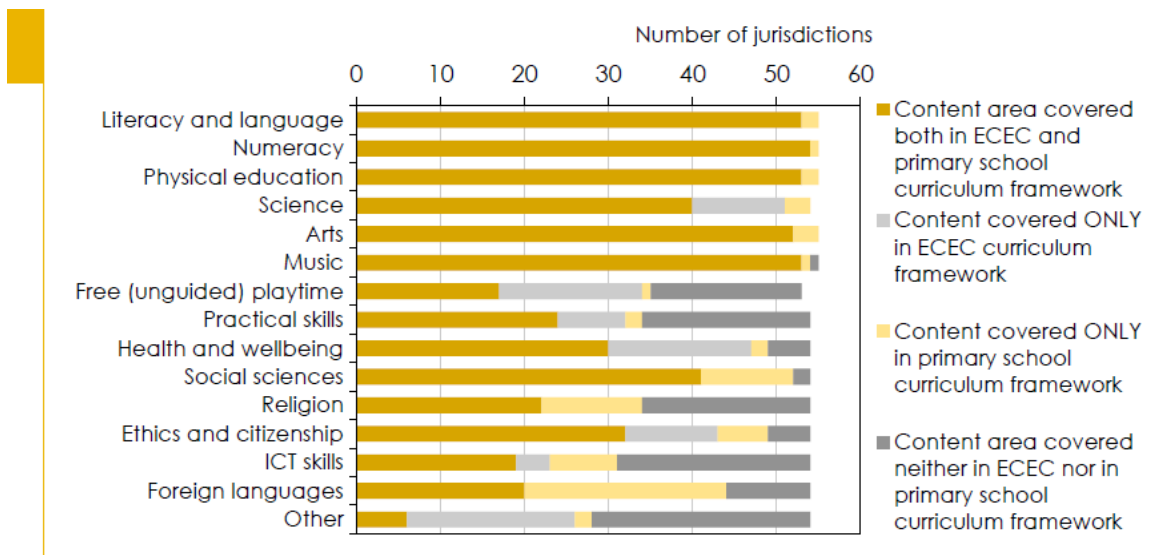
In a systems approach framework, the absence of behaviour problems in the classroom, conformity to school rules, teacher qualifications, as well as the availability of physical infrastructure and play materials for indoor and outdoor play, have collectively been used to assess quality in ECE (Forbes, Luu, Oswald & Tutnjevic, 2011:1,23; Wako, 2003:18). Although all these elements enhance learning and development of all learners, they create an understanding of ECE as a purely systemic process, thereby side-lining important psychology of educational concepts. The practice in a systems approach is to start by looking at the future, the outcome or vision (Forbes *et al.*, 2011:1,23; Wako, 2003:18). The products or outputs we envisage are considered first, rather than looking at today's plans and programmes, and walking through the process and considering the output last of all (Wako, 2003:18). In this way, much of the focus would be on the skills for the future while compromising learners' current needs for positive learning and development (UNESCO, 2014:12). Current



research-informed trends in ECD education are based on findings that show that the learners with poor socio-economic status benefit more from cognitive skills support programmes and guided play rather than long periods of free play for self-regulation and psychosocial skills (Gray, 2013:5; Tsai, 2015:1028). This stance has been adopted by many countries as a strategy to maximise cognitive development potential for learners who are under 5 years of age (Einloth, 2010:71; UNICEF Headquarters, 2015b:1). The importance countries place on self-regulation is evidenced by their vision or mission statements which describe a self-regulated learner as the product of the education system (Einloth, 2010:71; Wako, 2003:18).

In line with the systems approach, many countries have adopted a competency-based curriculum where the time for free play is minimal (OECD, 2019b:4). However, currently ways of increasing the duration of free play in the ECD phase are being sought because it supports the learners' needs in the ECD phase (Fenwick-Smith *et al.*, 2018:12; Jensen *et al.*, 2019:18). Teachers thus need to acquire skills and knowledge on how and when to provide free play with minimal risks of not achieving the required academic competencies for the grade (OECD, 2019b:4).

Current understandings are that academic, psychosocial skills and self-regulation skills complement each other in positive learner development (Elango *et al.*, 2015:71; Fenwick-Smith, *et al.*, 2018:12). Thus, allocating long periods of free play as a separate activity in the daily ECD phase timetable is not characteristic of current ECD phase timetables in many countries. Instead, psychosocial skills and self-regulation skills development are integrated into playful learning during the academic subject activities.



Note: "Other" includes individual contents named by the jurisdictions that fell outside the predetermined contents, e.g., social skills and media, media and external activities, and safety.

Source: OECD (2019b:3)

### Figure 2.4: Main curricular content areas in the ECD phase and primary education in 54 countries

Figure 2.4 shows that there are many areas of learning in the ECD phase curriculum and free play is considered one of the curriculum areas. According to Figure 2.4, thirty-four out of fifty-four countries have free play as a learning area in the ECD phase (OECD, 2019b:3). However, the absence of free play as a learning area does not mean that it is not present in schools (OECD, 2019b:4). Concerns have thus been raised whether learners were getting adequate free play time where free play is absent as a formal curriculum learning area (OECD, 2019b:4). Zimbabwe is an example of a country where free play is not scheduled on the timetable but is considered as the main strategy for teaching and learning (see Section 1.2). Figure 2.4 also shows that 22 out of 54 countries have ICT as a learning area in the ECD phase (OECD, 2019b:3). With ICT as a learning area in schools, there should be an interest in exploring free play using smart toys. Toys have become digitalised in line with advancement technology (Red Chimpz, 2019:1; OECD, 2019b:10). There are technologies, specifically, virtual reality and augmented reality environments and toys which could be rich play options for learners (Kara & Cagiltary, 2020:1; Red Chimpz, 2019:1). These programmes teach concentration, patience, teamwork and perseverance (Red Chimpz, 2019:1). This may be regarded as best practice yet those in the field of ECE observe that little attention has been given to such research internationally (OECD,

2020:10). In the next section, I look at curriculum support for the fostering of self-regulation during free play in three selected countries.

## **2.6.2 The United States of America**

In the United States of America (USA), education that emphasised hard work as evidenced by “obedience, silence, stern discipline, teacher control and memorisation of facts” characterised education for a long time before democracy (Morrison, 2016:49; Nicholson, 2017:228-234). However, democracy ushered in many changes which included free play in the ECD phase (Morrison, 2016:49; Nicholson, 2017:228-234; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016:2). Currently, the regular curriculum consists of academic subjects and programmes for supporting the learners’ development of social and emotional skills and self-regulation (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:81). However, Kamerman and Gatenio-Gabell, (2007:33) and Jensen *et al.*, (2019:23) observe that ECE in the USA is fragmented because many stakeholders deliver different programmes with diverse learning outcomes, namely state preschools, the Head Start programmes and centre based child-care programmes. The three types of ECE curricula are play-based, academically focused and the structure is balanced (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:23). The Head Start Programme is an example of the academically focused curriculum where emphasis is on supporting learners of between 3 to 8 years of age, who are at risk of school failure due to socio-economic disadvantages (Kamerman & Gatenio-Gabell, 2007:24; de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:81). Socio-political factors influence the sustainability of free play in large urban classrooms in an American urban district where the academic focused curriculum is used (Nicholson, 2017:228). The recommended teacher-learner ratio is 1:10 (Jensen *et al.*, 2019:23; National Institute for Early Education Research, NIEER, 2018: 3)

I have selected the United States of America (USA) because it is the country where Nelsen and associates began their work of teaching and training people in positive discipline (The Positive Discipline Association, |sa|:3). Since the USA is an expansive country with many states that control their own education systems, I have selected Connecticut. It is a state which has research-based policies and practices that are sensitive to the characteristic needs of the learners in the ECD phase (Dufresne, Hillman, Carson & Kramer, 2010:4; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2016:2, 9). There is an explicit programme for teaching social and emotional skills

which is grounded on behavioural techniques, with much emphasis on the use of special privileges rather than tangible rewards (Dufresne *et al.*, 2010:4).

The curriculum is play based and the need for free play is clearly articulated in ECE in Connecticut (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2015:8). Free play is defined as “extended, self-directed, imaginative and uninterrupted play, both indoors and outdoors” (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2015:8). Teachers are instructed to be “flexible and respond to the learners’ emerging needs, capitalising on teachable moments” (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2015:13). The other reason why Connecticut was selected is that one of the active branches of the Positive Discipline Association is based in Connecticut (Dores, 2016:10-12). Practising self-regulation is emphasised, particularly teaching learners to learn from their mistakes. Teachers encourage learners to be willing to take responsibility for their actions (both good and bad) as there will be no blame, shame or pain (Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, 2015:13; Dores, 2016:10-11). It appears that applying positive discipline is a way of fostering self-regulation skills. However, the extensive use of rewards in the form of special privileges as advocated by education policies, may promote external regulation, rather than intrinsic regulation.

### 2.6.3 Uganda

According to the Uganda Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act 2008 (Uganda Education Act 2008):10(1) (a,b,c,d) and the Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2016:2), ECD has many categories which include, prenatal and conception, zero to three (nursery), three to five (pre-primary) and six to eight (Primary 1, 2 & 3).

**Figure 2.5: Essential interventions in Uganda Early Childhood Care and Education**

	Pregnancy	0 – 2 years	3 – 5 years	6 – 8 years
Early Childhood Care & Education	Protective and supportive environment	Early stimulation (caregivers touch, talk, listen and respond to children)	Access to play materials and books	Access to quality education in early grades
			Group programmes to develop social skills	
			Development of early literacy and mathematics skills	Care and support services to address barriers to learning

Source: Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports (2017:10).

Figure 2.5 above shows that there are four categories of ECE in Uganda. The concept of presenting ECE as a continuum highlights that different categories have different sets of needs that need to be satisfied in ECE. Investments in mothers' wellbeing during pregnancy ensure that risk factors associated with poverty, nutrition and ill health are minimised. In the next phase, 0 to 2 years, emphasis is on stimulation activities. In the ECD phase (3 to 5 years of age), category emphasis is on school readiness and play is emphasised as a mode of learning. The important skills that learners develop in the ECD phase are, for instance, the ability to initiate and sustain positive social relationships with peers and teachers, self-regulation, as well as appreciation of their culture (Smith Glen, 2015:13). Having adequate toys for learners to play with is considered paramount, hence teachers and parents are encouraged to make toys from locally available materials through recycling boxes, bottles and banana tree bark (Smith Glen, 2015:13; Topan, 2017:1; Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017:40). Play promotes healthy development and resilience in children (UNICEF Uganda, 2018:20). The self-regulation skills that learners gain through free play include sharing toys, turn-taking, non-violent behaviour, reduction in fights, building learners' confidence, as well as perspective taking (Smith Glen, 2015:13; UNICEF Uganda, 2018:4). The last category is when learners have entered formal learning in the primary schools.

Basic education ECD programmes in Uganda have not received much attention in comparison to other countries in the East African region, such as Kenya, Rwanda and Tanzania (Kisutu, 2017:1; Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017:3). The focus is more on child nutrition, security and survival and development than the teaching of pre-formal education skills (Kisutu, 2017:4; UNICEF Uganda, 2018:20). The Government of Uganda contributes very little towards ECE (Ejuu, 2012:253). Adopting a human rights-based approach has been viewed as being biased towards child survival, security, protection, nutrition and basic health care (Smith Glen, 2015:11-12; Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2016:4). On the other hand, a rights-based approach to schools and pedagogy refers to child-friendly schools where learners have the right to talk and their voices are heard, thus their contribution as members in school is recognised (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:11).

Uganda is yet to establish a department of ECE (Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2016:5, 32). The ECD phase education is provided and

controlled by many stakeholders who include non-governmental organisations, international organisations, faith-based organisations, individuals and local communities (Ejuu, 2012:253; Topan, 2017:1; UNICEF Uganda, 2018:20). The education of learners in the pre-primary is the responsibility of parents or guardians and is run by private agencies or individuals (Uganda Education Act 2008):10(2) b, iii). Different stakeholders have different programmes and there have not been consultations among the stakeholders (Ejuu, 2012:253). The Aga Khan Foundation and Madrasa Early Childhood programme are examples of service providers who have been providing quality ECE for many decades (Topan, 2017:1).

Quality ECE refers to holistic ECD where learners are taught about nutrition, health habits, sanitation and environmental education in addition to play, numeracy and literacy (Topan, 2017:1; Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017:42). Free play of 60 minutes per day is recommended where adults (teachers and parents) observe learners and provide support when needed (Topan, 2017:1). Support given can also be in the form of teaching problem solving skills during free play and during story time, but learners are also able to learn some of the skills on their own (Smith Glen, 2015:35; Topan, 2017:1). However, some of ECE service providers interpret “child-centred learning” as no lessons should be taught by teachers and other adults (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017:39). One of the challenges in the delivery of quality ECE is the high teacher-learner ratio of 1:50 (Kisutu, 2017:3).

#### **2.6.4 Zimbabwe**

ECD was formally integrated into the education system in 2005 (Makokoro, 2017:1). The current structure of general education in primary schools in Zimbabwe has 2 phases, namely infants and junior primary. The Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe (ZMoPSE) refers to the learning programmes for learners who are between 3 to 8 years of age as ECE or infant education (MoESAC, 2012:1; Zimbabwean Principal Circular No. 49 of 2010; Zimbabwean Director’s Circular No. 48 of 2007; Zimbabwean Secretary’s Circular Minute No. 2 of 2014; Zimbabwean Principal Director’s Circular No.20 of 2011). However, the age group of the learners in the ECD phase, particularly those who are in the school grades that are below Grade 1, Grades ECD A and ECD B, is between 3 to 6 years of age. Play and social interaction are very important parts of the ECD phase (Munthali, Mvula &

Sila, 2014:7). The ECD phase is important for the foundation of education and learning. The responsibility lies with the teachers at school and the parents at home (ZMoPSE, 2015a:30). With respect to classroom practice, emphasis is on learning and teaching through play (ZMoPSE, 2015a:30; Nziramasanga, 1999:261) to foster self-regulation through positive discipline. Policies and practices that guide teachers in the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase are not explicit but implied from the statements in the curriculum framework and the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Currently, the quality and relevant learning for ECD competency-based curriculum is learner-centred and includes the fostering of strong life skills, as well as early reading, numeracy and literacy skills (English, Ndebele and Shona) needed for the junior years (ZMoPSE, 2015a:29, 47-48) through encouraging self-discipline and a sense of achievement and fairness (ZMoPSE, 2015a:7).

The curriculum framework emphasises the learner-centred approach. According to the Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (ZMoPSE, 2017: 41) “the focus on learning revolves around the learners as they engage in the search and discovery of new knowledge”. However, some critics of child-led self-discovery observe that “child centred practices can lead to misinterpretation which take time to be corrected and may create cognitive overload and overburden children’s and teachers’ working memory” (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:22). Furthermore, careful planning needs to be done so that learners may receive instruction and support to benefit from the programme (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020:117). In the context of Zimbabwe, the teacher’s role is that of “co-explorer and facilitator in knowledge discovery in order to arrive at an objective understanding and demonstration of skills so required” (ZMoPSE, 2017:41). This may be interpreted as that structured pedagogy guided practice and direct instruction are not consistent with the new curriculum that is hailed as inquiry based (ZMoPSE, 2015a:42; 2017:41). The learner-led explorations may require a substantial amount of self-regulation skills that is lacking in the learners in the ECD phase. It appears there is no room for teacher directivity in the teaching and learning process as in the previous curriculum, the thematic play-based curriculum.

The 2012 syllabus utilised the play-based and thematic approach to teaching and learning where all learning had to be done through play, and not through direct instruction (ZMoESAC, 2012:8). However, the suggested methods of teaching, such as telling and listening to stories, group projects and demonstration (ZMoESAC,

2012:8) are unlikely to be done only through play without direct instructions from teachers. According to Faas *et al.* (2017:82) and NCERT (2019:22), the thematic teaching and learning approach in ECE is a practice whereby teachers organise the learning content around themes that are relevant to the learners’ everyday experiences, such as family, occupations and food. A thematic curriculum is underpinned by the social constructivism philosophy, where “knowledge is socially constructed, and learning is essentially a social process” (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:12). However, such practice is associated with direct teaching and drill methods even though the play-based thematic approach allowed more time for free play than teacher directed activities. Thematic curricula in Uganda used for grades above ECD level and the USA’s reciprocal teaching of reading are examples of curricula that are underpinned by social constructivism (Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:12). A curriculum that is underpinned by constructivism (for instance the recently phased in Zimbabwe competency-based curriculum), theorises learners as explorers and builders of knowledge (ZMoPSE, 2015a:42; Westbrook *et al.*, 2013:9).

**Table 2.2: Time allocation in the play-based thematic curriculum**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>TIME</b>
Arrival, welcome, roll call and health check	30 minutes
Indoor activities	45-50 minutes
Toilet routines	30 minutes
Teacher directed activities	60 minutes (3 activities)
Outdoor free play	45-50 minutes
Break	30 minutes
Tidying up and dismissal	10-15 minutes
<b>MINIMUM TIME</b>	<b>4hours 10minutes</b>

**Please Note:** Children should be at the centre for a minimum of 4 hours 10 minutes but not more than 5 hours.

Source: MoESAC (2012:11).

Table 2.3 above shows the time allocation for activities which guide how teachers allocate time in the ECD phase in Zimbabwe (ZMoESAC, 2012:11). The minimum time



allocation for indoor and outdoor free play is 90 minutes per day whilst the minimum allocation of teacher-directed activities is 60 minutes per day. This suggests that in any given day, learners should spend more time engaged in free play than in teacher directed activities or the subject areas. Thus, teacher directed activities are distinguished from learner-led activities (indoor and outdoor play). Outdoor activities include activities such as swinging, sliding, running, sand play, dancing, skipping, and playing of traditional games. Indoor free play broadly means play in the classroom corners, for instance, the blocks corner, science corner, kitchen corner and art and craft corner (MoESAC) (2012:1; Zimbabwean Principal Circular No. 49 of 2010; Zimbabwean Director's Circular No. 48 of 2007; Zimbabwean Secretary's Circular Minute No. 2 of 2014; Zimbabwean Principal Director's Circular No.20 of 2011). Through corner play indoors, learners can develop skills in all areas of development; for example, the social skills of sharing materials and cognitive skills for planning how to play together (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:8). Learners develop emotional and language skills such as expressing their feelings or opinions, as they play in the socio-dramatic corner (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018a:8). While the class timetable clearly shows that teacher-directed activities constitute less time than indoor and outdoor play, the findings of recent research by Dube (2013:494) show that very little is known about teachers' understanding of free play.

**Table 2.3: Time allocation in the competency-based curriculum**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Teaching Approach</b>	<b>Time-allocation per week ECD A</b>	<b>Time-allocation per week ECD B</b>	<b>Syllabus page</b>
<b>English language</b>	Functional communicative	5 periods of 20 minutes	5 periods of 20 minutes	5
<b>Mathematics and science</b>	Problem solving	1 hour 40 minutes	1 hour 40 minutes	5
<b>Information and Communication technology</b>	Not specified	2 periods of 15 minutes per week	2 periods of 20 minutes per week	4
<b>Visual and performing arts</b>	Learner-centred and multi-sensory	4 lessons of 20 minutes per week	4 lessons of 20 minutes per week	3

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Teaching Approach</b>	<b>Time-allocation per week ECD A</b>	<b>Time-allocation per week ECD B</b>	<b>Syllabus page</b>
<b>Physical education</b>	Natural exploratory process	5 periods of 20 minutes per week	5 periods of 20 minutes per week	4
<b>Mass displays</b>	Natural exploratory process	5 periods of 20 minutes per week	5 periods of 20 minutes per week	4
<b>Indigenous languages</b>	communicative	5 periods of 20 minutes per week	5 periods of 20 minutes per week	4
<b>Heritage and social studies</b>	Spiral approach (immediate environment, community, world) & participatory	2 periods of 20 minutes per week	2 periods of 20 minutes per week	5
<b>Totals</b>		<b>650 minutes</b>	<b>660 minutes</b>	

Source: adapted from Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2015c:2-5)

Table 2.4 shows the learning areas, teaching approaches and time allocation in the ECD Grades A and B for subject teaching. Only two subjects, physical education and mass displays endorse exploration and discovery as the key teaching approaches. Mathematics and science are taught through problem-solving that are mostly project-based and discovery learning is in line with the description of a competency-based curriculum that is underpinned by constructivism. Languages use the communicative approach and heritage and social studies use the spiral and participatory approaches. It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss all the approaches that are used in the ECD phase subjects. What I want to highlight is that the teaching approach for information and communication technology (ICT) is not specified. The ZMoPSE curriculum framework for primary and secondary education 2015-2022 has “a strong scientific and technological bias” and views technology and digital information as a source of knowledge (ZMoPSE, 2015a:IV, 25). However, at ECD phase level, learners manipulate models of different appliances, for instance, toy cell phones, and do colouring activities in the ICT workbook (ZMoPSE, 2015a:32). Based on the above sentiments, I thus suggest that games be organised within virtual play using computers

(see Section 2.5.7). The learners' use of computers in the computer rooms should be explored to involve smart toys which can enhance the learners' development of self-regulation and other psychosocial skills. Naming and colouring in workbooks or socio-dramatic play at the ICT corner may not represent the digital skills fully in a technologically biased competency-based curriculum. In a recent study that is underpinned by the SDT, virtual games offer players opportunities for social interaction, making choices and practice autonomy which may lead to acquisition of autonomous self-regulation (Rigby & Ryan, 2016:37). Virtual play is an intrinsically motivated activity, sustained through the satisfaction of competence, relatedness and autonomy (Rigby & Ryan, 2016:36).

The time allocation based on the new curriculum, which is competency-based, shows that free play time could be replaced by various subject areas that take more than 2 hours per day (130 minutes ECD-A & 132 minutes ECD-B). When routines that take 100 minutes (arrival, welcome, rollcall and health check- 30 minutes; break- 30minutes; toilet routines- 30minutes & tidying up and dismissal- 10 minutes) are added, the time left for free play is just 20 minutes. In contrast, in the play-based thematic learning curriculum, time allocation for free play (indoors and outdoors) had the highest allocation (90-100 minutes per day). This suggests that free play is integrated in the activities during subject teaching. It is unlikely that teachers use times for routines such as toilet and break time for free play.

At national level, government has mechanisms of monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum through research, for instance the Zimbabwe School Examination Council (ZimSEC) and Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2017:34; ZimSEC & ACER, 2013:52). The theoretical framework used by ZimSEC and ZMoPSE (2016:106), the Biggs input-process-output model, identifies three points of time at which learning-related factors are placed: presage (before learning takes place, process (during learning) and product (outcome of learning). However, there are many gaps in knowledge for understanding every day practices that are left when using quantitative methods and frameworks. The study of the Education Transition Fund (ETF) programme gathered quantitative data about funding, resources, teacher quality and teacher training and the learners' backgrounds in both 2012 and 2013 (Zimsec & ACER, 2013:53). The current national average trained teacher-learner ratio for ECD phase is 1:71 and in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province it is 1:37, yet the official ratio

stands at 1:20 (ZMoPSE, 2019:87-88). This suggests lack of resources at various levels of the education system which impacts the quality of ECE in different contexts. Individual researchers have contributed to qualitative research in ECE in Zimbabwe. The common research strategy is the use of case studies, semi-structured interviews, thematic analysis, Tech's method of data analysis, for instance, Mangwaya, Blignaut and Pillay (2016:1-8) and Mugweni (2017:318). Most of current research focuses on the numerous challenges of implementing Early Childhood Education in Zimbabwe (Sibanda, 2018:759). Interpretive phenomenological research that captures understanding of the teachers' lived experience of everyday phenomena is scarce.

### **2.6.5 Comments on the Early Childhood Development Programmes**

There are commonalities and differences in the curricula in the three selected countries. The common aspect is that ECE is still developing and it is now perceived as the backbone of flourishing societies in the three countries. There is thus a need for research-informed contextual practices as suggested by OECD (2020:10). What comes out is that teachers' competencies are not only about providing toys and time for free play but include effective strategies that maximise the development of the cognitive processes (Kara & Cagiltary, 2020:10; UNICEF Headquarters, 2015b:1). Current research, for instance Kim and Mariani (2019:99) and Willis and Dinehart (2014:487-499), indicate that self-regulation skills are linked with free play and can make a significant contribution to school readiness and long-term academic success.

The teachers' focus when fostering self-regulation skills should be on activities that can challenge learners' thinking and motivate them intrinsically, giving them positive experiences of being in control of their choices, decisions, actions and emotions (Cagiltay *et al.*, 2013:3-8; Rabella, 2020:1). The challenges that many teachers face when fostering self-regulation skills is the lack of realistic knowledge and practical examples of strategies for fostering self-regulation skills during free play in a competency-based, child-centred curriculum. Telling teachers not to use direct instructions, for instance in Zimbabwe, may not be practical when considering some of the strategies for fostering self-regulation skills and the needs of the learners. The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological research design is to understand the teachers' patterns of meanings and practices with regards to the research topic.

## 2.7 OBSERVATION ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MINDFULNESS

From the descriptions of the types of self-regulation and instructional practices and strategies, it appears that mindfulness is a cross cutting aspect for both teachers and learners. It is in line with the positive psychology framework where the focus is not so much on the problem behaviour and dealing with disturbances but on activities that teach and strengthen the learners' capacities to self-regulate. In a recent study by Alphonso *et al.* (2019:38), findings show that the teachers' application of mindfulness strategies yielded a significantly positive effect on the learners' self-regulation in the ECD phase in three classrooms in three different countries. The term mindfulness comes from *sati* (awareness) and *samprajanya* (clear comprehension) (Grecucci *et al.*, 2015:1). Awareness is the key factor in mindfulness because it assists people in accessing the physical and psychological constructs of reality, events and processes (Brown & Ryan, 2003:833; Brown, Ryan & Creswell, 2007:212). Brown and Ryan (2003:833) associate self-awareness with the presence of genuine and real self-regulation. From the meaning of these terms, mindfulness refers to the persons' ability to act or behave in ways that are informed by a conscious understanding of the situation at hand (Brown *et al.*, 2007:212; Grecucci *et al.*, 2015:1). Mindfulness refers to "the awareness that arises from paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally" (Brockman *et al.*, 2016:2; Cuncic, 2020a:3). This definition characterises mindfulness as being an awareness where one's attention is being harnessed towards the present moment; an accepting stance towards this experience characterised by an attitude of curiosity and openness (Brockman *et al.*, 2016:2-3). In the ECD phase, mindfulness is associated with the development of self-regulation skills that enhances emotional and social maturity (Cuncic, 2020a:1; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23). In this view, maturity reflects the learners' capacity to face psychosocial and cognitive challenges with thoughtfulness, perseverance and tolerance (Cuncic, 2020a:1). Thus, mindfulness as a strategy for teaching self-regulation skills in the ECD phase involves encouraging learners to take "a pause between a feeling and an action taking time to think things through, make a plan and wait patiently" (Cuncic, 2020a:1). On the other hand, mindlessness refers to automatic, habitual or chronic behaviour that is done without conscious registration of the consequences of one's behaviour and actions (Brown & Ryan, 2003:823; Grecucci *et al.*, 2015:2). An example of mindlessness in the context of the current study would be

learners who grab toys from others instead of asking politely. The teachers' habits of over-controlling learners using disciplinary violence are also examples of mindlessness. The behaviours that demonstrate mindfulness include patience, trust, willingness to learn, compassionate, open-hearted and a non-judgemental attitude (Grecucci *et al.*, 2015:2). Strategies for teaching mindfulness are cognitive reappraisal, problem solving and calming down (Brown *et al.*, 2007:212; Grecucci *et al.*, 2015:2). When teachers are mindful, they can determine the right moment to intervene or to continue observing and allow learners to solve problems amicably amongst themselves (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23).

Mindfulness captures people's thinking and actions at a high level of consciousness experience and functioning in terms of precision and intensity (Brown & Ryan, 2003:823). In the past, mindfulness has thus been used for disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits and unhealthy behaviour patterns, such as smoking and drug abuse (Brown & Ryan, 2003:823). However, within the framework of positive psychology, mindfulness could play a key role in fostering informed and self-endorsed behavioural regulation, which has been associated with wellbeing enhancement (Brown, & Ryan, 2003:823). The common strategies of mindfulness in the ECD phase are talking, consoling, calming down, breathing exercises, diverting children's attention, finding solutions and discussing problems (Alphonso *et al.*, 2019:25). Behaviours that are associated with mindfulness include "staying focused on the concentration, self-aware, aware of others' needs and feelings, managing body and emotions in challenging situations and demonstrating inhibitory control" (Alphonso *et al.*, 2019:26-27). These behaviours seem to be adequately featured in the descriptions of types of self-regulation as well as the strategies for fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase. However, they seem to imply a set of different psychological needs which may not be represented by the three basic psychological needs. Thus, mindfulness could be suggested as a basic psychological need.

## **2.8 SUMMARY**

In the context of ECE, the acquisition of self-regulation skills is considered as a key developmental task. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 showed that self-regulation is important for emotional regulation, behavioural regulation, positive child development, as well as learners' wellbeing. The continuum of the forms of self-

regulation gave important background on how self-regulation looks like at the end of successfully completing the ECD phase programme. Using Deci and Ryan's SDT and BPNT, allowed me to discuss the teachers' support during free play as experiences of satisfying the learners' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, rather than simply gaining the learners' cooperation or obedience. Different strategies are available for use by teachers in the ECD phase, but it has not been ascertained how the ECD learners' self-regulation skills could be enhanced using the strategies during a disciplinary process during free play. In the next chapter, the researcher focusses on exploring how the teachers' application of positive discipline can enhance the development of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase.

# **CHAPTER 3: POSITIVE DISCIPLINE FOR SELF-REGULATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Thriving in today's fast changing world requires teachers to use age-appropriate positive discipline practices that maximise the development of intrinsically motivated regulation. There are various descriptions and interpretations from different scholars and fields of psychology with regards to what constitutes positive discipline methods that enhance the fostering of self-regulation skills in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 focused on clarifying pertinent concepts and understanding processes relating to the fostering of self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase. Chapter 3 reviews relevant literature in line with the research sub-question that seeks to understand teachers' application of positive discipline as an ally to the teaching and learning of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase. I discuss discipline and punishment in schools, the branches of psychological practice that can assist in understanding the teachers' practices of discipline and punishment. Theories and models for understanding self-regulation and positive discipline, and practices in selected countries are discussed. The contexts of the United States of America and Uganda are selected not only for providing diverse understanding of the phenomenon under study, but because the authors of the discussed positive discipline models live in those contexts. The chapter begins with clarifying pertinent concepts and approaches for understanding discipline and punishment in the ECD phase.

## **3.2 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION**

As previously indicated, it is important to give meaning and understanding to concepts within this study. This section discusses concepts that pertain to school discipline with focus on the research topic and the theoretical framework of the study.



### **3.2.1 Punishment**

Punishment is an important concept within this study. In the next subsections I discuss the general definition of punishment, corporal punishment and mild forms of punishment.

#### **3.2.1.1 General definition of punishment**

Over the past decades, the meaning of the word punishment has broadened to include other punitive measures taken by teachers to control learners' behaviour besides corporal punishment (Durrant, 2010:11; Walters & Frei, 2007:13). Examples of punishment are physically hurting the learner by pulling the learner's hair or arm, humiliating the learner in the presence of peers, ignoring the learner, always talking about the learner's past mistakes and behaviours negatively, as well as withdrawing love (Klein, 2015:4-5; McTague, 2016:37). Punishment is generally defined as the physical and/or psychological pain that teachers apply to learners with the aim of decreasing problem behaviour rapidly (Ormrod, 2014:289). In psychology, punishment is any unpleasant or undesired event or consequence that follows the learners' inappropriate behaviours and decreases its occurrence (Bear, 2010:4). Punishment thus comprises negative hurtful activities for inflicting pain or purposeful injury and therefore, it is incompatible with encouraging positive discipline and the fostering of self-regulation (Lonczak, 2019:2-5; Save the Children Fiji, 2015:13). However, the proponents of punishment, like Malik (2014:901), believe that physical punishment serves to "deter offenders and future transgressors from committing offences". In other words, the physical and/or psychological pain that the learners feel is supposed to force the learners to change or stop the negative behaviours. However, such practices can be hurtful and fail to yield the desired effects, but instead they become negative experiences that are detrimental to the learners' positive development (Klein, 2015:4-5; Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:12).

Within the positive psychology framework, the understanding is that punishment cannot teach learners to understand the value of rules, respect for other learners, empathy, or to take responsibility for their behaviour (Bear, 2010:7). When teachers use the behavioural strategies to foster self-regulation skills, concurrently they discourage inappropriate behaviour through negative reinforcement or withdrawal of privileges (Winner, 2019:2). This suggests that punishment could have a negative

impact on the learners' development of self-regulation skills. There are thus controversies surrounding the use and purpose of punishment as a method of discipline in schools. Corporal punishment, as one of the most controversial ways of disciplining and punishing learners, will be discussed next.

### **3.2.1.2 Corporal punishment**

In the past decades, the application of discipline often meant the use of corporal punishment to correct misbehaviour (Bear, 2010:5). There are many harmful beliefs that encourage the use of corporal punishment, for instance the belief that it can mould the learners' moral value systems and thus teach learners to appreciate their culture and tradition (Gomba, 2015:67; Raising Voices, 2012:3). Corporal punishment is a cross-cultural discipline practice that refers to the application of physical pain or discomfort on purpose (however light) as a method of disciplining the learners (Busienei, 2012:155; Raising Voices 2012:3). Corporal punishment thus means using physical force to inflict pain, such as beating children with a whip, clapping and kicking children (Cathcart, Palmon & Peterson, 2015:3). Examples of corporal punishment practices are for instance, beating the learners with a rod, pulling the learners' ears, kicking, forcing the learners to kneel for a period, as well as, not allowing the learners to eat during break times (Plan International, 2009:49). Within the school context, it is part of a wider culture of violence in schools, which includes other forms of humiliating punishment, peer bullying and gender-based violence (Orgando-Portela & Pells, 2015:30). It is a form of violence against children that is not condoned in global or local contexts (Gershoff, 2017:236; Gomba, 2015:67).

On the other hand, there seems to be an understanding that when teachers use corporal punishment to discipline learners, the aim is to assist the learners to become disciplined and responsible (Chemhuru, 2010:182; Dreikurs & Cassel, 1991:19). In other words, corporal punishment is good for the learners, because it discourages negative behaviour. According to Siddons (2017:1), most adults think of corporal punishment as an event, for instance, an adult can beat a learner with a rod, and think that they are through with disciplining the learners. On the other hand, learners begin a process of trying to understand the meaning of the violent act. It is emotionally damaging as it causes humiliation (Gershoff, 2017:232). In addition to this, Adler (1998:125) views the teachers' application of corporal punishment as "a clear sign of

intellectual misunderstanding” of discipline as an educative process. Corporal punishment is also linked with behavioural problems which are stubbornness, disobedience, verbal aggression, as well as telling lies (Gershoff, 2017:233; Riggerbach *et al.*, 2019:4). Corporal punishment is known to traumatise children instead of guiding learners towards learning appropriate skills (Gershoff, 2017:232-236; Sternberg & William, 2010:254). There are other forms of punishment which are believed to be less traumatic than corporal punishment, but they are also not educational or child friendly, as will be discussed in the next section.

### **3.2.1.3 Mild forms of punishment**

By definition (see Section 3.2.1.1) punishment involves deliberately inflicting some form of harm (physical or emotional) on learners. Some psychologists have coined the term ‘positive punishment’ for punishment that can be used in a positive manner and regarded as positive discipline methods (Bear, 2011:9). In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 37(a) states that “State Parties shall ensure that no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. The statement could be interpreted as suggesting that some forms of punishment are not cruel and inhuman. Although the intention of positive psychology is not to replace practices that are effective in addressing learners’ problem behaviour, according to Bear (2011:9), teachers should be aware that the use of rewards, praise and punishment in a controlling manner may be harmful to the development of autonomy and self-regulation as well even if it is seen as non-violent. This means that the mild forms of punishment, for instance just making eye contact, verbal warnings and reprimands, taking away privileges or points earned, time-out or moving towards the learner indicating that an undesired consequence is likely to follow if the behaviour continues (Bear, 2010:4; Ormrod, 2014:277), are not necessarily violent discipline actions (McConnell, 1990:247-249), depending on how it is done. What is negative about punishment is when it makes learners feel threatened, coerced, embarrassed, damaged, scared, as well as belittled when administering the mild forms of punishment (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:48-50). Controlling practices are characterised by use of coercive, critical and authoritarian practices and a tendency to enforce the child to act, feel, or think in adult imposed ways. This is predictive of the frustration of the child’s basic psychological needs, which in turn would lead to more internalising and

externalising problems (Riggenbach *et al.*, 2019:4). As with corporal punishment, learners do not learn self-regulation skills and how to behave better next time from the teachers' use of mild forms of punishment (Charles, 2014:59; Save the Children South Africa, 2008:8; Walters & Frei, 2007:59-60).

The inclusion of mild forms of punishment as elements of positive discipline methods is thus debatable (Arnall, 2010:16). Some models of positive discipline incorporate mild forms of punishment and reinforcement that are believed to cause no harm (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:28) whilst others do not (Durrant, 2013:3). However, there seems to be an agreement that all forms of physical punishments and verbal reprimands, which entail scolding the learners, making them feel ashamed or belittled, constitute damaging discipline (Bear, 2010:7; Ormrod, 2014:277; Pagliaro, 2011:21). This suggests that some forms of punishment can be regarded as violent discipline depending on the way they are administered. Learners in the ECD stage mostly think that punitive consequences should always follow the breaking of rules, because the traditional and behavioural methods utilise rewards and punishments (Sternberg & William, 2010:100). The forms of discipline are discussed in the next section.

### **3.2.2 Discipline**

The definition of discipline was given in Section 1.10. In the framework of positive psychology, discipline was referred to as assisting the learners to develop self-regulation to enhance their autonomy, competence and sense of belonging. This section will clarify the concepts of logical and natural consequences, proactive discipline and discipline from the perspective of positive psychology. These concepts are associated with positive discipline in the Zimbabwean context (see Section 3.3.4).

#### **3.2.2.1 Logical and natural consequences**

Dreikurs believed that when disciplining the learners, teachers should use natural and logical consequences (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:76-85). The University of Minnesota Extension (2009:8) defines a consequence as a "result of something a person does". Logical consequences are sensible actions that teachers use to correct the learners' misbehaviour (Pagliaro, 2011:97). Nelsen *et al.*, (2014:278) describe logical consequences as "punishments that fit the crime". Logical consequences require teachers or peers to apply consequences that are not only directly related to the

problem behaviour, but also respectful and reasonable (Plan International, 2009:73). An example of logical consequence that is directly related to the problem behaviour of graffiti on the wall could be to ask the learner to clean it. However, questions could also be raised as to whether the consequence is respectful and reasonable for an ECD phase learner or do teachers simply rename punishment and call it a logical consequence. Charles (1985:84) as well as Kohn (1996:39-48), observe that the difference between logical consequences and punishment is marginal. This suggests that although it is important that logical consequences should be related to the problem behaviour, what is more important is that they require mindful planning and application. According to Dreikurs, at times the difference between logical consequences and punishments may only be in the tone of voice (Charles & Senter, 2005:116; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:266; Kohn, 1996:39-48). Thus, if teachers are not mindful in their application, learners can perceive the teachers' interventions as intimidating, coercive, commanding, controlling and judgemental rather than logical. The negative outcomes that are associated with the use of logical consequences are resentment, revenge and retreat (Nelsen *et al.*, 2016:4; Plan International, 2009:73).

According to Klein (2015:5), teachers should use natural consequences as a form of discipline. A natural consequence is when an action happens, and the natural outcome is what teaches the child to become self-controlled (Klein, 2015:5); for example, if a learner deliberately breaks his/her crayons, he/she will have to use the broken crayons. In other words, what teaches the learner not to break crayons is the experience of using broken crayons (natural consequence), rather than punishment (insulting or beating the learner). It is thus important to make sure that the natural consequence is safe and does not impact negatively on the learners' psychological needs and wellbeing. For instance, if an ECD phase learner soils his/her pants it would be humiliating and grossly punitive to make him/her stay in dirty clothing. Natural consequences should be enough discipline for learners to learn from the experience and there is no need to add other consequences like negative criticism or sarcasm (McVittie, 2003:5; Plan International, 2009:73). The growing need for effective ECE is being recognised globally but understanding school discipline using a quantitative research approach framework may disregard the importance of understanding the teachers' lived experiences of the phenomenon in different contexts. Therefore, a

qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach to understanding the fostering of self-regulation skills through positive discipline may be more appropriate.

### **3.2.2.2 Proactive discipline**

In a positive psychology framework, both proactive and reactive discipline are important in school discipline (Dârjan & Tomița, 2014:30). Reactive discipline was dealt with in the section where the researcher discussed punishment and logical and natural consequences (see Section 3.2.1 and 3.2.2.1). The proactive approach to discipline refers to “positive and preventative approaches to shape individual and school-wide discipline responses” (Dârjan & Tomița, 2014:30-31). Proactive disciplinary strategies that include social and emotional learning, are recognised as playing a crucial role in school discipline (Bear, 2009:313; Boniwell, 2017:1; DS Psychology Melbourne, 2017:1; Emmons, 2019:1). Social and emotional learning involves the fostering of “self-regulation, executive function, intrapersonal skills and inter-personal skills” (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020:99).

An example of a proactive discipline programme for fostering self-regulation skills is the School-Wide Positive Behavioural Support and Interventions programme, which is currently one of the popular global trends. This is noted in the amount of research that focuses on measuring the efficacy of the programme (Fox, Hemmeter & Synder, 2013; Schmitt, Pratt & McClelland, 2014; Smith, 2013; Steed & Webb, 2013). Even the research that focuses on emotional development and school readiness (Bredekamp, 2011; Carter, Norman & Tredwell, 2011; Kerr & Nelson, 2010; McCabe & Frede, 2007; Vincent & Tobin, 2012) measures the success of the programme in addressing the social-emotional needs and mental health needs of the learners. However, such research cannot provide detailed descriptions, examples and understandings of the teachers’ understandings of the phenomenon under study.

### **3.2.2.3 Positive discipline**

Currently it is difficult to clarify the concept of positive discipline because it is a broad concept and there is no universal definition of positive discipline (see Section 1.4.3). As a disciplinary strategy, positive discipline aims not only to end disciplinary violence in schools, but to teach learners essential psychosocial life skills that promote mental health and wellbeing (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:5; Webster-Stratton, Reid & Stoolmiller,

2008:473-474; Durrant, 2013:3; Murray *et al.*, 2015:7; Rae & MacConville, 2015:41; Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018:1764). Positive discipline is compatible with play for learning and development in the ECD phase (Whitebread & Basilio, 2012:28; Hodgson, 2017:20; Pyle, 2018:48). Too much control over the learners is not positive discipline because it can make it hard for learners to self-regulate.

Positive discipline incorporates all the aspects of life for all age groups, professions, subjects as well as different community backgrounds (Assali, 2015:5; Positive Discipline Association, |sa|:1). The cross-cultural character strengths and virtues that underpin positive discipline are in positive psychology. These are kindness, honesty, fairness and self-regulation (Bear, 2009:312; Cooke & Carr, 2014:100). Fairness means applying the principles of justice and caring in relations with others (Bear, 2009:312). Being kind means that the teachers and learners are self-respecting. The USA Mental Health Foundation defines kindness as “doing something towards yourself or others, motivated by a genuine concern to make a positive difference” (Place2be Organisation, 2020:1).

Generally, positive discipline is effective because teachers are willing to give up control over the learners and work with them in a cooperative manner instead (Nelsen *et al.*, 2013:9). This can be easily accomplished when working with older learners and adults who are autonomous and self-regulated (Densmore & Bauman, 2011:228-229; Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:4; Nelsen *et al.*, 2013:9). However, this can be problematic, because the learners in the ECD stage are not yet autonomous and self-regulated, therefore they depend on adults to guide them towards learning these skills. Nelsen *et al.* (2007:6) suggest that rather than merely telling the learners what is right and what is wrong, teachers need to invite the learners to think and participate, taking into consideration the level of psychosocial development of the learners. Free play offers learners the opportunity to make their own decisions on how to direct their own play in a self-regulated manner (Dube, 2013:491), but this also affords teachers the time to apply positive discipline to foster self-regulation. Thus, teachers need to apply positive discipline without thwarting the learners’ opportunities to play freely. The main goal for teachers is to assist the learners to develop self-regulation, fairness, as well as a sense of achievement and responsibility (ZMoPSE, 2017:7, 49).

Recent research on positive discipline suggests that programme developers focus on trustworthiness of the programmes rather than designing contextual models of positive discipline (Gershoff, Lee & Durrant, 2017:19). As a result, the gaps that are identified in literature remain focused on the need to prevent disciplinary violence and physical punishment (Gershoff *et al.*, 2017:19). On the contrary, research shows that the use of physical punishment is reduced (UNICEF Headquarters, 2015a:2), but this does not necessarily mean that positive discipline is implied. The persistence on the focus of eradicating physical punishment seems to disregard other damaging discipline tactics as well as contextual factors that may be thwarting the learners' development of self-regulation. According to Deci and Ryan (2000:231), Ryan and Deci (2000:76) as well as Stosny (2011:1), excessive control, coercive actions and criticism can lead to lack of initiative, irresponsible defiance, guilt, shame, anxiety, sorrow as well as psychopathology. This suggests that the seemingly clear everyday teachers' practice involving controlling learners' behaviour through use of rewards and punishment may need to be brought under the spotlight to understand school discipline (Adler, 1998:125; Curriculum Development Council Hong Kong 2006:12; Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000:5; Karreman *et al.*, 2006:571). On the one hand, there are concerns that the teachers' exertion of power over the learners during a disciplinary process may undermine the development of self-regulation (Barrable & Arvañitis, 2019:46; Silkenbeumer *et al.*, 2016:21). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation, in the form of rewards, praise and punishment, is important for assimilation of values and social competences which can assist the learners in learning and developing self-regulation (King & Howard, 2016:57).

Discipline that focuses more on developing the learners' self-regulation skills than imposing consequences for misbehaviour, is likely to assist the learners' positive development. Instead of punishment, Rudolf Dreikurs suggests that "each child needs encouragement like a plant needs water. Without it, his/her growth is stunted and his/her potential sapped" (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000:3). In line with Dreikurs' view, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000:228-229), Barrable and Arvañitis (2019:46) and the Self-Determination Theory Organisation (2019:1-2) recommend that teachers should support the learners' need for autonomy, competence and relatedness. The status of discipline and punishment is discussed in the next section.



### 3.3 DISCIPLINE AND PUNISHMENT IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT AND SELECTED COUNTRIES

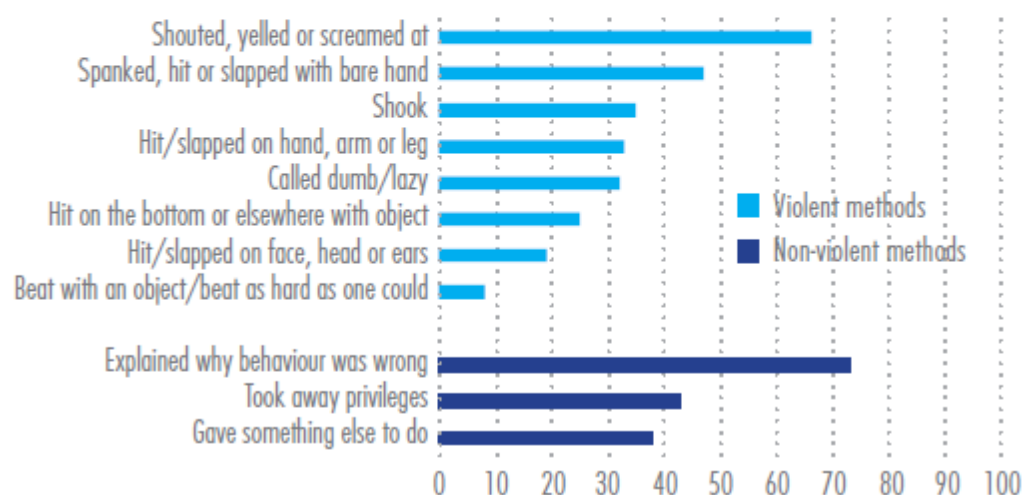
In the following subsections, discipline and punishment in various contexts, the global, USA, Uganda as well as Zimbabwe, are discussed.

#### 3.3.1 The Global Context

Violent discipline impacts negatively on the motor, social and cognitive development of the learners. The main concern in this study is that absence of physical violence does not necessarily mean that positive discipline is being understood and applied.

#### Even the youngest children are exposed to violent acts of discipline

Percentage of children aged 2 to 4 years who experienced any discipline in the past month, by type



Source: UNICEF Headquarters, 2015a:2

**Figure 3.1: The average levels of young children’s exposure to disciplinary violence and non-violent methods**

Figure 3.1 above shows the average levels of young children’s exposure to disciplinary violence and non-violent methods of 54 middle and low-income countries (UNICEF Headquarters, 2015a:2). The statistics show that adults apply both violent and non-violent methods when disciplining the children who are between 2 to 4 years of age. The category of “beating children with an object / beat as hard as one could” (torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment), has the lowest

prevalence of less than 10%. Shouting, yelling and screaming is a form of violent discipline that has the highest prevalence (66%). The prevalence of various forms of violent methods ranges between 18% and 46%. The method of discipline with the highest prevalence is explaining to the children why the behaviour is wrong (approximately 75%). Taking away privileges is regarded as a non-violent method, but this does not necessarily follow that it is a form of positive discipline. Problems with using consequences was discussed in Section 3.2.2.1. Any form of violence puts learners “at risk for later neuropsychological problems, poor school achievement, early school dropout, low skilled employment, and low care of their own children, thus contributing to the intergenerational transmission of poverty” (Einloth, 2010:100; McClelland *et al.*, 2015:2; UNICEF Headquarters, 2015a:2). In the next section, I discuss discipline and punishment in selected countries, with focus on positive discipline.

### **3.3.2 The United States of America (USA)**

In the USA, understanding discipline and punishment in schools involves reporting the rates of expulsions and suspensions (Mongeau, 2016:1). Suspension refers to the removal of a learner from their classroom while expulsion means the termination from attending school (Zeng, Corr, O’Grady & Guan, 2019:1). Although suspensions and expulsions come as consequences for learners’ violent or disruptive behaviour that endanger the safety of other learners and teachers (Turner, 2016:1), they deny learners their right to access ECE and opportunities for attaining appropriate psychosocial skills that develop when playing with peers (Gilliam, 2014:1). It is known that some of what may be regarded as disruptive or violent may be typical phase-related behaviour, such as externalising behaviours and bullying (see Section 2.2.3). Beyond that, there are various contextual factors that are associated with problem behaviour; for example, poverty, neglect, abuse and exposure to violence at home and in the neighbourhood (Turner, 2016:1). Therefore, such learners need to be at school so that teachers can foster self-regulation using positive discipline methods as well as to receive additional support or referral to other professional support services. According to Mongeau (2016:1), teachers who receive support from mental health services are less likely to report expulsion and suspension.

One of the strengths of the curriculum in Connecticut is the focus on addressing the learners' care and developmental needs comprehensively (CONNCAN, 2015:32; Connecticut Department of Children and Families, 2016:4; National Institute for Early Education Research, NIEER, 2018: 1; State of Connecticut State Board of Education, 2006:VI). As a result, the state-wide programmes and School Readiness Legislation supports mental health needs, for instance, Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP) and the Public Act 15-96, which prohibits most of suspensions and expulsions in the ECD phase (United States Department of Health and Human Services & Administration for Children and families, 2017:9). The ECCP facilitates the early identification of learners with behavioural problems and mental health needs and provides group and individual support for learners at school and in the learners' homes (Connecticut Department of Children and Families, 2016:4; Gilliam, 2007:6-10). Topics covered in ECCP are for instance, communicating with learners in supportive ways, classroom management and behaviour modification. Most importantly, ECCP programmes are effective in reducing the number of expulsions and suspensions in the ECD phase, although the rates are still on the high side (Megan, 2019:1; Mongeau, 2016:1). Countrywide statistics suggest that there are more learners who are expelled in the ECD phase than other phases combined (Gilliam, 2014:1; Zeng *et al.*, 2019:2).

The following exemplar is taken from a report on the effectiveness of ECCP, as narrated in Mongeau (2016:1);

*“A boy with orange socks, swings a stick at classmates. His teacher, without yelling at the boy, convinced him to use the stick for a jumping game instead. Next thing you know, all children are taking turns jumping over the stick. If you’ve ever watched a 4-year-old on the edge of a temper tantrum involving a stick you’ll know just how incredible this little scene is”.*

The above exemplar shows how possible violent behaviour was addressed in a positive way that avoided suspension and/or expulsion of the boy with orange socks. The behaviour of threatening others with the stick was enough for the teacher to decide on suspension or expulsion based on current legislation and instruction from the US Department of Education. However, the teacher used a direct instruction, calming down and modelling as strategies for teaching self-regulation. The positive discipline method, diverting the learners' attention towards something positive, allowed the boy

to control his emotions and behaviour immediately. The teacher did not try to use her authority and power to stop the misbehaviour. Although what happened next was not narrated, the teacher did not apply punitive consequences but rather redirected the boy's behaviour. If the teacher had threatened or yelled at the boy saying, "Stop it!!" it could have escalated into a violent power struggle. In my view, I see this as an exemplar of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play where a teacher meets the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness and mindfulness.

From the above exemplar, ECCP is effective in reducing suspension and expulsion but the problem is that the implementation of the ECCP programme is on a case-by-case basis. It depends largely on the situation at hand and the capabilities of teachers and consultants involved in the case (Gilliam, 2007:21). As a result, the ECCP strategy for delivering support can be difficult to scale up or export to other situations because it is highly customised.

Many schools in Connecticut use School-Wide-Positive Behavioural Support Interventions (Connecticut Department of Children and Families, 2016:4; Dufresne *et al.*, 2010:4; Wentzell, 2017:3). The use of behavioural strategies is associated with reliance on prioritising implementation of school rules rather than developing the learners' life skills like self-regulation (Ryan, 2019:24). The weaknesses of the use of rewards in the form of special privileges in schools (see Section 2.6.2) seems to contradict the fostering of intrinsically motivated regulation. There are challenges in transforming programmes that are designed for parents at home, for instance, the Positive Parenting Triple P programme (Connecticut Department of Children and Families, 2016:8), to the school context. What sets Nelsen and associates' positive discipline approach (see Section 3.5.1) apart from School-Wide-Positive Behavioural Support Interventions or the other positive discipline models, is the emphasis on encouragement in a way that it is not merely presented as an alternative of praise or punishment (Nelsen *et al.*, 2018:2). Based on the above discussion, it appears USA schools are yet to incorporate the positive discipline strategies in school discipline.

### **3.3.3 Uganda**

Although there are laws that prohibit the use of corporal punishment in schools, learners in Uganda are more likely to be beaten by their teachers than their own

parents (Devries & Kyegombe, 2015:1). In the Ugandan context, Uganda Children Amendment Act 2016:42c, Uganda Ministry of Education (1997:1) and the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports (2006:1) banned corporal punishment in the ECD phase in 1997 through the Ministry's circulars CE/C/ 23 dated 10 June 1997 and Circular No. 15/2006. The circulars explicitly spell out that teachers are not allowed to apply corporal punishment in the ECD phase, because the learners "ought to be brought up in love and fellowship rather than brutality, violence and sadism" (Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, 2006:1). The goal of school discipline is to foster positive character traits and development through positive discipline (Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, 2006:2). However, rather than using positive discipline, teachers disguise disciplinary violence as cultural practice (Devries & Kyegombe, 2015:1; Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports, 2006:1). The researchers of Cambridge Education (Uganda Ministry of Education and Sports, 2017:42) observed that teachers still use various forms of disciplinary violence, such as corporal punishment, humiliation, yelling and threats. The understanding of positive discipline in Uganda is associated with the elimination of corporal punishment (Devries & Kyegombe, 2015:1; Sekiwu & Naluwemba, 2014:25; Siddons, 2017:1). In other words, the absence of corporal punishment seems to imply that positive discipline is being applied. Thus, when teachers aggressively shout at the learners, they do not regard it as disciplinary violence. It appears that the use of positive and negative reinforcements that exclude corporal punishment, is what constitute positive discipline methods (Raising Voices, 2012:10; Sekiwu & Naluwemba, 2014:25). For more details, see Section 3.5.3. Instead of promoting the application of positive discipline during free play, Naker and Sekitoleko (2009:49) seem to perceive play as an example of a privilege and thus it can be withdrawn when used as a penalty for misbehaviour. Thus, the importance of free play in the context of fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase can be easily overlooked.

After some parents and teachers were trained in positive discipline methods, they perceived positive discipline as non-violent discipline that resulted in positive relationships (UNICEF Uganda, 2018:52). They appreciated that the use of toys enhanced the quality of learners' interactions during free play (UNICEF Uganda, 2018:52). Teachers and parents who received training in positive discipline methods were also able to use the method of explaining to the learners what is right and wrong

with compassion (UNICEF Uganda, 2018:52). What is discussed above suggests that although there are challenges in the ECD phase, progress has been made towards the adoption of positive discipline methods during free play.

### **3.3.4 Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, it is important to understand that the concept of discipline and punishment in schools is different to that experienced in the home. In the home setting, the concepts of discipline and punishment revolve around the use of corporal punishment because both cultural and religious beliefs support its use outside the school environment. The failure to physically punish a child is regarded as a weakness on the part of the parent (Mufaro, 2014;1). Corporal punishment is regarded as a “necessary evil” if it is done in moderation (Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, 2015:253-254; Mufaro, 2014;1). Parents are supposed to give several warnings (threats of violence) before applying corporal punishment (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2014:665). In this way, physical punishment can be regarded as not the first option, but rather used as the last resort. This suggests that many parents may not believe that physical punishment is the only method of disciplining learners.

Some teachers in schools support the use of corporal punishment. In the findings of a study by Matope and Mugodzwa (2011:103) that explored the prevalence of corporal punishment in secondary schools in Zimbabwe, the teachers had mixed feelings on the use of corporal punishment. On the one hand, teachers’ arguments for the continued use of corporal punishment were that it produces a well-disciplined and orderly class. The teachers viewed corporal punishment as necessary and that “any attempt to abolish it will compromise the authority of the teacher” (Matope & Mugodzwa, 2011:103). This means corporal punishment is considered as an indispensable tool for character building. On the other hand, arguments against the use of corporal punishment were that corporal punishment was unwarranted and had no advantage at all in the teaching and learning process (Matope and Mugodzwa, 2011:103). Similar sentiments were suggested in a recent study where teachers thought that corporal punishment was not good practice (Chibwana & Gumbo, 2014:60; Chitiyo *et al.*, 2014:1091) and in media, for instance, Mananavire (2017:1) Myzimbabwe (2016:1). Statements that are contradictory may be expected when one considers that Zimbabwe is a developing country in Africa. African cultures are often

regarded as being violent towards children (Dreikurs & Cassel, 1991:11), but this is changing because of positive discipline methods (Parenting in Africa Network, 2016:7). This is in line with the major global trend in addressing the problem of school violence by supporting the view that punishment is violence that should not be allowed in schools. Based on the above statements, endorsing a positive discipline policy seems to be too ambitious for a country that has not yet banned corporal punishment in all settings. Zimbabwe for instance, is yet to ban disciplinary violence at home.

In Zimbabwe, a new curriculum against disciplinary violence is being phased in. The curriculum seeks to nurture the learners in becoming caring persons, having various positive character traits such as tolerance, resilience and self-regulation (ZMoPSE,2015a:19). The learning environment is learner-centred, yet the curriculum framework is competency-based (ZMoPSE, 2015a:4,48). Thus, the curriculum uses a balanced approach but the information on discipline is not well articulated as already highlighted in Section 1.1. The emphasis on learning through play and the centrality of learner-centred learning, together with specified teachers' roles of acting as a co-explorer and facilitator, can be understood as acknowledging the importance of teachers' supportive roles and learner participation (ZMoPSE, 2017:30, 41). The concept of learner-centred learning is still new and may not be well understood by the teachers (Samkange, 2015:1488). Thus, teachers could be experiencing challenges in understanding the use of learners' free play time to learn and develop self-regulation skills. In a recent study which sought to find the impact of stakeholders' perceptions on free play in the ECD phase in a district in Zimbabwe by Dube (2013:491-494), showed that stakeholders (who included teachers, parents, principals and district education officers) had a limited understanding of the benefits of free play for learners' development and learning. As the researcher of this current study, I believe that 'learner-centred', 'learner-paced' as well as 'learner in control' are concepts that need to be contextually defined in the ECD phase, considering that learners have not yet developed adequate self-regulation.

According to Sibanda (2011:3), everyone in Zimbabwe needs discipline, particularly positive discipline. As already highlighted in Section 1.4.3, the information on positive discipline is scarce in Zimbabwe. Findings emerging from the research that was conducted in Zimbabwe by Mlalazi, Rembe and Shumba (2017:120-123); as well as Sibanda and Mpfu (2017:123-124), found that teachers perceived positive discipline

as guidance and counselling, rewards and punishment. Findings also showed inconsistencies between teachers' understandings of positive discipline and actual practice in the classrooms. What was observed was that parents and teachers found it difficult to act in a positive and self-regulated manner when interacting with the learners (Sibanda & Mpofu, 2017:121). This echoes the findings of the Commission of the Inquiry into Education and Training in Zimbabwe in 1999 (Nzirasanga, 1999:63), where people expressed concern about the teachers' misuse of corporal punishment, as well as the violence against children which was disguised as discipline in schools. The commission recommended that "discipline should not be merely imposed but rather treated in such a manner that it leads to self-motivated self-discipline for life" (Nzirasanga, 1999:63). This means that the fostering of intrinsically motivated self-regulation is associated with positive discipline rather than disciplinary violence. Currently the recommendations of the commission have been visibly incorporated in the new curriculum framework as well as the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) (ZMoPSE, 2016:V, VIII, 72). The recommendations are in line with the positive psychology framework, which promotes positive experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions (See Section 1.7.2).

Recently a high-profile stakeholder consultation on the alignment of the Zimbabwe Education Act [chapter 25.04] with the Zimbabwean Constitution deliberated on how discipline could best be applied in Zimbabwe (ZMoPSE, 2017:32). Among the recommendations of the deliberations were that positive discipline methods are recommended, rather than allowing the use of corporal punishment in schools (ZMoPSE, 2017:32). Also recommended were policies that prohibit unacceptable and unproductive punishment, for instance, the use of abusive language, sending learners out of the classrooms, digging holes for trees, as well as suspensions for more than a week (ZMoPSE, 2017:32-33).

The Zimbabwe Education Act [chapter 25.04] has recently been amended to align it with Section 51 and 53 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20). The purpose of the insertion in the recent Education Amendment Act 2019 was to achieve several principal objectives of the whole education system in Zimbabwe. Pertinent to the study is Section 68A in the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 (2019:4-5) on learner discipline. This section mandates school principals to "draw up a disciplinary policy for the school in accordance with standards set out in regulations



prescribed by the minister for the purpose”. Despite the emphasis on the need for use of only non-violent disciplinary practices, the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A.2b mentions that principals should prescribe the methods of administering punishment in the schools. The Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A.3 recommends that “disciplinary measures must be moderate, reasonable, and proportionate in the light of the conduct, age....and the best interest of the child shall be paramount” (Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019, 2019:5). Section 68A.5 states “that under no circumstances is a teacher allowed to beat a child”. From the above sentiments, it appears that the ban on the use of corporal punishment by teachers is clearly stated. However, it is not clear whether principals can administer corporal punishment. The Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A.3 resembles the statements highlighted in the ECD syllabus, except that the ECD syllabus clearly points out that discipline can only be achieved through logical and natural consequences, and not by punishment (ZMoESAC, 2012:8). The understanding of discipline in the ECD syllabus is that natural and logical consequences are not punishment but are a form of discipline that helps learners to learn to take responsibility for their actions. The use of consequences is complicated as it may also involve discipline that is damaging to the learners. Researchers, who have focused on learner discipline in Zimbabwe, for instance, Tshabalala, Ncube and Mapolisa (2014:7-8) and Chimhenga and Mpofu (2016:36), have discussed suspension and expulsion as consequences for serious misconducts such as gross insubordination, fighting with dangerous weapons, violence against teachers and other learners, vandalism as well as theft (Tshabalala, Ncube & Mapolisa, 2014:7-8; Chimhenga & Mpofu, 2016:36). However, research on understanding teachers’ experiences of positive discipline is scarce.

Recent studies by Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) (2015:218) show that Zimbabwe is receptive of positive discipline. In the Zimbabwean context, there is no official model of positive discipline; however, the ECD syllabus (ZMoESAC, 2012:8) and the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A.3, prescribe the use of non-punitive discipline in the form of logical and natural consequences. The importance of learning through play, teaching self-regulation with positive discipline interventions, is highlighted by Nziramasanga (1999:63), the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2017:13, 24-30, 41) and the Zimbabwe National

Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) (2015:218). In the conclusion of the study by Chimhenga and Mpofo (2016:36), the researchers recommended that teachers needed positive discipline skills which will allow them to apply discipline without the use of punishment, but positive discipline seems to be a complicated phenomenon within the context of Zimbabwe. The statement that articulates positive discipline explicitly in the Zimbabwean ECD syllabus (ZMoESAC, 2012:8) reads as follows:

*Discipline needs to be achieved not by punishment but by careful application of natural and logical consequences that are respectful in their application, clearly related to the issue at hand and reasonable (ZMoESAC 2012:8).*

The ECD syllabus indicates that teachers should apply logical and natural consequences whilst they provide a positive, gentle and supportive classroom atmosphere (ZMoESAC 2012:8). A child-centred approach to discipline is implied by the above statement. In the competency-based curriculum, the child-centred approach and learning through play are well articulated (see Section 2.6.4). The focus of this study is to understand how teachers understand and apply positive discipline to foster self-regulation skills during free play in the context described above. The participants are ECD phase teachers who received positive discipline training from an ECD trainer as part of the UNICEF funded ECD phase programmes (see Section 1.2).

### **3.3.5 Comment on practice in the selected countries**

It appears that the context of Uganda has some resemblance with the Zimbabwean context. The main commonality is the emphasis on applying consequences rather than using the events as opportunities for teaching appropriate self-regulation. However, the practical day-to-day application of discipline during free play may need to be investigated in line with fostering self-regulation. In the USA, the discipline policies of expulsion and suspension seem to be a major concern in the ECD phase, whereas it is not an issue in Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The meaning of positive discipline in the selected countries suggests that teachers should discipline learners gently in a supportive way. Teachers thus need to provide supportive discipline while also maintaining the learners' joyful experiences (LEGO Foundation, 2019:13; Rabella, 2020:2). This, however, has not been investigated in actual practice in the context of the ECD phase in Zimbabwe. The scope of the

curricula and practice in the selected countries does not seem to address the connection between the fostering of self-regulation skills and the teachers' use of positive discipline in detail. The importance of the teachers' meanings and understandings of the fostering of self-regulation skills using positive discipline methods thus have been understated in ECE literature. The following section discusses two popular branches, perspectives or domains of psychology of education from which I can understand the discipline methods that are used in ECE.

### **3.4 BRANCHES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL PRACTICE FOR UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE DISCIPLINE**

Behavioural psychology (behaviourism) and Adlerian (individual) psychology provide the basis for understanding behaviour and discipline in the ECD stage from specific theoretical orientations. The researcher decided on the two branches of psychological practice because they offer alternatives to corporal punishment, which are incorporated in the models of positive discipline methods that are discussed in this chapter. The discussion is guided by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT). The BPNT was discussed in Section 1.7.4 as part of the theoretical framework of the study. It was highlighted as the central theory of the SDT. The BPNT concerns three basic psychological needs, namely, autonomy, competence and relatedness which are assumed to be innate and universal. Within the positive psychology framework and the SDT, self-regulation and positive discipline was linked to the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs. The BPNT provides structure and attributes in the discussion below.

#### **3.4.1 Behavioural Psychology (Behaviourism)**

Behavioural psychology (behaviourism) is not merely discussed as a disciplinary method but as a means of understanding the teachers' practice of discipline and punishment with regards to the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase. In the following sub sections I describe and discuss the background and understanding of behaviourism with focus on Skinner's behaviourism and how it relates to the topic and the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness).

### 3.4.1.1 Background

Behaviourism is based on the work of John Watson (1913), recognised as the father of behaviourism (Kelland, 2017:1), and B.F. Skinner (1957). Behaviourists view psychology as a science subject, just like physics or chemistry (Watson, 1913:1, 13), therefore behaviourism is not synonymous with rewards and punishment but is a branch of psychological practice. The focus of behaviourism is on observable behaviour (Egeberg, McConney & Price, 2016:4; Radick, 2016:50; Ferguson & O'Donohue, 2015:431; Swinson & Harrop, 2012:113). Watson believed that the theoretical goal of psychology is “the prediction and control of behaviour” (Watson, 1913:1). He suggests that teachers may be able to predict as well as control the learners' behaviour without paying attention to the learners' emotional states (Ormrod, 2014:266; Payne, 2015:484; Watson, 1913:13-16). As a result, Watson (1913:13) believed dealing with states of consciousness was the work of psychiatrists.

Like Watson's ideas, Skinner focused on scientific explanations of observable behaviour (Baum, 2005:11). Skinner (1938:6) defines behaviour as “what an organism is doing or more accurately what is observed by another organism to be doing.... that part of the functioning organism which is engaged in acting upon or having commerce with the outside world”. This statement confirms that Skinnerian behaviourism focuses on observable behaviour. To a large extent, Skinner's work was conducted with animals (rats and pigeons) and not with human beings, because he believed the findings were applicable to human beings (Catania, 2003:313). Skinner's theory of learning is based on the premise that all behaviour is a result of operant conditioning, meaning that human behaviour is shaped and maintained by its consequences and the environment controls how people behave (Skinner, 1976:23-24; Machan, 1974:92). According to Skinner (2003:23), to teach in the ECD phase is to “nourish or cultivate the growing child ... or to give him intellectual exercises or to train him in the horticultural sense of directing or guiding his growth.” Thus, the focus is not on teaching formal academic skills of reading, writing and mathematics but rather to enhance psychosocial, moral, school readiness and self-regulation skills.

### 3.4.1.2 Autonomy

Skinner believes that there are no opportunities for using initiative, because an individual adjusts to a situation rather than that the situation shapes and maintains adjusted behaviour (Skinner, 1981:504). Thus, Skinner's line of thinking is that learners cannot act voluntarily or use their own initiative, because teachers help learners to acquire appropriate behaviour by showing or telling learners what to do with respect to the relevant consequences. The learners either conform to the teachers' demands of standards or choose to be punished (Skinner, 1979:2). Skinner's assertions seem quite unlikely in the context of a child-centred ECD curriculum but are consistent with some cultural beliefs that learners need to be punished (particularly corporal punishment) for them to be self-regulated. The aim is to do something about the misbehaviour rather than allowing the learners to get away with misbehaviour. Such approaches to discipline are reactive rather than proactive (Murray *et al.*, 2015:7; Sanders, 2003:134-136).

Skinner (1976:53, 61-64) denies the existence of the concept of autonomous self-regulation. He explains that the concept of autonomy overlooks the fact that reinforcements, in the form of praise, natural consequences and punishment are responsible for controlling behaviour. Karreman *et al.*, (2006:57-2) use the term "positive control" to describe limit setting involving mild to moderate power over the learners that is related to compliance. According to Skinner (1979:11), a non-punitive society or happiness that is not associated with reinforcements may not exist. Skinner explains that it is essential to identify the reinforcements that foster peace and happiness rather than violence (Skinner, 1979:11). The challenge in determining the positive reinforcements is that positive reinforcement can be misused (Skinner, 1976:39). According to Baum (2005:184), Skinner argued in favour of positive reinforcement for two reasons. Firstly, Skinner regarded positive reinforcement as being highly effective in teaching, and for shaping and maintaining behaviour. A reward is a positive reinforcer and the effects of rewards have been studied in the experiments of operant behaviour (Skinner, 1976:38). In other words, positive reinforcements control the learners' choices and actions, rather than believing that the act is the right thing to do, or is done autonomously (Skinner, 1976:25, 43). Negative reinforcement refers to aversive responses that reduce the occurrence or ends a

behaviour (Skinner, 1976:32). Example of a negative reinforcement could be teachers nagging the learners until they do a task or use threats as well as the actual use of punishment to make learners pay attention. By paying attention in class and doing what the teacher wants learners to do, learners can avoid nagging, threats as well as teachers' use of punishment. Thus, negative reinforcement is used to control learners' behaviour through aversive tactics which reduces the occurrence of unwanted behaviours in the classroom.

Ryan and Deci (2017:109-110) discuss reinforcements and behavioural theories with regards to the satisfaction of the psychological needs. What I deduce from the discussion is that the effective use of positive and negative reinforcement can facilitate vitality, social skills and well-being of the learners, that may not be solely attributed to intrinsically motivated forms of regulation. For more details about the forms of regulation, see Section 2.2.1.2. When people place priority on extrinsic rewards and punishment (threat or actual), they tend to report less autonomy, happiness, and quality of relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2008:182; Ryan & Deci, 2006:1566). There are, however, types of extrinsic motivation that can be internalised, which are consciously valued by people (See Section 2.2.1.2). The goal should be to harness self-regulatory powers from within the person (Brown & Ryan, 2015:140; Ryan & Deci, 2000:73).

### **3.4.1.3 Competence**

When it comes to learner competencies, Skinner has reservations pertaining to the use of praise and rewards in classrooms where the learners are already self-regulated. According to Skinner (1979:6), conspicuous reinforcers such as tokens or credit points which could be exchanged for some natural reinforcers are needed if the classroom is out of control. The reason for this is that Skinner believes that "success is a natural reinforcer that is always available in the classroom". Instead of using tangible rewards and punishment, teachers can use natural reinforcements that are available in the learners' context (Skinner, 1979:5), such as allowing extra minutes of free play. The problem therefore is the reckless and unrestricted use of praise, rewards and punishment which do not conform to the principles of behaviourism. As a result, Skinner (1979:4) suggests that learners should be given attention when they are behaving appropriately and not when they are misbehaving. For example, a teacher can praise or reward a learner who has demonstrated empathy towards a peer during

play to enhance the learners' competencies of the skill. However, deliberately ignoring the learners' misbehaviour, such as bullying, is likely to compromise the opportunities for laying the foundation for positive development that assists the learners in behaving better in the future. The kind of regulation that comes through rewards and punishment makes learners feel competent enough just to comply.

#### **3.4.1.4 Relatedness**

In terms of promoting relatedness, the Skinnerian behavioural approach does not embrace the use of punishments in schools. Skinner (1976:43) notes that people are responsible for their behaviour, not only in the sense that they face negative consequences for bad behaviour, but also in the sense that they receive positive consequences, for instance, when admired for achievement. A great change occurs in classrooms when teachers use positive reinforcements as alternatives to punishment (Skinner, 1979:4). Skinner associates the use of tangible reinforcers with behaviour modification (Skinner, 1979:5) rather than bribery, as believed by the critics of behaviourism (Dreikurs *et al.*, 1998:6; Nelsen *et al.*, 2016:216). He regards behaviour modification as “the first organised effort to develop alternatives to corporal punishment” (Skinner, 1979:4). Skinner (1979:5) explains that bribes are payments made to induce a person to do something that is illegal or wrong, thus Skinner believes “that those who call positive reinforcement bribery do not understand how operant conditioning works practically in classrooms” (Skinner, 1979:5). Solutions for alternatives to corporal punishment that involve the use of cooperation are likely to foster positive relationships in schools, families, communities as well as life in general (Skinner, 1979:11). Nonetheless there is recognition that the regulation attained through praise and rewards is short lived and thus cannot assist the learners in developing long-lasting positive relationships (O’Roarty, 2016:13). The use of punishment is worse than the use of praise and rewards because it leads to unintended reinforcement of misbehaviour which eventually provokes more punishment (Skinner, 1979:9). Specific application to the ECD phase is that teachers should be mindful of the need to model self-regulated behaviour.

### **3.4.2 The Adlerian Psychology**

As indicated in Section 1.4.3, the Adlerian psychology approach is quite different from behaviourism but not strictly the opposite. In the following subsections, I describe and discuss Adlerian psychology in the light of the BPNT.

#### **3.4.2.1 Background**

Adler is recognised as the founder of individual psychology because he was the first person to assume that human behaviours can be changed when the people's "beliefs and cognition system is modified" (Adler, 1998:125). Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology "explores the holistic and phenomenological orientation of human personality and behaviour, and ties personal growth and achievement to social interest" (Siedlecki, 2013:2). In using the term "individual psychology", Adler emphasises that every person is unique, based on biological as well as social attributes (Adler, 1998:124; Sindelar & Pap, 2017:77). Adler's Theory of Human Nature and Personality depicts the holistic approach to learners' problems (Siedlecki, 2013:2; Sindelar & Pap, 2017:77). The personality of the learner consists of the body, mind and the emotions. These cannot be dealt with separately but should be treated as an inseparable whole. In other words, teachers should consider the learners' emotional and physical states before applying discipline because even if it is positive discipline, it will not be effective, if the approach is not holistic. Teachers should look at both the learners and the situation at hand holistically. The biggest mistake that teachers make when dealing with learners' problem behaviour is just to deal with the symptoms such as pride, laziness, telling lies, stealing or unkindness. Adler explains that it is futile to deal only with the observable symptoms, rather look at the problem holistically to find a permanent solution to the problem (Adler, 1998:124).

#### **3.4.2.2 Autonomy**

The effective use of encouragement is viewed as the foundation of positive discipline that is based on Adlerian psychology (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:140-171; McVittie, 2003:5). A theme of positive discipline and Adlerian Psychology is that "a misbehaving child is a discouraged child" and that a powerful motivation for change is encouragement (Nelsen *et al.*, 2001:1; Nelsen *et al.*, 2016:5). The possible disadvantage pertains to the risk of errors that the teachers may make in interpreting the learners' emotions and



behaviour (Hodder Education, 2013:16). For instance, the proponents of individual psychology believe that learners misbehave when they are discouraged (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 2000:31; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:36). Consequently, at times it may be difficult for the teachers to establish whether the learners are discouraged or not. A positive psychologist, Wong (2015:179), defines encouragement as “the expression of affirmation through language or other symbolic representations to instil courage, perseverance, confidence, inspiration, or hope in a person(s) within the context of addressing a challenging situation or realising a potential”. Thus, encouragement can be associated with satisfying the learners’ need for autonomy.

### **3.4.2.3 Competence**

Encouragement offers learners the opportunity to recognise their own competencies because this promotes the development of the learners’ strengths to optimal levels (O’Roarty, 2016:13). During the ECD phase, the learners should gain enough psychosocial skills to cooperate with others (Adler, 1998:123; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:17; Oberst, 1998:156, 164). This means that they must make social and emotional adjustments that pertain to self-regulation. An appropriate example that is within the context of this study is to encourage the learners to demonstrate calmness in solving a problem when provoked, instead of a confrontation that can develop into physical fighting (O’Roarty, 2016:13-14). Adler (1998:123) observes that what is often understood as self-regulation is to be obedient to adult controlling power, that is characterised by suppressing the learners’ interests or initiatives. Findings of a study on the appropriateness of imported pedagogies to Moroccan educational culture conducted by Chafi and Elkhouzai (2017:1094), show that teachers who are authoritative find it difficult to delegate some of their powers to the learners to make their own choices. In such cases, learners do not cooperate willingly. Instead of using the term obedience, Adler suggests the phrase “independent cooperation” (Adler, 1998:123). Independent cooperation is not forced, consequently it is much more productive than mere obedience, because the learners choose to cooperate voluntarily. Learners, who grow up rigidly obedient, are likely to become unhappy and unproductive adults who have a very low self-esteem. They will not have self-regulation competencies but seek situations where they will be led, influenced, dominated or ruled by other people (Adler, 1998:123).

#### 3.4.2.4 Relatedness

Adler believed that the learners' fundamental social-emotional need is to belong and have a feeling of significance within a group (McDonald, 2013:8; Oberst, 1998:164). This requires learners to treat others and be treated with dignity, respect, care and compassion and that these requirements should not be compromised for the sake of discipline (Nelsen *et al.*, 2016:1-2). Adlerian psychology is learner centred and therefore associated with play and play-based learning in the ECD phase (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:73).

Adler believed that when children feel a sense of belonging, they will cooperate with teachers more willingly (Adler, 1998:123). The word *Germeinschaftsgefühl* is a German word which means social interest; it is used by Adler to express his view of people as social beings (Oberst, 1998:164). It is about the sense of belonging with a deep feeling that one is part of a family, classroom, school, as well as other social institutions. The learners' interest in belonging exists at birth and it may take a positive or negative direction depending on the quality of the social relationships between the learners and the significant adults in their lives (Dreikurs *et al.*, 1998:6). When the learners cooperate with the teachers or parents with a sense of free will, they feel the sense of belonging to the school or family (Adler, 1998:123). Unfortunately, some learners want to be happy and treated with dignity, but they often do not show desirable behaviour or cooperation that is needed for their own wellbeing as well as the wellbeing of others (Adler, 1998:122). An example of this in the ECD phase is the case of bullies who are happy when they bully other learners during play and expect other learners to continue playing with them, rather than stopping the bullying. Adler (1998:122) concedes that bullies often choose goals that show the "lack of social interest, social concern and caring involvement with others". This happens because of the misinterpretations of what is right and what is wrong. It is therefore understood that learners' behaviour is shaped by learners' interpretations of social interactions and their sense of self-worth (Hodder Education, 2013:15). Parents and teachers can demonstrate their love for the learners through constant encouragement towards independence (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:55). Lack of a sense of belonging or separation from others can result in discouragement, anxiety and hostility (Katużna-Wielobob, 2017:167). If learners misbehave because of discouragement, it follows that if the

motive for misbehaviour is removed, they may feel encouraged (Nelsen, et al., 2001:1). However, what counts as encouragement or discouragement is contextual, because it is the cultural context that defines a construct as a positive or negative character trait and practice (Pauwels, 2015 in Joseph, 2015:813).

### **3.5 POSITIVE DISCIPLINE MODELS WITH FOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Three models of positive discipline from Nelsen and associates, Durrant as well as Naker and Sekitoleko are defined and described. I chose the authors, because they have different backgrounds and theoretical orientations regarding positive discipline, all of which can assist in understanding positive discipline, especially in the context of Zimbabwe. The discussion below pertains to the authors' descriptions of positive discipline. The researcher studies the models in the light of the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT).

#### **3.5.1 Jane Nelsen and Associates**

Jane Nelsen is a licensed marriage, family and child therapist (Lowry, 2012:1) and the background to and description of this model of positive discipline is presented in the subsequent sections.

##### **3.5.1.1 Background**

The Positive Discipline Association (|sa|:3) explains that in the 1980s, Lynn Lott and Jane Nelsen attended a workshop facilitated by John Taylor on Adlerian psychology. After the workshop, Lott started training interns and co-produced the first training manual. Nelsen wrote a book on positive discipline and published it in 1981. Later Lott and Nelsen wrote a book entitled *Positive Discipline for Teenagers* and began to teach positive parenting. Currently there are many books on positive discipline which they have co-authored, and their training takes place in more than 50 countries. There are many certified positive discipline associates and the positive discipline model of Nelsen and associates is used in some schools in the USA, from ECD phase to high school (Positive Discipline Association, |sa|:4). Jane Nelsen and Associates framed the principles of Adler and Dreikurs within the context of positive discipline (Bear, 2009:306; Charles & Senter, 2005:112; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017:2; Nelsen *et al.*,

2016:2). According to Eist (1999:1110), Adler's line of thought was "humanistic, open minded, optimistic" and it influenced the thinking of Rudolf Dreikurs and Martin Seligman. As already highlighted in Section 2.2.1.5, Seligman is recognised as the founder of positive psychology while Dreikurs was Adler's student. Thus, the positive discipline programme of Nelsen and associates may have common features that fit with positive psychology because of Adler's teachings which influenced Dreikurs and Seligman. According to Nelsen *et al.*, (2007:5-6), learners in the ECD stage need teaching, guidance and love which is a good definition of positive discipline, because discipline at this stage teaches valuable social and life skills such as autonomy, competence and relatedness.

### **3.5.1.2 Autonomy**

In Nelsen and Associates' positive discipline model, learners are taught social and emotional skills to manage their behaviour (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:4; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017:4), rather than relying on teachers' control. Teachers satisfy the learners' need for autonomy by inviting learners to take responsibility through curiosity and asking questions, making agreements with learners rather than dictating rules, as well as validating the learners' feelings rather than telling learners how they feel when they are upset (Lowry, 2012:1; Positive Discipline Association, [sa]:4). The use of criticism, sarcasm, rewards and punishment is discouraged because of the negative side effects on the learners' autonomy (Dores, 2016:11; McVittie, 2003:5; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017:1). When considering the context of the ECD phase, using "kindness" during the disciplinary process is age appropriate (McVittie, 2003:5). The purpose of kindness is to show respect for the learners, for instance, allowing learners time for cooling off when emotionally aroused, while firmness is important to show the teachers' self-respect and mindfulness (Nelsen, 2006:17). Thus, love, firmness and kindness are necessary to satisfy the learners' needs for autonomy.

The logic behind this model of positive discipline is that teachers and learners can learn to behave with dignity, self-control and concern for others (Charles & Senter, 2005:111; Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:9). In other words, learners have the responsibility to treat everyone and all resources and equipment they use in school respectfully. On the other hand, it is difficult for teachers to automatically come up with an appropriate logical consequence for each occurrence of problem behaviour in the ECD classroom

(Nelsen, 1981:84; Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:6). However, with time, the learners develop skills and it is only then that teachers can involve the learners' participation in focusing on solutions during the disciplinary process (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:6). At this stage, developing self-regulation, autonomy and initiative are among the developmental tasks on which teachers need to focus (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:10). Nelsen's model is a disciplinary approach that is neither permissive nor punitive but instead uses internal motivation, cooperation as well as self-regulation (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:13). It is thus a model of positive discipline that teaches self-regulation skills that assist learners in using a sense of autonomy and initiative to learn life skills, respect and to cooperate with teachers and peers, as well as to solve problems (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:11).

### **3.5.1.3 Competence**

The positive discipline model of Nelsen and Associates fosters social and emotional skills to support the development of school readiness and self-regulation skills through play (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:73). Teachers are advised to take time for training learners to develop competencies associated with fostering self-regulation skills (Lowry, 2012:1; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017:4). Thus, it is important that teachers should ensure that learners understand what sharing, turn-taking, calming-down and problem-solving means. Teachers who use positive discipline do not use blame, shame and pain to gain the learners' cooperation (Nelsen, 2006:14; Positive Discipline Association, [sa]:3-4). Rather than emphasising rules and blaming children for behaving inappropriately, teachers who apply Nelsen' positive discipline model should focus on solutions instead of consequences (Nelsen *et al.*, 2016:115-120). Getting ECD phase learners involved in the disciplinary process ensures that they develop the language skills critical for identifying, expressing and managing good and bad emotions in controlled and healthy ways. Consequently, this helps reduce throwing tantrums or bottling up negative emotions. As highlighted in Section 2.2.3, learners in the ECD phase are at risk of developing a sense of guilt if teachers apply punishments. An example of using the positive discipline approach, according to Nelsen (1981:74, 86), could be to remind learners about the rule of keeping the classroom clean, and requesting them to pick up the papers in a calm voice.

#### **3.5.1.4 Relatedness**

The positive discipline model of Nelsen and associates recommends that teachers create classrooms where learners feel a sense of ownership, belonging and significance. This should be based on the teachers' genuineness of valuing learners' contributions and mutual respect (Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017:4; Positive Discipline Association, (|sa|:1). When learners feel valued, they do not feel discouraged and thereafter do not present an array of problem behaviours. Nelsen's model of positive discipline thus teaches ECD phase learners to become responsible, respectful and resourceful members of their community (Positive Discipline Association, (|sa|:1). As highlighted in this chapter, learners who do not feel a sense of belonging in the classroom get discouraged and then they misbehave. I argue that it is important for teachers to model and practise genuine kindness that is mutual, as it is an important factor in building and maintaining healthy social relationships. An example of showing respect and kindness and firmness during free play would be to allow learners to use playground equipment as soon as they start cooperating and able to demonstrate respect for others again. It may thus not be positive discipline when isolating misbehaving learners from others for the entire free play period or make them lose breaktime. This may have a negative impact on the learning of self-regulation skills during free play.

#### **3.5.2 Joan E. Durrant**

Joan Durrant is a child clinical psychologist, a professor in family social sciences at the University of Manitoba (Durrant, 2016:1; Lowry, 2012:1). In the following subsections, the background to Durrant's model and how it relates to the basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) are discussed.

##### **3.5.2.1 Background**

Positive Discipline in Everyday Parenting is a group-based parenting curriculum which was developed by Durrant and Save the Children (Durrant, 2010:13, 40-45; 2013:6; Gershoff, *et al.*, 2017:12). Durrant wrote the manual that guides teachers in positive discipline after the 2006 United Nations World Report on violence against children, which revealed the existence of high prevalence of disciplinary violence in schools (Durrant, 2010:1, 4). Among the recommendations, there is an indication that school

staff needs training and support in the use of non-violent approaches to teaching and classroom management (Durrant, 2010:1). According to Durrant (2013:24, 39), proper discipline entails respect for the child's developmental level, sensitivity to the child's needs and empathy with the child's feelings. Teachers should focus on facilitating learning, not trying to control it through punishment (Durrant, 2010:43). Positive discipline is a non-punitive approach to discipline that is respectful and age appropriate (Durrant, 2013:3). In other words, Durrant believes that positive discipline should focus on satisfying the learners' developmental needs, rather than responding to learners' behaviour through punishment.

Positive discipline is applicable to all aspects of the learners' educational, social, economic as well as psychological wellbeing, not just about responding to the misbehaviour (Durrant, 2010:40; 2013:6). The short-term objective of positive discipline in Durrant's model is to reduce the approval of physical punishment (Durrant *et al.*, 2014:112). However, Seligman (2008:4-5,16) recommends that the focus should not be on the absence of the negatives, because they hinder consideration for positive emotional engagement, purpose, positive relationships and positive accomplishments beyond the negatives.

### **3.5.2.2 Autonomy**

In Durrant's model of positive discipline, teachers need to clearly communicate their expectations, rules and boundaries that should be adhered to when learners exercise their right to active participation in learning (Durrant, 2014:3; 2014:1). Like the Nelsen and associates' model, Durrant (2013:6) believes that positive discipline in the ECD phase is about increasing the learners' autonomy and fostering skills for problem-solving. When ECD learners are punished or criticised, they may feel rejected, insecure or anxious which may lead to not developing autonomy (Durrant, 2014:3). Other learners may become withdrawn because of fear of the consequences for making mistakes (Durrant, 2014:3). Thus, such learners may not learn self-regulation during free play as they may not be actively engaged. Mistakes, misbehaviours and developmental challenges are to be viewed as "not weaknesses but springboards for learning" (Durrant, 2010:43).

### **3.5.2.3 Competence**

In Durrant's positive discipline model, teachers should capitalise on the learners' abilities, efforts, competences and talents (Durrant, 2010:43). The emphasis seems to be on recognising and building the strengths, competencies as well as the talents to assist the learners in learning and developing self-regulation. Teachers apply positive discipline by modelling and teaching learners how to solve conflicts with other learners in constructive non-violent ways (Durrant, 2014:3). The character strengths and virtues that teachers teach in the ECD stage are for instance, courtesy, non-violence, empathy, self-respect, human rights and respect for others (Durrant, 2013:6).

### **3.5.2.4 Relatedness**

In relation to satisfying the need for relatedness, Durrant (2010:40) advocates for promoting positive relationships within the school and at home. All the aspects that pertain to learners' learning and development are not isolated, but interdependent and interrelated (Durrant (2010:41-50). The understanding of positive discipline as a holistic approach to education, recognises the importance of looking at the learners' behaviour as part of the individual's development, family social relationships, as well as school and community safety. What can be deduced from Durrant's model is that positive discipline in the ECD stage is a result of the teachers' support for the development of self-regulation skills whilst addressing misbehaviour respectfully which places emphasis on the teachers' guidance and support (Durrant, 2010:40; 2013:6).

### **3.5.3 Dipak Naker and Deborah Sekitoleko**

Naker and Sekitoleko (2009) argue that the use of physical punishment has physical, psychological, behavioural and developmental consequences in learners. In physical consequences, learners can be physically harmed using punishment.

#### **3.5.3.1 Background**

The context in which Dipak Naker and Deborah Sekitoleko (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:1) worked was in Uganda where teachers face challenges in disciplining the learners without the use of corporal punishment. As a way of assisting the teachers, Naker and Sekitoleko (2009:5) wrote a handbook. *Positive Discipline: Alternatives to*



*corporal punishment*, that guides the teachers in thinking about positive discipline as an alternative to corporal punishment. The handbook offers suggestions on how these alternatives can be practised in schools. Positive discipline entails guiding the learners' behaviour by paying attention to their psychosocial development (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:27). The aim of this guide is to assist the learners in taking responsibility for making appropriate decisions as well as to understand why those decisions are in their best interests (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:27). Therefore, positive discipline in this model refers to a system that helps the learners to develop appropriate positive behaviour "which is informed by compassion and derives its vision that children need guidance not retribution" (Moore, 2015:1; Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:33). However, the main concern in the practical application of this model is that the suggested alternatives to corporal punishment are dependent on other humiliating punishments (for example, oral apology to the entire school) or physical work such as slashing grass (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:48-49).

### **3.5.3.2 Autonomy**

According to Naker and Sekitoleko (2009:33), a good school has a system that allows learners to learn acceptable social and emotional behaviour, and where the learners' mistakes are opportunities to teach rather than to punish and humiliate the learners. Positive discipline thus helps learners to learn without the fear of being punished (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:27). However, the principles of reflection (for example time-out), penalty, reparation and last resort (referral to the principal) (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:48) are punitive rather than positive, they therefore do not fit in with promoting autonomy. The use of punitive language is thus a concerning issue in the development of intrinsic regulation because as soon as teachers start using threats, disciplinary violence is suggested. The principles seem to represent some of the alternatives of corporal punishment instead of positive discipline. Among the examples, there seems to be little that focuses on supporting the learners' autonomy; for instance, the penalties of making learners do physical work like cleaning the school, withdrawing recess or playing games with the other learners, or the humiliation that could come with making a public apology in front of the whole school (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:49). These examples seem to exemplify non-professional and unacceptable responses to learners' misbehaviour (Ugandan Ministry of Education, 1997:1). A

commitment to positive discipline teaches learners that violence and forced compliance are improper ways of solving conflicts (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:29). Despite lack of practical practices that focus towards promoting autonomy, Naker and Sekitoleko (2009:30) maintain that their positive discipline model has a positive influence on learners' personalities.

### **3.5.3.3 Competence**

The skills that learners can demonstrate using Naker and Sekitoleko's (2009:30) ideas are that the learners have clear goals, believe in themselves, they are self-motivated and are willing to work hard for their goals, they trust their own judgement, they think of new ways to solve problems, and they are persistent (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:30). They learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:30).

### **3.5.3.4 Relatedness**

It is important to promote intrinsically motivated self-regulation because it makes learners feel positive about themselves and the people around them. Positive discipline is a critical component of good schools because it helps the learners feel accepted and valued as members of the school and the classroom (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:38). A good school provides learners with opportunities to develop positive relationships with teachers and other learners, and to value the contributions of other learners (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:30, 32). The school's atmosphere encourages learners to be respectful and to feel respected and valued (Moore, 2015:1; Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:36). As a result, learners have positive school experiences due to the opportunities that are available to learn self-regulation (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:30).

## **3.5.4 Discussion on the Models of Positive Discipline and Examples of Practice**

The three models confirm that theoretically and in actual teaching practice, the fostering of self-regulation is a complex process which includes many contradicting elements (Wigfield *et al.*, 2011:34). From the discussion of the models of positive discipline, corporal punishment may not be administered as a positive discipline method or as part of fostering self-regulation skills. The use of logical consequences can fall within the auspices of punitive discipline that is damaging to the learners,

though the intention may be to teach discipline. However, the use of logical consequences is unavoidable in all three models. The success of positive discipline methods requires teachers and learners to have strong self-regulation skills and act as models of how to control emotions. In other words, managing the learners' behaviour through positive discipline and fostering self-regulation, require teachers who are self-regulated, calm and mindful.

Learners who have strong self-regulation skills can cooperate wilfully because they can regulate their thoughts, emotions and behaviour instantaneously (Florez, 2011:46). As noted in Section 1.7, the positive psychology framework encourages teachers not to ignore such learners but to support learners so that the skills can develop to higher levels. Teachers should thus focus on enhancing the learners' development for autonomy, competence and relatedness even though the learners may not be presenting problem behaviour. Learners who have challenges in following instructions automatically without being coerced by teachers or peers, also demonstrate a need of support for autonomy, competence and relatedness, rather than punishment. The use of coercion and punitive discipline can result in regulation that is at the lower end of the continuum, for instance, external regulation. The goal of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline methods is the attainment of intrinsically motivated self-regulation. Learners develop not only self-regulation skills but also become mindful (Rogowski, 2011:1-2). Thus, the use of positive discipline during free play ensures that learners do not feel that they are being excessively punished, controlled, coerced or criticised. The definitions and descriptions of phenomena based on the teachers' lived experiences can help understand the complexities of what the phenomenon entails in practice in the ECD phase, there is thus a need to conduct an empirical study.

### **3.6 POSITIVE DISCIPLINE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

In the ECD phase, the programmes of positive psychology are aimed at increasing resilience and wellbeing of learners, teachers, school as well as the other stakeholders (Baker *et al.*, 2017:4). Although empirical research has been the backbone of positive psychology (Tillier, 2017:1-3), most of the research on child discipline is in parenting through positive psychology (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018:1776), thus not focusing much on school discipline. This suggests that positive parenting interventions influence the

understanding of positive discipline in ECE. There is thus a need to find insights into understanding positive discipline from positive parenting programmes using positive psychology for learners in the ECD phase.

### **3.6.1 The Influence of Positive Parenting Interventions in Early Childhood Education**

Parenting is defined as “the process of nurturing, socialising, providing for the child’s holistic growth and development” (Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2018:7). Parental roles in parenting entail managing households by making plans for children’s duties, rules, clarifying expectations of behaviour, applying consequences for problem behaviour or non-compliance, as well as encouraging good behaviour (Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2018:7). Thus, parenting is an everyday lived experience. Currently, there is increased pressure to end all forms of violence against learners because disciplinary violence is a global concern (see Section 3.3.1).

Positive discipline is a suggested cross-cultural and cross-contextual intervention in eliminating disciplinary violence in schools, homes and communities (Gallagher, 2015:10; Kwast & Laws, 2006:8; Lansford & Deater-Deckland, 2012:62; Save the Children United Kingdom, 2016:VI; UN, 2015:28). The World Council of Churches (WCC) (2017:16), which is a fellowship of 350 churches in 140 countries with an estimated membership of over one billion Christians, endorses positive discipline. The organisation has “Putting Children at the Centre” as one of their themes (WCC, 2017:9, 16). The spiritual virtues described in Galatians 5 verses 22-23 in the Christian Bible (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control) are used in encouraging positive parenting so that children grow in an atmosphere of respect, love as well as kindness (Perrin, Miller-Perrin & Song 2017:514; WCC, 2017:9, 16). Parents play a critical role in the learners’ development of self-regulation (Baker, Morawska & Mitchell, 2019:52-53).

In the context of ECE, Durrant’s positive parenting is designed as a universal primary prevention programme to reduce physical violence against children, and therefore the focus is on assisting parents to understand children’s rights principles, positive parenting, healthy child development as well as protection from violence (Durrant,

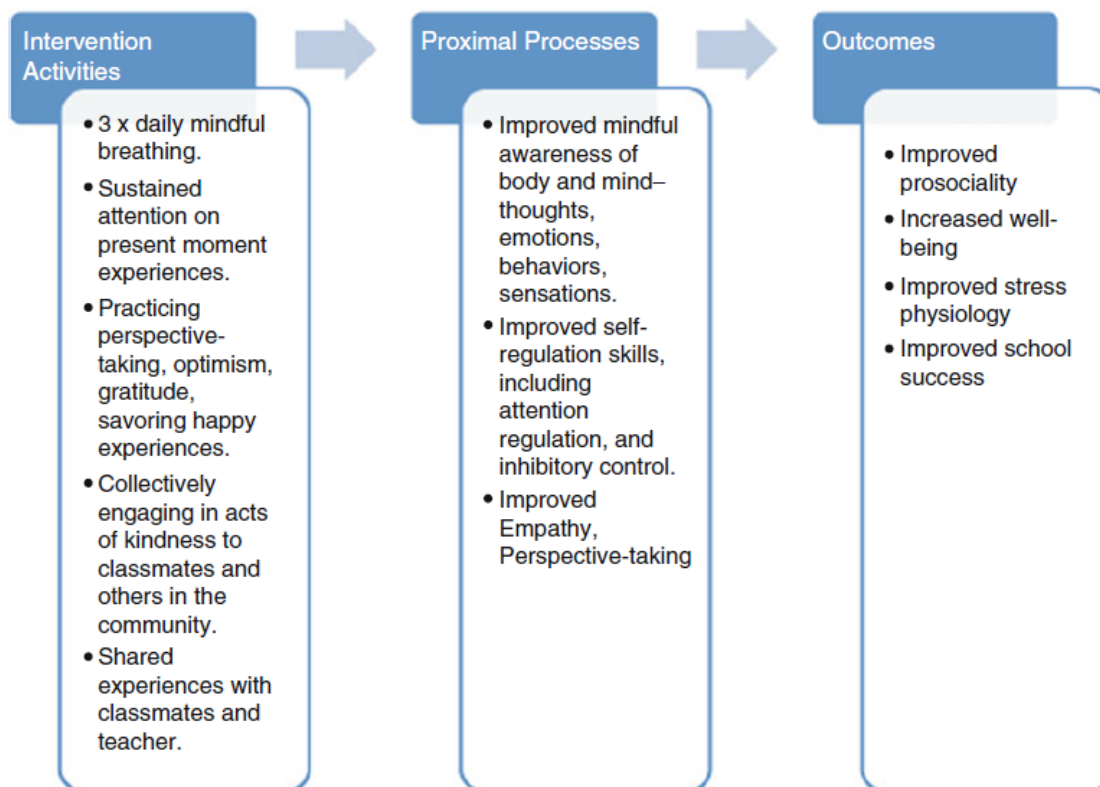
2010:1; Durrant *et al.*, 2014:112; Save the Children Fiji, 2015:18). Currently, a substantial amount of research on child discipline pertains to parents' views and positive parenting (Durrant *et al.*, 2017:523; Gershoff *et al.*, 2017:12; Grusec, Danyliuk, Kil, & O'Neill, 2017:465). The above discussion suggests that positive parenting interventions can influence the practice of positive discipline in homes, schools, churches and communities. The current situation in Zimbabwe is such that positive discipline is only confined to the school context because corporal punishment is still allowed in the home setting and there are no positive parenting programmes for ECE (see Section 3.3.4).

In positive psychology, there are specific positive parenting interventions for ECE. Positive psychology parenting interventions (PPPIs) refer to intentional activities aimed at increasing wellbeing by cultivating positive emotions, cognitions and behaviours (Baker *et al.*, 2017:4). In these programmes, the objective is to discipline in a way that teaches self-regulation through developing a sense of belonging, autonomy and competence. Positive discipline is described as "a great way to raise children who are self-regulated, creative and compassionate" (Lowry, 2012:1). Previous research findings, for instance Sanders (2003:134-136), ascertained that positive psychology parenting programmes exclusively used the behavioural approach, particularly positive reinforcement, role modelling and rewards and punishment. In contrast, recent researchers of positive discipline and positive parenting programmes associate positive discipline with the use of attaining learners' cooperation mainly through encouragement (Durrant *et al.*, 2014:110-111; Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018:1777; Meuwissen & Carlson, 2019:11-12). In this understanding, positive parenting is a non-violent and mindfulness-based parenting programme that encourages nurturing self-regulation and positive development (Lonczak, 2019:2-5; Woodhead, 2014:76). This suggests that parents should be kind and gentle but consistently firm when disciplining the learners. The non-violent methods that are recommended for both teachers and parents are for instance, turning chores into games (Klein, 2015:4), the use of reasoning and explanations as a discipline method (Lansford & Deater-Deckland, 2012:72) and the use of teacher and peer modelling (Ackerman, 2019:6). PPPIs thus encourage parents to foster self-regulation through positive discipline (Corthorn, 2018:2; Lonczak, 2019:2-5). According to Baker, *et al.*, (2017:4, 9) the inclusion of PPIs in ECE as well as the understanding of the ECD

phase as a critical educational, developmental and psychological window, should be key areas for research. While there are positive psychology parenting models proposed by Seligman (Kyriazos & Stalikas, 2018:1761,1775), little has been done to explore positive psychology discipline programmes in schools at the time when this study was conducted.

### **3.6.2 Importance of Mindfulness in Self-Regulation and Positive Discipline Programmes in Positive Psychology**

The concept of mindfulness, which the researchers of the SDT explored as an aspect aligned with the three basic psychological needs, is one of the key concepts in positive psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2008:184). Programmes that are informed by mindfulness hold potential for improvement in achieving focused attention, increased awareness of social-emotional behaviours, managing stress and behaviour, cognitive skills and resilience (Crooks *et al.*, 2020:2; Willis & Dinehart, 2014:487-499). Mindfulness is cultivated through specific training techniques with an attitude of open-heartedness, curiosity, kindness, patience, perseverance and acceptance of what unfolds during practice (Maloney, Lawlor, Schonert-Reichl & Whitehead, 2016:313). Mindfulness improves self-regulation, treating others with respect and caring for self and others (Brown & Ryan, 2003:833; Brown *et al.*, 2007:212; Maloney *et al.*, 2016:314). Mindfulness practices are theorised to enhance one's ability to observe external factors and internal reactions and reflect before taking conscious action (Alphonso *et al.*, 2019:38; Maloney *et al.*, 2016:314). Thus, mindfulness can incorporate positive discipline and the fostering of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase, within the framework of positive psychology. The MindUp programme illustrates this assertion.



Source: Maloney *et al.* (2016:317).

### Figure 3.2: The MindUp programme

The MindUp programme draws on theories from positive psychology (Crooks *et al.*, 2020:5; Maloney *et al.*, 2016:316). In positive psychology, for instance, acts of kindness and gratitude have been found to encourage and sustain the learners' sense of wellbeing and happiness. Findings of studies by Maloney *et al.* (2016:327) were that learners and teachers found the calming down activities beneficial in their learning of self-regulation skills. MindUp curriculum units, themes lessons and objectives address the learners' needs in an extended way beyond the three basic psychological needs. The learners' behaviour improved because of the intervention with most improvement noted on the executive function (Crooks *et al.*, 2020:10). The aim of mindfulness practices from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy is "to develop non-judgemental equanimity in the face of both positive and negative emotions" (Kristjánsson, 2012:97). This means that the goal is to develop self-regulation skills through positive discipline rather than punitive discipline.

### **3.6.3 What Positive Discipline could look like**

From the perspective of positive psychology, positive discipline is based on the premise of encouraging individual learners to freely choose to engage in the activities that enable the development of strengths and virtues to acquire authentic self-discipline (Conoley *et al.*, 2014:497; Seligman & Pawelski, 2003:161). The main purpose of disciplining learners in the ECD phase in line with the positive psychology theoretical framework is to assist the learners in developing self-regulation (Bear, 2011:8). Positive psychology does not disregard the worthiness of the use positive and negative reinforcements and prevention of problem behaviour in ECE, but instead encourages augmenting these practices with a focus on fostering positive traits. In the context of the school, positive discipline in the ECD phase would focus on nurturing the development of self-regulation during free play. When learners experience violent discipline, they could disengage from exploring the environment during free play. Learners in the ECD phase have limited self-regulatory skills and their behaviour can challenge the teachers' tolerance. In general, the positive discipline approach is demanding and therefore not an easy option for teachers (Klein, 2015:9-10; Wolfgang, 2009:127). According to Nelsen (2006:8) misbehaviour might get worse when positive discipline skills are first introduced. However, misbehaviour would gradually become less frequent when positive discipline is used consistently.

Research on positive discipline for the school context in positive psychology is yet to be explored (see Section 3.6.1). Available literature on positive psychology (Bear, 2011:8) highlights that unless the three basic psychological needs are met, learners might not experience self-regulation, and various other positive psychosocial outcomes that are associated with self-regulation. The use of punishment is thus not the primary disciplinary technique but used as a last resort, in combination with the non-violent positive techniques such as calming down or reasoning with the learner first before applying consequences (Bear, 2011:8). The intent of positive psychology is not to replace practices that are effective in addressing problem behaviour which would include the wise and strategic use of punishment, especially the mild forms (proximity control, verbal reprimands, taking away privileges) (Bear, 2011:9). However, positive psychology makes it explicit that punishment does not assist learners in developing self-regulation (Bear, 2011:9). Although positive psychology



presents an inspiring viewpoint of what learners may become, the contextual knowledge for understanding phenomena involving positive constructs is not well articulated in literature and gaps in knowledge have been noted in this area (Bronk *et al.*, 2013:8). Hefferon *et al.*, (2017:211) recommend qualitative research as ideal for exploring such under-researched areas.

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

Discipline in the ECD phase is not about following a branch of psychological practice such as behaviourism or Adlerian psychology. It is about addressing the learners' psychosocial needs. Satisfying the basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) as suggested in the BPNT, provides attributes and structure in the understanding of the fields of psychology and the models of positive discipline, as well as the teachers' application of positive discipline in selected countries. Based on the literature reviewed in this chapter, there is a need to discuss mindfulness as a possible basic psychological need in the ECD phase.

The commonality in the three countries was that there are instructions for teachers to support the learners' development through play activities. Also noted were contextual barriers which pertained to the non-alignment of educational policies and some suggested applications in the positive discipline models with fostering self-regulation during free play. While PPIs may inform positive discipline practice at home, there is a need to have positive discipline interventions that are specifically for the school context. Thus, there is a need to conduct an empirical study to understand the teachers' experiences. The next chapter describes research design and methodology adopted in the study to research the teachers' understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECE in Zimbabwe.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this study, I sought to understand how teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in three primary schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, in Zimbabwe. In Chapter 2 and 3, I reviewed literature pertaining to understanding positive discipline used during free play to foster self-regulation in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase. In Chapter 4, I give comprehensive details pertaining to the research design and methodological procedures. I provide readers with insights in the research design, paradigm, approach and research strategy. The methodological procedures for selecting participants, the research field, data collection and analysis are discussed. Also discussed in this chapter are procedures and strategies to ensure trustworthiness. Lastly, ethical considerations regarding the entire empirical study are discussed. In the next section, I provide the rationale for conducting the empirical study.

### **4.2 RATIONALE FOR EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

The teachers' lived experience of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, as an everyday teaching practice in the ECD phase, needed to be explored to answer the research questions. The need for the study was established through an analysis of the problem and a literature review that revealed a significant gap in literature (see Sections 1.2, 1.5, 3.3.5 & 3.6.3). The teachers' application of positive discipline during free play as a way of fostering self-regulation, was not well articulated in the literature. This is most probably due to the more regular use of quantitative research methods instead of qualitative approaches in both international and local literature (Dereli-Iman *et al.*, 2019:1494-1495; ZIMSTAT, 2015:220). The use of quantitative research methods does not reveal teachers' practical skills and professionally grounded experiential knowledge that can contribute to the understanding of teachers' use of positive discipline in the fostering of self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase. The main reason for conducting field work rather than mere desk top research was to collect qualitative data needed to fulfil the purpose of the study. The professional practice of teachers executed in their

everyday duties at school is influenced by their teacher training, as well as experiential socially and contextually constructed practical knowledge, therefore, a quantitative approach was not appropriate (Altmann, 2007:114; Leonard, 1994:58). Qualitative phenomenological research is interpretive in nature (Benner *et al.*, 2009:460; Nagata, Wu & Kim, 2017:284; Willig, 2017:276). In this study, I moved beyond discussing the themes by discussing the findings in relation to the sampling decisions and I explain my pre-understanding of the phenomenon under study, as well as the theoretical framework of the study.

Using the interpretive phenomenology method of Patricia Benner, I sought to fill gaps in understanding the participants' experiences (Benner & Chan, 2010:XX1; Benner *et al.*, 2009:XIV; Leonard, 1994:60). Benner's method is especially endorsed in the health sciences where novice researchers are encouraged to consider phenomenology when exploring a practice-based phenomenon (Pascal, Johnson, Dore & Trainor, 2010:173). According to Pascal *et al.* (2010:175) phenomenology is a science and its main "objective is direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced". When I selected Benner's interpretive phenomenology, the understanding was that the phenomenon under study was a professional skill that involved people's behaviour and ethics. A demonstration that Benner's interpretive phenomenological method has the capacity to explore peoples' actions and to examine the meaning of practices is detailed in articles by Altmann (2007:114-123), Hjelm *et al.* (2014;1-3) and Gill (2014:14-15). In these articles, Benner's interpretive phenomenology method is discussed as appropriate for studying phenomena in health and social sciences, education and administration, though it is also widely used in nursing research. The narrative accounts of the lived experiences of people filled the gap between theoretical descriptions (psychology of education) and actual manifestations of the phenomenon in practice (Benner, Hooper-Kyriakidis & Stannard, 2011:23; Terry, 2018:300).

Based on the above sentiments, research where teachers provided their detailed accounts of actual actions, thoughts and concerns, was necessary. The experiential knowledge added to the body of existing knowledge and informed policy and practice. Skilled practical knowledge that was generated from text, in line with interpretive phenomenology, was often misunderstood as a strategy of explaining, extracting or discovering theoretical meanings or concepts that are hidden behind the texts

(Altmann, 2007:114; Benner *et al.*, 2009:460) instead of understanding every day skilled practice (Benner, 1999:310). In the current study, I did not just aim to uncover meanings in the text, but to understand the participants' experiences and judgements of their everyday practices. Details pertaining to the research design are given in the following section.

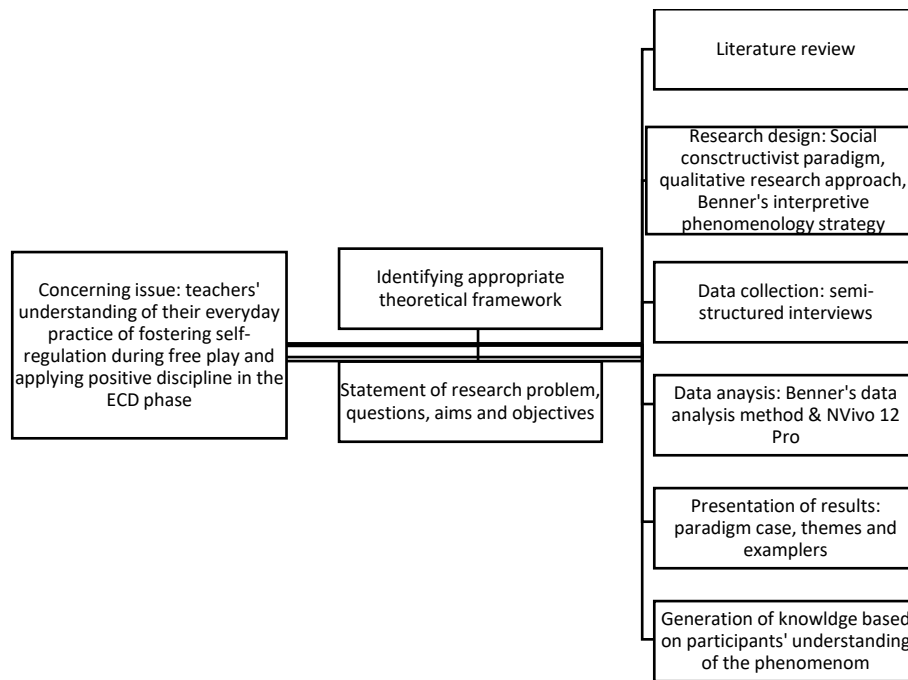
### **4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

According to Creswell (2009:5), a research design refers to “the entire process of research from conceptualising a problem to writing research questions, and data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing”. The research design directs a researcher in conducting the study, from the beginning to the end, along with the reasoning behind the procedures and methods used during the research project (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:165; Creswell, 2014:17; Kothari, 2004:8, 31-32; Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016:3). In this study, research design referred to the research processes and the steps I took to answer the research questions. The present study was designed to understand the day-to-day experiences of teachers who attended workshops on ECE topics which included self-regulation, free play and positive discipline methods.

According to Campbell and Machado (2013:573), within the qualitative approach, there are several research designs that I could have employed to understand the phenomenon under study, but I selected phenomenology. Apart from phenomenology, the qualitative research approach includes a vast range of research designs such as ethnography, grounded theory, narrative and case study (Creswell, 2014:12; Gobo, 2018:80; Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:141). Each of these designs have their own “traditions, procedures and structures that are specific to the design, including methods of data collection, analysis and report writing” (Campbell & Machado, 2013:577). In phenomenology, researchers do not study individual participants *per se*, but what a researched phenomenon looks like according to selected participants' lived experiences (Vagle, 2018:23). I decided that phenomenology was the best fit for understanding the phenomenon under study. The two main phenomenological philosophies associated with research in psychology of education are Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology. I selected Benner's interpretive phenomenology, which is informed by Heidegger's notion of the

taken-for-granted background meanings of everyday experiences (Gill, 2014:14) as the research design in this study.

Researchers in social sciences, health education and health psychology have developed various interpretive phenomenological strategies for understanding experiential skilled practice, for instance, Max van Manen and Patricia Benner's method (Norlyk & Harder, 2010:422). Benner has contributed theory and a research strategy for conducting an interpretive phenomenological research in clinical nursing practice, social sciences, management, education and other areas of research (Brykczynski & Benner, 2010:122). According to Benner *et al.* (2009:XXV), practitioners who work with vulnerable groups of people in places such as schools and homes should develop caring practices that promote positive development and protect the vulnerable from harm. Benner (1985:5-6) contends that exemplars and paradigm cases embody the meaning of everyday practice, and that by interpreting and presenting them, I can portray the participants' lived experiences. However, Benner's research strategy is not yet prominent in the field of psychology of education research, but van Manen's research strategy is important (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:97; van Manen, 2007:12). (For more details see Section 4.5.1). I needed to plan for the interpretive phenomenological study (Vagle, 2016:75). I used the graphic illustration below to explain how the research problem, research questions, worldviews, research design, approach, paradigm and methods fitted together in the study.



Source: Constructed from Benner (2012:462-464)

#### Figure 4.1: Graphic illustration of the research design of the study

Figure 4.1 above is a graphic illustration of the plan and structure of my research which began with a concerning issue and progressed through stages up to the understanding and generation of practical knowledge of the fostering of self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. My interest of understanding how ECD phase teachers described and interpreted their day-to-day experiences led to interpretive phenomenological design. The concerning issue comprised the introduction and background, researcher's pre-understanding of the phenomenon under study and a preliminary literature review. This led to the statement of the problem, research questions, aim and objectives, as well as the identification of the theoretical framework. The literature review comprised Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. The details on the empirical part are the focus of this chapter. The research design and methodology employed in this study were underpinned by the social constructivism paradigm and utilised the qualitative approach, as discussed below.

#### 4.3.1 Research Paradigm

In this section, I explain the philosophical assumptions to the readers, as advised by Taylor *et al.* (2016:12) and Vagle (2016:74). A research paradigm is concerned with "how things work, sometimes illustrated as a worldview involving shared

understandings of reality” (Brown & Duenäs, 2019:1). A paradigm is the “combination of epistemological, ontological and methodological premises,” which constitute beliefs that guide how researchers should design and conduct research (Luciani *et al.*, 2019:61-62). Kuhn (1962:176) explains that a “paradigm is what the members of a scientific community share, and conversely, a scientific community consists of men(women) who share a paradigm.” From the above explanation, a paradigm can be summarised as an established world view that guides research and practice in a field (Merriam, 1988:55; Monaheng, 2018:26; Roulston & Choi, 2018b:239). Thus, a paradigm is a theoretical way of thinking about a study, and it holds the philosophical assumptions about the nature of that specific reality. In the field of education, the paradigm is crucial in examining the methodological decisions taken in the empirical part of the study pertaining to data collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:27; Merriam, 1988:54). It was crucial in this study, because there was a need for philosophical congruence amongst various components of the research inquiry which included the paradigm, purpose, data collection and analysis, as well as the theoretical framework (Monaheng, 2018:34). Based on the research questions, aim and Benner’s interpretive phenomenology, the social constructivism paradigm underpinned the study. Phenomenological research aligns with the social constructivist paradigm (Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:143; Willig, 2019:2). Constructivism or an interpretive paradigm came about as a shift away from preoccupation with establishing ‘absolute truth’ to inquiries that embrace human interpretation and understanding (Constantino, 2012:117; Monaheng, 2018:29). Constructivists object to the reduction of human experience to a single number and raise questions about whose judgement was used to decide what data to collect, how to analyse those data, and how to interpret them (Mertens, 2018:61).

During the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, developments in the constructivist paradigm developed other paradigms which reflected varying degrees to which knowledge was socially constructed, namely social constructivism, psychological constructivism and radical constructivism (Constantino, 2012:117). It was beyond the scope of this study to discuss these various paradigms. The focus was on social constructivism. Creswell (2003:8) informs that the social constructivist paradigm came from the ideas of Mannheim, Lincoln and Guba and from the seminal work of Berger and Luckmann, entitled *The Social Construction of Reality*. In the social constructivist paradigm, the

philosophical assumption is that it is not possible to have a single objective reality of a phenomenon's description or interpretation but multiple subjective realities from the participants (Constantino, 2012:117-118; Mertens, 2018:59; Sclater, 2012:171; Whitehead, 2004:514). Researchers in social constructivism seek to understand the phenomenon under study by developing subjective meanings of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009:8; Grover, 2015:3; Staller, 2012:1159-1161) and the complexity of views (Creswell, 2007:20).

In the context of the current study, I was guided by the following assumptions that are in line with the social constructivist paradigm and Benner's interpretive phenomenological method. Benner's interpretive phenomenological supports the view that it is not enough to explain or predict scientific causes and propose theories, but rather to explore the situational context of the lived experience in search for shared meanings and differences that are socio-culturally grounded (Benner, 1985:10; 1994:123). This suggests that Benner's interpretive phenomenological research method is congruent with the social constructivist paradigm. Research in the constructivist paradigm utilises a qualitative approach and data analysis methods which are inductive (Constantino, 2012:119; Swain, 2018:5). The qualitative research approach is discussed in the next section.

### **4.3.2 Research Approach**

As previously indicated, the social constructivist paradigm is associated with the qualitative research approach because knowledge or reality is socially constructed from understanding the individual experiences of the participants in the study (Adom *et al.*, 2016:5). In the next subsections I describe the common research approaches and the qualitative research approach.

#### **4.3.2.1 Common research approaches**

Creswell (2014:12) discussed three approaches from which research can be approached as qualitative, quantitative and mixed approaches. According to Creswell (2014:3), qualitative and quantitative approaches can be viewed as representing different ends on a continuum considering that a mixed methods design can be located anywhere along the continuum. Thus, a pure qualitative research approach rigidly focuses on the participants' subjective meanings, while a pure quantitative approach



focuses on scientific experiment results that are objective. The disadvantage of using the qualitative approach is that there are limitations in the way the findings of the study can be generalised to the society at large (Creswell, 2014:203-204; Flick 2015:12). In contrast, the main assumption in quantitative research is that reality is a single, fixed and objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, observed and measured (Donley, 2012:39; Marshall & Rossman, 2016:44; Merriam, 2009:213-214). When doing quantitative research, researchers seek to explain a phenomenon with reference to a specific set of factors, hence the aim is to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of researchers and to achieve generalisable results (Creswell, 2014:4; Flick 2015:10; Kumar, 2011:103-104). While a qualitative researcher strives to understand the holistic meaning of an experience, the quantitative researcher seems to be doing the opposite. Essentially, quantitative researchers aim to produce statistical results while qualitative researchers aim to provide highly descriptive data in the form of words and/or pictures rather than numbers (Kothari, 2004:5; Kumar, 2011:104; Merriam, 2009:5; Willig, 2019:4). The main disadvantage of using quantitative research, where deep understanding of a phenomenon is sought, is that the aspects that are studied may not necessarily be the relevant aspects for participants, therefore, the context of the meanings linked to what is studied, cannot adequately address the context of the participants (Flick 2015:12). The major strengths of qualitative research are in-depth, textured data, often called thick descriptions (Kothari, 2004:5; Pistrang & Baker, 2012:6). Thick descriptions mean detailed explanations of phenomena in their social context (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:41; Grix, 2010:20). From the above discussion, it appeared that one approach was “not inherently superior to the other” (Donley, 2012:40), because they both had their advantages and disadvantages. The qualitative research approach was, however, selected because it seemed more appropriate for the study than the quantitative approach.

#### **4.3.2.2 Qualitative research approach**

Based on the background of the study and the research questions that call for contextual interpretation of teachers’ understanding and application of positive discipline in the ECD phase, the study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is grounded on assumptions of the phenomenological view of ‘life world’ as

experiences of people (Davidsen, 2013:319; Roulston, 2014:302). Merriam (1988:16; 2009:14) and Willig (2019:2) indicate that the ultimate objective in a qualitative approach is to understand and interpret the meaning that people have constructed about a phenomenon. This means having access to the teachers' subjective meanings of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, based on their understanding of their lived experiences. Subjectivity is concerned with the meanings that the participants attach to their actions, understandings or spoken words (Baronov, 2016:112; Cohen *et al.*, 2018:287; Creswell, 2014:17; Pistrang & Baker, 2012:6). Qualitative researchers seek to understand the subjective meanings through identifying the thematic features of a phenomenon and how a range of meanings come about (Flinders, 2009:641; Merriam, 2009:214). Apart from subjectivity, the consistent features in the qualitative research approach and Benner's interpretive phenomenology method are the recognition of contextual boundaries (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:807; Mertens, 2018:58) and the importance of generating knowledge for better understanding of the social or psychological processes (Willig, 2019:2). In this study, the use of the qualitative approach enabled me to generate practical knowledge for understanding how teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

### **4.3.3 Research Strategy: Phenomenology**

According to Burns and Peacock (2018:1), there are many types or strategies of phenomenological research and it is important that researchers choose a phenomenological strategy that is compatible with both them and the phenomenon under study. Based on the research aim, which sought to understand the teachers' experiences in every day taken-for-granted practices, I chose Benner's interpretive phenomenology as the research method (see Section 1.7). An overview of phenomenology as well as Benner's interpretive phenomenology are discussed in the next section.

#### **4.3.3.1 An overview of phenomenology**

Phenomenology is a philosophy, approach or a research method (Flinders, 2009:641; Priest, 2004:4; Tuohy *et al.*, 2013:17) that is common in the humanities, human sciences and arts. According to Kant (cited in Yüksel & Yildrum, 2015:3), the word

phenomenology comes from the Greek word *phainen*, which means ‘to appear’ hence the notion of phenomenology is often equated with appearance or experience (Eberle, 2014:185). In this study, phenomenology was used as a scientific research method rather than a philosophy that underpins the study (Norlyk & Harder, 2010:420; Pascal *et al.*, 2010:173). Phenomenological research presents the “chance to access darker matter” (Skea, 2016:1144). This suggests that a phenomenological method of inquiry can be used to explore a phenomenon that exists but is unclear, taken for granted or poorly explained in everyday practice. A common definition of phenomenology, as a research strategy, is that it is an approach to research that utilises the peoples’ experiences and the ‘phenomenological attitude’ to better understand a phenomenon (Hopkins *et al.*, 2017:20). A phenomenological attitude refers to consciously reflecting on the shared understandings of concepts or phenomena that people normally take for granted (Hopkins *et al.*, 2017:21). The lived experiences that are referred to in a phenomenological study are the conscious experiences (Creswell, 2007:58), which involve descriptions and interpretations of memorable thoughts, actions and emotions (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:96). It is a conscious experience that exists within a specific context. A common phenomenological proposition is that every act is directed towards something, therefore a conscious act is intentional or purposive (Benner, 1999:310; Papadopoulou & Birch, 2009:273). The distinctive feature of phenomenological research is that at the centre is the focus on the subjective experiences of the participants and what the experiences mean for the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:300-301). The understanding is that there is an individual construction of reality and a societal level construction of reality that is shared among a group of people (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:301; Finlay, 2014:121; Usher & Jackson, 2017:181).

#### **4.3.3.2 Descriptive and interpretive phenomenology**

There are two commonly discussed orientations in phenomenology as a research method, the transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology of Husserl and the hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology of Heidegger (Priest, 2004:4-6). Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a student of Edmund Husserl and moved phenomenology from a descriptive research method to interpretive philosophy (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2006:260; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011:165-169). Differences between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology are in the aims and methodological underpinnings

(Benner *et al.*, 2009:461). Consequently, the approach to research design, methodology and data analysis is distinctly different. The notion of background pre-understanding is one of the major distinctions between descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Benner, 1985:7; Diekelmann & Ironside, 2006:261). Pre-understanding is defined as a structure for being in the world which is comprised of cultural organisation and meanings that are already in place, before considering the people's historical background (Laverty, 2003:24). Consequently, my pre-understanding is not something that can be set aside or overlooked in a research design that is guided by an interpretive phenomenological strategy.

Descriptive phenomenology seeks to bracket presuppositions and try to approach something as though one has no prior experience, ideas, suppositions or expectations (Benner, 2012:462). The personal thoughts of researchers are "bracketed" (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:96). Bracketing involves setting aside values, beliefs, predispositions and taken for granted assumptions about a phenomenon to examine it more fully (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:96; Yin, 2016:333). In other words, bracketing increases the validity of data collection and data analysis as well as facilitating a level of objectivity when presenting the nature of the phenomenon under investigation (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:96). On the other hand, the interpretive phenomenological design, seeks to understand, describe, and interpret human behaviour and the meanings that participants make of their experiences, without setting aside their understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007:9; Creswell, 2014:14; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011:165-166; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:37).

Heidegger did not accept "bracketing", because he believed that prior understanding has an impact on data analysis and interpretation (Adams & van Manen, 2017:4; Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:96). Thus, the philosophy underpinning Heidegger's phenomenology is 'existential' and it is about the "respect for the social and cultural nature of being human" (Benner, 1994:XV). Heidegger thus believed that human existence is embedded in a world of meaning that originates from lived experiences referred to as "the human experience of being there" (Hennessy, 2018:26; Laverty, 2003:24) or the *Dasein* (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2011:167; Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:96). Dreyfus's (1991:13-14) commentary discusses Heidegger's fundamental analysis of *Dasein* which Heidegger calls 'being there' (Heidegger, 2001:8). Pertinent to this study is that *Dasein* is to be understood as a way of being that is characteristic of all people

or a specific individual rather than just “basic mental states and their intentionality” (Dreyfus,1991:13-14). Thus, researchers who undertake studies, using interpretive phenomenology, describe and interpret the common experiences of groups of people, such as church ministry workers, soldiers, nurses, university lecturers or teachers (Benner *et al.*, 2011:22; Willis, 2004:4).

However, because both research methodologies use the term “phenomenology” they continue to be confused (Benner *et al.*, 2009:461). Interpretive phenomenology is often misunderstood as a project to discover hidden psychosocial processes that underlie participants’ actions, or abstract structures within skilled practice or experience (Benner *et al.*, 2009:448, 461; Benner *et al.*, 2011:22; Leonard, 1994:58; Willig, 2019:3). Rather, the aim of an interpretive phenomenology is to understand the everyday practices of the participants in the contexts in which they work, moving as close as possible to how they describe and understand their habits and concerns (Benner *et al.*, 2009:461). In other words, researchers make sense of the experience by giving it a wider meaning (Willig, 2019:3).

#### 4.3.3.3 Phenomenological strategies in interpretive phenomenology

Within phenomenological research methods, I sought a suitable strategy for understanding skilled everyday practice of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline which had exploratory, qualitative and phenomenological aspects. There are various interpretive phenomenological research methods as discussed below.

Phenomenological (46 articles)	Phenomenological-hermeneutical (12 articles)	Hermeneutic-phenomenological (16 articles)	Interpretive-phenomenological (14 articles)
Benner van Manen Colaizzi Giorgi Polkinghorne Ricoeur	Benner van Manen    Ricoeur	Benner van Manen Colaizzi Giorgi Polkinghorne	Benner van Manen

Source: Norlyk & Harder (2010:422)

#### Figure 4.2: Phenomenological approaches in interpretive phenomenology

Figure 4.2 above shows that there are several terms used by interpretive phenomenological researchers categorised into four groups of methods (Norlyk &

Harder, 2010:420). The groups are phenomenological, phenomenological-hermeneutical, hermeneutical-phenomenological and interpretive phenomenological. The methods of Benner and van Manen feature in all the groups therefore suggesting that the methods are not only common, but also multifaceted, thus having the potential of being flexible and adaptable in understanding practice. I searched and read widely on phenomenology, particularly the two methods of van Manen and Benner. After reading extensively on how Benner (2012:462-464) translated Heidegger's philosophical concepts into a research methodology, I decided that Benner's method was suitable in fulfilling the aim of the study. The interpretive phenomenological assumption, according to Benner (1994:113-114) and Jorgensen and Brown-Rice, (2018:143), is that "practices and concerns are a way of being and knowing. One does not imagine that there is a greater truth behind the text." This suggests that the richest source of data for understanding the phenomenon were the participants' descriptions and interpretations of their lived experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play.

The other compelling reason for selecting Benner's method instead of van Manen's method was its openness in terms of data collection methods and that it provided for expertise of consensual validation of themes and interpretation at some point during data analysis. Benner's and van Manen's methods suggested the same methods for data collection and the use of thematic analysis in data analysis. However, van Manen's method was potentially challenging because of the emphasis on language used by the participants that necessitated findings to be presented using arts, "for example, translating key statements into a poem or using drawings or photographs to support or describe the meaning of a theme" (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018:97; van Manen, 2007:12). When using Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy, the aim is to collect data for describing and understanding actual everyday practice (Brykczynski & Benner, 2010:115-116). According to Diekelmann and Ironside (2006:262) and Terry (2018:299), Benner introduced a hermeneutic research method in nursing which viewed nursing as an interpretive practice with skills, expertise and practical knowledge. Benner's strategy brought about new dimensions that recognise experiential skilled knowledge as a way of understanding practice, research and education (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2006:262; Terry, 2018:299; Willis, 2004:2). In this study, I viewed skilled experiential knowledge as a way of understanding teaching

practice in ECE. This suggests that Benner's interpretive phenomenology strategy was the most appropriate strategy that fitted with the research problem and thus appropriate for understanding the phenomenon under study. However, this did not mean that there were no parameters set that identify with Benner's interpretive phenomenological method, as discussed in the next section.

#### **4.3.3.4 Benner's interpretive phenomenological research method**

Benner was a student of Hubert Dreyfus who was a professor in philosophy and an internationally recognised expert in interpretive phenomenological research (Benner, 1994:XIV; Willis, 2004:2). Thus, Benner's interpretive phenomenological method is influenced by Dreyfus and Heidegger. Benner's interpretive phenomenological research method is not without criticism and challenges (Darbyshire, 1994:755). Critiques of the use of Heidegger's writings mainly centre around the fact that Heidegger's intentions were not of developing a research method (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar & Dowling, 2016:1). Nonetheless, Heidegger's work was used in developing interpretive research strategies that illuminate the understanding of the participants' interpretations of lived experiences (Benner, 1994:103; 1985:5; Horrigan-Kelly *et al.*, 2016:1). This understanding forms the golden thread in data collection, analysis and interpretation. The other criticism involves the use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, as advocated in Benner's strategy (Brykczynski & Benner, 2010:115). The reliance on participants' stories or narratives gathered through interviews is susceptible to bias as people are very selective when it comes to what they tell and how they interpret what they have heard. Over 60% of people acknowledge introducing exaggerations, minimisations and omissions into the narrative accounts of events (Thiele & Young, 2016:47). Narratives are prone to bias, because researchers tend to favour and select data that supports their assumptions and convictions, while ignoring or withholding certain information (Benner *et al.*, 2011:23; Thiele & Young, 2016:46). To overcome the problem associated with the use of narrative interviews, I upheld standards of trustworthiness and ethics that were applicable in the context of the study (see Sections 4.5 and 4.6). I asked the participants to be honest when relating their experiences during the interviews.

What defined Benner's strategy in the context of this study were first-person, experience and accounts of real practice which differed from participant reports of

opinions or generalisation about practice (Brykczynski & Benner, 2010:115). During data collection and analysis, I aimed to understand the participant's detailed descriptions of their experiences, thoughts, concerns and understandings of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Considering the incorporation of Heidegger's idea of taken-for-granted background meanings, Benner's research method contributed to understanding the teachers' practices as well as the delineation of examples of practical knowledge within each of the participating schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Thus, Benner's interpretive phenomenological research method was suitable for exploring day-to-day authentic encounters which included "experiences of coping, skilled know-how, habits, practices and common meanings" (Benner, 1994:103; 2012:463; Hennessy, 2018:265). I sought to understand "situated actions and thinking in action" (Benner, 2012:462) of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

#### **4.3.3.5 My role as the researcher in this study**

When using Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy in the current study, my task was to understand "the meaning in everyday practice in such a way that they are not destroyed, distorted, decontextualized, trivialised or sentimentalised but to accurately portray lived meanings in their own terms" (Benner, 1994:123; 1985:6). Consequently, my role was to interpret the unique meanings of teachers' experiences of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. This was meant to provide the readers with enough "explicated text" to recognise the common practices and shared meaning in a situation (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2006:262). According to Adom *et al.* (2016:5), Benner (1994:118-119), as well as Usher and Jackson (2017:188-193), the craft of asking questions and writing the research report are central to the interpretive research method. The meanings of their lived experiences of the participants were derived from the data that I collected during interviews. The sharing of the research purpose, aims and main research question with the participants prior to the interview played a crucial role in ensuring that the participants' kept their experiences focused on the research topic. Based on the above, my role in the current study was not to create or propose suitable teachers' practices for fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the



ECD phase, but it was to see clearly, describe and understand the practices that were already there from the participants' perspectives. Ultimately my role was to write a thesis with enough excerpts from the participants' narratives about their practice and knowledge of the phenomenon.

#### **4.3.3.6 The role of methodological expert in the consensual validation process**

Although the calculation of inter-rater reliability has been done as part of trustworthiness or rigour in some qualitative research studies, I viewed the use of inter-coder reliability as philosophically inconsistent with the social constructivist paradigm. Furthermore, it was also inconsistent with the use of consensual validation, as suggested in Benner's interpretive phenomenology strategy. The relevance and role of a second researcher or an inter-coder in qualitative research is debatable and currently under scrutiny (DuBois, Strait & Walsh, 2018:381). A recent study by Olson *et al.*, (2016:30, 39), however, confirms that inter-coder reliability plays an important role in qualitative data analysis. It is defined as a "verification strategy" for clarifying and identifying codes from a qualitative data (Olson *et al.*, 2016:30). Benner's interpretive phenomenology requires consensus to be achieved by a team of multiple researchers through dialogue (Benner *et al.*, 2009:XXV).

The role of the team of multiple researchers in the consensual validation process was done by an independent methodological expert and myself. Expert methodological researchers in qualitative research have much experience and are highly proficient in qualitative data analysis (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004:128). It is noted that while I adhered to step-by-step procedures and guidelines in the data analysis, the methodological expert utilised analytical processes that demonstrated "an intuitive grasp to qualitative data analysis" (Benner *et al.*, 2009:461; Benner *et al.*, 2011:22; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004:128). Despite the differences, the independent methodological expert's role did not involve setting the "gold standard" or "correct coding of events" for me (DuBois *et al.*, 2018:383; Wilhelm, Gillespie Rouse, & Jones, 2018:4), but rather fulfilled the demands of the consensual validation process as suggested by Benner (2012:463) and Benner *et al.* (2009:436). This entailed both of us doing thematic analysis independently and thereafter having a face-to-face meeting to discuss the codes, themes and interpretation of findings in as far as their representativeness of what the participants said (for more details see Section 4.5.1.1).

I viewed the involvement of independent methodological expert as a reality check of my interpretation of the data set. It added dimensions in the data interpretation and prompted new ideas with new understandings to explore (Bazeley, 2009:7).

#### **4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this section I explain the interpretive phenomenological method of Benner (2012:462) as I applied it in the current study. Benner's interpretive phenomenology was appropriate for the study's design, which considered the inclusion of multiple diverse school contexts to understand varied participants' descriptions and interpretations of the practice of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. This section focuses on the research methodology, that is, the procedures and the tools that I used to arrive at the findings of the study. In qualitative research, "method" refers to the actual techniques that are used in data collection and analysis, the practical activities of research together with the justification of selecting the methods (Brown & Duenäs, 2019:5; Luciani *et al.*, 2019:62; Vagle, 2018:17). Research methodology refers to the methods and procedures used in the research process (Creswell, 2007:16,19; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:28; Laverty, 2003:28; Luciani *et al.*, 2019:62) which includes the selection of participants, data collection, access to the field, semi-structured interviews and data analysis.

##### **4.4.1 Selection of Participants**

The participants of this study were ten ECD phase teachers from three Bulawayo Metropolitan Province primary schools in Zimbabwe. The three schools that were selected were on the list of schools where the ECD trainer in the provincial office provided training and support to teachers with many aspects pertaining to teaching and learning in ECE. The ECD trainer recommended the schools because of their history of active participation in workshops and use of non-violent disciplinary practices. The ECD trainer indicated that the teachers in the schools on the list had undergone training in positive discipline methods (see Sections 1.2 & 1.9.4). The aim of sampling was to find participants for whom the research questions were significant, and who had first hand experiences of the phenomenon under study. In the next section, I present an account of the selection of the participants by describing

purposive sampling, selection criteria, context of the study and participants' biographical information.

#### **4.4.1.1 Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling and convenience sampling are generic methods used by researchers in a qualitative study. In this study, convenience sampling was not applicable because I needed to be purposeful when selecting the three participating schools and the participants. In qualitative research, purposive sampling is a method for selecting the research sites and the participants with the information that is needed for the study (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:220; Elo *et al.*, 2014:4; Rapley, 2014:50). Purposive sampling means a “deliberate process of selecting an appropriate setting and people for inquiry” (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:41). It is thus a broad term referring to selecting samples for specific purposes, therefore there are many strategies which can fall under purposive sampling. In this study, the purpose was to select participants who would have in-depth knowledge and experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Therefore, purposive sampling meant selecting participants from the schools where the ECD trainer conducted workshops on various ECD phase content including the use of positive discipline methods.

Based on the research questions, and the need to demonstrate sensitivity to the phenomenon under study (Finlay, 2014:121-125; Hopkins, Regehr & Pratt, 2017:23), I used criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling from Patton's (2002:243-244) strategies of purposive sampling. Maximum variation sampling involves selecting samples with a wide range of characteristics such as different contextual settings, gender and age groups (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:219; Patton, 2002:243). I used maximum variation sampling to ensure that the sample reflected a diverse group of participants in terms of skilled everyday experiences in different school contexts (Forero *et al.*, 2018:2). In the context of the current study, maximum variation sampling entailed teachers' experiences in classes for the deaf learners, special classes for learners with physical disabilities, classes in a Christian school and classes in a disadvantaged area. Another variation was the different age groups of the learners in the ECD phase, namely the ECD-A (age range of between 3 to 4.5 years) and ECD-B (age range of between 4 to 5.5 years). The information provided by the ECD trainer was critical in

sampling (see Section 4.4.1). Gender did not apply because all Grade ECD-A and ECD-B teachers in the schools where the ECD Trainer conducted workshops were female.

The other purposive sampling strategy was criterion sampling. According to Patton (2002:238) and Cohen *et al.*, (2018:219), the understanding behind criterion sampling is to consider only participants who meet the requirements of a predetermined criterion of importance in the research site. The reason for using criterion sampling in the study was to be sure to engage with participants who have first-hand experiences of the phenomenon under study and a qualification in teaching. The teachers should have attended workshops on positive discipline facilitated by a district trainer. The workshops done by the ECD trainer were part of the UNICEF programmes that support Early Childhood Education in Zimbabwe through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2018:58). The ECD trainer was employed by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education as a facilitator/ curriculum advisor for ECD teachers in the province. Her duties involved promoting effective delivery of the child-centred curriculum (learning through play), sourcing learning and teaching materials for teachers and learners, and teaching about child development in the ECD phase. One of the workshops focused on the importance of using non-violent teaching and learning methods during play to promote self-regulation. Positive discipline was one of her key areas of concern in the workshop because it is believed that the use of corporal punishment is not compatible with play-based learning and developing self-regulation. The ban of use of corporal punishment by teachers in schools was clear in the context of Zimbabwe (see Section 3.3.4). However, there were concerns about the teachers' practices of discipline in line with the new play-based competency-based curriculum.

Establishing a set of criteria allowed possible applicability of the findings of the research to the teachers in a wide-range of school settings. The reason for using criterion sampling and maximum variation sampling was to be sure to engage with participants who could add an important qualitative component in understanding the phenomenon. All the participants met the set criteria.

#### 4.4.1.2 Research field, sample and participants' biographical information

The number of participants in this study was ten. It was within the typical range of between 3 to 10 participants for a phenomenological study, as suggested by Creswell (2014:189). This type of sample was composed of a heterogeneous mix of settings (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:41). The varied settings were an inclusive school, a Christian school and a regular primary school in a disadvantaged area. This was important to ensure a wide range of descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon. The sample was also a criterion sample (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:41) because the participants met the criterion for participating in the study. As highlighted in Section 1.4.1, the government of Zimbabwe required schools to provide learners with two years of ECE prior to Grade 1. The selected participating schools had classes of ECD A and ECD B. The three schools were in the districts where teachers attended ECE staff development workshops which incorporated a positive discipline component. In line with the set criterion of inclusion, the principals gave me the list of names of the teachers who participated in the study. In consideration of the above, I presumed that the ECD phase teachers in the three schools could be regarded as participants who could provide the data that was needed in this study.

**Table 4.1: Participants' biographical information**

Name of participant	Way of participation in the study	Years of experience in the ECD phase	Type of school	Current grade taught	Number of learners	Teaching qualification
DA1	Interview	2	Disadvantaged	ECD A	42	DE
DA2	Interview	5	Disadvantaged	ECD A	43	DE
DB3	interview	3	Disadvantaged	ECD B	50	DE
DB4	Interview	10	Disadvantaged	ECD B	49	DE
SA5	Interview	5	Special Needs	ECD A	9	DSNE; DE
SA6	Interview	3	Special Needs	ECD A	20	BEEd; DE;
SB7	Interview	3	Special Needs	ECD B	7	BEEd; DSNE; DE

Name of participant	Way of participation in the study	Years of experience in the ECD phase	Type of school	Current grade taught	Number of learners	Teaching qualification
SB8	Interview	21	Special Needs	ECD B	19	BEd; DSNE, DE
CB9	Interview	15	Christian	ECD B	30	DE
CA10	Interview	10	Christian	ECD A	30	DE

Legend: Teaching qualifications: DE- Diploma in Education (ECD or Junior primary); DSNE- Diploma in Special Needs Education; BEd- Bachelor's Degree in Education

Table 4.1 above shows that there were ten teachers who were participants in the study. The participants consisted of ten teachers from three schools (Christian, disadvantaged and a special school) in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The participants were all qualified teachers with teaching experience ranging from 2 to 21 years. The numbers of learners in the Christian school (30) and disadvantaged school (42-50) were much higher than the stipulated teacher-learner ratio of 1:20 in an ECD phase classroom. In the next section, I discussed pre-field work and how data was collected.

#### 4.4.2 Fieldwork

Access to the research field refers to the appropriate ethical and academic practices used to gain entry to a given community for the purposes of conducting academic research (Bengry, 2018:99; Creswell, 2014:96; Jensen, 2012:1). After the approval of the research proposal, there was need to get permission from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province were not allowed to give potential researchers any information about the research site unless the person had a permission letter from the Ministry. This meant that I had to get permission from the officers in the provincial offices who were the gatekeepers of research conducted in schools. Gate keepers were individuals who assisted me in entering the research field and in determining the most suitable participants for the study (Creswell, 2014:96; Donley, 2012:40; Jensen, 2012:1). The process of acquiring the permission letter consisted of a written application and attachments which included the copy of the proof of registration at UNISA. This was followed by an interrogation of the topic and research problem by

the officers at the provincial offices. I found this stage of the research process crucial. The interaction with the provincial officer ascertained that the research topic was a concerning issue that warranted research in the province (see Section 1.2). Learner discipline was a perpetual issue where solutions were being sought therefore the research on the teachers' application of positive discipline during free play to foster self-regulation was within the research interests of the province. Upon receipt of the permission letter (see Appendix C), the provincial officer referred me to the district ECD trainer who gave me information about schools and districts in the province. I applied the recommendations of the ECD trainer during sampling. Thus, the gatekeepers helped me to get the necessary permission and information that assisted me in selecting the participating schools. The permission letter was one of the requirements of the ethical clearance application at UNISA. Following the guidelines and procedures approved by the Research Ethical Clearance Committee at UNISA was essential to ensure that I did not cause harm to the participants' psychological, physical and/or professional welfare (Jensen, 2012:2). The ethical clearance certificate is attached as Appendix A.

The other permission that I sought was the permission from the principals. This was done prior to the interviews. I phoned each principal of the participating schools to determine whether they were willing to let their teachers participate in the study. Upon granting me permission over the phone, I made appointments with each principal and took the permission letter from the province and the permission letters requesting permission to conduct research at the schools. I asked the principals to read the letters and provided clarifications where needed. The principals signed the permission letters as proof of granting informed permission. The letter is attached as Appendix D. The principals told me that they would decide about interviews after consultations with the teachers in charge of the ECD phase and teachers.

The interviews were done during the third term in 2019. It was a very busy term in Zimbabwean primary schools because it was the time for the Grade 7 National Examinations which took place yearly in October. The time that the schools allowed me to conduct the empirical study was soon after the examinations. After the exams, the ECD phase teachers concentrated on preparations for parent consultations, graduation of learners, speech and prize giving ceremonies, farewell parties or trips, as well as Christmas parties. As the ECD phase teachers and learners were preparing

for the occasions, the schools would only allow me to conduct one interview per participant. In addition, I only got the opportunity to meet the participants on the day of the interviews.

What worried me mostly was not being able to gather enough data for the study since the schools would not afford to give me follow up interview slots. What consoled me was that the principals had indicated that I could make follow up interviews by arrangement with individual participants, outside school hours. Although the principals felt that the timing of the interviews was not suitable, I experienced it as the most appropriate time as teachers reflected on levels of the psychosocial development of their current learners from the beginning of the year up to the last term, as well as focusing on their future development, particularly the learners' preparedness for formal learning in Grade 1. According to Tracy (2010:841), it is important to collect data that "will provide for and substantiate meaningful and significant claims".

The informed consent process was done prior to starting the interview process as required in the guidelines of research ethics at UNISA (see Appendix A). It was the procedure for describing and explaining the research study to potential participants and providing them with the opportunity to make autonomous and informed decisions regarding participation in the study (Kumar, 2011:220; Marczyk *et al.*, 2015:245-253; Roulston & Choi, 2018b:238; Merriam, 2009:162). Informed consent gave details of the research topic, the questions and aims of the study, purpose and benefits. The potential benefits of taking part in this study were to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to learner discipline in the ECD phase. Consequently, the insights gained from the study could help to better understand learner discipline processes that addressed the developmental needs of learners in the ECD phase, particularly with regards to fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. It was hoped that the knowledge gained from the study formed part of the solution for disciplinary problems in schools. There were no financial or other incentives presented to the participant, the learners, the principal or the school. Consent for participation was freely given. I also informed participants that there were no penalties or any need to give reasons for not giving consent or withdrawing the previously given consent at any point in the study.



I emphasised ethical procedures pertaining to confidentiality, anonymity and privacy to the principals and the participants. I answered the participants' questions during the informed consent process. This took a lot of time because the consent form was detailed and lengthy. Some participants raised concerns about the signing of the declaration because they perceived the writing of their names and signature as a contradiction to the use of pseudonyms to protect their right to anonymity. I assured participants that the signed consent forms were going to be kept confidential as written in the consent forms. I also assured the participants that they could phone or email my supervisor for more clarity on the procedure as well as any issue of concern, pertaining to the study. One participant, after reading the interview guide asked me not to ask the lead question, but only the specific questions and probes. At that point some thoughts came to my mind that maybe the participant felt obliged to participate in the study because she was a civil servant. Marshall and Rossman (2016:57) note that in some cases, civil servants face consequences for declining to participate in a research study and thus cannot withdraw their participation at any given point. However, the participant's concern was that she left the learners unsupervised. I decided not to persuade the participant to answer the lead question. This was also an ethical consideration because I respected the participant's decision in terms of their rights to participate in the study. In Section 4.6, I offer further details about anonymity, freedom to withdraw, protection from harm, as well as feedback and dissemination of results.

#### **4.4.3 Semi-Structured Face-To-Face Interviews**

As suggested by Benner (1994:118-119) and Gill (2014:), I accessed the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon through using face-to-face interviews in the participants' natural settings. The data collection strategy entailed the use of audiotaped semi-structured interviews with ten ECD phase teachers from three primary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, in Zimbabwe. I used a voice recorder to record the interviews. The reason for using a recording device was to capture the data precisely rather than taking written notes. The actual time that I spent with each participant was between 70 minutes and 130 minutes because the informed consent processes had to be done immediately before the interviews. Using semi-structured interviews allowed me to focus on the research questions, as well as to use

the interview guide with the lead question, specific questions and probes (Forero *et al.*, 2018:2). I did not write observational notes or field notes.

Interviews and open-ended questions are a requirement when using Benner's interpretive phenomenology method (Benner, 1994:110; Benner *et al.*, 2009:436). Interviews were suitable for generating data in research that was underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm and the qualitative approach, where the aim was to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the participants (Constantino, 2012:119; Creswell, 2014:14; Moustakas 2011:103-119). Taylor *et al.*, 2016:106). Semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to freely describe and reflect on their own experiences in an unstructured way. In this study, semi-structured meant that the questions on the interview guide were re-phrased according to the participants responses (Yin, 2016:147). As suggested by Terry (2018:300), I listened carefully to the participants' narratives without interrupting the participants; as a result, some of the narratives and descriptions of actual experiences were lengthy.

Each interview started with establishing rapport, mainly extending appreciation for the participant's voluntary participation and acknowledging her contribution to the study. I explained how the audio recorded information would be kept confidential and safe. The right to withdraw from participation was re-emphasised. Participants were asked to communicate any inconvenience or discomfort during the interview. All the interviews were held in offices in the schools. In the disadvantaged school, interviews were held in the principal's office and deputy principal's office. In the Christian school the interviews took place in principal's office and in the special school the interviews were held in the head of department's office. I tried to make participants feel comfortable.

I designed an interview guide (see Appendix F) with probes. This required me to have a good idea of what the interview would entail before engaging in fieldwork. When it came to the actual interviews, I was able to focus more on what the participants were saying because of having thought about the questions and challenges I might encounter, thus I could handle the interviews more confidently.

The lead or first interview question was, "How would you describe your experience of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase? I asked the lead open ended question

because it was important for the participants to reflect and recall their experience of the phenomenon holistically, with as little prompting as possible. The lead question was followed by open-ended questions that were likely to elicit descriptive narratives of experiences of the phenomenon under study (Roulston & Choi in Flick, 2018b:233; Sohn, Thomas, Greenberg & Pollio, 2017:133). By asking participants to explain what they meant, I was trying to expose what the participants may have taken for granted or were unable to articulate (Taylor *et al.*, 2016:124). All the face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, but teachers were given latitude to respond, make comments or ask questions in the language they were comfortable with, such as IsiNdebele, which was the home language of the schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. I stressed that all responses were valuable and there were no incorrect answers.

I avoided researcher bias by following the participants' lead to the relevant factors that were associated with the research question, instead of directly leading the participants to discuss the elements of the BPNT (autonomy, competence and relatedness). Given the situation that follow up interviews were unlikely, I developed greater understanding of the participants' practices through rephrasing the questions and seeking clarification and additional information about the response to the lead question. The data collected during the interviews yielded paradigm cases, thematic findings and exemplars that were necessary in addressing the research questions.

#### **4.4.4 Overview of Data Analysis and Benner's Interpretive Phenomenology**

##### **Data Analysis**

In general, analysis is a scientific activity that is carried out with objectivity, rigour and attention to detail, whereas, interpretation illuminates interesting parts which are associated with arts and humanities (Willig, 2017:276). Data analysis is defined as "the information conceptualisation process, with the goal to determine research themes that give a voice to the lived experiences" (Friese, 2019:1-2; Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:144; Neale, 2016:1097). There are different goals of data interpretation (Willig, 2017:283). In this study, I was concerned with understanding the narratives of the participants. The aim was not only to understand the participants' lived experience but also to generate knowledge for teaching practice, based on those lived experiences, with much focus on addressing the research problem (Leonard,

1994:58). Regarding the above sentiments, Benner's interpretive data analysis method demonstrated trustworthiness while simultaneously exposing the phenomenon for what it was and meant in daily practice of the participants. Analysis, interpretation and representation are inseparable in qualitative research (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007:235), and therefore in this study I did not separate them.

Qualitative data analysis in research that is underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm is usually carried out inductively from the data collected (Adom *et al.*, 2016:6; Cohen *et al.*, 2018:643- 645). The research themes needed to be linked to the purpose of the study and research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006:10; Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:144). The interpretive phenomenological data analysis method suggested in Benner's research method is in line with the qualitative approach and the social constructivist paradigm; however, paradigm case analysis strategy and producing a consensually validated interpretation that is agreed upon by multiple researchers, are some of the identifying marks (Benner *et al.*, 2009:XXV). Three discovery and representational strategies typically used in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method were used in data analysis and interpretation, namely, paradigm cases, thematic analysis and exemplars. This comprised initial presentation and interpretation of data using the paradigm case data analysis strategy. The second phase was thematic analysis. This procedure involved repeated examination of the data set with the aim of understanding the participants' actions, meanings and concerns. According to Benner (2012:463), to minimise researcher bias, an interpretive team is recommended for consensual validation of interpretations of the text. The interpretive team in this study involved the methodological expert and myself. For more details on the process of consensual validation see Section 4.5.1. The meaning of paradigm case, thematic analysis, exemplars are given below.

#### **i. Paradigm case**

A paradigm case is a "a particularly vibrant example of practice that stands out from other examples when one is considering the whole text of an interview or a group of interviews" (Benner *et al.*, 2009:446). A paradigm case is a "marker case" because it stands out with a pattern of meaning (Terry, 2018:299). Benner (1994:118) defines a paradigm case as strong instances of particular patterns of concerns, ways of being in the world, or ways of working out a practice." Paradigm cases are strong examples of practice that substantially influence the understanding and interpretation of the

practice (Benner *et al.*, 2009:44700. In other words, a paradigm case is a real example that intensely articulates the teachers' concerns and practical knowledge of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. In this study, the narrative of participant SB8 was regarded as the paradigm case in showing important practical aspects of the phenomenon under study. The narrative stood out for me as a way of understanding what it means to foster self-regulation in a competency-based play-based curriculum.

In this study, the paradigm case, narrated by SB8, helped me to represent and interpret data on the first level of data analysis. The main difference between paradigm cases and themes is that a paradigm case is perceived as a broad understanding of the phenomenon, whereas a theme is a descriptive statement of part of the broad understanding of a phenomenon. Thus, the value of the paradigm case analysis was equivalent to the three themes that represent understanding of the whole data set. The limitation in using paradigm analysis was that the narrative of SB8 was the focal point hence much reference was made to SB8's narratives. To address this bias, I used the paradigm case to recognise similarities, differences and concerns in other cases (Gill, 2014:15). Thus, inputs from other participants were represented in the findings and discussion.

## **ii. Thematic analysis**

Generally, a theme is used to describe some elements of what data constitutes but it can also describe an "integrating, relational idea from data" (Bazeley, 2009:6). A theme is thus an 'abstract entity' that describes and interprets the participants' shared experiences (Beck, 2003:232; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:8). Thematic analysis is analysis of documents or any qualitative material, such as interview transcripts, using a manual or computer-assisted technique to explore core patterns or themes (Roberts, Dowell & Nie, 2019:4; Wang, Wang & Khalil, 2018:230). It is a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006:7). Benner (2012:463) defines thematic analysis as a qualitative data analysis process whereby a researcher closely examines the transcribed interview texts, applies codes and develops themes. The analysis is called thematic, because patterns, stances or concerns with relevance to the research question, theoretical framework and research context are considered (Conroy, 2003:37). Themes are used to report findings from a

study (Bazeley, 2009:7). In other words, themes are used to describe and interpret data.

According to Benner (1994:116-123), an inductive as well as iterative step-by-step thematic analysis of all transcripts must be carried out. By being an iterative process, it means that the steps of thematic analysis are not carried out in a linear progression but there are forward and backward movements between the steps and comparison of codes of transcripts in relation to the whole data set. In interpretive phenomenological studies, the movement is called the 'hermeneutic circle'. According to Heidegger (1927 cited in Whitehead, 2004:513), the "hermeneutic circle is a metaphor for describing the analytic movement between the whole and the part, in which each gives meaning". Benner (2012:462-463) uses the phrase "propitious way" when describing how researchers should utilise the hermeneutic circle as the core activity in interpretive phenomenology. Thus, thematic analysis increases the depth of engagement with and the understanding of the texts (Diekelmann & Ironside, 2006:261; Lavery, 2003:24; Wang *et al.*, 2018:204). In this study, thematic analysis helped me to understand, describe and interpret the phenomenon under study.

### **iii. Exemplars**

Exemplars augment the themes and paradigm cases because they illustrate common patterns of meaning, common situations, and embodied skilled knowledge (Benner, 2012:463-464; Conroy, 2003:55). As suggested by Benner (1994:118-119), I endeavoured to give the readers adequate textual evidence using exemplars. In other words, the readers of the interpretation should understand the 'practical worlds being articulated' as practical knowledge, rather than thinking that there could be a greater truth behind the text (Benner, 2012:463). In this study, the exemplars constituted the crucial part of the analysis because they assisted me in presenting the interpretation in a way that portrayed the participants' experiences and meanings of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase (see Benner, 2012:462; Gill, 2014:15). They helped me to show the commonalities and differences in participants' practices, incongruencies and concerns.

#### **4.4.5 The Procedures of Data Analysis Adhered to during the Present Research**

In line with Benner's interpretive phenomenological method, multiple stages of interpretation are recommended for achieving unbiased understanding of the

phenomenon under study (Benner, 1999:311). In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, data findings are presented, described, discussed and interpreted. The interpretive data analysis involved the identification and use of paradigm cases, interpretive themes and exemplars, as suggested in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method (Benner, 2012:463). It was a requirement of the study's research design that I stayed close to the data and there was no need to prove causal effects during data analysis (Benner, 1994:116-123; Benner, 2012:463; Roberts *et al.*, 2019:4). However, it is important to note that each qualitative data analysis that utilises Benner's interpretive phenomenological method is not prescriptive but uniquely designed (Benner, 1994:110; Benner *et al.*, 2009:436). In this study, the preliminary stage of data analysis was during the interviews as I asked questions that sought to verify understanding of participants' descriptions and interpretations (see Section 4.4.3). The data were unstructured hence my use of NVivo 12 Pro made the process of data analysis manageable. The data analysis steps were discussed in Section 4.4.4. Interpretation in a study that is influenced by Heidegger's hermeneutic circle focuses on the phenomenon under study, reflections on the researchers' pre-understandings of the topic and an iterative process which entails moving back and forth between individual transcripts and all the transcripts, as well as moving back between the literature review and all transcripts (Benner, 1994:118; Roulston, 2014:302).

As already stated, the research paradigm was social constructivist while the approach was qualitative. In line with the social constructivism paradigm no single interpretation was taken as representing the phenomenon under study because there were multiple understandings (Roulston, 2014:308). So, in this study, I used Benner's strategy because it provided the means for understanding how teachers make sense of their experiences (see Creswell, 2007:57; 2014:66). The next section discusses how the data were prepared for analysis, the procedures and programmes used in data analysis, as well as data storage.

#### **4.4.5.1 Preparation of the data**

I transcribed the semi-structured interviews word-by-word. Generally, a transcription is a written copy of an audio recording (Donley, 2012:45). It is a simple but demanding technical procedure of representing the audio recorded data in written form (Sutton & Austin, 2015:227). A transcript is the outcome of the process of transcribing (Kowal &

O'Connell, 2014:67; Sutton & Austin, 2015:227) and must be done in accordance with the requirements of the research design (Neale, 2016:1097; Roulston, 2014:300). In interpretive phenomenology, transcription is regarded as an "interpretive act" (Bailey, 2008:127-130). As transcription was regarded as part of data interpretation in this interpretive phenomenological study, I opted to do the transcription personally rather than seek professional service providers. This allowed me to be acquainted with the data in its totality as well as to ensure transcript accuracy (Tracy, 2010:841).

In the context of the current study, capturing the verbal detailed descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon under study using accurate quotes was required. A tradition associated with data preparation in phenomenological studies is to reduce data by eliminating repetitive statements and data that is irrelevant to the phenomenon under study (Bailey, 2008:127; Kowal & O'Connell, 2014:67; Roulston, 2014:304; Sohn *et al.*, 2017:133). The process for data cleaning entailed the removal of repetitions and false starts as well as the extra linguistic utterances, for instance, laughter and words such as "um". This was done to comply with required consistency recommended for transcription in a phenomenological study, without loss of fidelity to the phenomenon under study (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:645; Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:141). Thus, the transcripts comprised relevant quotations of the teachers' experiences of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in ECE. The last procedure in transcription was de-identification. Before uploading the transcripts on NVivo 12 Pro, it was necessary to anonymise names of participants, schools and significant events or any other information that could lead to the identification of the participants or their schools (Archer, Jansen van Vuuren & van der Walt, 2017:1; Sutton & Austin, 2015:228).

#### **4.4.5.2 The use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS)**

According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013:4) and Friese, Soratto and Pires (2018:7), the acronym 'CAQDAS' stands for Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis and refers the software that is designed to help researchers to do qualitative data analysis. CAQDAS originated in the 1980s in Germany, Australia and North America (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013:4). There are many different types of software analysis programmes that are regarded as CAQDAS but in this study the focus is on Atlas.ti that was used by the independent methodological expert and NVivo that was used by me during data



analysis. Atlas.ti was developed as part of the ATLAS project between 1989 and 1992, at the Technical University of Berlin, Germany (Friese et al., 2018:7). The acronym Atlas.ti stands for *Archiv Für Technik, Lebenswelt and Alltagssprache* meaning Archive for Technology, the Life world and everyday language, 'ti' stands for text interpretation" (Friese et al., 2018:11). Atlas.ti can be used with any type of qualitative research (Archer et al., 2017:l; Friese et al., 2018:7). The history of NVivo began in 1981 as NUD\*IST which stands for 'Non-numeric, Unstructured Data\* Indexing, Searching, Theorising or Theory-building' software which was developed by Tom and Lyn Richards at La Trobe University in Australia (Bringer, Brackenridge & Johnston, 2006:3; Richards, 2002:199; Silver & Bulloch, 2018:1). Qualitative Research Solutions International (QSR International) took up the project of developing the programme into what is currently known as NVivo (Dollah & Abduh, 2017:61). The name NVivo was first used by QSR stands for NUD\*IST VIVO (Bringer et al., 2006:3).

The developers of the qualitative data software programmes sought to facilitate data management and to promote trustworthiness in qualitative research. The trustworthiness of the results of the study depends on the skill of researchers to use the software to effectively execute the steps required in the research design (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013:6). The danger for novice researchers or the first-time users of CAQDAS is that they can make mistakes without realising that they have done so, thus, raising ethical concerns about the credibility and dependability of the study. To address the ethical concerns, I did a NVivo online course which assisted me with technical skills on how to store, locate and retrieve data when carrying out the data analysis steps in this study. Atlas.ti has been used in a study that uses Benner's interpretive phenomenological method for data management during analysis and interpretation (Benner et al., 2009:461-462). A recent study by Dollah and Abduh (2017:61-63) confirms that NVivo assists qualitative researchers in managing data efficiently during data analysis, for instance in doing thematic analysis. However, no computer software programme by itself can do qualitative data analysis but it assists researchers in systematising and accomplishing the data analytic process (Palmberger & Gingrich, 2014:95), thus performing all retrievals relatively quickly (Gibbs, 2014:291; QSR International, 2019b:1). In this study, CAQDAS did not impose the analytic method, but supported me in organising and managing the analytic process, as required in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method.

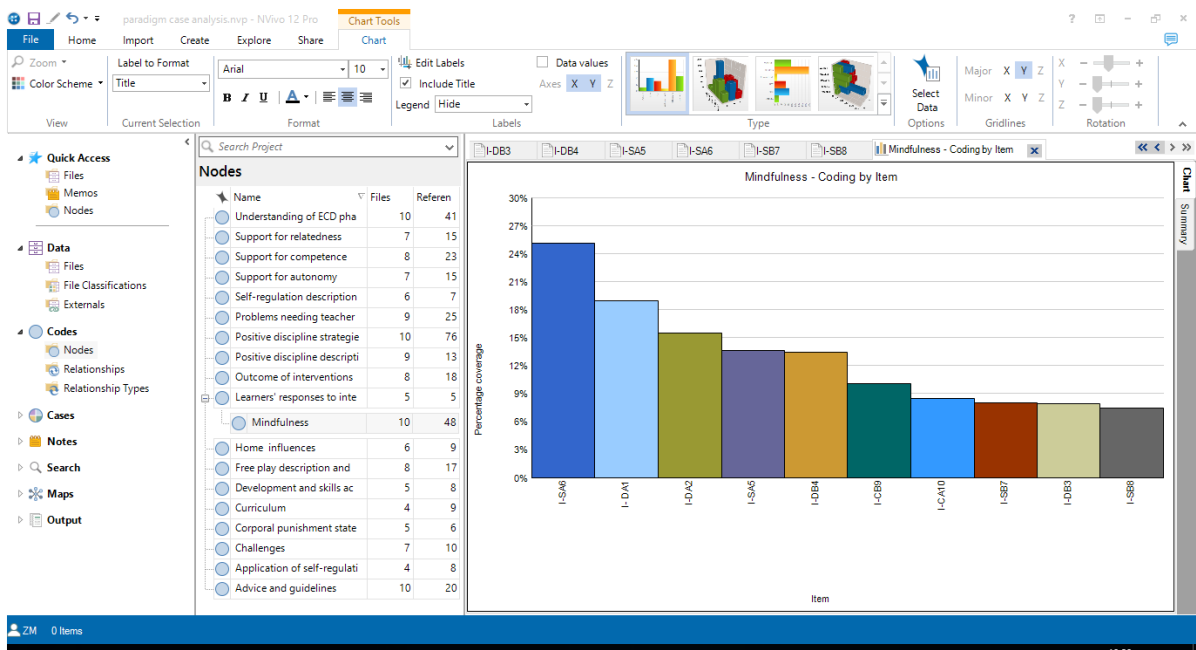
Current research findings such as Paulus, Pope, Woolf and Silver (2019:1) as well as Paulus, Woods, Atkins and Macklin (2017:35), show that researchers do not give details on how they utilise CAQDAS in research, other than naming the programme. The software can be used for many analytic tasks, but researchers only use CAQDAS for data management and coding, not necessarily for presentation and visualisation of the findings. In a recent review on the use of Atlas.ti in research, Paulus and Lester (2016:405) demonstrate nine different analytic tasks in their research. Findings from studies by Humble (2015:12-13) and Roberts, Breen and Symes, (2013:279), suggest that the teaching of CAQDAS should be a component of qualitative research methods content for universities. In addition, Silver and Rivers (2016:593) and Woods, Macklin, and Lewis (2016:385) believe that the researchers' understanding of their research design and methodology is essential for successful use of CAQDAS for managing the data analysis steps during coding, presentation and interpretation. Coding refers to the identification and classification of interesting features in data, of events in discrete categories and the labelling of these categories, (Kowal & O'Connell, 2014:67; Creswell, 2014:241; Neale, 2016:1099). In qualitative research, a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolises or translates data and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, assertion or proposition development, and other analytic processes (Saldaña, 2016:4). NVivo and Atlas.ti assist researchers in generating codes and categories as well as in searching for themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes for the data set quickly and efficiently (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:650; Friese, 2019:1-2).

As suggested by Nowell *et al.* (2017:5), I transcribed the interviews on to a Microsoft Word document which could be exported to NVivo 12 Pro. I imported the transcripts to NVivo 12 Pro which allowed me to execute the data analysis process proficiently (QSR International, 2019b:1). I sent the same transcripts to the independent methodological expert who used Atlas.ti for coding and thematic analysis.

NVivo 12 Pro software allowed me to maintain simultaneous access to the whole data set and the direct concrete narratives of participants' practices of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Thus, retrieval functions of the software programme allowed me prolonged engagement with data with much ease as the functions enabled me to display and work on the selected

excerpts and transcripts alongside each other. NVivo 12 Pro software made data organisation and the coding process much easier but I needed to make decisions and needed inputs that facilitated the generation of codes (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:46; Friese, 2019:1-2; Hwang, 2008:521).

Beck (2003:232) and Vagle (2016:98) appreciate the merits of using CAQDAS but at the same time appear concerned about producing findings that are mechanistic rather than genuinely embodied. This could be a genuine concern where a researcher is using auto coding. In such cases, the programme just picks the frequently-used concepts without much reference to the meanings that participants attach to the phenomenon under study. As a result, many researchers are unsure about the efficacy of arriving at credible results when using of CAQDAS in the empirical study (Paulus & Lester, 2016:405). I overlooked the concerns and used NVivo 12 Pro. The main task in data analysis was coding of data and to engage in an iterative process of moving from the parts back to the whole texts to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study (Benner, 1994:116-123). The functions in NVivo 12 Pro allowed me not only to carry out the iterative process but also to check for commonalities, incongruences and repeated unifying concerns rather than the simple use of primary units of analysis such as words or phrases. CAQDAS software made the iterative process, restructuring and reorganising coding possible without starting from the beginning because the software allowed retrievals and restructuring to be done easily and quickly when making decisions in relation to the interpretation (Evans & O' Connor, 2017:4; Friese *et al.*, 2018:7). Using CAQDAS enabled me to retrieve the segments of the texts in their original context while simultaneously focusing on the interpretive task at hand (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:46). This could have been very difficult, disorganised, time consuming and demanding when using manual methods (Evans & O' Connor, 2017:4, Neale, 2016:1100). This means that much of my time would be spent in trying to organise data rather than using the NVivo 12 Pro software programme for data analysis and interpretation efficiently (Adu, 2016:2-3; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013:3). Screenshots assist researchers in showing how NVivo was used in data analysis (Bringer *et al.*, 2006:15).

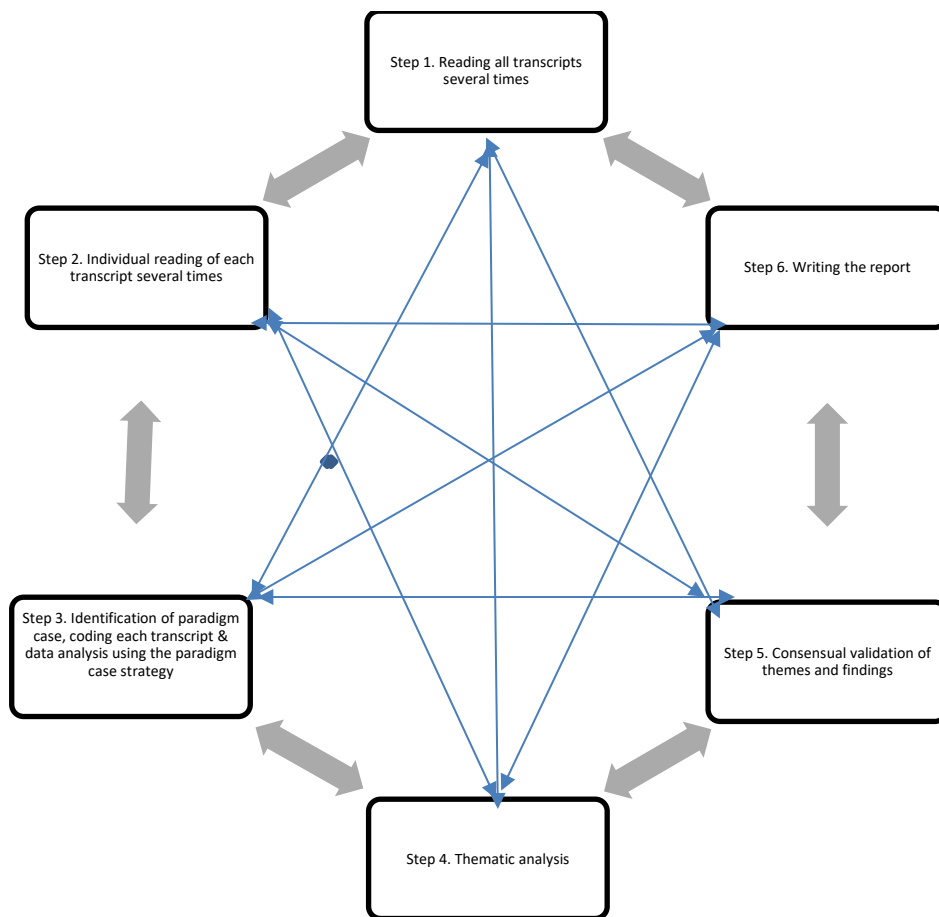


**Figure 4.3: Screenshot showing coding by item: Mindfulness**

Figure 4.3 shows a screenshot indicating coding during data analysis. The information on the screenshot shows how mindfulness is a cross-cutting node. Interpretations can be drawn from the data presented in the screenshot. In the next section, I describe the data analysis steps.

#### 4.4.5.3 Data analysis steps

The main steps involved in Benner’s interpretive phenomenological data analysis (Benner, 1994:99-127; 2012:462-464) discussed in this section, incorporated the use of NVivo Pro. The descriptions of the steps and the explanation of how the NVivo Pro software programme was utilised to augment the steps in Benner’s interpretive phenomenological design, are shown in Figure 4.4 below.



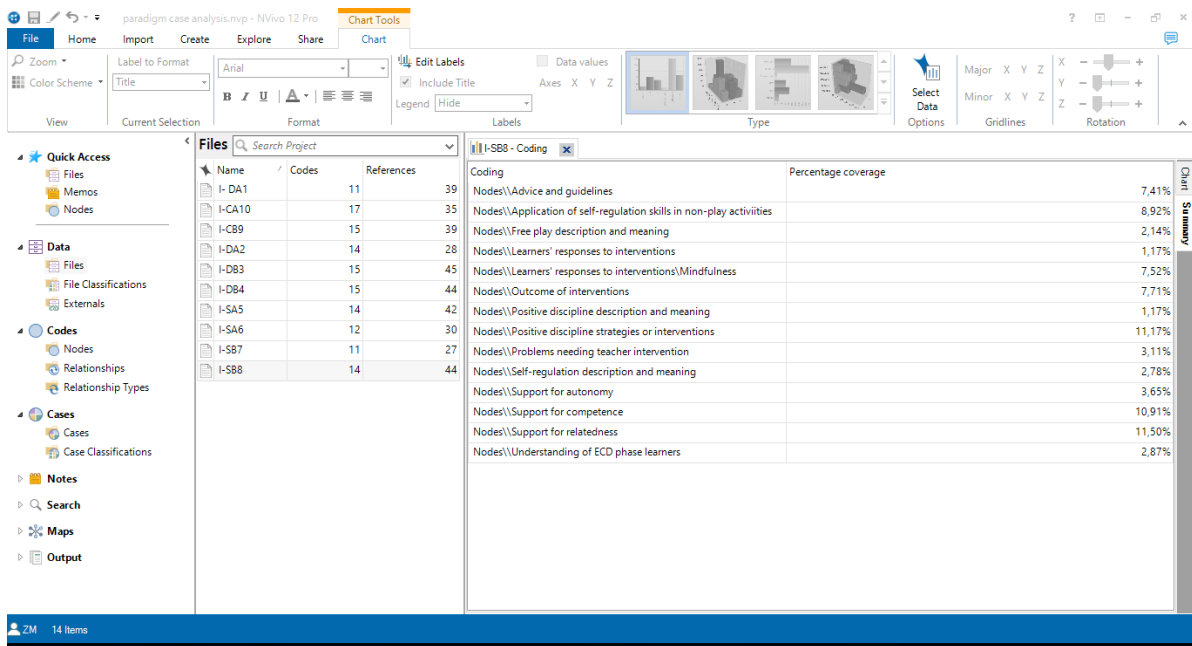
Source: Constructed using the guidelines of Benner (1994:99-127; 2012:462-464) & Hjelm *et al.* (2014:1-5).

#### Figure 4.4: The steps applied in data analysis and interpretation

Based on Figure 4.4, *Step 1* entailed the *reading of all transcripts several times*. I also used the “read aloud” function to listened to the transcripts being read several times (QSR International, 2019a:1). I imported the transcripts to the NVivo 12 Pro software programme. I read the texts again several times. I did this to have a general sense about the whole research data set content. I kept in mind the research questions and aims of the study.

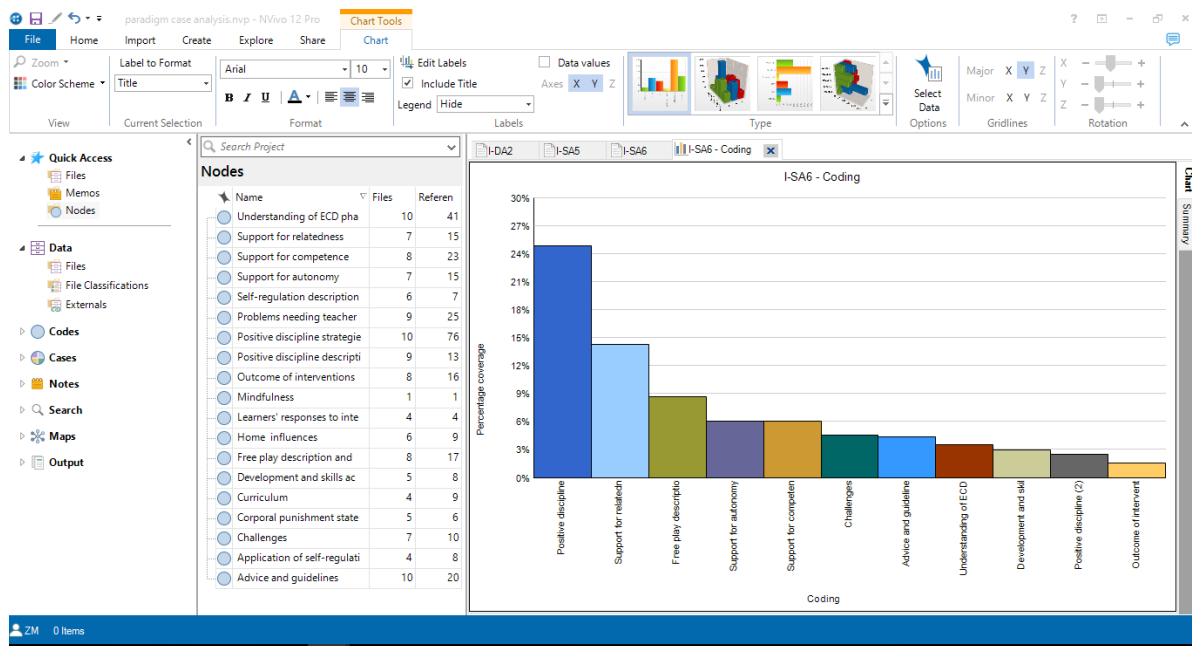
*Step 2: Reading of each transcript several times.* As suggested by Hjelm *et al.* (2014:2), I read each individual transcript several times, and interpreted them in their own contexts, with much focus on descriptions and interpretations which illuminated the participants’ experiences and meanings. I deliberated on which interviews best articulated and represented the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

*Step 3: Paradigm case analysis.* At this stage I commenced with superficial reading of each transcript several times to gain a holistic understanding of the participant's individual perspectives of their lived experience. This was followed by identification of the paradigm case. I identified SB8's transcript as the paradigm case and read it several times. I used nodes in NVivo 12 Pro to code the transcript. All transcripts were coded using the nodes from the paradigm case.



**Figure 4.5: Screenshot taken during coding the paradigm case**

Additional nodes were added where necessary when coding all the transcripts (see Screenshot below).



**Figure 4.6: Screenshot taken during coding showing additional nodes**

*Step 4: Thematic analysis process.* This step involved the identification of themes across all transcripts. I generated codes, categories and themes for the whole group of participants. Thematic analysis was also done across participants to clarify distinctions and similarities. Searching for descriptions containing similarities and patterns that emerge through the iterative process was achieved using the NVivo12 Pro software programme.

*Step 5: Consensual validation of themes and findings.* In Benner’s interpretive phenomenological strategy, producing a consensually validated interpretation that is agreed on by multiple researchers is regarded as very important (Benner *et al.*, 2009: XXV, 436). However, research students do not adequately understand or articulate the consensual validation process (Benner *et al.*, 2009:462). In this study I discussed the consensual validation process and the role of the other researcher in detail (see Sections 4.3.3.6 and 4.5.1.1). I had a meeting with the methodological expert who had done her own independent analysis using Atlas.ti. The outcome of the meeting and consequent communication through email led to refinement of themes and consensus was reached on data interpretation. The interpretive meetings are challenging but they are “essential to correcting blind spots, to pointing out habitual interpretive movements that each researcher might make on a text, and to providing multiple unique perspectives on what the text might mean” (Benner *et al.*, 2009:462). In other words,

the consensual validation process helped to reduce the risk of interpretation bias and enhanced trustworthiness of the study.

*Step 6: Writing the report:* The purpose of writing the research report was to make ‘the inquiry process more orderly and efficient than it really was’ (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002:78). Grounding the research findings in the participants’ lived experiences meant to tell the story of the participants’ understandings of the phenomenon under study using themes, the paradigm case and exemplars from their own narratives (Adu, 2016:2; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013:3; Sutton & Austin, 2015:228). In this study, I sought to report the teachers’ understanding fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase in a comprehensible manner.

The details of data analysis are presented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. Prior to that, data storage, details of the measures taken for trustworthiness and ethical considerations are discussed below.

#### **4.4.6 Data Storage**

According to Marczyk *et al.* (2015: 201, 245), research data are stored in a way that will ensure security and confidentiality. I stored the softcopies of the data files (audio recordings and transcripts) on my laptop and secured them with a password. I stored the backup files on a USB memory stick and memory card. I used passwords that were only known to me. I stored the hard copies of the transcripts in a lockable cabinet at my residence. I was the only person who had access to the keys of the cabinet. I will keep the data for the prescribed period of five years after submission of the results to the participants. After five years, I will shred hard copies of interview transcripts and delete the electronic copies and audio-recorded information permanently from the hard drive of the computer with a relevant software programme. I will also delete back up information on the USB memory stick and memory cards. The stored data could be used for future research or academic purposes in articles or reports, but individual participants will not be identifiable. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval.



## 4.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS

There is no one correct way to approach trustworthiness in qualitative approach because different paradigms and strategies require different considerations (McDonald, Schoenebeck & Forte, 2019:19). Trustworthiness is important in an interpretive phenomenological study “to ensure accountable, systematic and high-quality methodology” (De Witt & Ploeg, 2006:227; Tuohy *et al.*, 2013:17). It was thus important that I disclosed adequate details of the theoretical framework that guided the study, research assumptions and methods of data collection and analysis, to enable the readers to determine the study’s trustworthiness (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:2). In this interpretive phenomenological study, trustworthiness of the research was considered not only in the empirical research but in the entire research. The choices I made were clarified from the onset to reduce doubts about the scholarly practice applied in the study (Norlyk & Harder, 2010:426). Trustworthiness refers to “the conceptual soundness and standards of credibility with which research is judged in the qualitative approach” (Hamlet, Carr & Steinruck, 2015:6).

Benner does not give clear interpretive phenomenological criteria for trustworthiness in her method. Since there is a wide range of criteria for addressing rigour in nursing research (De Witt & Ploeg, 2006:215), I decided to select criteria that are consistent with philosophies that underpin Benner’s method from the generic qualitative approach criteria of trustworthiness. In line with the University of South Africa guidelines for conducting qualitative research in the College of Education (CEDU), I established trustworthiness in this study by using the four-dimension criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985 as cited by Forero *et al.*, 2018:2; Pistrang & Baker, 2012:15).

I did not apply some of the methods for trustworthiness in qualitative research such as triangulation of findings, interrater reliability and member checking. The concept of triangulation supports the assumption that there is a single reality which can be arrived at through using different data sources, methods, theories or researchers (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:48; Tracy, 2010:843). As such, triangulation was not compatible with research that is underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm where multi realities and subjectivity are fundamental concepts. Similarly, member checks also suggest a single true reality (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:48; Tracy, 2010:844). Performing a

member check means examining essential points with the participants to verify the accuracy of ideas and representation (Chase 2017:2689; Jorgensen & Brown-Rice, 2018:145; Marshall & Rossman, 2016:48; McGovern, 2017:4; Merriam, 2009:217). In the process, participants can react, agree, or disagree or point out problems with the analysis (Tracy, 2013:238). The reason for not doing member checking was that the interpretations and findings that were aimed for when using Benner's interpretive phenomenological method, were a combination of the understandings articulated by all the participants within the theoretical framework of the study. When the lived experiences of participants are combined, a description of those multiple voices are taken and can be articulated through identifying a paradigm case, interpretive themes and exemplars so as to present the combined experience of the participants in the study (Benner, 1985:10; 1994:123; Hennessy, 2018:265). Member checks are thus challenging for participants to carry out during data analysis because more than just checking the accuracy of the participants' descriptions is required (Krefting, 1991:219). As such, it was unlikely that the participants would recognise the interpretations of meanings as their own (Lopez & Willis, 2004:730; Luciani *et al.*, 2019:63; Willig, 2017:284).

I discussed inter-rater reliability briefly in Section 4.4.3.6 where I explained the role of the methodological expert in this study. The place of inter-rater reliability in assessing trustworthiness in qualitative research is highly contested (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007:230). The reason why interrater reliability could not be used was that it was not consistent with the social constructivist paradigm whereby the focus was on subjectivity rather than objectivity, and the need to remain true to the text (actual words of the participants) (see guidelines given by McDonald *et al.*, 2019:3). Intercoder reliability is not suitable if the data include unstructured interactive interviews as this might lead to an oversimplification of the coding analysis to reach agreement between the coders (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:810-811). When using Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy, there was no need to ensure consistency across the coders or to report quantitative results. I considered that this study was in the social constructivism paradigm which emphasises subjectivity, reflexivity and interpretation (see Section 4.3.1), thus the emphasis on the quantitative measurements of agreeableness of codes between the methodological expert and myself was not applicable. Calculating intercoder reliability could have added an unnecessary burden

for the independent methodological expert and me. As suggested by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007:230), consensus was achieved by negotiation and was grounded on the clear explanation of findings in the data set. In the next section, I discuss how the four-dimension criteria were fulfilled in this study.

#### **4.5.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the conscious effort to establish confidence in an accurate interpretation of the meaning of the data (Chase, 2017:2689; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:11). According to Merriam (2009:228), credibility involves proficiency, professional integrity, and methodological competence. In Benner's interpretive phenomenology, credibility involves staying true to the text and the use of "direct concrete narratives of practice" from the transcripts (Benner, 2012:462-463; Benner *et al.*, 2009:461-462). To address credibility in this study, I stayed true to the text, engaged in the consensual validation process of themes and interpretation of findings, as well as the use of audit trail.

##### **4.5.1.1 Consensual validation of themes and interpretation of findings**

According to Benner (1999:311), the interpretive phenomenology researcher should "attempt to be 'true to the text' and not to read in meanings that are not supported by textual evidence". In this study of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase, data interpretation involved the consensual validation process as suggested by Benner *et al.* (2009:462). The purpose of the consensual validation process was to adhere to Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy. I did the consensual validation process with the methodological expert. We individually spent time reading, analysing and interpreting text, and met to discuss, explain and compare the themes and interpretation of data. The meeting with the methodological expert facilitated the process of data analysis and interpretation which, among many benefits, illuminated my bias towards a view that all teacher-controlled activities were against the fostering of authentic self-regulation. Differences and discrepancies found during the validation process of codes and themes were minor and these were resolved, and adjustments made accordingly. Comparison and refinement of themes and codes that led to consensual validation of themes focused on understanding the patterns in the data set rather than measuring

the differences (Barbour, 2014:500; Palmberger & Gingrich, 2014:95). Therefore, the likelihood that the interpretation remained true to the participants lived experiences was substantial. In other words, there were benefits which added credibility in involving the methodological expert in the consensual validation process (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007:230-231).

#### **4.5.1.2 Staying true to the text**

I did not attempt to establish generalisability and causal relationships but to understand the phenomenon under study from the participants' narratives. According to Benner *et al.* (2009:436), Benner's interpretive phenomenological method is disciplined in its focus on meanings and concerns that can be interpreted from direct texts from participants as opposed to theoretical abstractions from that text. In this regard, I needed to be truthful and took care not to provide participants with bias or manipulating information during the data collection process. This was done by asking questions that were focused on the research question (Benner, 2012:462-463; Mertens, 2018:60). I transcribed the interviews myself and to maintain credibility in staying true to the text, I compared each written transcript with the audio taped interviews several times. This was very important because the actual words of the participants constituted the paradigm cases and exemplars which were used in data presentation and interpretation. As suggested by Krefting (1991:220), the inclusion of the participants' descriptions and interpretations when reporting the findings of the study optimised stayed true to the text.

On the other hand, Vagle (2016:97) suggests that the statements from the participants and contextual variation provide adequate credibility of the research findings which have the same impact as triangulation. Multiple stages of interpretation (see Section 4.4.4 and 4.4.5) worked as bias control in that they exposed understandings that were not accounted for by an earlier interpretation (Benner, 1999:311). Thus, multiple stages for analysis and interpretation promotes credibility (Hwang, 2008:524). However, the findings from multiple stages of interpretation (for instance, interpretive themes) went further beyond the words of the participants because they were not just descriptive but also interpretive. This gave language to the participants' every day experiences of the phenomenon under study (Benner *et al.*, 2009:461; Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004:128; Willig, 2019:3), that is, the fostering of self-regulation through

positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. In this regard, for readers to determine whether the findings were grounded on the data, it would be necessary for them to read the entire study rather than concentrate on the transcripts and data analysis.

#### **4.5.1.3 The use of audit trail**

An audit trail in qualitative research describes in detail how data were collected, the coding process, how categories were derived and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 2009:223; Rogers, 2008:43). All transcripts were confirmed for accuracy by reading each transcript several times while listening to the audio recording of the interviews (see Section 4.4.5.1). The documentation that constituted the trail of evidence in this study included the description of sampling strategies used in the selection of participants data collection (see Sections 4.4.1 & 4.4.2), the description of my role and experience in conducting the study, as well as the incorporation of CAQDAS in data analysis (see Sections 4.3.3.5 & 4.4.5). The use of NVivo 12 Pro software programme enabled me to document how the data analysis process was conducted (insights, interpretations, reactions). Thus, the NVivo software was helpful in the construction of an audit trail through the ability to save copies and printouts of various stages of the data analysis such as the key patterns, for instance mindfulness and gender equality education, were derived from the data (Beck, 2003:232; Gibbs, 2014:277; Evans & O'Connor, 2017:3-4; Rogers, 2008:43).

Establishing an audit trail is one of the means for enhancing credibility (Forero *et al.*, 2018:6; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007:229). In the process of establishing an audit trail, I kept a record of the data collection, the consent forms and permissions. I also described data collection and analysis procedures applied in the study. This included the rationale behind the selection, use, and the development of those strategies (see Sections 4.4.2, 4.4.3 and 4.4.5). I abided by the standards as approved by the CEDU in the Ethic Clearance Certificate (see Appendix A). The use of NVivo Pro is worth highlighting in this study because it facilitated not only the generation of themes, but also the consensual validation process that involved refinement of themes until consensus was reached (see Section 4.5.1.1).

#### 4.5.2 Transferability

According to Elo *et al.* (2014:2) and McInnes, Peter, Bonney and Halcomb (2017:38-40), transferability refers to the “potential extrapolation”. This entails the degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts and settings or with other groups - it is the ability to generalise from the findings to larger populations (Forero *et al.* 2018:2; Krefting, 1991:214). A key factor in the transferability of the data is the feeling of being represented by the participants in the context of the study. One strategy used to address transferability was thus giving adequate details pertaining to the sample, sample selection and context (see Sections 4.4.1.1 and 4.4.1.2).

In interpretive phenomenological studies, transferability concerns ‘case-to-case’ transfer rather than generalised transfer (Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). This means that those who seek to transfer findings to their situations (schools) should judge the applicability of generalising the findings (Elo *et al.*, 2014:4; Mertens, 2018:60). Thus, detailed descriptions of the study’s context, presentation of transcripts from interviews, and how the participants were carefully sampled, are particularly important in making judgements about transferability (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:51-52; Mertens, 2018:60). It is critical that researchers provide adequate background information about the participants and the research context and setting to allow other to assess how transferable the findings are (Krefting, 1991:220).

In this study, transferability was limited to the extent to which the readers’ felt that the exemplars, paradigm cases and themes described in the research, had meaning that could be applied to their own situation and contexts. This could happen if readers could reasonably transfer the research recommendation and conclusions to their own situations (Tracy, 2010:845). As suggested by Garvis (2015:20), I had the complete responsibility for the analysis and interpretation of the data, but transferability was the issue for the readers who would assume the answerability of deciding whether the study can contribute meaningfully to their own context (Beaudry & Miller, 2016:52; Benner, 2012:464; Garvis, 2015:21). In this chapter, I provided the essential details such as descriptions of data, the research sites and the data collection process, sampling method (see Section 4.4.1.1 & 4.4.1.2), description of the semi-structured interview (see Section 4.4.3) and the interview guide (see Appendix F). The ethical considerations are outlined in Section 4.6.

### 4.5.3 Confirmability

Since the research was underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm, the concept of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase, was not a fixed objective reality but constituted multiple subjective realities (see Section 4.3.1). This then suggested that confirmability of the findings is done by the reader's understandings rather than the participants' or my understanding (Cutcliffe & McKenna, 2004:127). In Benner's interpretive phenomenological method, confirmability is crucial because ensuring that the findings are the result of the participants' descriptions and interpretations of their experiences are important rather than ideas and preferences of the research team (see Section 4.3.3.4).

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the interpretations and conclusions can be derived from the data rather than imagined or imposed by researchers (Jensen, 2008:112; Mertens, 2018:60; Nowell *et al.*, 2017:3). Data analysis was inductive and involved paradigm case analysis strategy and an iterative step-by-step thematic analysis to identify common themes which were supported by exemplars extracted from the interview transcripts. Confirmability was also achieved through the consensual validation process (See Section 4.5.1.1) and the use of CAQDAS to ensure that the findings were a trustworthy interpretation of the participants' narratives. Using NVivo 12 Pro enabled me to manage data efficiently in ways that ensured that interpretations and conclusions were derived from the data. To manage the data means to store and track data using the software (Adu, 2016:2; Bazeley & Jackson, 2013:3). Screenshots from NVivo 12 Pro were presented (see Section 4.4.5.3). As suggested by Benner (1994:116-123), I was open and gave transparent reflections of the nature of knowledge that I brought to the study to allow readers to interpret the findings in the light of my pre-understanding (see Section 1.3). The inclusion of a clear description of Benner's interpretive phenomenological method should also assist readers in determining the confirmability of the findings. As suggested by Kennedy-Clark (2012:7), I included a reflection of the limitations of the study to enhance confirmability (see Section 7.7).

#### **4.5.4 Dependability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:298) as cited in Collier-Reed, Ingerman and Berglund (2009:342-344), dependability is underpinned by the concept of “consistency” of the research findings. It is asserted that dependability is connected to establishing credibility and confirmability of a study (Collier-Reed *et al.*, 2009:342-344; and Kennedy-Clark, 2012:6; McInnes *et al.*, 2017:38-40). This suggests that if credibility and confirmability are established then dependability is concurrently proven. In a study underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm, dependability could be raised in relation to consistency in transcription of interviews during data analysis and data interpretation of findings (Kennedy-Clark, 2012:6). Thus, similar results could be obtained if readers had access to details on how I conducted the empirical part of the study. The degree to which I described and documented the research procedures and methods, could allow the readers from outside the research to follow, assess and critique the data analysis and interpretation as either dependable or not. The engagement of the methodological expert enhanced dependability by ameliorating the threat of researcher bias in the interpretation of data.

### **4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethics in research can be broadly defined as understanding the moral principles of the rights of the participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:112; Marczyk *et al.*, 2015:133, 271). This study received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education, UNISA (see Appendix A). The ethics that were applied entailed anonymity, informed consent and freedom to withdraw, protection from harm and feedback and dissemination of results. Informed consent was discussed in detail in Section 4.4.2. The other ethical considerations are discussed below.

#### **4.6.1 Anonymity**

To maintain anonymity, the participants, were given pseudonyms so that they were not traceable (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:650; Marczyk *et al.*, 2015:233; Marshall & Rossman, 2016:53). I informed the participants of the measures for ensuring privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. In this regard, I used pseudo names for the participants and schools. For more details and information see Section 4.4.1.1.



#### **4.6.2 Freedom to Withdraw**

As discussed in Section 4.4.2, participating in this study was voluntary and participants were under no obligation to consent to participation. After giving their consent by signing the consent forms, the right to withdraw from participation entailed the right to withdraw information or participation at any given time during the interviews without negative consequences. Thus, participants were notified that they were free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, even after having agreed to participate.

#### **4.6.3 Protection from Harm**

In educational research done in schools, ethics are defined as principles that protect the schools and participants from harm (Merriam, 2009:161). This is done by observing the participants' rights to privacy, respect and dignity, including observing the rights of the participants' schools, families and communities (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:111-112; Merriam, 2009:162). As suggested by Cohn *et al.* (2017:132), I created rapport with the participants before the interviews. This ensured that the atmosphere under which the interview took place was conducive. To protect the participants from harm, I observed all the ethical guidelines as outlined by UNISA CEDU. I asked participants to communicate any inconvenience and/or discomfort. I dealt with potential psychological harm by demonstrating care, honesty, respect and empathy during the research process. I respected periods of silence and the participants' readiness to continue with the interview. I told participants that they had the right to withdraw their participation in the study if they were not feeling comfortable at any time during interviews.

#### **4.6.4 Feedback and Dissemination of results**

After the completion of the study, I plan to give feedback to the participants and publish a journal article. Giving feedback to the participants is done to comply with the ethical requirements of UNISA CEDU as well as research ethics in general (Merriam, 2009:233). The feedback will consist of a summary of the findings and examples of practical knowledge and corresponding strategies based on the participants' experiences. Recommendations for teachers and other stakeholders will also be included in the feedback. The same feedback will be given to the principals of the participating schools and the officer at the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The

options that were available for dissemination of results to the participants were through a phone call, a printed document and email. Depending on the preference of each participant, I will provide feedback in the form of verbal (phone call), hard copies (printed document), or soft copies (email). Writing journal articles is a recommended research practice for the dissemination of the findings to the public (Kothari, 2004:351-352; Marczyk *et al.*, 2015:266-267).

#### **4.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The focus of Chapter 4 was on describing the procedures that were used in the study. The study was underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm with the research design being Benner's interpretive phenomenology using a qualitative approach. A detailed discussion of how the study was conducted included justifications on why certain decisions, methods and procedures were made. Choosing Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy allowed me to embrace the value of researching the teachers' experiences and skilled knowledge in ECE. The use of the paradigm case, themes and exemplars in data analysis as well as in presentation and interpretation of findings, contributed to making the interpretation of the phenomenon perceptible. The coding, search and retrieval functions of NVivo 12 Pro software allowed me to handle and process the coded data efficiently, which thus ensured credible, dependable, transferable and confirmable findings. In the next two chapters I present the findings and interpretations.

## **CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS OVERVIEW, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: PARADIGM CASE ANALYSIS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

I conducted the study to understand the teachers' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. In Chapter 4 I presented and justified the research design and methodology in terms of the research purpose and research questions. Data collection and data analysis procedures were described in detail to allow the readers to decide whether the findings of the study were trustworthy. The use of a paradigm case, exemplars and thematic analysis was a requirement for data analysis in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 dealt with presentation of findings and discussion. The focus of this chapter is on the analysis where I used the paradigm case and exemplars where I combine presentation, discussion and interpretation of the data. I present a brief report of the data collection process and an overview of the process of reporting findings and discussion that were adhered to in this study. These are followed by presentation of the paradigm case and discussion of findings using exemplars from all the participants. Lastly, a synopsis of the findings from the paradigm case analysis is given.

### **5.2 A BRIEF REPORT ON WHAT HAPPENED DURING FIELD WORK**

The specific objectives of the empirical study were discussed in Section 1.6.2.2. In the empirical part of the study, I accessed the participants' lived experiences through semi-structured interviews. Prior to data collection and analysis, I reviewed literature pertaining to the research topic and research question guided by SDT and BPNT. The use of a theoretical framework in the literature review was also necessary in the interpretation of the data and the generation of findings (Lopez & Willis, 2004:730). The ten participants were ECD phase teachers from three primary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The participants were all females because there are generally no male teachers in the ECD phase. Purposive sampling strategies that were used in selecting the schools and the teachers were discussed in Section 4.4.1. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews using an interview guide were used to collect data.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe interesting and pertinent areas of interest during data collection (see Section 4.4.3).

### **5.3 OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS OF REPORTING THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In Benner's interpretive phenomenology data analysis, the focus is on the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study within the participants' narratives and perspectives (see Sections 4.4.4 and 4.4.5.3). I focused on an in-depth understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. In reporting findings, I focused on a paradigm case (participant SB8's narratives) as a point of entry for reaching the findings and discussing the data set. The current chapter comprises a presentation and discussion of the findings of this study with a view of answering the empirical study main research question, namely *How do Early Childhood Development teachers describe and interpret their day-to-day experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province?*

In this chapter, I used SB8 as a paradigm case to present data. The salient codes (nodes) were identified during several readings of participant SB8's transcript. Paradigm case data analysis as a strategy uses an open-ended inductive approach to analysing and interpreting data (Benner, 2012:462-463). Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data and developing themes without trying to fit data into a pre-existing coding frame or the researchers' analytic preconceptions (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:8). At this level of analysis, I mainly used participants' words, descriptions and interpretations to understand the key concepts and the phenomenon under study. Description can be useful to illustrate complex phenomena that have gone relatively unexplored and exploration builds on description by investigating poorly understood concepts (Luciani *et al.*, 2019:63). However, description alone is not enough because "the data must be challenged, extended, supported and linked to reveal their full value" (Bazeley, 2009:8).

The paradigm case was defined in Section 4.4.3. Accordingly, a paradigm case analysis is the relation between a particular case to the other cases that allowed other descriptions and interpretations of practice to be recognised in relation to the paradigm

case (SAGE Research Methods, 2019:1). It was thus saturated with different codes that summarised the participants' understanding of the phenomenon under study (Tracy, 2013:207). The steps involved in identifying the paradigm case entailed reading all transcripts and individual transcripts several times. While reading I reflected on the empirical research question and corresponding objective. This was done in accordance with Benner's (1994:113-114) suggestion. Thus, reading all the interview transcripts helped me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. I used the NVivo 12 Pro software programme "nodes" function to code each transcript. This enabled me to identify the paradigm case after several cycles of coding. After the identification of the narrative accounts of SB8 as the paradigm case in this study, I read it several times again. In studying a paradigm case, the aim was to understand the features of the practical situation that was articulated by the participant (Benner, Tanner & Chelsa, 2009:448). At this phase of the data analysis, my aim was to interpret the phenomenon through understanding the descriptions and meanings that SB8 gave with much focus on the concepts as well as the holistic account or presentation of the phenomenon (Luciani, Jack, Campbell, Orr, Durepos, Li, Strachan & Mauro, 2019:61).

#### **5.4 THE PARADIGM CASE**

As highlighted above, the narratives of SB8 were presented as the paradigm case because they adequately illustrated the complexity of the phenomenon as well as the whole data set. It was a case which illustrated practical understandings of the fostering of self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase. This was done based on the understanding that "the most adequate interpretive account is one that addresses the practical concerns that motivated the inquiry in the first place" (Benner, Tanner & Chelsa, 2009:455). In Section 2.6.4, the analysis of the competency-based subject syllabi teaching approaches and time allocation (Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2015c:2-5) revealed that play was not specified as a teaching approach in the subject syllabi. This research thus identified gaps in instructing teachers on how a competency-based play-based curriculum works. The objective of doing the empirical study was to understand the participants' experiences of the phenomenon under study in three primary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Below is the transcript of the interview with participant SB8, which

constituted the paradigm case. Some narratives have been left out to protect the identity of the school and the participants. I italicised the narratives of the paradigm case and exemplars from other participants to distinguish them from the other texts.

*INT: Can you please tell me about your experience of being an ECD phase teacher?*

*SB8: Well, I have been an ECD teacher as far as I remember. I am a primary trained ECD specialist because when I went to college, we had to choose whether we wanted to do the Junior Programme or the Infants Programme. It was in 1994 to date. I have taught other grades besides the ECD classes but most of those years I have been teaching ECD classes, ECD A, ECD B, Grade One and Grade Two. When I obtained my additional qualification in special needs, I still maintained the ECD level.*

*INT: You have a lot of experience. How would you describe your experience of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase?*

*SB8: Well, self-regulation you are concerned about emotions because during free play the children exhibit a lot of emotions, different ones. Mind you they are from different background, families, have different temperaments, just individuals in their own right. So, we do our best to encourage or foster positive emotions, and if you see any negatives, you try to mould, divert or stir in the right direction what we may call the positive.*

*INT: How would you define free play, your understanding of free play and its role?*

*SB8: Free play as the name suggests, I strongly believe that it should be free, and the teacher or facilitator should have very little input. It's all about the child or the learners as they engage in whatever they choose to. Well, we provide the play material, and during free play there we direct the children to play in a certain area. Suppose maybe you are teaching about occupations and you have different props derived from different occupations, and you want to engage in play. You find that they normally direct themselves or arrange themselves, saying "I am the teacher you are the pupil", "I am the mother you are the children", or "I am the doctor you are the patient". And they will use their experiences to play, and through that they learn as the saying goes, "We learn through play in the ECD." So, they learn the different roles in their lives, occupations or family set up, things like that, they learn from that. It also helps them to take turns. They*

may take turns to reverse roles or take turns to play different roles. That teaches them patience. Like they know that if this one is mother today, tomorrow I can be mother as well. So, it helps them to appreciate what others can do. It helps them socially, they socialise together. If they find that someone is emotional, he or she can be told, "When you do this role you are not a very good mother, you threaten others, you beat children, if you do this it's better you are not the mother." If this child is portrayed in a negative way but he or she still wants to play with the others, that helps them to alter their behaviour. They can learn to alter their emotions and learn to socialise with others in acceptable ways, because children are very frank, they can always tell you we don't want to play with you because of this and this and point out the negatives. So, through free play, you can mould positive behaviour and it's also good for language development. They talk, they engage, be it verbal language, sign language, they learn a lot from there because some children may have signs for different things which others do not have then they learn from that and their language develops.

INT: When do you actually come in as they do free play?

SB8: I may, like I said before, but my involvement should be minimal. So, sometimes I just avail the play material and sit back and see what they can do. If maybe there are fights or squabbles, I may intervene to get to the bottom of the problem. Sometimes you find there is somebody who does not want to share a toy or there is somebody who does not let go of a role, then you explain it is best you take turns; you do this, or you do something else. We interact in such ways or when you resolve squabbles, you may even encourage them to apologise, that's a positive trait in socialising.

INT: So, what is your understanding of positive discipline?

SB8: Positive discipline I would say is what I would employ to do away with the negative behaviour while replacing it with the positive one, without embarrassing or intimidating any child. Like in the way we do things here if I say or if I identify the root of the problem and one child is at fault, the child is required to apologise, but it's not only him or her who apologises. If someone tomorrow does something, they also apologise. So, even if I am in the wrong or maybe let's say I misinterpret a situation and judge it wrongly, if I find that I am the one in the wrong, I should apologise. Children should know that if you apologise it doesn't mean that you are weak. It's just something human, something which shows

*humility in that you agree you also make mistakes, so anyone can make mistakes, be it adult or what.*

*INT: Could it be that you believe in positive role modelling?*

*SB8: Yes, positive role modelling is very good, you apologise.*

*INT: Can you describe a practical situation that you remember of what you did as you applied positive discipline during free play?*

*SB8: You would find maybe, like I was saying the issue of roles, there is one child who wants to stick to playing the lead all the time, so, you don't allow that, but we are not harsh about it. We encourage the child by saying, ok this was you yesterday today it's this one. Luckily, we have small classes, so we can change roles like everybody can have a different role for every day of the week, so that may be upsetting in the beginning. You find a child maybe who is used to getting having their own way always, that child may throw a tantrum because they don't want to share. But then we ask others, Is this ok? And they will tell you this is not ok. You just change, tomorrow you change. It may be upsetting her really in the beginning, cause emotional scenes in the beginning, but in the end, it bears fruit. They know, they can even tell you, yesterday it was so and so. Today it's so and so, tomorrow it's me, the next day it's so and so, they really take turns. Because even outside play activities, when we move away for play activities, we pray before snack time and once we introduce the children to say we take turns to lead in the prayer, it's now automatic. They know that, they tell you last week so and so prayed, when Friday came it was this one, but we are still going, our row has not ended, so it's now so and so. They now know how to take turns and they will even encourage those who did not want to pray in the beginning, they are also able to do that now. And those who wanted to pray every day are also consented and relented and know that we should take turns.*

*INT: Okay, I understand. Which other positive discipline strategies do you use besides the ones from the practical example that you have given me?*

*SB8: Well, sometimes we explain to the children that if you do what others don't want, that the majority does not want, they will leave you alone. You will play by yourself. When you play by yourself you will be lonely. Do you want to be lonely? If no, then that encourages them to cooperate with others.*



*INT: Based on your experiences, what do you think are the core things that should be passed on to the inexperienced teachers about fostering self-regulation using positive discipline methods during free play?*

*SB8: Maybe we could have laid down ways of fostering positive regulation. Maybe we could have workshops to induct the new teachers when they come into the field, what they are expected to do. Normally, I think school policy would be best because when people come in, they go around the school, they tour the school, they are told what happens in the environment and all they are expected to know. Like we know we do not exercise corporal punishment, we do not humiliate a child verbally, we do not make a child feel out of place emotionally, and role modelling. But as a guideline to the new teachers, if you just have a printed copy of something or guidelines it is just easy to put it away and not read it. I think workshops and staff developments are the best. It's continuous, you reflect on those continually, maybe you have fortnightly meetings amongst ECD teachers to discuss what you had encountered and how you solved it, and how others can help you. You always get new suggestions.*

*INT: The major skills that the learners can gain from your interventions, which ones do you think are the most important?*

*SB8: Like on the scenario of fighting or squabbling over toys, as a teacher when I intervene, I expect then the children to later on to learn that we resolve conflict in pleasant ways. It does not have to be unpleasant or negative. It may be upsetting, the decisions may not satisfy everybody, but we should always find a way to resolve conflict. So, conflict resolution is something that the children should be able to do. Sometimes you find them squabbling over a toy and if you delay your intervention, they may solve it themselves. Because sometimes maybe it's is a problem, say maybe if in a squabble I as a teacher see that the turn taking bid does not work, I may confiscate the toy. So, if two people are fighting for a toy, if I confiscate it, no one has the toy, they find an alternative for the toy to play with. So, now they should know that if we do not resolve this quickly amongst ourselves, this may be withdrawn, yet it's something that we want to use during our playtime. Sometimes you find they resolve it among themselves to say, ok you have it first, then I can have it. Then you know you have done something.*

*INT: This is interesting. I may have left something important; I don't know. So maybe you can highlight something important about helping the learners to relate to one another.*

*SB8: On the issue of belonging to the group, I think it's very important to make every learner feel comfortable. Every learner should feel loved, every learner should feel comfortable. Every learner should feel they can approach their teacher at any given time. Favouritism is a big No-No, because no child should get preferential treatment. We have children with special needs. They have different needs, but everybody should be treated the same way.*

*INT: When you are talking about needs, what do you think are the developmental needs of the learners at that stage?*

*SB8: Well at ECD level, children are very emotional. They have conflicting emotions and they have been exposed to different ways of dealing with those emotions. Some are treated as babies at home, some are left alone to deal with their own problems. Some are actually ignored, and they want to be the teacher's pet or they want to be as close as possible. But then, it is important to understand where the child is coming from, that's why we have a social record, the child study record, to get to the root of the problem, you see. I remember there is this little one in our department. She would bring her bag and her lunch box and cool drink bottle packed in tight plastic bag. I understand, I think from my own opinion, I thought maybe they did that so those things wouldn't shake or spill into her bag, fine. Then she would come to school, she wouldn't be able to unpack her lunch, and somebody had to intervene, an adult would unpack for her. She eats, after eating that child never wanted to clear away her food, to repack her lunch tin and put her cool drink bottle, she didn't want to do that. She would actually tell the teacher to come and pack, or to ask another child to pack it for her. So, when I realised that I told her No! we do not do that here, nobody packs for you, you pack your own lunch box because everyone packs for themselves. She actually had now managed to convince the other children to pack the stuff for her. But then I put a stop to that and told her you are going to do it yourself. She would sit there and sulk and suck her fingers and not want to move. Then I would tell others you can go and play, and she will stay here until she packs her lunch box. Then she realised she was missing out on playtime, and now she started packing her own stuff. It was quite bad because she would even say they take off her*

*shoes, or if her laces come undone, she would just put her foot forward, meaning tie my shoelaces. I told her, no I'm not going to do that because at ECD level before you go to Grade One, she should be able to tie her own laces. So, she would sulk, and sulk and sulk, but in the end, she realised that she was missing on other fun stuff if she delayed doing stuff for herself.*

*INT: That's interesting. Are there any other things that you would like to add?*

*SB8: As for guidance the staff developments, workshops, those do because we have those. The positive traits that we can develop at ECD level and the best ways we can employ. As for play children can play at any time and that is an opportunity to learn new things. It's an opportunity to develop language skills, social skills, physically because in play they develop both fine motor and gross motor skills. They can also learn to behave in socially acceptable ways, which later helps them to behave like proper acceptable citizens in society.*

*INT: There are many positive character traits, which ones do you focus on at ECD level?*

*SB8: At ECD we just aim to produce a well-rounded child. So, everything comes into play, yes, everything. Cooperation and just giving each child opportunity to express themselves, because you would find here in my present class, when they first come here the new ones will be having challenges in communication. And those who have been here for longer, are always ready to assist. They always ready to bring new learners up to speed, they always do that a lot. They help each other. We have children who are physically challenged. Let's say when we are going outside to play, you would find you do not really have to assign somebody to push somebody's wheelchair, they do that readily which shows that the children here, whether disabled or not, they are able to appreciate that we not the same, we are all different. As long as they are exposed to that at an early age, that they grow up with a sense of, I wouldn't call it charity as such, I would say a sense of appreciation that we differ and we are not the same. And you find that for those who cannot walk, the other learners who are very mobile, they actually go to a corner, they bring a toy for their counterpart, or their friend who cannot move easily, or they can help him or her to get to where the toys are, and then they play. So, with play, they always want to play together and they will always find a way of involving everybody.*

INT: So, they practise a culture of inclusivity and positivity?

SB8: Yes, inclusivity here is done on a very high level, we have embraced that and you find physically challenged children, the regular children those who are non-disabled, they try to accommodate everybody. We have children here who have learnt sign language through their deaf friends and they have learnt sign language because they want to communicate with them.

The paradigm case presented above was SB8's description and understanding of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. What seemed to qualify the narratives of SB8 as the paradigm case was the integration of free play sessions within pre-academic subject learning.

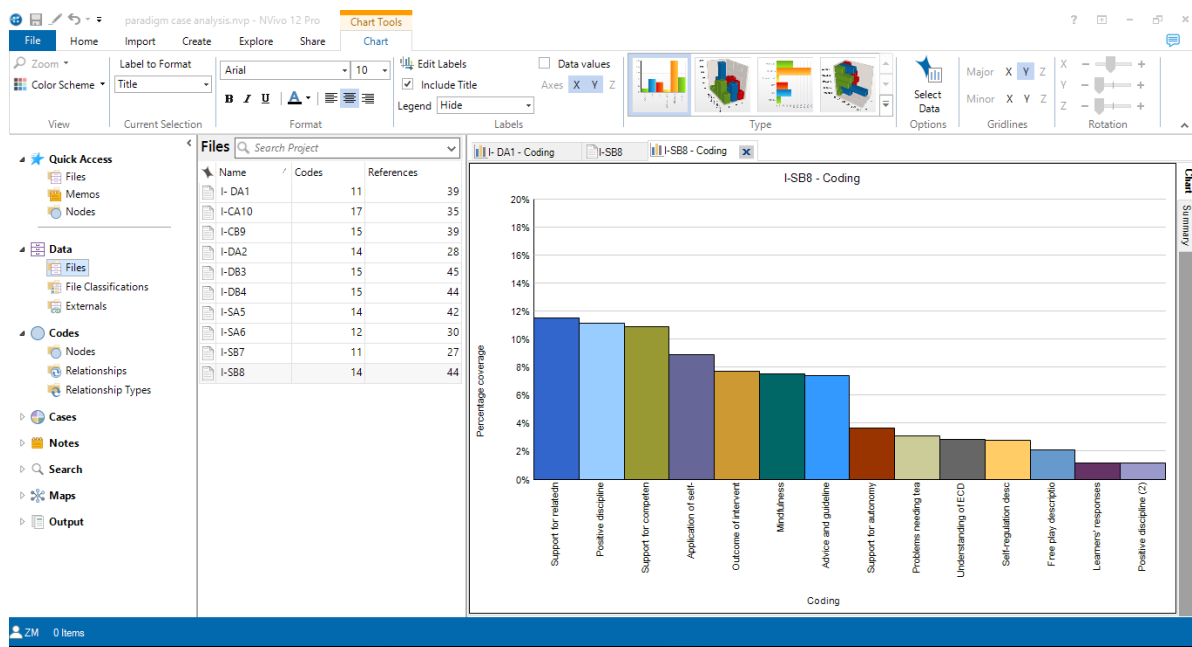


Figure 5.1: Screenshot from NVivo 12 Pro

Figure 5.1 above, is a screenshot from NVivo 12 Pro which showed that the paradigm case had fourteen codes. I regarded the codes as containing the teachers' understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase in the context of Zimbabwe. The paradigm case is presented as a whole without breaking down into small units to avoid losing important aspects of the pattern of meanings and concerns presented by the participant (Benner, 1999:310). In the next section, I present the findings and discuss the paradigm case data analysis.

## **5.5 PARADIGM CASE ANALYSIS PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

The 14 codes from the paradigm case were grouped and merged to come up with the categories that I used to discuss the findings. The categories were: knowledge about learners in the ECD phase, the purpose of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase, understanding of free play, understanding positive discipline in the ECD phase, experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, the learners' needs, as well as guidelines and advice for inexperienced teachers.

Although much reference was made to the paradigm case in presenting the findings, reference was also made to the literature review and exemplars from other participants in the discussion (Benner, 1994:113-114; Tracy, 2013:207). This helped me to illuminate the participants' understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. In the following section I presented the findings from the paradigm case and the discussion which I did in the light of exemplars from other participants' narratives and the literature review.

### **5.5.1 Knowledge about Learners in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Phase**

As previously indicated, the development of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase is highly connected with the areas of child development as will be presented and discussed in the following subsection.

#### **5.5.1.1 Presentation of findings within the paradigm case**

SB8 regarded learners' development, particularly emotional development as crucial for fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase. She perceived self-regulation as a cross-cutting theme in all activities in the ECD phases. She explained that learners' individual characteristics, for instance, temperaments and home background were important in developing the learners' self-regulation skill. SB8 believed that learners, to some extent, were capable of learning to control their emotions on their own during free play. The teachers' role was to provide positive guidance rather than controlling the learners' free play. The following statements substantiated the above sentiments.

*Self-regulation - you are concerned about emotions because during free play the children exhibit a lot of emotions, different ones. Mind you they are from different background, families, have different temperaments, just individuals in their own right. So, we do our best to encourage or foster positive emotions, and if you see any negatives, you try to mould, divert or stir in the right direction what we may call the positive.*

*They can learn to alter their emotions and learn to socialise with others in acceptable ways, because children are very frank, they can always tell you we don't want to play with you because of this and this and point out the negatives. So, through free play, you can mould positive behaviour and it's also good for language development. They talk, they engage, be it verbal language, sign language, they learn a lot from there because some children may have signs for different things which others do not have then they learn from that and their language develops*

From the above excerpts from the paradigm case, I established that SB8 believed that learners in the ECD phase struggled to deal with their emotions, but they could learn self-regulation during free play. As the learners came from different home backgrounds, it was important for teachers to do child study to discover the underlying cause of the problem, for instance some learners were ignored at home while others were pampered. The findings of a study by Binfet and Passmore (2017:42) confirm that effective teachers' support involves acknowledging the learners' background and individual needs. Learners could learn to control their emotions when given opportunities to practise self-regulation during socio-dramatic play. According to findings emerging from Savina (2014:1692), learners "learn to inhibit impulsive behaviour and follow rules which transform their behaviour from impulsive and spontaneous to mediated and voluntary". This suggests that during socio-dramatic play, learners could acquire other forms of extrinsic regulation besides external, for instance introjected or identified regulation (see Section 2.2.1.2).

### 5.5.1.2 Discussion

The finding of learners acquiring forms of extrinsic regulation other than external regulation aligns with the process of internalisation as described by Deci and Ryan (2000:236). The practice of doing child study is supported by Klein's (2015:6) 21 strategies for guidance in the ECD phase. The first strategy is "Know the child... watching, listening and learning about child temperament, interests and learning styles often demystifies behaviour and helps adults guide the child". In other words, ECD phase teachers should take time to do child study to "learn and remember the uniqueness of each child" (Klein, 2015:6). This was pertinent knowledge for ECD phase teachers. The following exemplars from other participants articulated the sentiments raised above.

[<Files\\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 6 - 3,50% Coverage

*Try to understand there are a lot of things that build a character of a person and even children they are like that. There are a lot of things that should be taken into consideration when trying discipline or to instil self-discipline in a child. Look at the background of the child.*

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 1 - 3,40% Coverage

*I am teaching ECD A. When they come straight from home, they will be changing the environment as they are used to home set up before they come to school, they have challenges. We say they develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually. For them to develop in these areas I engage them, I think I will use emotional development mostly.*

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#)Reference 1 - 1,47% Coverage

*Well during free play, since these ones are children, usually as they play sometimes, they fight. It's so difficult for them to share at times. There is this egocentricism in them so as a result, they end up fighting.*

The above exemplars showed that participants have experiential knowledge about learners in the ECD phase. They have taken time to study the learners with their focus

mostly being on emotional development. There were both developmental and environmental factors that were associated with the learners' challenges in controlling their emotions. Egocentrism, which was mentioned by one participant, is an example of a developmental factor that contributes to learners' problems of controlling their emotions in the ECD phase. Recent findings of a study done by Haslip, Allen-Handy and Donaldson (2019:2) confirm that some ECD phase learners demonstrate behaviours that are egocentric, for instance, lack of empathy towards peers. The other participants also mentioned the influence of learners' background as a key consideration when supporting the development of self-regulation through positive discipline in the ECD phase. Learners who were not in control of their emotions were prone to temper tantrums, fighting and bullying, as discussed in the literature review (see Section 2.3.5).

### **5.5.2 The purpose of Fostering Self-Regulation through Positive Discipline during Free Play**

Fostering self-regulation is an everyday skilled practice in the ECD phase that has been associated with positive psychology and the development of positive character traits.

#### **5.5.2.1 Presentation of findings from the paradigm case**

SB8 indicated the need to develop positive traits using the best ways possible. Findings from the paradigm case centred on the need to prepare learners to become good citizens who flourished. To do that, play was regarded as crucial for positive development in the ECD phase. In Section 1.7.2, I explained that the application of a positive psychology framework in the context of this study allowed teachers to also think about fostering acceptable behaviour, as well as other positive aspects of health and wellbeing for everyone in the school, rather than only responding to problem behaviour.

From the perspective of SB8, it was clear that self-regulation concerned the management of different types of emotions to develop cognitive, emotional and behavioural regulation, rather than external regulation. SB8 did not rely on punitive discipline but on fostering positive ways that included teaching life skill competencies, for instance, conflict resolution, problem-solving, sharing and turn-taking. SB8



monitors learners and suggests that learners can solve some of the problems on their own, for instance when learners are squabbling over possession of toys.

The following excerpts describe how SB8 understood the purpose of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline. SB8 described the learners' needs as free play to develop positive character traits. These allowed the learners to develop holistically to become good citizens in future.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,90% Coverage

*The positive traits that we can develop at ECD level and in the best ways we can employ. As for play children can play at any time and that is an opportunity to learn new things. It's an opportunity to develop language skills, social skills, physically because in play they develop both fine motor and gross motor skills. They can also learn to behave in socially acceptable ways, which later helps them to behave like proper acceptable citizens in society.*

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 2 - 0,64% Coverage

*At ECD we just aim to produce a well-rounded child. So, everything comes into play, yes, everything.*

*Like on the scenario of fighting or squabbling over toys, as a teacher when I intervene, I expect then the children to later on to learn that we resolve conflict in pleasant ways. It does not have to be unpleasant or negative. It may be upsetting, the decisions may not satisfy everybody, but we should always find a way to resolve conflict. So, conflict resolution is something that the children should be able to do. Sometimes you find them squabbling over a toy and if you delay your intervention, they may solve it themselves.*

From the above excerpts, the findings are that SB8 is mindful of her actions and is focused on addressing the learners' psychological needs and nurturing the development of self-regulation. The purpose and application of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play was to satisfy the learners' psychosocial needs and to develop competencies, as required by the curriculum.

Some definitions of self-regulation from the participants were consistent with the understanding as described in the paradigm case above. Below are exemplars of the overall understanding of the meaning of self-regulation from the other participants' definitions and descriptions.

[<Files\\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 1 - 6,48% Coverage

*By saying a learner has self-discipline I think I will be looking at the behaviour of the child. The whole character of the child. Can the child do proper things even with less supervision. We usually give them instructions, "When we get to play centre, we should do this, you should not do this". We give them rules to follow during free play there. So, if a child reaches that point whereby, he or she can follow those instructions or behave well with less or no supervision at all, then I say the learner is self-disciplined now.*

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § 3 Reference 1 - 0,48% Coverage

*Yes, I want to empower them with skills that will help them for the rest of their lives*

The above exemplars suggest that there is a common understanding that the main purpose of providing ECE is to lay a strong foundation for life skills. School discipline is associated with the development of self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase.

### **5.5.2.2 Discussion**

The findings indicated SB8 fostered self-regulation for school readiness and self-regulation that nurtured their ability to take responsibility for their actions in line with the literature review (see Section 2.2.1.5). Firmness and being mindful, seemed to have guided SB8 (see Nelsen, 2006:17). In Sections 2.2.1.5 and 2.5.2, the literature review on self-regulation reflects learners' demonstration of compliance to rules like turn-taking or the ability to wait for the teacher to finish talking without interruptions, but the teachers' aim should be helping learners to become independent and take responsibility for their actions and choices (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23; de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:77). Free play is regarded as developmentally appropriate practice that allows learners to function at their highest level of self-regulation with minimal teacher supervision. The strands of self-regulation in the ECD phase according to the

paradigm case were “regulation of emotions, behaviour and cognitions”, as also indicated by Nieminen and Sajaniemi (2016:2).

In Section 2.6.1, I discussed global trends where I highlighted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) Article 29(a) which dealt with prioritising optimal positive development of all learners. Similarly, in Section 3.4.2.4 in the literature review, I discussed Adlerian psychology using the BPNT where I indicated that parents and teachers needed to demonstrate mutual love for the learners through constant encouragement towards independence. On the other hand, lack of love and relatedness not only discourage learners, but is associated with anxiety and violent behaviour (Katużna-Wielobob, 2017:167). The exemplars described the participants’ efforts towards demonstrating mutual concern for the learners’ psychosocial needs.

### **5.5.3 Understanding of Free Play**

In Section 1.1 and 1.4.4 I indicated that the notion of free play is one of the areas of debates in ECE. The understanding of SB8 is presented in the next subsection.

#### **5.5.3.1 Presentation of meaning from the paradigm case**

SB8 believed that free play involves giving learners opportunities to feel a sense of freedom to control or choose what to play with and how to play. In SB8’s view there were two types of free play within the context of a competency-based curriculum where there was no separate or specified time allocation or period for free play. The first type of free play involved learners choosing whatever they wanted to play with, and the teachers’ involvement was minimal. The second type of free play occurred during subject teaching and was initiated by the teachers through giving a specific objective or guideline in line with the lesson objectives. For example, giving the topic or guidelines provides structure that is in line with achieving curriculum objectives, but learners have the freedom to choose who will play the characters and use their imagination and creativity during socio-dramatic play. Thus, there is both teacher and learner directivity in free play that involves integration of free play with pre-academic subject learning.

During the free play activity, SB8 stressed that her role mainly involved setting up an environment that was conducive for the learners’ free play. This entailed providing the materials and directing the learners where to play. She expected learners to learn and

develop language, cognitive and social skills during free play, but at the same time achieving some curriculum goals. The following exemplar describes Sb8's understanding of free play.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,14% Coverage

*Free play as the name suggests, I strongly believe that it should be free, and the teacher or facilitator should have very little input. It's all about the child or the learners as they engage in whatever they choose to. Well, we provide the play material, and during free play there we direct the children to play in a certain area. Suppose maybe you are teaching about occupations and you have different props derived from different occupations, and you want to engage in play. You find that they normally direct themselves or arrange themselves, saying "I am the teacher you are the pupil", "I am the mother you are the children", or "I am the doctor you are the patient". And they will use their experiences to play, and through that they learn as the saying goes, "We learn through play in the ECD."*

From the above excerpt, SB8 regarded free play as a child-led and child-centred activity. The teachers' role was to support the learners by providing some guidance without taking over control of play. SB8 valued the learners' freedom to choose how to play as well as the integration of free play with subject teaching.

The following exemplars portrayed the participants' understanding of free play and their roles.

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 3 - 4,97% Coverage

*Free play is the time when we allow our learners to manipulate the models or toys in the play areas. We have corners in our classrooms like dramatic play, science and technology, and ICT where we have models. So, when we say free play it can be free play as in outdoor by the swings, or free play within where learners socialise. I will not be involved, I mean it is a learner centred activity where the learners play and socialise on their own, though I will be observing not instructing them to do this or that. They will be doing it in their own way, but I will be there to observe from a distance.*

*INT: Can you describe what happens during free play and how you arrange the classroom for the learners who are deaf?*

*SA5: What actually happens during free play time. I have what I call organised free play and the other one I just tell them to go and play, I will just be monitoring. In the organised one I organise the play.*

*Organised one, that's when I put the toys the way I want them to play with them. The actual toys that I want them to play with that day, and I will be monitoring and picking out one, then they go and play. The non-organised one I don't organise the toys, I don't do anything, I just tell them to go and play. They will be choosing the toys on their own.*

The above exemplars depicted different forms of structured and unstructured free play which could be broadly referred as socio-dramatic play, indoor play and outdoor play. The teacher's role was multi-faceted, but not of being an unobtrusive observer because of the need to support learners' psychosocial development during free play. The participants' involvement helped learners to be self-regulated, non-violent and promoted positive development.

### **5.5.3.2 Discussion**

In line with the SB8's perspective, there was a general understanding that low levels of teachers' control and involvement during play was what defined an activity as free play in the ECD phase. Participants distinguished two types of free play, guided free play and free play that is not guided by the teacher. In free play, participants believed that giving learners opportunities to choose the play corners or outdoor equipment was important during free play. The teachers' role was of observer and facilitator. Guided free play as indicated in the literature review, in studies by Barrable and Arvanitis, (2019:44) and Mugweni *et al.* (2012:94), revealed that teachers provided adequate support for learners to benefit optimally from free play. These included teachers giving learners limited choices and control on how they could utilise resources, time and the indoor and outdoor environment. Thus, the notion of guided play, was perceived as handing over some of the control to the learners, where possible. Participants described free play where they did not give guidance and they were simply observing

learners without giving instructions on how learners should play. However, there were instances where they needed to apply positive discipline during free play, to promote self-regulation. In such situations, participants needed to be mindful not to take over the learners' play. It was also important that participants should apply positive discipline that will enhance the learners' development holistically.

The main finding from SB8's narrative, the paradigm case, is that teachers can integrate play with academic learning. This finding is supported by Schlesinger, Hassinger-Das, Zosh and Sawyer (2020:202) who reviewed cognitive behavioural science literature on how teachers promote play, learning and positive interactions. I have found that the integration of play and learning would be good practice in a competency-based play-based curriculum in the context of Zimbabwe.

#### **5.5.4 Understanding Positive Discipline in the Early Childhood Development Phase**

As mentioned in Section 3.6.3 the contextual knowledge for understanding phenomena involving positive constructs is not well articulated in literature and gaps in knowledge have been noted in this area. In the next section I present the understanding based on the paradigm case.

##### **5.5.4.1 Presentation of the meaning of positive discipline from the paradigm case**

SB8 understood positive discipline as a child-centred process for correcting problem behaviour and teaching learners to be responsible for their actions. SB8 thus regards positive discipline as part of teaching life skills in all school activities, both teaching lessons and daily routines. She emphasised fairness and democracy as important factors in her understanding of self-regulation. The following excerpt from the paradigm case describes SB8's understanding of positive discipline.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,47% Coverage

*Positive discipline I would say is what I would employ to do away with the negative behaviour while replacing it with the positive one, without embarrassing or intimidating any child. Like in the way we do things here if I say or if I identify the root of the problem and one child is at fault, the child is required to apologise, but*

*it's not only him or her who apologises. If someone tomorrow does something, they also apologise. So, even if I am in the wrong or maybe let's say I misinterpret a situation and judge it wrongly, If I find that I am the one in the wrong, I should apologise. Children should know that if you apologise it doesn't mean that you are weak. It's just something human, something which shows humility in that you agree you also make mistakes, so anyone can make mistakes, be it adult or what.*

The finding from the paradigm case suggests that there is no need for using violent disciplinary practices that could cause emotional harm. In the literature review (see Section 2.2.3), I indicated that acknowledging that mistakes were inevitable was very important for the learners' self-esteem because it helps learners not to feel bad or understand mistakes as signs of incompetence (Zhou & Brown 2017:71; Cherry, 2019a:1). Instead, mistakes were part of learning to respect the self and others.

The following exemplar from DA1's narrative describes understanding of positive discipline in line with the paradigm case and the development of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\- DA1>](#) - § Reference 1 - 5,38% Coverage

*Positive discipline, I would say it's when kids are able to understand if a learner has done something wrong to someone. He or she is supposed to be able to realise that I have wronged someone during that free play. Maybe the child steps on someone or take someone else's blocks, and sees that other kid crying, the child has to understand that I have hurt my classmate. The child has to go and apologise and give back the toys that he or she has taken or apologise for hurting someone. That's positive discipline without me intervening. That's positive discipline according to my understanding.*

From the above exemplar, I deduced that participants had an understanding that positive discipline was not merely the absence of corporal punishment or other punitive measures. Participants give learners opportunities to feel autonomous rather than telling learners what to do all the time. Participants seem to strive to rely less on the application of logical consequence or punishments when dealing with disciplinary

issues in the ECD phase. The emphasis seems to be on promoting sustainable positive relationships that are based on mutual respect.

#### **5.5.4.2 Discussion**

Based on the paradigm case excerpts and exemplar from the narrative of DA1, positive discipline involved moral, social, emotional and cognitive issues that are related to positive character strengths such as accepting responsibility for one's actions and humility. The focus is on assisting learners' control of their emotions and behaviour, not only to control negative emotions, but also to develop positive emotions and behaviour that reflect self-regulation. The importance of demonstrating effective or sustainable emotional skills is also reflected in recent findings of a study done by Asi, Karabay and Aydin (2019:969). According to literature reviewed in Section 3.6.3, positive discipline in the ECD phase entailed nurturing the development of self-regulation during free play. Disciplinary violence can have a negative impact on the learners' engagement in free play and positive development. From the above descriptions, SB8 and DA1 interpreted positive discipline as a mindfulness practice of fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase. Literature on positive discipline in the ECD, for instance, McLaughlin *et al.* (2017:23) and Widiastuti (2017:42) also suggest that positive discipline is a mindfulness-based practice that involves teaching acceptable behaviour and strategies for emotion control using opportunities that arise during free play.

#### **5.5.4 Experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play**

In the next subsection I present the meanings and concerns of the phenomenon under study.

##### **5.5.4.1 Presentation of findings from the paradigm case**

SB8 associates fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play with satisfying the learners' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness using a variety of positive discipline methods, for instance, problem-solving, co-management, withdrawal of privileges,



The findings from the paradigm case showed that teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline in different ways. In the excerpt below, SB8 mentions that teachers could mindfully delay intervening when learners are having disputes pertaining to possession of toys as this may give learners an opportunity to solve the problem on their own. SB8 also describes a scenario where learners failed to resolve the problem and she intervened in a way that encouraged learners to learn to solve problems on their own.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 6 - 4,87% Coverage

*Sometimes you find them squabbling over a toy and if you delay your intervention, they may solve it themselves. Because sometimes maybe it's is a problem, say maybe if in a squabble I as a teacher see that the turn taking bid does not work, I may confiscate the toy. So, if two people are fighting for a toy, if I confiscate it, no one has the toy, they find an alternative for the toy to play with. So, now they should know that if we do not resolve this quickly amongst ourselves, this may be withdrawn, yet it's something that we want to use during our playtime. Sometimes you find they resolve it among themselves to say, ok you have it first, then I can have it. Then you know you have done something.*

These strategies were not punitive, for instance delaying the intervention to allow learners time to solve the problem amongst themselves. SB8 taught learners the skill of turn taking but the learners did not apply the skill during free play, and this led to a squabble for possession of the toy. As a logical consequence, SB8 withdrew the toy. On their own, the learners figured out the solution to the problem amongst themselves. The withdrawal of the toy rather than complete exclusion of the learners from play was what I considered as an exemplar of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. Recent findings of studies by Stack and Nikiforidou (2019:1) indicated that learners in the ECD phase have the capacity to negotiate and resolve possession-based disputes without the involvement of teachers. In addition to the above, Yogman *et al.* (2018:3) found that effective interventions for ECD phase learners during free play encouraged them to make their own discoveries. In the paradigm case, the discovery by the learners that they should plan and agree on how they would share the toy to avoid confiscation, constituted a valued experience of developing the learners' autonomy, competence and relatedness. SB8's

demonstration of competence shows in the use of firmness and co-management when fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. This encouraged learners to demonstrate a sense of responsibility, sharing and turn-taking as described in the following excerpt.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 8 - 5,46% Coverage

*SB8: You would find maybe, like I was saying the issue of roles, there is one child who wants to stick to playing the lead all the time, so, you don't allow that, but we are not harsh about it. We encourage the child by saying, ok this was you yesterday today it's this one. Luckily, we have small classes, so we can change roles like everybody can have a different role for every day of the week, so that may be upsetting in the beginning, you find a child maybe who is used to getting having their own way always, that child may throw a tantrum because they don't want to share. But then we ask others, Is this ok? And they will tell you this is not ok. You just change, tomorrow you change. It may be upsetting her really in the beginning, cause emotional scenes in the beginning, but in the end, it bears fruit.*

From the above excerpts, SB8 addressed problem behaviour immediately using a variety of positive discipline methods, for instance, giving learners something else to do, problem solving, reasoning with the learners and co-management. The use of the co-management was noted where SB8 asked learners "Is this ok?" This showed that SB8 engaged in dialogue on moral issues giving learners opportunities to judge whether an action was right or wrong rather than simply telling learners what is right or wrong. This demonstrated the strategy of reasoning with the learners.

SB8 gave learners opportunities to engage in free play (for instance, socio dramatic play) during lessons. Socio-dramatic play is a prime context in which children willingly display subordination of their activities to social rules. Thus, socio-dramatic play is inherently self-regulating (Berk, 2018:4). A key challenge in capturing the causal role of make-believe is that the study of imaginative play does not transfer easily to the laboratory.

Other participants seemed to understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in many ways, for instance, co-regulation, calming down, and reinforcements. Their instructional strategies focussed on enforcing rules and

impose consequences but also took time to nurture the learners' development through modelling, and teaching learners to take responsibility for their mistakes. They also taught skills for calming down.

SA6's exemplar showed the use of calming down and co-regulation

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 6 – 7,82% Coverage

*When the learner throws temper tantrums, she will not be able to talk, then I am the one who calls the learner. I will call her next to me. Most of the learners will be looking at that learner. Then I will be the one who says, "Come, let's not worry about the other learners. I want us to write something here"*

*I ask them to say they what they want exactly, not me to tell them what to do. This one has a sister I think she is very fond of her and she loves her very much. I said who do you want to draw, and she said I want to draw my young sister, then she scribbled. We ended up getting on very well, but she had to spend the day next to me, she refused to join the others.*

SA6 redirects the emotion that the learner is experiencing and tells the learner to do something else, thus drawing his/her attention away from the problem. As suggested by Skinner (1979:5) CB9 used positive reinforcement, particularly the use of non-tangible rewards (drawing or painting) rather than praise or tangible rewards (e.g. gold stars or sweets) (see Section 3.4.1.3).

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 3 – 2,13% Coverage

*First time you talk to the child you can say, if you stop doing this and do good, I am going to give you this. It could be an extra paper or paint if the child loves painting. The child will paint a lot and show all the tantrums on the paper, instead of on others, until the child develops that discipline and he or she is able to control his temper.*

To diffuse a situation where learner behaviour threatens the group, DB4 redirects the learner and tells him/her to do or play with something else.

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 1 - 5,22% Coverage

*What I have noticed a lot is that they like that slide. So, what I usually do I make them make a line, they take turns to climb that slide, but when the boy climbs that slide,*

*instead of going back to the end of the line the boy comes back at the front. When asked about the behaviour, the boy says, "Teacher you see my this and that." What I do if he does that, I remove him from that slide, tell him to go to the swing or merry go round, but I don't deny him from play. No! I don't do that. I tell them to share, to take turns usually. They must take turns and they must share those swings.*

SA5 discusses the importance of displaying love and caring for the learners.

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,77% Coverage

*He is now ok and is coping through love. They need love to get them to this point (self-regulation). It takes a patient teacher for that because some who are not patient will say these children are a problem, and that would affect the child.*

There were several distinct positive discipline strategies that participants used when fostering self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase. The choice of the strategy depended on the teachers' understanding of the problem behaviour, the demands of the situation, and understanding of the ECD stage where learners as individuals and as a group are at, and the goals of teaching practice.

#### **5.5.4.2 Discussion**

From the above exemplars as well as the excerpts from the paradigm case, participants' strategies were influenced by both the behavioural psychology (see Section 3.4.1) and Adlerian psychology (see Section 3.4.2). The findings also suggest that what made participants' interventions effective was the use of mindfulness alongside behaviourism and/or Adlerian psychology techniques. Similar findings were suggested in studies by Harper, Webb and Rayner (2013:432-440). Thus, in the current study, using mindfulness alongside positive discipline methods, promoted self-regulation that was characterised by a feeling of autonomy and being taught life skills rather than feeling controlled and violated through punishments. It also entailed encouraging positive peer relationships among learners and shared responsibility maintaining a positive environment for development of playful teaching and learning. The evidence of this is in the paradigm case where SB8 used a co-management technique. DB4 believed that denying learners access to free play was counterproductive, suggesting that play was a need for positive development. This

was echoed by Mugweni *et al.* (2012:94) who indicated that the learners' capacity for positive development is thwarted if denied access to a range of stimulating play opportunities.

From the above exemplars, it appeared free play, love and mindfulness were important learner needs, in addition to the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence. The interpretation of this was that play, love and mindfulness were important for the fulfilment of the basic psychological needs in the ECD phase.

### **5.5.5 Guidelines and Advice for Inexperienced Teachers**

Guidelines presented in the paradigm case contribute pertinent meanings in understanding fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

#### **5.5.5.1 Presentation of findings from the paradigm case**

SB8 believed that workshops and staff development meetings empowered teachers with practical knowledge and guidelines for fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\-SB8>](#) - § Reference 1 - 6,32% Coverage

*Maybe we could have laid down ways of fostering positive regulation. Maybe we could have workshops to induct the new teachers when they come into the field, what they are expected to do. Normally, I think school policy would be best because when people come in, they go around the school, they tour the school, they are told what happens in the environment and all they are expected to know. Like we know we do not exercise corporal punishment, we do not humiliate a child verbally, we do not make a child feel out of place emotionally, and role modelling. But as a guideline to the new teachers, if you just have a printed copy of something or guidelines it is just easy to put it away and not read it. I think workshops and staff developments are the best. It's continuous, you reflect on those continually, maybe you have fortnightly meetings amongst ECD teachers to discuss what you had encountered and how you solved it, and how others can help you. You always get new suggestions.*

Based on the above excerpt, SB8 regarded common knowledge about fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play that teachers should not cause physical and emotional harm through corporal punishment, humiliation, verbal abuse, or discrimination. Such common knowledge has the potential of addressing diverse forms of disciplinary violence. Thus, her understanding of the importance of the learners' wellbeing was depicted in the excerpt. She also emphasised that regular meetings needed to be done to reflect on disciplinary practices and other issues in the school policy, in addition to hard copies of disciplinary practices that are issued to teachers.

From the findings of the paradigm case, the items regarded as common knowledge to be imparted to new and inexperienced teachers, demonstrated that SB8 was concerned about addressing the learners' psychological needs and wellbeing. The issue of addressing disciplinary violence was also highlighted in the exemplars of other participants. Other participants also suggested that meeting the learners' needs was key and that teachers needed to give positive guidance using firmness, fairness and kindness. This does not mean that learners do as they please, disregarding rules or respect for self or others. Findings of a study on kindness in the school context by Binfet and Passmore (2017:42) showed that teachers had the learners' wellbeing, development and happiness at heart. The following exemplar from DA1 compliments the findings from the paradigm case.

[<Files\\I- DA1>](#) - § Reference 1 - 18,32% Coverage

*What I can say is children are not allowed to be beaten. .... Sometimes you just show them the way how you interact with the other kids. Your first encounter with the kids, that's the most important, how you let the kids understand you, because I have realised that the kids treat other teachers like their friends, in a way whereby when such teachers try to discipline them or say something, the kids usually don't listen to them. It's due to their first encounter with the kids. ... At first encounter they show kids what they want. They must not allow kids to own the class but during lessons they must allow learners to be free, like child centred teaching.*

### 5.5.5.2 Discussion

As discussed above, SB8 was confident of the strategies she used in terms of addressing the learners' needs for positive development. The key findings from a study involving a quality ECD programme in a disadvantaged area in Kibera in Kenya, showed that teachers who were trained in positive discipline methods learnt that learners behaved in a certain way because some of their needs were not being met. This finding highlighted the importance of listening to learners, involving them in decision making, for instance, making rules and structuring the classroom (Parenting in Africa Network (PAN), 2016:11-12).

Similarly, participant DA1 was confident in the use of positive and negative reinforcement as alternatives to corporal punishment. DA1's exemplar highlighted that it was based on the context of a school in a disadvantaged area where teacher-learner ratios were 1:50, instead of the stipulated maximum of 1:20. But what was important here was that her perspective resonated with Skinner's behaviourism, as discussed in Section 3.4.1.2. Pertinent at this point was that Skinner (1976:53, 61-64) denied the existence of the concept of autonomous self-regulation. He believed that effective use of reinforcement, in the form of praise, natural consequences and punishment were responsible for controlling learners' behaviour rather than intrinsic regulation. Thus, teachers used their controlling power to attain learners' co-operation and compliance. The advice that teachers should avoid being too friendly was important as it could become hard to discipline learners effectively without any controlling power. The use of reinforcements and punishment was also mentioned in the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A.3 (See Section 3.3.4). Thus, DA1's last statement was, "They (teachers) must not allow kids to own the class but during lessons they must allow learners to be free, like child centred teaching" seemed to be contradictory, but may be representative of an everyday experience of practice for many ECD phase teachers in disadvantaged schools in Zimbabwe.

Thus, there were different perspectives for guiding practices in the ECD phase. There was not one scientifically proven method or perspective but multiple perspectives for understanding teaching practice. This point was supported by the literature review in Section 2.6 where I discussed curriculum support for fostering self-regulation during free play. Curricula in three countries, the USA (Connecticut), Uganda and Zimbabwe,

were discussed. Uganda advocated for a thematic curriculum where free play time constituted the bulk of the days' time-table. In the USA and Zimbabwe, free play was regarded as a child-centred activity and a method of teaching through play-based learning in the ECD phase. Acknowledging multiple ways of understanding the phenomenon under study was not only important in Benner's interpretive phenomenology but also important and in line with the social constructivism paradigm that underpinned the study.

## **5.6 SYNOPSIS OF FINDINGS FROM PARADIGM CASE ANALYSIS PHASE**

Free play was not a stand-alone period in the competency-based curriculum in the context of Zimbabwe, but the findings showed that it was a common context for fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase. While findings from the paradigm case suggested that teachers could create free play sessions within the competency-based curriculum, this was not the only way. Groupwork activities gave learners opportunities for developing language, emotional, social, moral and cognitive skills. Active participation in small group activities during socio-dramatic play, indoor and outdoor exploration activities enhanced a sense of belonging in a competency-based curriculum where free play is not regarded as a separate activity on the timetable.

Participants did not use the same words when describing free play, but it still meant that the teachers' involvement was minimal. While learner-directed activities were preferable during free play, teachers' guidance and support was regarded as crucial for learners' development of self-regulation.

My understanding of the participants' descriptions and their interpretations of concrete experiences is that free play is still an important activity for the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase. It was crucial for teachers as they focused on age-related developmental problems, for instance bullying, fighting for toys and egocentrism.

According to what the participants shared, self-regulation was perceived as the learners' capacity to adapt their own behaviour, emotions, actions, feelings and thoughts in ways that were beneficial to the interactions with others in the classroom and playground environments.



Positive discipline was not only about responding to or correcting problem behaviour, but it has to do with laying a solid foundation in ways that meet the learners' developmental needs, particularly the psychological needs to foster the learners' autonomy, competence, relatedness and mindfulness.

## **5.7 SUMMARY**

In Chapter 5, I presented the findings from the paradigm case analysis. Participant SB8's narrative illustrated multiple facets of the phenomenon under study, the complexity of skills needed to support the learners, and provided a structure for understanding the value of experiential practical knowledge of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. The discussion of the paradigm case was strengthened by exemplars from the other participants and the literature review. The use of exemplars from all participants enabled me to vividly describe, interpret and present the phenomenon under study. The key finding in the empirical study in the paradigm analysis phase was that fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase was a mindfulness-based practice. Training and practising self-regulation skills and teachers' application of positive discipline during free play were important in satisfying the learners' need for mindfulness as well as the basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness). Participants did not expect the learners to be self-regulated without training, hence they used co-regulation, storytelling, cognitive re-appraisal, logical consequences and calming down. However, participants also believed that learners were capable of learning self-regulation through positive discipline on their own during free play hence they used natural consequences, problem solving and reasoning with the learners. In the next chapter I present findings from thematic analysis phase.

## **CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 5, I presented the findings and discussion using the paradigm case analysis and exemplars. In Chapter 6, I present the analysis using thematic analysis and the three themes that represent how the participants experience, describe and understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. I sought to present the themes using narratives from the participants' transcripts and by referring to the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3). This chapter begins with an overview of thematic analysis and the presentation and discussions of themes and sub-themes. These are followed by discussions of findings in relation to school context, grades taught by participants and the researcher's pre-understanding. Also discussed is how the findings relate to the theoretical framework of the study.

### **6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS PROCESS**

At this level of interpretive analysis, I worked out three themes that represented the participants' understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. In doing thematic analysis, I attempted to name and "articulate broader understandings that arose from constant comparison and reading side-by-side" of the participants' narratives and exemplars (Benner *et al.*, 2009:449). In Benner's interpretive phenomenology, "naming" rather than "coding the text" is preferred to describe the process that leads to the identification of themes (Benner *et al.*, 2009:451-452). In this effort, names were used to code text with related meanings for future retrieval, but the names never replaced the text (Benner *et al.*, 2009:452-453).

The importance of a theme is related to whether it captures something important in relation to answering the main research question (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:809,812; Swain, 2018:4; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019: 9-10). Thus, a theme, when using thematic analysis, cannot be composed of one word but should be descriptive or interpretive statements or phrases that answer the main research question. Evidence of multiple realities, in line with the social constructivism paradigm, included the use

of multiple quotes based on the actual words of different individuals and presenting different perspectives from individuals (Conroy, 2003:37-41; Creswell, 2007:18).

This process involved the reading of the transcripts as was done in the identification of the paradigm case and exemplars in Chapter 5. For more details on the analytic procedures that I applied to arrive at my themes, see Sections 4.3.3.6, 4.4.3, 4.4.4.2, and 4.4.3.3. The table of themes is presented below.

**Table 5.1: List of themes and sub-themes**

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
<p>THEME 1:</p> <p>UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AS FOSTERING AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE, RELATEDNESS AND MINDFULNESS</p>	<p>SUB-THEME 1: KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (ECE)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional development</li> <li>• Social development</li> <li>• Cognitive development</li> <li>• Language and speech development</li> <li>• Moral development</li> <li>• Physical development</li> </ul> <p>SUB-THEME 2: TEACHER AS FACILITATOR FOR LEARNERS' AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE AND RELATEDNESS</p> <p>SUB-THEME 3: ACTING IN LOCO-PARENTIS TO FOSTER AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE AND RELATEDNESS</p> <p>SUB-THEME 4: SENSITISING LEARNERS ON GENDER EDUCATION</p>
<p>THEME 2:</p> <p>USING DIFFERENT SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SELF-</p>	<p>SUB-THEME1: AGE-APPROPRIATE POSITIVE DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time-out</li> <li>• Rewards and praise</li> <li>• Logical consequences and punishment</li> </ul>

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
<p>REGULATION COMPETENCIES DURING FREE PLAY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natural consequences</li> <li>• Positive and negative reinforcement</li> <li>• Modelling</li> </ul> <p>SUB-THEME 2: COMMON TYPES OF FREE PLAY ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor play</li> <li>• Outdoor play</li> <li>• Socio-dramatic play</li> </ul> <p>SUB-THEME 3: COMMON PRACTICES AND SKILLS FOSTERING SELF-REGULATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct instruction</li> <li>• Co-regulation</li> <li>• Cognitive re-appraisal</li> <li>• Modelling</li> <li>• Problem-solving</li> <li>• Teaching social and emotional skills</li> <li>• Storytelling</li> <li>• Calming down</li> </ul>
<p>THEME 3: SUPPORTING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS DURING FREE PLAY IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PHASE</p>	<p>SUB-THEME 1: WORK ETHICS FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT</p> <p>SUB-THEME 2: ENHANCING LEARNERS' SAFETY DURING FREE PLAY</p> <p>SUB-THEME 3: DEALING WITH CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO INADEQUATE RESOURCES</p>

In the presentation of themes, I connect the literature review to the sub-themes as I present the analysis in a single “findings and discussion” section. Thereafter, I separate the “discussion” that link the findings to pertinent aspects of the interpretive phenomenological study, namely, sampling, my pre-understanding and the theoretical framework.

### **6.3 THEME 1: UNDERSTANDING CHILD DEVELOPMENT AS FOSTERING AUTONOMY, COMPETENCE, RELATEDNESS AND MINDFULNESS**

The theme “understanding child development as fostering autonomy, competence, relatedness and mindfulness” describes and interprets the participants’ understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play as child development pertains to the development of autonomy, competence and relatedness. This encompasses the significance teachers placed on the importance of psychosocial development in the ECD phase. The interpretation of this theme was that it was important to understand that addressing the learners’ developmental needs in the ECD phase involves satisfying the learners’ psychosocial needs. Autonomy is the experience of making a choice that is characterised by a feeling of psychological freedom within a given context voluntarily (Conoley *et al.*, 2014:497-498; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:10; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2016:131). With autonomy, one experiences choice in ownership of behaviour, which is perceived as emanating from the self and is in accord with socially accepted values and interest (Lambert, Passmore & Holder, 2015:313; Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2016:131). In summary, autonomously motivated behaviour is self-endorsed, volitional and done willingly (Brown & Ryan, 2015:139). From the above statements, autonomous learners’ behaviour is associated with the learners’ intrinsic motivation, with no reference to teachers’ external control. In the literature review, I established that there were many forms of regulation and types of play in playful learning that were linked to child development in the ECD phase (see Sections 2.21 and 2.2.2). Fostering self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase is regarded as a complicated process which includes many contradicting elements (Wigfield *et al.*, 2011:34). In the next section, I present first of the sub-themes.

### **6.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Knowledge of Child Development in Early Childhood Education (ECE)**

The knowledge of child development is considered as part of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Fostering self-regulation during free play enhances child development holistically (see Section 2.3). In the context of Zimbabwe, teachers and parents are responsible for laying a strong foundation for life skills and educational skills through play and positive discipline (see Section 2.6.4) in line with the competency-based play-based curriculum (ZMoPSE, 2015a:30; Nziramasanga, 1999:261).

[<Files\\-DB3>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,16% Coverage

*As they are young, at times we think that they know nothing, but it's there where they build skills for the rest of their life. They build from early childhood, from birth and they are building, even now in the ECD phase.*

From an early age, the child begins development on several levels like emotional development, social development, language and speech development, moral development and physical development, all of which are discussed below.

#### **6.3.1.1 Emotional development**

In Section 2.2.3 in the literature review, I defined emotional development as the learners' ability to be competent in identifying feelings of self and others such as feelings of fear, pride, empathy, shame, guilt, happiness and anger, as well as managing strong emotions (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000:105-107). Also discussed was an understanding about what was often regarded as lack of self-regulation or hopelessness, namely the experience of too many emotions simultaneously, which made it almost impossible for learners in the ECD phase to stay focused on academic seatwork activities for long periods of time and be productive (Section 2.3.5). The findings from the study are echoed in the sentiments below.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 7 - 4,62% Coverage

*Well at ECD level, children are very emotional. They have conflicting emotions and they have been exposed to different ways of dealing with those emotions. Some are treated as babies at home, some are left alone to deal with their own problems. Some are actually ignored, and they want to be the teacher's pet or they want to be as close as possible. But then, it is important to understand where the child is coming from, that's why we have a social record, the child study record, to get to the root of the problem, you see.*

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,77% Coverage

*First you must know your children, their behaviour characteristics such as, being selfish or has a short-temper, before you go to the playground. If you have knowledge about your children, I don't think you will have a problem. So, you must know your learners' behaviours, how they behave, naturally how they are.*

The above exemplars suggest that ECD phase teachers are aware of the learners' emotional challenges which may be exacerbated by poor parenting at home. Participants have an open-minded approach when dealing with those challenges. They are mindful and do an analysis of the learners' behaviour problems and development challenges prior to providing nurturing. Providing the support when fostering self-regulation during free play is regarded as age appropriate and thus promote sustainable development (Britto *et al.*, 2017:91-92). This kind of intervention is consistent with findings of a study by Rigby, Schultz and Ryan (2014:2-3) where mindfulness is perceived as having a non-apologetic attitude to the psychosocial needs of the learners in the ECD phase. On the contrary, some research findings, for instance, Elango *et al.* (2015:72) show that ECD phase programmes for learners from poor countries should focus on pre-academic subject teaching. In Zimbabwe, the newly phased in competency-based play-based curriculum is not clear about when and how teachers should facilitate emotional development in the ECD phase (see Section 2.6.4).

### 6.3.1.2 Social development

According to the participants' narratives, social development is a key area in the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Recent studies by de la Riva and Ryan (2015:85) indicate that learners' poor social skills deprive them of the social benefits of positive interactions that are associated with developing friendships and feeling a sense of belonging. Learners' with poor social skills need encouragement and support from both teachers and peers during free play (see Section 2.3.3). The following exemplars describe and interpret the importance of understanding social development, as an aspect of the phenomenon under study.

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,68% Coverage

*Then the social part of it as they interact, they should know how they should talk to the next person, how they play with the next brother or sister. I have to discourage bad language.*

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 6 - 2,87% Coverage

*Well, sometimes we explain to the children that if you do what others don't want, that the majority does not want, they will leave you alone. You will play by yourself. When you play by yourself you will be lonely. Do you want to be lonely? If no, then that encourages them to cooperate with others.*

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 5 - 9,67% Coverage

*I mentioned turn taking and social skills. I think social skills is the one that is best and the one I want my learners to acquire first. If they learn how to socialise, from socialisation every other skill can fall into place when they can socialise. Socialisation in the ECD phase means to be able to express themselves verbally and to be able to talk to each other. You find that there are some learners who want to be alone. So, I'm saying if that learner can manage to socialise, then it's easier for him or her to acquire other skills like turn taking, because when we say he or she cannot socialise, for example, we mean the learner cannot do turn taking. Like the one who wants to play alone, for him or her to be able to say let*



*me wait for this one to go on the slide, he or she will tell himself that I'm ok on my own. So, I think socialisation skills are the ones that I want my learners to acquire first. It is the one that is very important.*

The above exemplars suggest that as teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, they simultaneously teach social skills and mindfulness. The participants' emphasis on positive social development is congruent with the positive psychology framework, as discussed in Section 2.3.3. People and experiences are embedded in the social context (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:8), therefore the understanding from the positive psychology framework is that it is important to help learners to have positive relationships with family members, peers as well with teachers and other adults.

### **6.3.1.3 Cognitive development**

According to participants, understanding that learners in the ECD phase are egocentric, is important knowledge of child development when fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase. In Section 2.2.3, the term egocentric was explained by Kalyan-Masih (1973:35) and Ryan (2019:25) as learners' developmental characteristics of not being able to demonstrate empathy and kindness towards teachers and peers. Thus, learners who did not want to share toys or do turn taking are regarded as being egocentric by participants in the study. Participants understanding of this knowledge is portrayed in the in the following exemplars:

[<Files\\-DB3>](#) Reference 3 - 1,74% Coverage

*As a teacher I can assist children grow out of their problem behaviour, let's suppose the child was egocentric, that behaviour of saying "it's mine, mine," If I engage the child in free play activities, such as sharing, the child would understand and would develop would end up knowing that things are not mine alone, I have to share.*

[<Files\\-SA5>](#) - § Reference 3 - 2,33% Coverage

*Problems like the children who do not want to share the toys. For instance, here they bring the toys from home and the child will be knowing that it is my toy. This is mine, so no one should take this toy because it's mine, I brought it from home.*

*Because the deaf kids have got that thing of selfishness in them, they possess things if they bring something, they say it's mine, they want it to be theirs.*

The above exemplars show that participants acknowledge egocentrism as a developmental challenge pertaining to cognitive development. To address this problem may be a challenge because learners in the ECD phase also have limited attention span and memory challenges (see Section 2.3.2). The following exemplar describes the challenge and how to address it.

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 6 - 2,23% Coverage

*They listen for one minute. They learn through repetition. So, I keep on reminding them, "Don't do this" on a daily basis. They repeat the same mistakes, but as time goes on, they stop the problem behaviour. They get to know that this thing is wrong.*

The findings from the participants narratives indicate that ECD learners are still developing and do not have higher order cognitive skills like problem solving. The above exemplars illustrate that they lack focus, have little concentration span and learn through repetition. However, they were beginning to have focus. In Section 2.3.2, I discussed "focus" as an important aspect in relation to fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase. Focus refers to the learners' ability to pay attention, follow classroom rules and to concentrate on a task and ignore distractions. Also noted were beliefs of Ziv *et al.* (2018:10-12) that learners in the ECD phase do not use mental strategies (memorising, constant rehearsal and use of categorisation) but instead they use simple strategies for remembering (verbally naming and visually inspecting), because they rarely are able to use memory consistently. Thus, learners' levels of cognitive development skills at this stage, are not yet adequately developed to use the same mental strategies that adults and older learners use. In this regard, Ackerman (2019:5), a positive psychology researcher, recognises teachers' support for developing attention and memory as the teaching of mindfulness. Thus, fostering cognitive development could be regarded as a mindfulness-based practice.

#### 6.3.1.4 Language and speech development

Findings of a recent international study, (OECD, 2019b:3) indicated that free play, particularly socio-dramatic and indoor play at the 'blocks' corner, encourages language development. Such forms of play encourage learners to engage in conversations with each other. In Section 2.3.4, I discussed the importance of language and speech development in the ECD phase in line with an understanding that play is children's work. Participants in the study believed that learners develop language during free play, and mostly during socio-dramatic play. The freedom to choose activities, in line with learners' interests, is supported by Morrison (2016:49, 53). Participants shared a common understanding that good language development is linked to a supportive and well-resourced school environment. The participants' understandings are presented in the following exemplars:

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 1 - 3,57% Coverage

*They also develop socialising skills when they are in the dramatic play area because mostly in the dramatic area you find that they engage in pretend play. So, during pretend play you find that one learner may say I am going to be father, the other one mother, or they pretend to be at a store selling. So, I think socialising skills are developed there.*

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 4 - 2,87% Coverage

*When I remember at college they used to say, 'Play is children's work'. So, kids must play and play and play to develop. They learn through play. Usually when you see them playing in twos, they learn language and other skills from each other. They understand better when another child explains things to them than the teacher.*

The following exemplar is from a participant who taught learners who are deaf and related the importance of determination and persistence in promoting language and speech development.

*To try to instil the language, so it took me almost the whole of first term, up to the end that's where they were now picking up. I mean to understand that when you are doing this when you are signing you are meaning this. But it was hard, it was very hard.*

In the literature review, I indicated that McDevitt and Ormrod (2014:28) believe that poor language development suggests that there are problems in the execution of cognitive and emotional processes. The above exemplars show that free play facilitates language and social development simultaneously, but learners who are deaf do not have adequate basic language skills upon starting school. The teachers who teach learners who are deaf, face many challenges in assisting the learners with language development because learners do not have the basics for sign language. Language development is connected to other areas of development, for instance, social, emotional and cognitive development, hence teachers need to give appropriate support and instruction for learners who are deaf. Similar findings were noted in a study by Diamond (2017:220-223), where the development of skills for problem-solving was regarded as the purpose of fostering self-regulation in ECE. This finding suggests that the different forms of activities (indoor, outdoor and socio-dramatic play) that learners engaged in during free play promote competencies and positive interactions that lead to language and speech development. The OECD (2019b:3) also supports the use of different types of activities that encourage conversations during free play. However, in Zimbabwe, the use of direct instructions is discouraged because it is negatively associated with teacher-centred learning rather than learner-centred teaching (see Section 2.6.4). I associate this negativity with literature that broadly defines the regulation of emotions as extrinsic and intrinsic but do not go further to explain the types of regulation that fall under extrinsic regulation, for instance, Silkenbeumer *et al.* (2016:18). This obscures the types of extrinsic regulation, for instance introjected and identified regulation, that are relevant in understanding self-regulation and positive discipline in the ECD phase. These types of regulation involve both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (see Section 2.2.1.2).

### 6.3.1.5 Moral development

Moral development in the ECD phase pertains to teaching learners to differentiate between a behaviour or action that is right from the wrong, for instance, refusing to take turns is wrong (Erikson,1997:77-82). According to Bear (2008:2), nearly all children tend to excuse or justify moral transgressions with various explanations of blaming other learners. Such excuses and self-centred thinking were also highlighted by participants in the study. They perceived moral development and education as important for fostering self-regulation during free play. The following exemplars portrayed the situations involving moral issues.

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,71% Coverage

*They say so-and-so has done this, has taken this, has insulted me, or yelled at me, so I am beating him or her. Obviously, their feelings are shown there. So, I say, don't do that, play nicely.*

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,36% Coverage

*The first thing in the morning is that we usually have our worship sessions and devotions. During those worship sessions we teach them ethics where they have to learn to share, give each other chances.*

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,76% Coverage

*Yes, by telling them stories I am trying to teach them that we should behave this way. If we do good, this is going to happen. If you do bad, we try to discard bad behaviour.*

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 2 - 0,58% Coverage

*Showing them the moral value and the advantages of why they are not supposed to do this or that.*

The above exemplars showed that participants believed there is a strong connection between moral development and the development of self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. The participants' descriptions suggest that teachers teach morals and learners depend largely on teachers' guidance, as also indicated in the literature review (see section 2.3.6). The teaching

of good morals is important because learners can eventually become independent and self-regulated. This promotes mutual respect and relationships between teachers and learners (Kalyan-Masih, 1973:39-40; Ryan, 2019:25).

### **6.3.1.6 Physical development**

In Sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.1, free play was discussed not just as a fun activity but for learning and development. Erikson regarded the ECD phase as the “play stage” with the perspective that learners could explore and make discoveries on their own during free play, including developing self-regulation skills (Erikson, 1968:49-50). Recent studies of, for instance Cherry (2019a:1) and Russell *et al.* (2016:153) corroborate Erikson’s assertions as there is still ongoing debate about the efficacy of free play in teaching and learning. With regards to the research topic, participants do not fully subscribe to Erikson’s assertions because they value both learners’ freedom to explore and the importance of teachers’ support during free play.

[<Files\\-CA10>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,42% Coverage

*The physical part is when they are playing running around, especially outside. They develop even in class. As they build blocks there is intellectual part of it. As they play with dolls the finger dexterity develops, the fine motor skills.*

[<Files\\-DA2>](#) - § Reference 1 - 4,77% Coverage

*Children being children, they need guidance. They need supervision. Let them be children but at the same time be there. Try to give instructions here and there. They need you to be close to them. If you just leave them, especially with the playing materials, some may not even have a chance to use them. So, they just need supervision.*

The above exemplars showed that learners develop physically during free play. They develop both gross motor skills outdoors and fine motor skills when playing indoors. However, learners need close monitoring, guidance and direct instructions to participate and have a chance to utilise play equipment. The findings did not suggest that physical activities directly promoted the learning of self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play. In Section 2.3.1, I explained an understanding of physical development involving psychomotor skills (see ICAC, 2007:13). Participants

did not see physical development as a key aspect like social, cognitive, moral, language and emotional development when fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. This is concerning because the analysis of the Zimbabwe competency-based curriculum subject time allocated indicated that physical education and mass displays (combined daily allocation of 40 minutes) were the only subjects that indicated natural exploratory processes as the teaching approach (see Section 2.6.4). I think that the use of a natural exploratory approach in mass displays and physical education can be conducted as free play sessions to enhance holistic development. This thinking is supported by findings of a study by Schlesinger *et al.* (2020:202) where play was found to promote academic learning and holistic development in ECE.

### **6.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Teacher as Facilitator for Learners' Autonomy and Relatedness**

Teaching involves giving instructions to learners (Pace, 2019:1). There are diverse perspectives from which researchers can understand the practice of the fostering of self-regulation in the ECD phase (McClelland *et al.*, 2015:2, 8). In the ECD phase, teaching strategies that are often labelled as 'teacher-centred', such as giving instructions or directions during child-led activities like free play, are very important for fostering self-regulation and development. This is an everyday teachers' experience in the ECD phase that this research sought to understand from the participants' experiences. The following exemplars illustrate how participants acknowledged their role as facilitators and how they understood fostering the learners' needs for autonomy and relatedness as aspects of child development.

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 1 - 3,93% Coverage

INT: I can see you are passionate about the ECD phase.

DB3: *Yes, I just enjoy being with them. To understand them better, from the experience I have got so far, or to develop them better, you must have a good relationship with the parents. ECD goes with the parent, the child and the caregiver. So, I cannot say I am a teacher, I am a facilitator, I am a caregiver because I don't teach them, but I develop them.*

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 2 - 10,57% Coverage

*When the learner throws temper tantrums, she will not be able to talk, then I am the one who calls the learner. I will call her next to me. Most of the learners will be looking at that learner. Then I will be the one who says, "Come, let's not worry about the other learners. I want us to write something here". I had a learner who during the first days at school cried, screamed, and lie on the floor when her mother left her at school. Then I will call her to sit next to me and said, "By the way when we come to school what will we be coming to do? We are here to learn, right? If we are here to learn let's take paper and I want you to tell me what you want to write today". I ask them to say they what they want exactly, not me to tell them what to do. This one has a sister I think she is very fond of her and she loves her very much. I said who do you want to draw, and she said I want to draw my young sister, then she scribbled. We ended up getting on very well, but she had to spend the day next to me, she refused to join the others.*

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 1 - 3,30% Coverage

*We give them free choice because most of the times the children's interests are different. So, if you fail to give children those free choices you won't even realise a child's character. There are times when you need to use a guideline. There are times when you give free choice and the children will be able to explore intellectually, they would do many things and then you realise this child is very intelligent. You need to give them that freedom to choose, so that they would explore intellectually, emotionally and socially.*

From the above exemplars, it was clear that in a competency-based play-based curriculum, fostering learners' autonomy, competence and relatedness initially involves lots of support from teachers, with teachers showing much respect, kindness, love, and firmness. As time goes on teachers gradually reduce the support to allow learners to become more independent. Section 3.5.1.2 discussed such kinds of practice as age-appropriate positive discipline strategies for ECD phase learners. Practical knowledge, institutional impediments, learner support and resources for the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play would be



understood from the teachers' description and interpretations of their experiences (Roulston, 2014:300).

### **6.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Acting *in loco-parentis* to foster Autonomy and Relatedness**

Participants described their experiences of acting *in loco-parentis*. The Uganda Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (2018:7) described parental roles as activities which included managing households by making plans for children's duties, rules, clarifying expectations of behaviour, applying consequences for problem behaviour or non-compliance, as well as encouraging good behaviour (see Section 3.6.1). Participants used parenting techniques that involve emotion coaching, which according to Silkenbeumer *et al.* (2016:22), involves a wide range of strategies such as listening attentively, giving positive guidance and teaching problem-solving. The following exemplars captured the participants' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline when acting *in loco-parentis*.

[<Files\\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 2 - 14,74% Coverage

*At ECD we do loco parentis. We are their parents so children definitely need love and care. When I am disciplining that child, I should discipline as a parent. I should show that child love. Maybe at home you know they do corporal punishment; they are still using the stick to discipline but at school we try all possible means to say of course the child is misbehaving but what else can I do. Maybe some they don't stay with their parents. They lack love. They lack that understanding parent who can maybe talk with the child. Talk with the child nicely to say, "Why are you doing this?" just to understand. There are some hidden causes for misbehaviour at times, some elements that contribute to the misbehaviour of a child. So, as a teacher I become a parent to that child. I listen to that child. Maybe, I take that child, sit with the child. I try to ask maybe to understand the background of the child. Then by so doing at times you discover that there is a gap at home. You try to fill that gap as a teacher to understand the child better. Maybe you would know that this child is misbehaving because of she or he lacks a mother figure at home, so you try to discipline along those lines.*

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 4 - 2,38% Coverage

*What I can say about learner discipline is that these little ones need patience, love and gentleness. Though you are applying all those things they need firmness because the generation they are in now makes them hyperactive. The television is teaching them a lot of things, so it means they need to be guided. If you just let them do whatever they want they might go astray, but they need love.*

The understanding from the above exemplars was that positive guidance nurtures the development of the learners' autonomy, competence and relatedness. Teachers need to become loving and caring parents through demonstrating kindness and valuing the learners. This could make learners feel good about themselves, as suggested in the studies by Binfet and Passmore (2017:42). Participants' actions were within the positive psychology parenting framework, where the understanding is that punishment does not teach learners to understand the value of rules, respect for other learners, empathy, or to take responsibility for their behaviour (Bear, 2010:7). Thus, to make learners feel related and autonomous, teachers need to make learners feel valued, happy and cared for (see Section 2.4.3). The findings support the notion that studying positive ways of developing the learners' self-regulation skills in the ECD phase can be mostly based on the teachers' subjective experiences and interpretations of the learners' behaviour (Hedges & Cooper, 2018:369; Hefferon et al., 2017:211; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017:4; Urban, 2017:20).

#### **6.3.4 Sub-Theme 4: Sensitising Learners to Gender Education**

Participants regarded gender equality education as part of fostering the learners' autonomy and relatedness. In Section 2.6.1 in the literature review, I highlighted Article 29(d) of the CRC, explaining education as “[t]he preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin”. The ECD phase teachers know that they are laying a strong foundation which should make it easier for teachers in higher grades and other stakeholders like workplaces to build upon. Knowledge and skills of gender equality was part of life skills training that promote development and a sustainable culture of non-violence in society (WHO, 2016:39). The following exemplars indicated that there was gender-based education done by participants' as interventions for fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 2 - 4,76% Coverage

*Yes, I want to empower them with skills that will help them for the rest of their lives, because through discipline, I can tell a moral story. ... Even during free play, maybe as I move around, I can find one group is playing role play about the responsibilities of family members. They are playing "house" doing pretend play. If I see the 'father' pretending to beat the mother, saying "I will beat you, I will beat you" I intervene there and then. I will see that maybe the child got this from home, that's why I say some they bring it from home. This beating is from home. From there I will tell a moral story, just there. I will entertain them in that group, from there I will move to another group.*

[<Files\\I-DA1>](#) - § Reference 1 - 6,48% Coverage

*So, I will assist them when I see a child maybe doing something wrong. For example, these days there is nothing like girls and boys should be treated differently, gender issues. There were some roles that were supposed to be done by boys and there were some roles that were supposed to be done by girls, but now everyone can do all the roles. Boys are allowed to sweep floors at home, girls are allowed to do different jobs that boys can do.*

*So, I just walk to them and explain to them that it's not always that boys are supposed to drive cars and build houses, even girls can do those jobs. I can tell them, you guys are supposed to sweep as well at home, you are supposed to wash plates. So that's how I help them.*

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) Reference 1 - 3,71% Coverage

*A child may want to play the role of mother all the time and will not want to change that role. So usually after every activity of free play I tell them to change roles so that all will have a chance to be the child, father or mother. Like these days there is gender education. So, I encourage the boys to play with the girls, and also do house chores, such as sweeping, just to promote gender balance during free play.*

In Section 3.2.1.2, I indicated that gender-based violence was a common type of school-based violence, like corporal punishment, humiliating punishment and peer bullying (see Orgando-Portela & Pells, 2015:30). Based on my findings, fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase presents many opportunities for gender education and teaching good morals from an early age and to foster resilience. Rogers and Tannock (2013:1) emphasise that all people, both males and females, have basic psychological needs which need to be met to ensure their development. The findings of the current study suggest that teachers do not regard boys as having the need to be more autonomous or girls needing to conform to submissive roles. Instead, teachers aspire to foster sustainable development and resilience.

#### **6.4 THEME 2: USING DIFFERENT SKILLS AND STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING SELF-REGULATION COMPETENCIES DURING FREE PLAY**

Theme 2 is “using different skills and strategies for developing self-regulation competencies during free play”. It presents the complexities of teaching strategies and competencies that teachers seek to promote in their learners. Competence is described as the “feelings of effectiveness and efficiency in the completion of task” (Lambert *et al.*, 2015:313; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:10). This mainly pertains to the attainment of strengths as well as the demonstration of motivation to work towards higher levels of achievement. In the empirical study, I describe and interpret the teachers’ experiences which highlight how they foster competence through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

##### **6.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Age-Appropriate Positive Discipline Strategies**

Appropriate positive discipline for the ECD phase learners is compatible with learning and development during free play (Whitebread & Basilio, 2012:28; Hodgson, 2017:20; Pyle, 2018:48). To understand the phenomenon based on teachers’ lived experiences of applying positive discipline during free play, it was necessary to view the phenomenon as a situated professional practice that incorporates experience, socio-cultural values and scientific theory (Benner, 2012:462; Terry, 2018:299). According to Benner *et al.* (2009:436-437), the meaning of “being situated in practice” is that people’s actions are neither totally autonomous nor totally controlled, because the

environment basically has an influence on determining the people's predominant ways of everyday practice (Ryan & Deci, 2017:620). The following exemplars embody the participants' age-appropriate positive discipline strategies.

#### 6.4.1.1 Time-out

In Section 3.5.3.2, I indicated that time-out was regarded as a positive discipline method that allowed learners to reflect on their behaviour (see Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:48). Giving learners time to think and reflect on their actions was common in the participants' experiences in the current study. The following excerpts are the participants' descriptions and their interpretation of time-out.

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § 8 Reference 3 - 1,82% Coverage

*Most of the time they say we isolate, not for a long time, if the child is withdrawn from play just for 5 minutes. The child will be remorse and saying, "Ok, I'm not going to do that again. I'm sorry teacher." And the child will go back and play with others, and promise that I won't do that again.*

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 2 - 2,03% Coverage

*I use positive discipline for example, I use time-out. That's when I will take one of the children, the troublesome child to a place in a corner. This is very good because the child would know that tomorrow if I do that the teacher will just tell me to go by the corner and will not be able to play with the toys, yet the child wants to play with the toys.*

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 2 - 4,55% Coverage

*So, when I notice what I would term unbecoming behaviour, I usually take the learner out of that area. Maybe let's use the dramatic play area as an example. If I see that a learner is exhibiting unbecoming behaviour, like, I ask the learner to come out of the dramatic play area, then go and place him or her at the naughty corner. The naughty corner is a space outside the play area but is still where the learner can see what the others are doing.*

[<Files\\I-DA1>](#) - § Reference 1 - 7,61% Coverage

*So, in my case I have some kids, one or two boys, they are very naughty. So, during play, they like beating others, they make noise and jump from this place to that place to disturb others play. So, what I do to discipline them is I withdraw them from the play, because during that time of free play they will be playing enjoying themselves as kids like to play mostly. So, if I withdraw them and tell them the reason why I am withdrawing them from the play they will be hurt. They have got a feeling that, "Eish"! but we wanted to play. Now we are sitting down here watching others play". And that's what helps me, the withdrawal method. I isolated them from others. They saw others play and I told them, "It's because of your indiscipline that's why I am taking you out of play, so that others will play and enjoy without you disturbing".*

From the above excerpts, participants view time-out as a positive discipline strategy for stopping misbehaviour. This suggests that it is used as a consequence, rather than a strategy for calming down. Learners also need to learn emotion suppression strategies to help them calm down. Calming down is a strategy for teaching self-regulation skills, that may involve creating a supportive environment and giving relational support before or after an upsetting event (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23; Housman, 2017:9; Rabella, 2020:2). The findings of the study do not reflect aspects of time-out that relate to giving learners the time to calm down or to reflect on what they have done wrong. Instead, they see time-out as a form of punishment rather than positive discipline.

#### **6.4.1.2 Rewards and praise**

The use of rewards and praise is common practice in the ECD phase and has been associated with external regulation and compliance rather than self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236; Deci *et al.*, 2015:118). In Section 2.2.1.2, I indicated that in the ECD phase there were some learners who found it difficult to self-regulate without teachers' use of praise and rewards. However, the debate on the efficacy and appropriateness of rewards and praise is on-going (see Sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3). The following exemplars describe rewards and praise as appropriate positive discipline in the ECD phase.

*As I said, I think positive discipline is when I reward the learners as in complementing how they are behaving, and that during free play learners develop socialising skills. When I see that this learner has done something good, let's say in a school which has learners with disabilities, when one learner helps a learner who has challenges of moving around, when one learner brings him or her a doll, then I praise that learner and say, "That's good, keep it up". I think other learners will also see that. In fact, they see that they should learn to help each other or helping each other is a good thing.*

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 1 - 4,29% Coverage

*So, if the teacher understands the child better, the relationship of the teacher and the child makes the child develop very well. Because at home if the child is told that he or she is dull, but the child comes to school, maybe today she or he managed to scribble but even if there is a child who is able write a pattern, I motivate that child who scribbled and say, "Wow! Look, today you did very well, your scribbling is very good", then maybe I put a star. The child will feel better with that star. Tomorrow he will be motivated to write or to play. Even if let's suppose I recommend about good behaviour, I can say "Wow! --today you played very well with others, well done. You didn't beat others today well done! Let's clap hands for ---." I'm motivating behaviour.*

The findings from the study suggest that the use of non-tangible rewards, such as compliments, is appropriate for ECD phase learners. The learners' need for autonomy may not be addressed but the need for competence, relatedness and mindfulness may be addressed through teachers' non-tangible rewards and praise. According to Widiastuti (2017:41), ECD phase teachers need to reinforce or encourage positive behaviour through using praise or rewards.

#### **6.4.1.3 Logical consequences and punishment**

The Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A.3 endorses age-appropriate discipline that excludes the use of corporal punishment by teachers (Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019, 2019:5). The ECD syllabus clearly points out that discipline can be achieved through logical and natural consequences, and not by punishment (ZMoESAC, 2012:8). Participants used punishments and logical

consequences. In the following exemplar, the participant indicated that clearly how she used punishment.

[<Files\\I- DA1>](#) - § Reference 10 - 3,53% Coverage

*When they made noise and I looked at them with that eye, they knew what usually what followed was not good. I punished them at times and told them that there were no toys that day because they have been undisciplined. Because they like playing, so I know that if I tell them that today there is no playing because they have been behaving badly or making noise or doing what, so they know.*

In the above exemplar, DA1 indicated that punishment meant “no toys” (withdrawal of privileges) as a consequence. However, DA1 was not clear about the “look” that indicated that what followed was not good. Both the “look” and withdrawal of privileges are among the list of strategies that were regarded as alternatives for corporal punishment in the category of mild forms of punishments (see Section 3.2.1.3). Some psychologists regarded the mild forms of punishments as positive discipline methods (Bear, 2011:9). In the CRC, Article 37(a) states that “[s]tate parties shall ensure that no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment”. The statement could be interpreted as suggesting that some forms of punishment were not harmful. According to Bear (2011:9), teachers should be aware that the use of rewards, praise and punishment in a controlling manner may be harmful to the development of autonomy and self-regulation. My interpretation of the above statements was that it is possible that some logical consequences are not harmful and could foster other types of extrinsic regulation, for instance identified and introjected regulation, that is appropriate for the learners’ development in the ECD phase. However, there could be a problem if learners perceived them as harmful. The following exemplar demonstrated how learners perceived logical consequences as punishment.

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § 1 Reference 1 - 5,71% Coverage

*When asked about the behaviour, the boy says, “Teacher you see my this and that.”  
What I do if he does that, I remove him from that slide, tell him to go to the swing or merry go round, but I don’t deny him from play. No! I don’t do that. I tell them to share, to take turns usually. They must take turns and they must share those*



*swings. Discipline in the ECD phase is a problem. Those kids are very young, actually they do not understand what discipline is. I think to them discipline is punishment. They say, "Teacher has punished me, teacher said I must not do this and that," but I will be trying to discipline. They think it's punishment to them, and not discipline.*

From the above exemplar, the use of logical consequences requires mindful planning and application. In supporting the above, Plan International (2009:73) researchers explained that logical consequences should be directly related to the problem behaviour, and respectful and reasonable, to avoid negative outcomes.

The following exemplar illustrated a situation where the teacher did not use a logical consequence, but instead used positive discipline.

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 2 - 3,46% Coverage

*Some of them will throw tantrums and even throw things at you. It just needs you to have patience and tell the child so that he or she will understand what she is doing is wrong or not. But the moment you want to discipline before you explain to this child what he or she is doing is wrong, you will never understand each other. So, patience and love must go hand in hand because if you use anger you will be in trouble, otherwise it will be more than what you expected. So, what I normally do with them, I try by all means to lower my voice and talk to them nicely.*

In the USA, throwing things at a teacher warrants suspension or expulsion (see Section 3.3.2). An exemplar was given of a boy who threatened others with a stick. The teacher used direct instruction and modelling as strategies for fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase. The positive discipline method, diverting the learners' attention towards something positive, allowed the boy to control his emotions and behaviour immediately. The teacher did not try to use her authority and power to stop the misbehaviour because she had received training and support from the Early Childhood Consultation Partnership (ECCP) (Mongeau, 2016:1).

The above exemplars and explanations showed that there were diverse meanings of what entailed positive discipline and punishment. Some logical consequences were regarded as punitive. The findings indicated the importance of good tone of voice and

mindful planning when applying logical consequences and application. The difference between logical consequences and punishments may only be in the tone of voice (Charles & Senter, 2005:116; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1990:266; Kohn, 1996:39-48). Thus, learners can perceive the teachers' interventions as intimidating, coercive, commanding, controlling and judgemental rather than logical, depending on the way teachers administer the logical consequences. At times, teachers may need to use natural consequences where their input is minimal.

#### **6.4.1.4 Natural consequences**

In Section 3.2.2.1 natural consequences were defined by Klein (2015:5) as actions that happened as a natural outcome of the learners' behaviour. Teachers thus did not apply natural consequences like logical consequences. However, since some natural consequences could be regarded as abusive or harmful, it is necessary that teachers allowed only those that yield positive learning experiences. An exemplar of natural consequences is described and discussed below.

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,72% Coverage

*I just ignore. When I ignore the other kids will know that the toy is his or hers. He or she doesn't want it to be shared. But I know next time that child who does not want with the toy would like the toy for the other child, so it's going to fix itself. Yes, the child will love to play with the toy of that other one. So, the other child will say you said I should not play with your toy, so you are not going to play with my toy. So later on, they will just exchange.*

Brown *et al.* (2007:212) and Grecucci *et al.* (2015:1) suggested that mindfulness should be viewed as the persons' ability to act or behave in ways that are informed by a conscious understanding of the situation at hand. This view corresponds with the way SA5 used the method of ignoring learners in her use of natural consequences as positive discipline for fostering self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase. This indicated that teachers should not always feel compelled to use punishment or logical consequences because natural consequences are positive discipline methods that can teach learners self-regulation skills.

#### 6.4.1.5 Positive and negative reinforcement

In Section 5.5.4.1, I discussed CB9's experience involving positive reinforcement. Some exemplars from other participants are as follows:

[<Files\\I-SB7>](#) - § Reference 3 - 4,05% Coverage

*At times I will give them stories about someone who used to behave very well and was rewarded, and I will reward them when they reform. I will always discourage them from beating others, like negative reinforcement, telling them that what you have done is very wrong, you were not supposed to behave like that.*

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 2 - 3,29% Coverage

*When I am disciplining them, yes, I give them that free choice because I ask the child, "What do you want? A black dot, or you want me to isolate you for some few minutes, or you don't want to go and play for some few minutes outdoor?" And the child will choose between those three. They normally love the most to go and play outside. So, if I say you are not going to play in the outdoor play it's something else. The child will ask for forgiveness there and there. They will say you better isolate me for some minutes then I go out to play.*

The exemplars suggest that the repeated use of reinforcement together with direct instruction constitute positive discipline methods that can assist learners to eventually acquire self-regulation and psychosocial skills. SB7's exemplar suggests that involving nagging when highlighting learners' mistakes is an example of negative reinforcement. CB9's exemplar demonstrated negative reinforcement in the form of punitive choices involving withdrawal of privileges. This suggests that teachers may also stop or discourage inappropriate behaviour through negative reinforcement and/or withdrawal of privileges (Winner, 2019:2). This view corresponds with benefits of using reinforcements and other behavioural strategies (see Housman, 2017:5; Diamond, 2017:220-223; Paes & Eberhart, 2019:12). However, it contradicts the view in the positive psychology framework, as asserted by Bear (2010:7), which emphasises that negative reinforcements are ineffective in fostering self-regulation because they cannot teach learners to understand the moral values that are associated with self-regulation and positive discipline, for example, empathy, kindness, fairness, self-respect and respect for other learners. This suggests that negative reinforcements

could have a negative impact on the learners' development of self-regulation skills. There are thus controversies surrounding the use and purpose of reinforcements as a method of discipline in schools, for instance, Section 2.5.3 highlights challenges of using reinforcements for learners who do not require them, such as those who are intrinsically motivated to self-regulate.

#### **6.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Common Types of Free Play Activities**

The common types of free play that participants described in their narratives were indoor play, outdoor play and socio-dramatic play. In the context of Zimbabwe (see Section 2.6.4) specified equipment was prescribed for free play in the thematic curriculum. However, the instructions seem not to have been revised to align with the newly phased in competency-based play-based curriculum. In Section 2.2.2.2, I indicated that in a competency-based curriculum, the purpose of providing learners with free play time is more about developing self-regulation and cognitive functions, for instance planning, problem solving skills, and motivation, than engagement for physical and social benefits. The exemplars showed how participants experienced free play when fostering self-regulation.

[<Files\\I- DA1>](#) - § Reference 8 - 2,92% Coverage

*Some of them will be role playing responsibilities at home, some of them will be playing games of picking careers. Some will be driving cars as drivers, others will be doctors, others will be builders using blocks to build houses. So those are skills. So, I will assist them when I see a child maybe doing something wrong.*

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 1 - 3,97% Coverage

*Like, we usually have a challenge, especially in the outdoor play. There are tyres that they play with. I noticed that there is a certain group who gave themselves entitlement to the tyres. Each time they went out, they want to play with the tyres, so others will be complaining, "Teacher so and so doesn't want to share tyres." So, what I have usually done, since I will be with them, I have given them a certain period of time so that they can play with the tyres, when they are done, they will move to the other play area so that others play with the tyres, until all are done.*

The above exemplars showed that learners did not engage much in learner-initiated explorations during indoor and outdoor free play. However, socio-dramatic play presented more opportunities for learners to use their own initiative than in indoor and outdoor play. In Chapter 5 (see Sections 5.5.1.1), socio-dramatic play was discussed as a context, where learners self-regulated with minimal teacher involvement. In Section 2.6.4, I discussed that socio-dramatic play supported psychosocial development. Similar findings were noted in literature as indicated by OECD (2019b:3) and UNICEF Headquarters (2018a:8).

Schools seemed not to have started exploring virtual play even though some of schools were equipped with computer rooms. Potential benefits of virtual play were discussed in Section 2.2.2.2. The significance of this finding is that virtual play could be recommended as the teaching approach for ICT following a gap that was revealed in the analysis of ECD phase curriculum which showed that curriculum did not specify the subject teaching approach for ICT, as in the case with the other subjects (see Section 2.6.4). Effective use of smart toys could provide learners with child-led exploratory activities that could provoke their imagination and interest, as well as provide opportunities for discovery learning. However, as indicated in Section 2.2.2.2, a lot of research work needs to be done in line with developing adequate self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase.

### **6.4.3 Sub- theme 3: Common Practices and Skills Fostering Self-Regulation**

The participants' common practices of fostering self-regulation were storytelling, modelling, narratives, co-regulation, problem solving, cognitive-reappraisal, calming down and direct instruction. In the literature review (see Section 2.5.1), I described direct instruction as a method that teachers use with other strategies. The teachers' effective use of reinforcements, direct instruction and co-regulation are techniques that assist learners in gradually acquiring self-regulation (see Section 2.5.1). The following exemplars were presented to understand some to the participants' understandings of the different skills and strategies for fostering self-regulation in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 3 - 11,35% Coverage

*INT: Is there any practical example or a story that stands out to you as representing your ideas about this topic.*

*DB3: During free play I don't guide them, I don't tell them how to play. Even if it can be outdoor play area, I don't tell them, use that climber or use that swing. On their own the children can choose what to do. So, one day, some children were on the swings, swinging, then one child came violently and pushed one of the learners who was swinging on the swings. He was not pushing the child because they were enjoying. He just wanted that learner to get down, so that he can go on the swing. He wanted to be the one on the swing. So, I intervened in that free play to teach the children turn taking. There is turn taking, that's why I said there are lots of skills. They were playing freely but I had to come in with my turn taking, since I said I will not be stagnant I move around. I say, "No, let's not hurt each other, let's wait, push him nicely. Take turns pushing each other. When one has had a chance, he must move from the swing to give the other child a chance." When I was still there one child said 'No Ma'am, he does not want to give me a chance to be on the swing.' At that point I intervened and empowered the child with skills and explained that it was not that the other learner was refusing to get down, he was still enjoying swinging. Then I told the one on the swing that if he got on the swing he must think of other children. The swings were few and had to give the other child a chance and also push the other child nicely. The learners enjoyed. I also took part by getting on the swing myself in order to demonstrate how long each learner could take on the swing. I also demonstrated how the learners should push the one on the swing.*

In the above exemplar, the participant used the skills of cognitive re-appraisal, problem-solving, modelling and direct instructions. As I explained in Section 2.5.5, using studies done by Grecucci *et al.* (2015:4), Hua *et al.* (2015:2) and Liu *et al.* (2019:2), cognitive re-appraisal involves reducing or adjusting the negative impact of negative situations or actions through interpreting them less negatively. In the above exemplar, SB3 effectively used cognitive re-appraisal to decrease the physiological arousal of negative emotions of the learner who was waiting for his turn on the swing. Recent studies, for instance, Asi *et al.* (2019:969) confirm that teachers' use of cognitive re-appraisal assists learners in dealing with negative emotions. SB3 also used problem-solving. In Section 2.5.4, I explained that problem solving was a cognitive process directed at achieving a goal when the problem solver did not initially

have a solution. Thus, it involved discovering and analysing the problem. From the definition of problem solving and how the participants described development in the ECD phase, teachers teach problem solving so that it is compatible with the learners' needs for competence and their development phase. Teachers needed to give learners instruction and coaching using actual situations, such as in the exemplar below.

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 1 - 5,24% Coverage

*So, if its free play I just let them do what they want but I will be having an aim of why I am giving that free play. For example, sometimes I might want to monitor their critical thinking. I want to see what they do and how they play with the toys. I may want to monitor their sharing, I move around because I want to remove that egocentric from them because they say it's mine, mine, so that one it must be removed. So, you don't just remove it, you give free play. You just monitor, since they are critical in thinking they learn through observing or experimenting. Some they break the toys, they just want to take a car and break it. So, what I will be doing there I will just monitor and say, "Oh, I can see you want to see how it moves. Can't you see? Let's just take it. Press it here and see how it moves." I will just be giving a guideline, but I let them play freely, because they will be developing maybe their social skills and fine motor skills.*

In the following exemplars, SA6 and CB9 indicated that in some cases their learners have temper tantrums and that they use 'calming down' as a strategy. Their understanding of calming down had similarities and differences based on the situation at hand. The similarities are that both participants use direct instructions and drawing to calm the learners down. SA6 used co-regulation while CB9 used positive-reinforcements. As I explained in Section 2.5.1, as was suggested by Florez (2011:48) and Widiastuti (2017:41), learners can gradually internalise self-regulation skills.

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 3 - 10,64% Coverage

*I am teaching ECD A. When they come straight from home, they will be changing the environment as they are used to home set up before they come to school, they have challenges. I usually address challenges, for example when they come*

*straight from home some of them will be crying the whole day, and most of them throw temper tantrums. Some learners cry to an extent that they throw temper tantrums. At times I take the learner and find activities that will make him or her calm down. If I see that the learner has emotional instability, I usually give him or her a plain paper and crayons just to scribble down. I say that his or her scribbling can make the learner to cool down and to release the emotions that trigger the temper tantrums. So, when I see that a learner is emotional, I give the learner activities, such as art and drawing.*

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 3 - 1,06% Coverage

*The child will be shouting and screaming but I try to calm the child first and talk to the child. Then after that, there are some of the things that children love. As a teacher you need to identify the areas the children love, especially with those with tantrums so that when you are disciplining them, you know the most things that touch them. So, if you are dealing with them you have to make sure you keep your promise because next time, they will not trust you. First time you talk to the child you can say, if you stop doing this and do good, I am going to give you this. It could be an extra paper or paint if the child loves painting. The child will paint a lot and show all the tantrums on the paper, instead of on others, until the child develops that discipline and he or she is able to control his temper.*

Since the findings showed that teachers use strategies that involve a teacher-led method, there was a need for teachers to encourage learners to internalise the strategies and consequently become intrinsically motivated to use them competently. In other words, learners should adopt the strategies and be able to use problem-solving, calming down and cognitive re-appraisal independently for their own good. However, Brown and Ryan (2015:141) indicated that self-regulation was to be regarded as an on-going life-long process. This means that the notion that the ECD phase fosters self-regulation should be regarded as just laying a foundation rather than inferring that learners have mastered self-regulation in the phase.



## **6.5 THEME 3: SUPPORTING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS DURING FREE PLAY IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PHASE**

Theme 3 “Supporting positive relationships during free play in the ECD phase in the ECD phase” describes and interprets the experiential knowledge that teachers have acquired with regards to the use of positive discipline during free play. This includes guidelines and advice for fostering self-regulation for promoting positive relationships in the ECD classrooms. The feeling of relatedness with others is about the quality of relationships or membership to a social institution which should be preferable on the positive rather than the negative side (see Section 1.7.4.3). The need for relatedness refers to the experience of reciprocal care and concern for important others, for instance, teachers and peers in the school context (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2016:13). Personal wellbeing as well as the psychosocial skills development, are maximised when these needs are met (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:10). Relatedness can grow when teachers allow learners to grow through using their initiatives to play on their own in groups. The sense of relatedness is demonstrated when learners have good social connections and a high concern for others through caring. In the empirical study, I describe and interpret the teachers’ experiences which highlight how they foster relatedness through positive discipline during free play. Positive relationships among learners are built on fairness, team work and tolerance towards each other.

### **6.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Work Ethics for Classroom Management**

The aim of the curriculum is to prepare learners “for life and work as they acquire practical competencies, literacy, and numeracy skills. The curriculum promotes inclusivity, lifelong learning, equity and fairness, and gender sensitivity” (Makokoro, 2017:1). This is in line with the positive psychology that emphasises civic virtues for good citizenship such as responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, as well as work ethics (Positive Psychology UK, 2004:1; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000:5). The participants’ narratives described aspects of work ethics as important for supporting positive relationships that enhance the development of work ethics from an early age. The following exemplars describe examples of work ethics with focus on promoting virtues in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\- DA1>](#) - § Reference 3 - 2,59% Coverage

*So, what I would encourage new teachers is they should know how to treat learners at different situations. At first encounter they show kids what they want. They must not allow kids to own the class but during lessons they must allow learners to be free, like child centred teaching.*

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,14% Coverage

*I think it's very important to make every learner feel comfortable. Every learner should feel loved, every learner should feel comfortable. Every learner should feel they can approach their teacher at any given time. Favouritism is a big No-No, because no child should get preferential treatment. We have children with special needs. They have different needs but everybody should be treated the same way.*

[<Files\\I-SB7>](#) - § Reference 1 - 4,28% Coverage

*As they play, learners learn to work as a team. They learn to work in groups through free play. So, when they learn to work as a team, they also learn leadership skills because some of them become leaders when they play. So, when they become leaders they will be disciplined, and they can discipline other learners. I think it's that.*

The above excerpts focused on the virtues and learners' rights to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of whether learners had disabilities or not. They also highlighted that the curriculum aimed at producing responsible adults. SB8's view that all learners needed teachers' support was in line with the positive psychology fundamentals. Thus, every learner needs positive discipline. DA1's emphasis on child-centredness suggested that teachers put the needs of the learners at the centre as was explained in the competency-based play-based curriculum (see Section 2.6.4). This does not mean that learners disregarded the teachers' authority or are free to do as they pleased in school. They were under the authority of the teacher and the school.

Skills for work and leisure are relevant in the competency-based curriculum (ZMoPSE, 2015a:5). The need for teamwork to be addressed at ECD level, as suggested by SB7, should focus on developing essential competencies necessary to maintain positive

relationships in the classroom. According to ZMoPSE (2015a:6), life skills such as teamwork, collaboration and negotiation are important work ethics for classroom management and to prepare learners for life and work.

### **6.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Enhancing Learners' Safety during Free Play**

The following findings from the literature review echoed the concerning issue that led to the exploration of the phenomenon under study (see Sections 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4). In the literature review, I found that in the USA, suspensions and expulsions were consequences that teachers could apply if learners' violent or disruptive behaviour compromised the safety of other learners and teachers (see Section 3.3.2). Durrant's model of positive discipline highlighted school and community safety as aspects when considering positive discipline in a holistic approach to education (see Section 3.5.2.4). The concerning issue in the model of Naker and Sekitoleko (2009:49) was that teachers disguised disciplinary violence as positive discipline. The forms of disciplinary violence excluded physical punishments but were still damaging, for instance, verbal threats, scolding, sarcasm or the withdrawal of privileges (see Sections 3.2.1.3 and 3.5.3.1). The following exemplars illustrated participants' strategies for enhancing the learners' safety as an aspect of supporting positive relationships during free play in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § 1 Reference 1 - 4,42% Coverage

*Before we leave the classroom, even going for assembly wherever I will be going with the learners, discipline first. I explain to the learners that we are going to this place. You must go in line, keep quiet and behave well. You can't just say, "Let's go to the swings, play." I don't think it's proper. So, before we leave the classroom, I would have told them, "We are going to such a place to do this and that". As they go, they will be having knowledge about what they are going to do at that place.*

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,42% Coverage

*So, the best way that I have done is you have to make sure that the moment we are going to a free outdoor play, we are supposed to remind each other of rules so that the children take precautions so that they won't hurt each other.*

The above exemplars resembled proactive discipline which I described in Section 3.2.2.2, that is in line with the positive psychology framework where both proactive and reactive discipline are regarded as important in school discipline. I referred to Dârjan and Tomița's (2014:30-31) explanation of proactive discipline as the positive and preventative approaches to fostering self-regulation and other important psychosocial skills at various levels in the school system. In the above exemplars, the suggested strategies were for classroom and individual levels because currently in Zimbabwe there are no school-wide programmes for social and emotional learning in schools. However, the recent Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A mandated that school principals draw up a disciplinary policy for the school in accordance with standards set out in regulations, prescribed by the minister for the purpose. It is thus likely that soon, schools might have policies that articulated both proactive and reactive disciplinary practices.

### **6.5.3 Sub-theme 3: Dealing with Challenges Pertaining to Inadequate Resources**

In Zimbabwe there is no model of positive discipline to refer to; however, the ban on corporal punishment in schools and the teachers' roles as co-explorers and facilitators could be understood as acknowledging the importance of nurturing the learners' development (see Section 3.3.4). This notion of nurturing, noted in Skinner's behaviourism, substantiated the teachers' role of nurturing learners' development in the ECD phase (see Section 3.4.1.1). However, due to challenges such as lack of resources, I discussed participants' suggestions on how teachers could maintain positive relationships in the current situation, with the focus on mindfulness. Self-regulation and mindful awareness were associated not only with peer relationships and social skills, but also stress regulation (Nieminen & Sajaniemi, 2016:1). It was thus associated with minimising the levels of stress by establishing conditions and routines that encourage positive interactions and a positive learning atmosphere. The voice of the participants offers practical guidance to teachers and other stakeholders through the following exemplars.

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § reference 1 - 9,70% Coverage

*In the classroom you have different corners, right. Children should rotate. You have groups, this group is going to the science corner, this group is going to another*

*corner. Don't let them go and squeeze in one corner. Like you have 20 minutes or 30 minutes of free play, allocate each group 5 minutes, of which 5 minutes won't be enough, but I am giving an example. Maybe after play time or the last part of the play time combine them. Then they tell you of their experiences, what they got, what they learnt, it would be an interesting part. If you just let them be and say ok it's free play, all of them will go to the dramatic corner and perhaps, they start fighting for whatever is there, but when you group them, they go to different play areas, then that way they also benefit. And when they are outside you also have different play areas. We have the swings, see-saw, we have the jungle gym. There are tyres. There is the Wendy house. Some of course they like the Wendy house. They will go to the Wendy house all the girls. Then the Wendy house is very tiny. Then if they are there, they will start fighting pulling each other to say, "Ok, can I come in?" But I think if you group them again quickly, for a certain period of time, you guys you will be playing here. Then you have feedback from them, what were their experiences, what they learnt. It will help you to strategise in a better way the next time they go out.*

[<Files\\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 1 - 3,09% Coverage

*The other character that we will be trying to impose on learners is sharing. We have got limited resources. We have limited playing materials. So, as much as we instil self-discipline, we also try to instil sharing. They learn to share those materials.*

[<Files\\I-SB7>](#) - § Reference 4 - 2,74% Coverage

*SB7: We do not have enough materials.*

*INT: So how do you manage?*

*SB7: Some parents volunteered, they brought materials for us, and some learners also. We have tried to make materials together with other learners.*

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 2 - 9,61% Coverage

*DB3: When you talk of discipline, discipline is wide according to my understanding. Some people when they think about discipline, what really comes first is to take a rod because they believe in the saying "Spare the rod, spoil the child". That's what comes first, but my understanding with the children, based on my experience with them I have learnt a lot. It is not only to use of the stick, but I can*

*discipline them by maybe tasking others like group leaders to monitor because they learn better as they interact among themselves. I can choose monitors to monitor noise. They can monitor how they play, even how the learners handle the play materials..... I think that's also discipline-it's a positive one. Don't bind them by saying do this, don't do this, but tell them about the positive things, for example, it's good to share. For, example some learners bring toys from home and they don't want to share, but since it's free play, someone may just grab the toy. If the learners have not yet acquired problem solving, the owner of the toy may hit the other child, then there will be a fight. But because they come from different backgrounds, some they bring that behaviour of fighting from their homes. They will be coming from homes where there are fights, so when they come to school and become violent to others, that's why I have to go back to the parent. But I would have monitored through free play how the child handles other children, how I tell that child that this is not good. Some of the learners can tell you, "I will fix you. I will box you, my mother told me to box you." So, it comes from home. So that's why I said to me positive discipline needs, child, the parent and me the facilitator.*

Based on the above exemplars, teachers' mindful planning and grouping helped minimise the negative impact of overcrowding in the ECD phase. CA10 suggested that feedback from the learners was crucial in planning for free play in line with the child-centred approach. The suggestion by SB7 to involve parents in making toys for the learners was also used successfully in Uganda (see Section 2.6.3). Parents made toys for learners to use at school and at home. They used locally available materials through recycling boxes, bottles and banana tree bark. The findings of the study by Smith Glen (2015:13) and UNICEF Uganda (2018:4) showed that learners gained self-regulation skills during free play, for instance by sharing toys, turn-taking and perspective taking. The skill of sharing toys improved when there were adequate toys for learners, contrary to what DA2 had indicated in the above exemplar. DA2 suggested that teachers could teach sharing where resources were limited. DB3 used the small group approach and gave learners the responsibility for co-managing the learners. She also highlighted that there was a need for a broad definition of positive discipline and fostering-self-regulation. This need was also highlighted in the preliminary literature review (see Section 1.4.3).

## **6.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS IN RELATION TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE STUDY**

In thematic analysis, identifying and defining themes lead to interpretations (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:812). In the following sections, I interrogate the findings to describe and understand the participants' experiences in relation to the sampling decisions, my pre-understanding and the theoretical framework. The discussions are important in fulfilling the aim of the study.

### **6.6.1 Discussion of Findings in relation to School Context**

In selecting the participating schools, I utilised purposive sampling strategies namely, maximum variation and criterion sampling in sampling (see Section 4.4.1). This section interprets the themes (distinct patterns of meaning and action) in relation to the type of school where participants worked (Christian, disadvantaged and special school).

#### **6.6.1.1 The Christian school**

According to Haslip *et al.* (2019:2), ECD phase teachers can support the learners' spiritual development through providing love, kindness and a positive learning environment. Participants in the Christian school demonstrated support and caring, striving to prevent damage to the teacher-learner relationship. This kind of relationship was indicated in the way Jesus related with God and people, which was characterised by "affection, love, admiration, solidarity" (Einloth, 2010:IX). Teachers were loving, caring and kind but at the same time remained firm. The common techniques involved taking away privileges and timeout. The positive discipline strategies that are directly associated with fostering self-regulation during free play were direct instruction, storytelling, co-regulation, modelling, problem-solving and calming down.

What stands out in participants from the Christian school is that they strive to create positive relationships with all the learners in their classrooms. They also want to maintain close communication with the parents by reporting the learners' problem behaviour to the office, asking input from parents, thus, making parents part of the classroom management plan. The participants from the Christian school expected the parents to practise positive parenting at home as well. They expressed concern about parents who did not spend quality time with their children, for instance, parents who

were too pre-occupied with work, and expected the school to do everything in terms of fostering positive behaviour and self-regulation. Correspondingly, Christian organisations, for instance the World Council of Churches, are also encouraging parents to provide positive parenting by endorsing positive discipline (see Section 3.6.1). The following exemplars portrayed the Christian school participants' understandings of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § 8 Reference 7 - 6,97% Coverage

*Most of the times I use the way of using the black dot. The black dot it will be having like, if you scream in the classroom and make a lot of noise, we put a black dot if you shout a lot, we put a black dot and also if you climb on top of the tables. We lay few things that children are not supposed to do. In the outdoor play, if you throw stones to others, we put a black dot because you are not allowed to pick stones and throw them to others. If you have more than three black dots, we talk to each other and we call your parents, and talk the administration, and the child will be able to correct his or her or mistake.*

*When it is done out of love, after sharing that with the child or giving positive discipline to the child, normally I pray with the child so that the child will understand. Some of them I have even asked, "Can you pray to Jesus so that he can help you to correct the mistake that you have done?" And most of the children will love to do that because they even said innocently, "Please help me not to kick others," because they know that what they have been doing is wrong.*

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 7 - 3,17% Coverage

*As they fight some of them become too emotional. I need to explain to them that this is ungodly because this is a Christian environment. After the fight, I give them a chance to apologise because I have told them that Romans 12 verse 10 says "Love each other like brothers and sisters, so you can't hit your own brother.*

The following exemplars portrayed the Christian school participants' concerns about the use time-out. The understanding seemed to be that teachers should be mindful of



the learners' psychological needs. understandings of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 7 - 3,50% Coverage

*Let it not be too extreme also. Sometimes you can say to a child, sit by the naughty corner there, and then you forget the child. The child stays there twenty minutes. The others are playing and done. You find the child sleeping. But let it be a punishment that the child can know that what I have done is wrong. So, maybe just time it two minutes to five minutes.*

The above exemplars indicated that the use of prayer, time-out and reasoning with the learners were commonly used as practices by the participants in the Christian school. This understanding is different from hostile discipline where teachers punish learners without offering an explanation in the hope that the behaviour would not recur. On the other hand, the forms of regulation that might be suggested are identified, introjected and integrated rather than intrinsic regulation. From a Christian perspective, participants described their understanding of positive discipline as an opportunity to teach appropriate behaviour through explaining why behaviour is inappropriate before applying consequences. Concomitantly, participants evoked feelings of guilt, regret and shame so that learners could learn that wrongdoing led to negative consequences. Nonetheless there were positive methods of making things right again through praying and asking for forgiveness. Accordingly, learners choose to behave in an appropriate manner wilfully, based on the principles of Christianity rather than the fear of punitive consequences.

The results showed that the participants supported competence, relatedness and mindfulness. For instance, "the black dot method" suggests that the participants are compelled to produce a list of arbitrary punishments for specific misbehaviours to discipline the learners. They could support the learners' needs for competence and relatedness through teaching love and kindness. These findings were in line with the literature reviewed in Section 3.6.1, where I indicated that positive discipline was still a new concept but had shown strong alignment with the positive psychology framework, for instance, the spiritual virtues described in Galatians 5 verses 22-23 in the Christian Bible (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

humility and self-control). These virtues were used for encouraging positive parenting so that children grew up in an atmosphere of respect, love as well as kindness (Perrin *et al.*, 2017:514; WCC, 2017:9, 16). An important finding in line with the above discussion, suggests that the positive parenting programmes can inform positive discipline in schools, within the positive psychology framework where positive forms of control are accommodated if they promote the learners' wellbeing. This finding is supported by Karreman *et al.* (2006:572) who found that compliance was positively related to positive parental control.

### **6.6.1.2 The disadvantaged school**

In Section 2.6.4, I highlighted that research reports on the status of education in Zimbabwe, for instance, ZIMSEC and ACER (2013:53), had indicated severe shortages of teaching and learning materials in schools in many socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Zimbabwe. Recent curriculum changes from a thematic curriculum to a competency-based play-based curriculum impacted on learners' opportunities for free play in various ways in different schools. The findings from the paradigm case showed a perspective of not looking at a competency-based curriculum as hindering the learners' engagement in free play. In this view, teachers created free play within subject teaching in the competency-based curriculum. However, meaningful integration of free-play with subject teaching could only be done effectively in schools where teacher-learner ratios were low, for instance in the special school. Participants in the schools where teacher-learner ratios were high, such as the disadvantaged school, expressed concern about a large workload needing to be completed in the workbooks which meant that learners did more seatwork than exploration and discovery. They had challenges during stand-alone free play sessions in the play corners and outdoor play because of limited resources and overcrowding at the play centres. This meant that teachers needed to control the learners' free play, contrary to their understanding of the concept of free play as a child-directed activity. The following exemplars were participants' experiences in that context.

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § Reference 1 - 8,20% Coverage

*I think as caregivers, we are having a challenge with the teacher to pupil ratio because I will be having so many children under my care. Under my care I have 50 ECD B children instead of maybe 20 to 25. So, to foster positive discipline, to foster*

*development fully when they are 50 children is a challenge because I have to cater for individual differences. Now, for example with the new curriculum we are having, it becomes very difficult because I am supposed to do eight lessons a day. ... Our space is small because of the number of the learners we have, but otherwise given much space to move around even with much materials they can develop better.*

From the above exemplar, it appears the key challenges for teachers in the disadvantaged school are factors such as high teacher-learner ratios, inadequate space and too many subject areas in the ECD phase. There are other socio-economic challenges that relate to the socio-economic status of individual learners and the community they live in. The following exemplar highlights some of those challenges.

[<Files\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 3 - 10,11% Coverage

*From my experience, I can say I think being a parent to the child, in loco parentis is very vital from talking from my experience in this background that I am in. A lot of children come from child headed families. They are orphans. Some parents are living outside the country in the diaspora. Some children they don't have that parent at home to guide that child or to teach that child discipline. So, as a teacher I would say teachers should just be parents to those children. Try to understand the child. Take the child as your own. Try to understand there are a lot of things that build a character of a person and even children they are like that. There are a lot of things that should be taken into consideration when trying discipline or to instil self-discipline in a child. Look at the background of the child*

Based on the findings and the above exemplars, the disadvantaged school that participated in the study faced many socio-economic challenges. The participants described challenges pertaining to poor socio-economic backgrounds, lack of positive role models at home, high teacher-learner ratios, academic-oriented curriculum and a lack of toys and other play equipment. However, despite the challenges, participants' descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon showed several elements of positivity and optimism. Participants were able to detect disruptive or destructive behaviour in learners' engagement and skilfully redirect the learners towards positive behaviour through providing guidance. Based on the above, I suggest that mindfulness

should be incorporated into the daily activities not only as a trait in the fostering of self-regulation but incorporated as a practice that is essential in addressing the learners' psychosocial needs in the ECD phase. The findings thus illustrate that practical knowledge, institutional impediments, learner support and resources would be understood from the teachers' description and interpretations of their experiences (Roulston, 2014:300). The findings also confirmed that participants have a positive attitude towards supporting learners' development and that their support yields the acquisition of self-regulation skills. Similar findings were found in a study by Moyo, Wadesango and Kurebwa (2012:149).

### 6.6.1.3 The Special school

Participants had no issues with overcrowding as they had small numbers of learners in the classrooms. The inclusive education policies were effectively in place. Participants used different strategies for fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. Participants in the special school rely mostly on time-out and direct instruction. The following exemplar from SA6 presents what is common practice in the special school.

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 3 - 3,35% Coverage

*Besides placing the learner at the naughty corner, I use storytelling, particularly the stories with a moral lesson or value. My learners hear that maybe such and such happened to a learner because he or she was doing bad things, good things or what. I would expect them to remember the moral lessons of the stories during free play.*

Some strategies were specifically designed for deaf learners, such as ignoring learners, which I interpreted as using natural consequences (see Section 6.4.1.4). In the following exemplars SA5 describes and interprets other experiential practices and knowledge about deaf learners, in line with the research topic.

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 7 - 9,18% Coverage

*The ones I was using, time out and ignoring. Ignoring really works with the deaf because they don't want to be ignored, so it's going to have an impact on them. They want that care and love so the moment you ignore them it has an impact*

*on them. And this time out also, it has got an impact. They don't want to be put aside. They want to be there belonging.*

*I can put the child in the corner for five minutes. It really works with the deaf because the they don't want that segregation. They don't want to be separated, so the next time they won't do that. They make sure they will be careful, and they are quick to say sorry to the teacher and to the other peers.*

*Even this "ignoring one", I ignore but my eyes will be talking, so they quickly see the teacher has ignored me, but she is not happy. They can read facial expressions fast and they are excellent in reading. They also use facial expressions. They want to see facial expressions if they don't catch the signing. If I am talking, they are lip reading, they look at my face, that's how they learn. They are so particular of how you use your face, facial expressions.*

*I use the ignore technique if the behaviour is not dangerous. When a child is fighting others, I just ignore the child. I know there will be a time when the child needs me, but I will remind the child through my actions that I did not like the fighting the child did. I ignore the child then the child recognises that the teacher is still angry about the fighting. Then the child will say sorry. Ignoring really works with the deaf. They don't want to be ignored.*

The following exemplar describes what takes place during free play session for the learners who are deaf.

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 3 - 5,73% Coverage

*For example, I can say today they are going to play with dolls. I want to pick out actually what they will be doing with the dolls. Can they relate the dolls to their daily lives? Then just monitor and see. I can see girls putting the dolls on their backs. They can also make-up a dish like they are bathing the doll. They can imagine a plate of food and they can be feeding the baby, things like that. I have observed that they actually do turn-taking, they give each other chances. They know I have this doll, this child has the doll I want they just talk to each other, when I'm done, I will give you the doll. And they are like doing it together, like helping each other. They will be like they want to clothe the doll. This one will be putting on shoes, the other one is putting this and that, without any squabbles and without any problems, it's turn taking.*

The most distinctive feature in the findings from the special school is the belief in inclusivity. As discussed in Section 6.5.1, inclusivity is embraced in the Zimbabwe competency-based curriculum. The following exemplar from SB8 describes how inclusivity works in relation to the research topic.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 5 - 3,70% Coverage

*As long as they are exposed to that at an early age, that they grow up with a sense of, I wouldn't call it charity as such, I would say a sense of appreciation that we differ and we are not the same. And you find that for those who cannot walk, the other learners who are very mobile, they actually go to a corner, they bring a toy for their counterpart, or their friend who cannot move easily, or they can help him or her to get to where the toys are, and then they play. So, with play, they always want to play together and they will always find a way of involving everybody.*

Participants from the special school highly regarded learners' autonomy, skills for independence and inclusivity. There were strategies that were common, such as time-out as shown in the exemplars of SA6 and SA5. However, the strategy of ignoring learners seemed to be specifically for deaf learners as other participants did not refer to the strategy.

#### **6.6.1.4 Comments on the situation in schools**

Self-regulation involves the “ability to modulate arousal and behaviour in the context of environmental demands” (Perry *et al.*, 2018:1542). The environmental demands refer to the expected cognitive, social and emotional self-control in different situations (Dan, 2016:190). The teachers' professional responsibilities in the ECD phase classrooms have become increasingly challenging as the duration of seatwork pre-academic written activities in the ECD workbooks seem to demand much more time than allocated in the subject syllabi. This has been noted predominantly in the disadvantaged school and Christian school where the numbers of learners in the classroom were well above the stipulated maximum of 20 learners in a classroom. Large numbers of learners in the classroom also jeopardised the chances of engaging learners in competency-based curriculum activities such as discovery learning and exploration, which could be easily integrated with fostering self-regulation during free

play. Large numbers in the classrooms also minimised the chances that learners would engage in authentic free play as teachers control how learners utilise the meagre resources and overcrowding in the play corners. The Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education thus needs to demonstrate an empathic understanding of the teachers' daily experiences, feelings and challenging demands of developing the learners' self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase in various school contexts. The following exemplar illustrates the current situation in schools in Zimbabwe that may represent the perceptions of many ECD phase teachers.

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 1 - 7,65% Coverage

*Actually, if ECD was learning through play it was going to be the best. I used to like the first approach that we used here in Zimbabwe, the thematic approach. Learning through play, the discovery learning, of which yes is there now, but now its too much of formal learning, they have little time to play. The thematic approach is you know, it would like you concentrate on one theme for all the subjects for that day or for that week. And then as you concentrate on one theme they connect easily from one subject to the other, and then as a result, they are able to grasp the concept easily, and then you give them time to play and they are just at ease. But now, because they sit for a long time, I think it's making it difficult to foster self-regulation, especially in the classroom, because in them there is play. That's what they want because when sometimes when you are teaching, they would ask me, "Teacher, are we going to play with this," whilst they are learning in the classroom, so in them there is play, but it has been changed to too much formal desk learning. Formal learning is now just too much for them.*

Based on the sentiments raised above, there might be a need for the curriculum planners to articulate the role of work books and other factors that are contributing to too much seatwork in the ECD phase. The findings suggest that the use of workbooks contributes to the conflicting or competing interests between the Zimbabwean competency-based play-based curriculum and free play in the schools.

## **6.6.2 Findings and Discussion in relation to Grades taught by Participants**

The following section presents the conclusions of the examination of patterns of practice across participants by grade, Grades ECD-A and ECD-B.

### **6.6.2.1 Grade ECD-A**

Participants in Grade ECD-A nurtured the development of psychosocial skills that were essential in the development of self-regulation skills. The participants' use of direct teaching and co-regulation was consistent with learners who were in transition from learning from home to school. Participants also utilised praise and other behavioural methods that promote external regulation. From the participants' descriptions of their practices, as they were assisting learners to be mindful, they simultaneously satisfied the learners' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (see Section 5.5.5.2 and 6.6.3). The strategies that participants used for fostering self-regulation during free play in Grade ECD-A were story-telling, time-out and co-regulation. In Grade ECD-A, participants expect learners to be mature enough to comprehend the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, many participants associated time-out and withdrawal of privileges as effective methods, yet research has consistently shown that these methods are not effective in the development of self-regulation, they only fostered external regulation, which is at the extreme lower end of the continuum in terms of the OIT (see Section 2.2.1.2). The other forms of regulation that were towards the upper end of the continuum, near intrinsic regulation were hardly mentioned in both literature and by participants in this study.

### **6.6.2.2 Grade ECD-B**

Encouragement seemed to be the key strategy for fostering self-regulation through positive discipline in Grade ECD-B. Encouragement was illuminated as a teacher-initiated strategy for assisting learners to appreciate the right behaviour from the wrong one. Mindfulness was also featured in Grade ECD-B as a strategy for fostering self-regulation, as noted in the participants' support of learners to appreciate and evaluate their own behaviours in ways that are not solely confined to the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs. Participants demonstrated that they also fostered mindfulness when promoting the development of self-regulation (see Section 5.5.4.1).



In Grade ECD-B, participants gradually handed over the responsibility of control of behaviour and emotions to the learners. Participants who teach Grade ECD-B learners rely mostly on applying logical consequences. As a result, the positive discipline methods for assisting learners to overcome the problem of egocentrism were perceived as punishment. However, when participants gave learners the chance of solving problems on their own, learners become intrinsically motivated to regulate their behaviour, for instance sharing toys voluntarily (see Section 5.5.4).

### **6.6.2.3 Synthesis of findings in relation to grade taught by participants**

The synthesis of findings from literature review and the empirical study showed that the development of self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase was progressive and followed developmental patterns of growth (see Section 2.2.1.2). In other words, younger learners had less self-regulation skills than the older ones (Florez, 2011:51). This was in line with the findings of research done by Montroy *et al.* (2016:2) which indicated that learners progressed from being able to regulate through co-regulation to the more advanced forms of regulation. This was possible through corresponding development in other areas of development such as language, physical, moral, social, emotional as well as intellectual development.

Participants in both Grades ECD-A and ECD-B perceived the learners' ability to take the initiative, do turn-taking, sharing and apologising for mistakes with the development of self-regulation skills and less externalising problem behaviours. Participants who taught younger learners in Grade ECD-A in the three schools, made use of timeout with reservations, while those who taught older learners used time-out more unreservedly. The difference between learners in the two grades is described in the following exemplar.

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 4 - 2,83% Coverage

*. The ECD want my love because they are coming from home. They want mother love. They are looking at me and saying, "There is another mother at school". They have left their mother at home and they still want me to be near them which is different from the juniors.*

In the above exemplar, SA5 explained why learners in Grade ECD-A needed love and care when they started school. Teachers needed to nurture their development. This

finding corresponds with the literature review finding in Section 2.2.3 which revealed that common understandings from researchers in ECE and child development for example Li (2012:20), Nelsen *et al.* (2007:4) and Ngaujah and Dirks (2003:6), generally agree that it is only at the end of the ECD phase that learners have acquired some form of self-regulation. Too much reliance on logical consequences and punishment was a concern, considering that some learners needed additional support or referral for psychological assessment.

### **6.6.3 Relating findings to the Researcher's Pre-Understanding**

In this section, I sought to explain the patterns of understanding of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play, through making comparisons with my pre-understanding. My pre-understanding was articulated in Section 1.3 as per requirements in Benner's interpretive phenomenology.

I indicated that my understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase had much to do with child-centred practice that I understood as non-violent discipline. The teachers' every day experiences presented in this interpretive phenomenological study, described practical knowledge with much focus on supporting the learners' psychosocial needs. The reality that teachers need training in positive discipline methods has been brought to light. The findings and discussion from the paradigm case analysis showed that participants viewed free play and non-punitive discipline as central to the development of self-regulation in their learners. Discussions of the findings in the thematic analysis showed that there were linkages between grade, type of school, type of positive discipline methods and advice given to the inexperienced teachers. Participants regarded gender equality education as a component of the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play.

The findings from the participants' narratives are not suggesting that teachers should never punish, praise, help or express disappointment about the learners' behaviour. The appropriateness of positive disciplinary action will depend on many factors based on the teacher's judgement of the situation at hand, the school context and the grade. Well-intended teachers' action may have unexpected, or even negative effects on the learners' development of self-regulation or beliefs about their own academic abilities.

Based on my reflection on my pre-understanding, the participants' use of strategies, for instance, co-regulation, cognitive-reappraisal and calming down, were associated with the training they received from the ECD trainer (see Sections 1.2). Similar findings were suggested for the effectiveness of positive discipline training programmes done by UNICEF in Uganda and ECCP programmes in the USA (see Sections 3.3.2 & 3.3.3). My interpretation of my pre-understanding is supported by the finding of a study by Ludwig *et al.* (2016:100-101) which showed that the development of self-regulation and positive relationships were related concepts in the ECD phase. Positive discipline is thus important to guide teachers and learners to resolve problems without violence. Disciplinary violence promotes external regulation rather than encouraging learners to develop towards achieving authentic self-regulation (Barrable & Arvanitis, 2019:44; Kirk & Jay, 2018:476).

## **6.7 RELATING FINDINGS TO THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 indicated that the sustainable development of the learners' self-regulation skills and effective teachers' application of positive discipline methods need the recognition of mindfulness as a basic psychological need. In this section I relate the findings of the empirical study to the theoretical framework of the study.

### **6.7.1 Positive Psychology**

The use of positive psychology as the location for the study enabled me to describe and interpret the multiple realities of understandings of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play (see Section 1.7.2). Surprising was the notion that participants knew that the purpose of free play was for learners to practice self-regulation and other psychosocial skills, but they perceived free play as a privilege that could be withdrawn as part of positive discipline. This belief may have emanated from a narrow understanding of positive discipline as the absence of corporal punishment. It could also have emanated from the idea that positive discipline was a very broad phenomenon (see Section 1.4.3).

There were thus mixed views and uncertainty on what constituted positive discipline methods, about the negative impact of positive discipline methods such as punishment, time-out and withdrawal of learners from free play. Some participants

perceived these methods as undermining the learners' psychosocial development, thereby increasing the learners' risk for psychopathology. Other participants seemed to disregard the concerns as valid, hence the efficacy of alternatives to corporal punishment as positive discipline was debatable. This calls for a universal definition of positive discipline that does not give reference to the negative (corporal punishment) but states elements of positive discipline, skills development and practices. The following exemplars illustrate the participants' uncertainty on the efficacy of behavioural techniques:

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § 3 Reference 2 - 1,79% Coverage

*As I praise, I encourage. Sometimes I can encourage good behaviour through appraisals, just to give a well done or ask others to clap hands, or just a soft touch, even to appreciate what he or she is doing. Even though bad behaviour might be promoted, my aim will be to promote good morals, good behaviour, positive discipline.*

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 6 - 4,96% Coverage

INT: So, let me understand the naughty corner. Is it part of positive discipline or punishment?

*It's punishment. Yes, it's a way of both. It's a way of disciplining because at times some children you talk to them, don't do ABCD because of this and this, some will not understand soon after talking to them. Just put them in the naughty corner maybe for five minutes. They don't like the naughty corner. Once you say, just go and sit there by the naughty corner, they put a long face that they don't want. Some of them will say, "Teacher, I'm sorry, I don't want to go to the naughty corner." By acknowledging that I'm sorry they are acknowledging that what I did was wrong, even if you don't let them sit by the naughty corner.*

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § Reference 3 - 4,80% Coverage

*What I can also do is to ask the learner who misbehaves to come and stand in front of the class for five minutes, and I tell other children that, "You see --- did this and is on punishment. If you do the same mistake, you will come and join this child."*

*Now, the other learners enjoy that. The whole class will be saying, “Teacher I did this” because they want to come to the front. So, I think just telling the learner to keep quiet, or to sit down, verbal reprimands is better than giving punishments. Punishment is worse because they enjoy it.*

[<Files\\-SA5>](#) - § Reference 1 - 1,82% Coverage

Learners who are deaf are at more risk of punitive discipline if teachers are not mindful especially if language and speech has not yet been developed.

*It's a double problem because you will be thinking that this child is misbehaving, yet the child is not misbehaving. The child cannot relate. They don't have the language. They don't know how to sign. When they want this, they want to do this, how to do the signing, they don't have. So, the language was the problem.*

From the above exemplars, positive discipline should be well defined internationally. What should be avoided in such a definition is the notion that punishment is discipline. If punishment is not perceived as discipline, terms like, disciplinary violence, will not exist. Teachers' actions would be classified as either discipline or violence.

### **6.7.2 Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

In Section 1.7.3, I discussed the SDT as a macro-theory of human motivation, development, and wellness which has been applied in a wide range of fields including education. The assumption of the SDT was that people were active organisms with natural tendencies to grow but to realise optimal growth, they require ongoing psychosocial support (Self-Determination Theory Organisation, 2019:1-2). This is supported by six mini-theories, two of which were used in this study, the BPNT and the OIT. I used the OIT to learn about types of regulation as the main assumption is that development of self-regulation is an on-going process and is life-long (see Section 2.2.1.2). The ECD phase learners are intrinsically motivated to engage in play but are still learning to control their emotions and behaviour (Nelsen *et al.*, 2007:4; Nelsen *et al.*, 2013:9). From the participants' descriptions of their practices, various forms of regulation were indicated which were neither external regulation nor intrinsic regulation. Some participants controlled the learners without the use of rewards, for instance, when using co-regulation. This did not suggest that the absence of rewards

and punishment yielded intrinsic regulation instantly (see Section 6.5.3). Based on the participants' descriptions and interpretations, I found introjected regulation as the most applicable form of regulation to describe the learners' regulation. Introjected regulation is partially external because it is associated with the development of learners' self-esteem and self-control using internal rewards rather than compliance, external rewards and punishment (Brown & Ryan, 2015:140; Deci & Ryan, 2000:236-237). It is characterised by inner conflict between ownership of behaviour and following rules (Deci & Ryan, 2000:236-237). Initiative, guilt, self-importance, power, as well as shame are some of the examples of behaviour that are a result of introjected and identified forms of regulation that are associated with ECD phase, as described in Erikson's stage theory (see Section 2.2.3.1).

### **6.7.3 The Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)**

In the ECD phase, mindfulness involves the learners' competencies for identifying and controlling their emotions using mindfulness techniques for calming down (see Section 1.8.1). Based on the findings of the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3, I indicated that the sustainable development of learners' self-regulation skills and effective teachers' application of positive discipline methods needs the recognition of mindfulness as a basic psychological need (see Sections 2.7 & 3.6.2). In Section 1.8, I indicated a conceptual framework that incorporated mindfulness as a fourth basic psychological need in the BPNT. I also explained that the theorists who devised the SDT and the BPNT, Deci and Ryan, as well as positive psychology researchers, had initiated discussions for considering mindfulness as a basic psychological need.

The following exemplars captured teachers' experiences of using mindfulness to foster self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play.

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 5 - 4,47% Coverage

*At times I take the learner and find activities that will make him or her calm down. If I see that the learner has emotional instability, I usually give him or her a plain paper and crayons just to scribble down. I say that his or her scribbling can make the learner to cool down and to release the emotions that trigger the temper tantrums. So, when I see that a learner is emotional, I give the learner activities, such as art and drawing.*

*I think let me say they should discipline you out of love. Whatever discipline that you are going to use, let it be out of love. These are the early stages of the child, and if something goes wrong because of the type of discipline, they keep it in the conscious mind, it affects the child for the rest of their lives, maybe the rest of their schooling, or the rest of their primary education, you know somehow it would come back later.*

The above exemplar from SA6, illustrated the teachers' use of calming learners by encouraging them to control their emotions through concentration on drawing and art assisted learners with tantrums to calm down. Calming is an essential element of mindfulness (see Section 3.6.2). In a study by Maloney *et al.* (2016:327) that investigated the efficacy of a mindfulness programme, MindUp, calming was explicitly taught as in SA6's exemplar (see Section 3.6.2). According to Maloney *et al.* (2016:327), learners and teachers found the calming down activities beneficial in their learning of self-regulation skills. The exemplar from CA10 affirmed that the fostering of self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase was an act of mindfulness.

Mindfulness is not good only for teachers but for learners as well. Deci and Ryan (2008:184) explain that Self-Determination Theory researchers have initiated discussions of considering mindfulness as a basic psychological need. Mindfulness is associated with intrinsic autonomous motivation and positive behavioural outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2008:184). Mindfulness has been found to reduce mood disorders, stress, anxiety and depression while increasing positive emotions ability to relate with others, anger management skills, communication of feelings as well as overall wellbeing (Corthorn, 2018:1-2). For more details and explanations see Sections 2.7 and 3.6.2. In the ECD phase and in relation to positive discipline, aspects of mindfulness are demonstrated when learners can identify their emotions and control their emotions using mindfulness techniques such as calming down and problem-solving skills (Durrant, 2014:3; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017:4, 8).

Mindfulness is particularly relevant in the ECD phase because learners are at a stage where they use initiative to explore the environment (Wiedel-Lubinski, 2019:1).

Corthorn (2018:2) describes this as a “normal need of the child for autonomy”. The results of a study by Brown and Ryan (2003:843-844) provided the empirical evidence that mindfulness has adequate qualities that could make it a basic psychological need. In the empirical study, I captured teachers’ experiences of being mindful and this suggested that mindfulness can be proposed as a fourth basic psychological need in the BPNT.

## **6.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Participants described experiences of acting skilfully from a deep scientifically informed experiential background that showed sensitivity to the psychological needs of the learners (for instance, support for relatedness for learners who had problems in engaging in play, and support for competency for learners from disadvantaged home backgrounds). Thus, the findings from the thematic analysis made visible some of the complexities pertaining to the fostering of self-regulation skills through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase in the different schools. In summary, teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase by understanding child development as fostering autonomy and relatedness, using different skills and strategies for developing self-regulation competencies during free play and supporting positive relationships during free play in the early childhood development phase. In the next chapter I discuss the summary, conclusions and recommendations.



## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapters 5 and 6, I used a paradigm case, exemplars and thematic analysis to present, describe and interpret the participants' understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in actual practice. In Chapter 7, I provide a summary of the research findings of key scholarly and empirical findings. Implications for practice are also given. The contribution of the study, recommendations for various stakeholders and avenues for further research are provided. Finally, a reflection on the limitations of the study and conclusions is also provided.

### **7.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS**

This study has seven chapters which comprised the orientation to the study, two literature review chapters, research design and methodology, two data analysis chapters, as well as the chapter with the summary, conclusion and recommendations. The aim of the study was to understand the participants' practice of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in three primary schools in the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province in Zimbabwe. Positive psychology, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the SDT's sub-theory, namely the Basic Psychological Needs Theory (autonomy, competence and relatedness) (BPNT) were the guiding frameworks for the study. Ethical approval was sought from UNISA College of Education Research Ethics Committee and Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Social constructivism as the paradigm underpinned this study and the qualitative approach was used. The meanings stated in the research findings were trustworthy in articulating the realities of the participants (see Section 4.5). This is in line with Benner's interpretive phenomenology which emphasised articulating practices of the participants' ordinary understandings and knowledge of the phenomenon under study. Benner's interpretive phenomenology was used as the research design because it was a pragmatic way to generate descriptions and understandings of the phenomenon in the data gathered from the participants.

### **7.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The summary of findings consists of key literature review findings and empirical findings from my study. The use of a paradigm case, exemplars and a thematic analysis in the summary of the empirical findings is done to comply with the requirement in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method. Some excerpts extracted from the paradigm case and the narratives of other participants are presented and supported by the findings from previous studies and the literature review. A diagrammatic illustration of understanding the participants' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play is also given.

#### **7.3.1 Key Scholarly Findings from The Literature Review**

Among the key scholarly findings is the indication that there were no guidelines or programme for explicit teaching and learning of self-regulation and psychosocial skills in the ECD phase in Zimbabwe. Teachers mostly relied on knowledge they received during teacher training and workshops, for instance the workshops on positive discipline that were done by the ECD trainer (UNICEF Zimbabwe, 2018:58). The recent Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019 Section 68A supports the development of school discipline policies and strategies that show understanding of the ECD (between 3 to 5 years of age) phase as a sensitive phase for the development of self-regulation skills. Similar sentiments are raised by the findings of a recent study by the OECD (2020:18).

The inclusion of pre-academic competencies in the curriculum in poor countries, like Zimbabwe, enables ECD phase teachers to foster relevant cognitive skills that are in line with the socio-economic needs of the country (Mokokoro, 2017:2). According to the OECD (2020:10) and UNESCO (2014:38), socio-economic policies influence how countries globally design their school curriculum. Governments in many countries have changed the teaching approach in the ECD phase from thematic play-based teaching to competency-based academic subject teaching (Elango *et al.*, 2015:72; OECD, 2020:18). In Zimbabwe, the competency-based curriculum framework in the ECD phase adopted a balanced approach which requires teachers to teach all academic subjects, for instance mathematics, languages, science and heritage studies through play and exploration (ZMoPSE, 2015a:42; 2017:41). One of the key

scholarly findings from the analysis of the competency-based Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education ECD phase subject syllabi was the identification of gaps in content and instruction pertaining to addressing the developmental skills and allocation of time for free play (ZMoPSE, 2015c:2-5). Research findings, for instance Cagiltay *et al.* (2013:3) and Housman (2017:4), show that the focus on pre-academic subjects in a competency-based curriculum in the ECD phase generally creates anxiety about the opportunities for fostering of self-regulation during free play. The debate on the relevance of free play has gained momentum (Gray, 2013:5; Tsai, 2015:1028) as advocates of guided play are pushing for the removal of free play in ECE practice. The other issue pertaining to free play is that while the new Zimbabwe competency-based curriculum is regarded as promoting technology (ZMoPSE, 2015a:IV, 25), the evidence of digitalised learning through play in the ECD phase is lacking in the curriculum (ZMoPSE, 2015a:IV, 25). This is also internationally noted as a gap (OECD, 2019b:10) which suggests that very little has been done to advance free play activities, like socio dramatic play and indoor play in line with advancements in technology. For example, ICT is one of the subjects in the ECD phase. The subject content entails manipulating toys and electric irons and kettles (that are no longer working) and doing colouring activities in the ICT workbook (ZMoPSE, 2015a:32).

Regarding positive discipline for fostering self-regulation, the scholarly findings revealed that there was no universal definition of positive discipline. According to Bronk *et al.* (2013:8), positive discipline is grounded in ethics, philosophy, culture as well as traditional religions, hence it is difficult for researchers to reach consensus of a universal definition or globally accepted programmes. The reliance on numerous contextual definitions and models of positive discipline, for instance the definition as articulated in the USA (Gershoff *et al.*, 2017:15) and Uganda (Naker & Sekitoleko, 2009:34-52), makes it difficult to discuss the critical components of positive discipline without giving reference to corporal punishment and other forms of disciplinary violence. My understanding of positive discipline from the perspective of the theoretical framework of my study, is that the focus should be on addressing learners' needs using age-appropriate methods that do not always need to be child-led, but child-centred to foster self-regulation through addressing the learners' needs holistically. The contextual definition of positive discipline in this study is given with much reference to Klein (2015:2), who defines positive discipline as guidance which involves

giving clear instructions consistently to foster the learners' self-esteem and independence. As ECD phase teachers foster the learners' self-esteem and independence, learners acquire different forms of regulation, such as, introjected regulation and identified regulation, resulting from both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, as suggested in the SDT and OIT (see Section 2.2.1.2). The context of free play is important because it is consistent with the understanding of self-regulation as involving autonomy, competence and relatedness (Dan, 2016:189-190, 198; Emmons, 2019:1-4). The findings of my study, see Section 7.3.2.2, confirm that fostering self-regulation during free play assists learners in developing many psychosocial competencies including autonomy, relatedness and mindfulness. Thus, in line with the contextual definition of positive discipline, self-regulation in the ECD phase entails assisting learners gain control of their behaviour and emotions, and to maintain focus and attention (Gillespie & Seibel, 2006:1).

### **7.3.2 Key Empirical Findings from The Paradigm Case linked to Literature Review**

The key finding in the empirical study in the paradigm analysis phase was the integration of free play into subject teaching, to foster self-regulation during free play. I regarded having a free play session as an activity during a lesson of teaching pre-academic content as important contextual skilled practice on how ECD phase teachers can foster self-regulation within a competency-based play-based curriculum. The following excerpt from the narrative of participant SB8 is an illustration of practice in a balanced approach curriculum design in the competency-based play-based curriculum in Zimbabwe.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 1 - 2,14% Coverage

*Free play as the name suggests, I strongly believe that it should be free, and the teacher or facilitator should have very little input. It's all about the child or the learners as they engage in whatever they choose to. Well, we provide the play material, and during free play there we direct the children to play in a certain area. Suppose maybe you are teaching about occupations and you have different props derived from different occupations, and you want to engage in play. You find that they normally direct themselves or arrange themselves, saying "I am the teacher you are the pupil", "I am the mother you are the children", or "I*

*am the doctor you are the patient". And they will use their experiences to play, and through that they learn as the saying goes, "We learn through play in the ECD."*

The balanced approach in curriculum design is supported by the findings from recent ECE research conducted by the OECD (2020:75) and Yogman *et al.* (2018:1). In contrast, some participants' views do not support the balanced approach curriculum design in the competency-based play-based curriculum in Zimbabwe. Among the various concerns raised by the participants was that the curriculum was too formal because it does not provide adequate time for free play. The following exemplar from CA10's narrative presents the concerns of ECD phase teachers who perceive the new curriculum as inappropriate and thus advocate for thematic curriculum.

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § 1 Reference 1 - 7,65% Coverage

*Actually, if ECD was learning through play it was going to be the best. I used to like the first approach that we used here in Zimbabwe, the thematic approach. Learning through play, the discovery learning, of which yes is there now, but now it's too much of formal learning, they have little time to play. ....But now, because they sit for a long time, I think it's making it difficult to foster self-regulation.*

The other key finding from the paradigm case analysis involves the skill of combining age-appropriate teacher-led strategies and learner-led activities to promote self-regulation and independence. According to Florez (2011:47) and Klein (2015:2), the teachers' application of several strategies simultaneously demonstrate that teachers are mindful about providing opportunities and experiences for learners to develop advanced self-regulation skills. The following exemplar from the narrative of SB8 illustrates the use of several strategies, namely, withdrawal of privileges, directing learners to find something else, problem solving as well as negative reinforcement to promote advanced self-regulation skills.

[<Files\\I-SB8>](#) - § Reference 6 - 4,87% Coverage

*Say maybe if in a squabble I as a teacher see that the turn taking bid does not work, I may confiscate the toy. So, if two people are fighting for a toy, if I confiscate it, no one has the toy, they find an alternative for the toy to play with. So, now they*

*should know that if we do not resolve this quickly amongst ourselves, this may be withdrawn, yet it's something that we want to use during our playtime. Sometimes you find they resolve it among themselves to say, ok you have it first, then I can have it. Then you know you have done something.*

The teachers' use of several strategies concurrently when discouraging inappropriate behaviour is supported by recent findings of studies by Winner (2019:2).

### **7.3.3 Key Empirical Findings from Thematic Analysis Linked to Literature Review**

There are three themes that represent the participants' understanding of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Presenting the summary of findings of thematic analysis using themes enabled me to present a coherent structure for the reader.

#### **7.3.3.1 Theme 1: Understanding child development as fostering autonomy, competence, relatedness and mindfulness**

One of the key findings is that participants understand holistic child development as fostering autonomy, competence, relatedness as well as mindfulness. The following exemplar from DB3's narrative clearly illustrates how teachers' support during free play addresses the satisfaction of the learners' psychological needs in line with developing learners holistically in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-DB3>](#) - § 2 Reference 1 - 7,82% Coverage

*They learn through observing or experimenting ... I will just be giving a guideline, but I let them play freely, because they will be developing maybe their social skills and fine motor skills. ... They can do role play where they just make things on their own. "You will be the mother, you are the father, you are the child." It's through free play. They learn skills. Then the skill of self-regulation, I think it just comes automatically.....They learn a lot of skills, not just one. They can develop social, emotional, intellectual and even their physical skills as they handle the toys.*

Baker *et al.* (2019:52-53) and the LEGO Foundation (2019:3) confirm that fostering self-regulation skills during free play in the ECD phase is considered important for positive holistic development.

The other key finding is that acting *in loco-parentis* provides participants with opportunities for positive parenting skills to enhance the learners' holistic development and self-regulation skills. The experiences mentioned by participants include providing moral support, guidance and counselling. The following exemplar from the narrative of participant DA2 reflects the experiences of many participants who believe it is important to give parental love and be aware of the learners' needs and background, to provide effective and informed support.

[<Files\\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 2 - 10,62% Coverage

*At ECD we do in loco parentis. We are their parents so children definitely need love and care. When I am disciplining that child, I should discipline as a parent. .... At school we try all possible means to say of course the child is misbehaving but what else can I do. Maybe some they don't stay with their parents. They lack love. They lack that understanding parent who can maybe talk with the child. Talk with the child nicely to say why are you doing this? just to understand..... So, as a teacher I become a parent to that child. I listen to that child. Maybe, I take that child, sit with the child. I try to ask maybe to understand the background of the child. Then by so doing at times you discover that there is a gap at home. You try to fill that gap as a teacher to understand the child better. Maybe you would know that this child is misbehaving because of she or he lacks a mother figure at home, so you try to discipline along those lines.*

Similarly, findings from ECE research, for instance, a meta-analysis study that examined the relationship between parenting and self-regulation in ECD phase learners by Karreman *et al.* (2006:571), consistently show links between positive parenting methods and the development of self-regulation skills. The above findings concur with the findings of studies done by Corthorn (2018:2) and Lonczak (2019:2-5), which suggest that positive parenting programmes can influence the parents and teachers to understand critical phenomena in ECE (in this context, self-regulation, free play and positive discipline) as mindfulness-based practice.

The last key finding I highlight in Theme 1, is that the participants give fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play a wide understanding that incorporates gender education. Participant DA1's exemplar of sensitising learners about gender equality education, for instance, illustrates how participants address gender inequalities such as societal beliefs that driving cars is for men, and that sweeping floors and taking care of children is a women's job.

<Files\\I- DA1> - § Reference 2 - 3,27% Coverage

*So, I just walk to them and explain to them that it's not always that boys are supposed to drive cars and build houses, even girls can do those jobs. I can tell them, you guys are supposed to sweep as well at home, you are supposed to wash plates. So that's how I help them.*

The findings resonate the knowledge and skills that are described by the WHO (2016:39) as a sustainable culture of non-violence in society. Similarly, the SDGs encourage countries to promote sustainable positive relationships in line with ending all forms of disciplinary violence by 2030 (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:71). Thus, gender education is a cross-cutting child development topic in all areas of development with regards to fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Recent research, for instance, Berk (2018:1) and Emen and Aslan (2019:25-26) confirm that the development of self-regulation during free play is especially important for the 3 to 5-year-old group in the ECD phase.

### **7.3.3.2 Theme 2: Using different skills and strategies for developing self-regulation competencies during free play**

The key finding in Theme 2 is that participants' commonly use direct instructions concurrently with other strategies such as logical consequences, co-regulation, cognitive reappraisal, problem solving, storytelling, modelling and calming down. The use of direct instruction is discouraged as it is perceived as a practice that is not consistent with the new Zimbabwean inquiry-based curriculum (ZMoPSE, 2015a:42; 2017:41). On the contrary, international literature reflects that direct instruction is not only age appropriate for ECD phase (Florez, 2011:51; Whitebread & Basilio, 2012:16), but is an inclusive teaching strategy and is responsive to individual needs (Lee & Anderson, 2013; Sawyer *et al.*, 1992:345). The definition of direct instruction in line with the findings of the study could be the one given by Westbrook *et al.* (2013:9),



namely the explicit instruction or structured instruction that is teacher-led and child-centred rather than teacher-centred. Thus, direct instruction in the ECD phase is an interactive practice that allows for both learner and teacher to foster positive child development (Darling-Hammond *et al.*, 2020:117). This ensures that learners receive adequate instruction and support to gain the necessary self-regulation skills to become independent. At some stage, as learners gain autonomy, competence, relatedness and mindfulness, teachers gradually reduce instructions to allow learners to practise and experience intrinsic regulation. The following exemplar from DA2's narrative reflects participants' understanding of the role of direct instructions in the teaching of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-DA2>](#) - § Reference 1 - 6,48% Coverage

*By saying a learner has self-discipline I think I will be looking at the behaviour of the child. The whole character of the child. Can the child do proper things even with less supervision. We usually give them instructions. When we get to play centre, we should do this, you should not do this. We give them rules to follow during free play there. So, if a child reaches that point whereby, he or she can follow those instructions or behave well with less or no supervision at all, then I say the learner is self-disciplined now.*

The other key finding is that teachers and learners perceive the teachers' application of time-out and logical consequences as punishment rather than positive discipline, because of the rigidity of their application without considering psychosocial needs. The following excerpts from the narratives of CA10 and DB4 reflect how some of the positive discipline strategies are perceived as punishment by teachers and learners.

[<Files\\I-CA10>](#) - § Reference 6 - 4,96% Coverage

INT: So, let me understand the naughty corner. Is it part of positive discipline or punishment?

*It's punishment. Yes, it's a way of both. It's a way of disciplining because at times some children you talk to them, don't do ABCD because of this and this, some will not understand soon after talking to them. Just put them in the naughty corner maybe for five minutes. They don't like the naughty corner. Once you say, just go and sit there by the naughty corner, they put a long face that they don't want.*

*Some of them will say, "Teacher, I'm sorry, I don't want to go to the naughty corner." By acknowledging that I'm sorry they are acknowledging that what I did was wrong, even if you don't let them sit by the naughty corner.*

[<Files\\I-DB4>](#) - § 2 Reference 1 - 9,83% Coverage

*What I do if he does that, I remove him from that slide, tell him to go to the swing or merry go round, but I don't deny him from play. .... I tell them to share, to take turns. Usually, they must take turns and they must share those swings. Discipline in the ECD phase is a problem. Those kids are very young, actually they do not understand what discipline is. I think to them discipline is punishment. They say, "Teacher has punished me, teacher said I must not do this and that," but I will be trying to discipline. They think its punishment to them, and not discipline.*

Findings also indicate that if positive discipline methods, for instance time-out, are used punitively, they may be counterproductive, as illustrated in the following exemplar from the narrative of SA6.

[<Files\\I-SA6>](#) - § Reference 1 - 5,79% Coverage

*The naughty corner is a space outside the play area but is still where the learner can see what the others are doing. But I also noticed something again about the naughty corner. I might say that I am disciplining my learner, but at the same time I have noticed that they end up enjoying being in the naughty corner. I think it has to do with time, if they spend too much time at the naughty corner, the learner seems to be enjoying being there. And then I see that my strategy is not working because it is not in line with my aim of placing the learner at the naughty corner.*

A positive way of using time-out as found in the literature (McLaughlin *et al.*, 2017:23; Rabella, 2020:2) is to use a calming down strategy by providing a quiet comfortable physical area where learners should go to for calming down. However, this would not be feasible due to lack of space in ECD phase classrooms with a high teacher-learner ratio. The solution would be to consider a suitable mindfulness programme that may not require much space or equipment, such as breathing exercises. Alphonso *et al.* (2019:25) suggest teachers can use breathing exercises, diverting learners' attention,

finding solutions and discussing problems. Another option of avoiding punitive time-out would be to incorporate a research-based mindfulness programme, such as the MindUp programme which uses theories from positive psychology (Crooks *et al.*, 2020:5; Maloney *et al.*, 2016:316). This will help both learners and teachers to improve how they would control their emotions.

Another key finding indicated that the common types of free play activities are indoor, outdoor and socio-dramatic play but teachers faced time constraints in conducting free play sessions because of work overload. The practice of engaging learners in both indoor and outdoor play is done to adhere to the Zimbabwean MoPSE regulations' specifications on how an environment for learners' free play should look (see Dube, 2013:491-494). Although participants adhered to the instructions for free play, they experienced many constraints in having free play within the competency-based curriculum. The requirement to use workbooks was perceived as negatively impacting on the time to do free play.

### **7.3.3.3 Theme 3: Supporting positive relationships during free play in the early childhood development phase**

One of the key findings in Theme 3 is the kind of regulation that teachers foster through positive discipline during free play, which also supports positive relationships that equip learners with skills for work. The following exemplar from the narratives of SA5 present the understanding of many participants who support learners in developing important life skills, for instance, team work, cooperation and communication in the ECD phase.

[<Files\\I-SA5>](#) - § Reference 2 - 2,70% Coverage

*I have observed that they actually do turn-taking, they give each other chances. They know I have this doll, this child has the doll I want. They just talk to each other, "When I'm done, I will give you the doll". And they are like doing it together, like helping each other. They will be like they want to clothe the doll. This one will be putting on shoes, the other one is putting this and that, without any squabbles and without any problems, it's turn taking.*

Similarly, research by Russell *et al.* (2016:153) and Sayre *et al.*, 2015:6) suggest that fostering self-regulation and positive discipline promote positive relationships in ECE.

The other key finding is that participants regard positive discipline as involving mindful planning for learners' safety and management of resources during free play. This involves giving instructions, reminders as well as teaching sharing. The following exemplar from the narrative of CB9 presents participants' practices of ensuring safety and addressing challenges pertaining to inadequate resources by encouraging sharing.

[<Files\\I-CB9>](#) - § Reference 4 - 2,75% Coverage

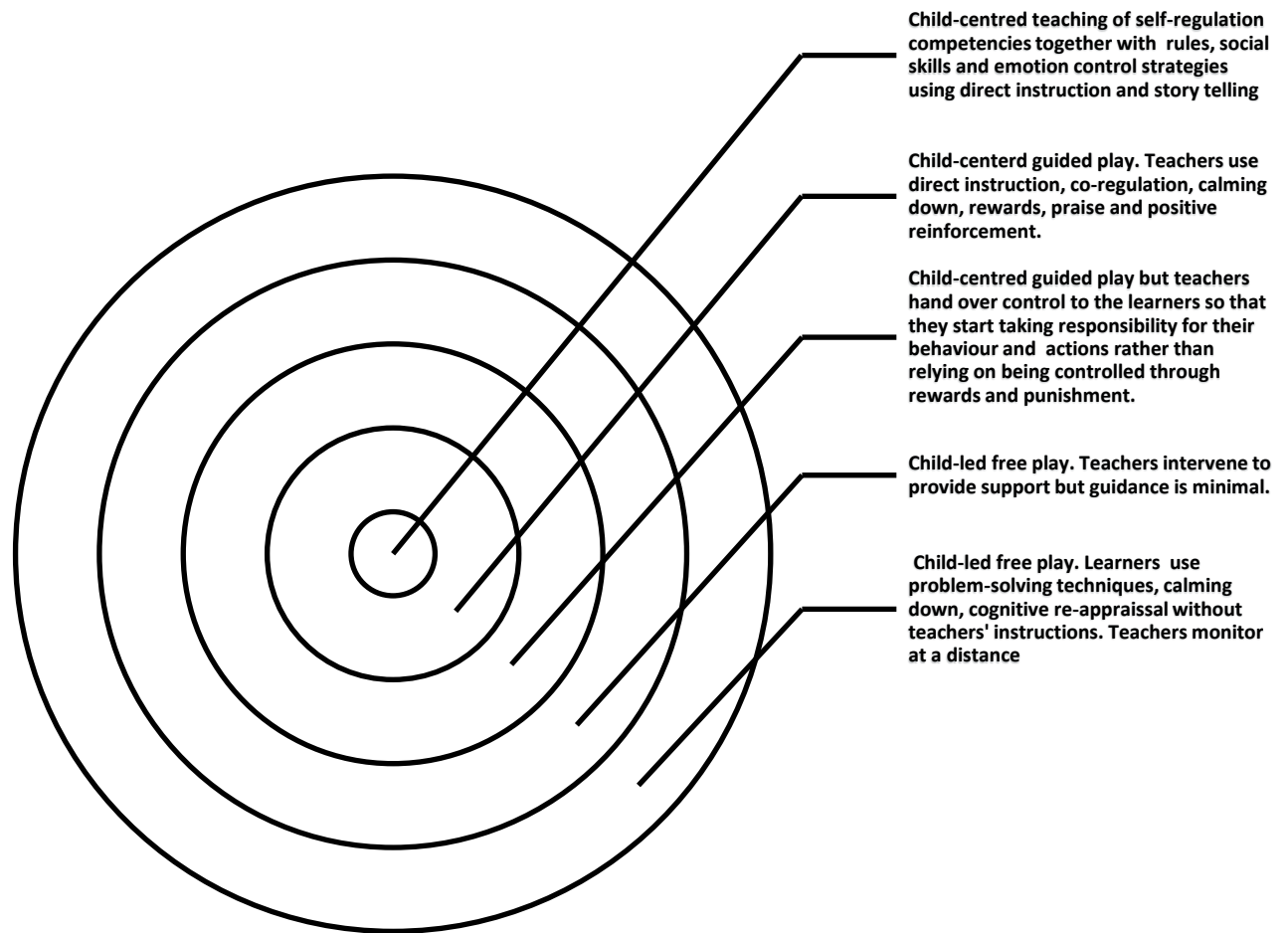
*The control that you normally do, if you are one at times it's not easy because sometimes you can be on the other side of the playground attending to one child and this other child come running in front of the swing. So, the best way that I have done is you have to make sure that the moment we are going to a free outdoor play, we are supposed to remind each other of rules so that the children take precautions so that they won't hurt each other. ....*

*We are a family as a school and while we are a family, let's take care of one another. If you want to play with those blocks alone, then somebody is disadvantaged. So, we treat them in such a way that they must show love to others and share amongst each other when they are playing indoors.*

#### **7.3.4 Diagrammatic Illustration of the Interpretation of the Findings**

This research has provided me with a better understanding of the skilled knowledge that teachers have pertaining to three important phenomena in learning and child development in ECE, namely, fostering self-regulation, positive discipline and free play. The use of the research design that utilised Benner's interpretive phenomenology, the social constructivism paradigm and the theoretical frameworks (positive psychology, SDT, BPNT) led me to focus on multiple understandings of the phenomena mentioned above and of skilled experiential knowledge. The scholarly and empirical findings indicated that meaningful fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in a competency-based play-based curriculum is an ongoing process of enhancing the learners' holistic development through satisfying the basic psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness and competence) and

mindfulness.



**Figure 7.1: Diagrammatic illustration for understanding fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase**

Figure 7.1 above shows a diagrammatic illustration of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon under study. The design of the illustration shows that at the centre is the direct teaching of fostering self-regulation using child-centred teacher-led methods, for instance direct instruction and storytelling. The use of direct instruction and storytelling is regarded as age-appropriate for teaching self-regulation through positive discipline during the ECD phase because they assist learners in identifying and understanding what socially and emotionally acceptable behaviour entails (de la Riva & Ryan, 2015:80). During free play, teachers also use co-regulation and calming down to assist new learners in controlling their emotions. As learners become more developed and gain self-control, teachers use time-out and logical consequences as strategies. The teachers' use of different positive discipline methods concurrently (for

instance, cognitive re-appraisal modelling, direct instruction and logical consequences) to nurture the learners' development of self-regulation during free play, is regarded as skilled practice in this research, in line with Benner's interpretive phenomenology. In both the empirical study and literature review, it was established that learners have strengths and capacities to develop self-regulation skills on their own during free play (Cherry, 2019a:1; Erikson,1968:49-50;). However, ongoing teachers' support is necessary to satisfy the learners' psychosocial needs adequately, as shown in the findings of this study.

#### **7.4 CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY**

In this section I give details of what I consider as important contributions of the research. According to Kennedy-Clark, (2012:10), contributions of a study need to be appreciated based on the trustworthiness of the design and the contributions that these studies make to local educational contexts and theory building. A significant contribution to research serves to make sense of what is not well articulated in the curriculum and create a sense of insight and deepened understanding of skilled practice (Tracy, 2013:240). The current study contributes to knowledge development in teaching practice in the various ways.

In view of the lack of a universal definition of positive discipline and lack of visibility of positive discipline in ECE official documents for practice in the ECD phase in Zimbabwe, this study has contributed by giving positive discipline visibility in ECE. As a contribution towards a definition of positive discipline in Zimbabwe, I provide the psychological and phenomenological aspects of positive discipline from the perspectives of the participants. These understandings are often obscured by equating positive discipline with the absence of corporal punishment and disciplinary violence. Therefore, skilled knowledge about positive discipline in practice is not well articulated in every day practice and official ECE documents. The use of Benner's interpretive phenomenological strategy enabled me to extend the knowledge of what was learned from a previous national study by Nziramasanga (1999:63). In this national study fostering self-regulation and positive discipline were emphasised in the ECD phase, however, what this meant in actual practice was not clearly articulated. To contribute towards filling the gap that was identified in the national study, I provide statements

that articulate what positive discipline entails in the ECD phase, based on the descriptions and interpretations of the participants of my study (see Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1: Description of positive discipline**

No.	Definition /description of positive discipline	Source
1.	<i>Positive discipline it is the discipline that will help the child that when I am correcting the child, the child feels that I am being corrected but I am given love. It is done out of love</i>	Taken from the transcript of CB9-Grade ECD-B teacher in the Christian school.
2.	<i>Positive discipline I would say is what I would employ to do away with the negative behaviour while replacing it with the positive one, without embarrassing or intimidating any child.</i>	Taken from the transcript of SB8-Grade ECD-B teacher in the special school
3.	<i>Positive discipline, I would say it's when kids are able to understand if a learner has done something wrong to someone. He or she is supposed to be able to realise that I have wronged someone during that free play. Maybe the child steps on someone or take someone else's blocks, and sees that other kid crying, the child has to understand that I have hurt my classmate. The child has to go and apologise and give back the toys that he or she has taken or apologise for hurting someone. That's positive discipline without me intervening. That's positive discipline according to my understanding.</i>	Taken from the transcript of DA1-Grade ECD-A teacher in the disadvantaged school.

Table 7.1 offers exemplars which indicate an understanding of positive discipline that are given as experiential knowledge for practice to promote the development of self-regulation skills in ECD phase learners. These descriptions and understandings contain inherent complexities, challenges and dynamics of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. They also provide a foundation on which to build a contextual definition of positive discipline with a focus on satisfying the learners' psycho-social needs. The key finding of the study is that participants understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play as a process that occurs synchronously with holistic child development. The findings from a literature review study on early childhood education in developing countries done by Rao *et al.* (2014:5) confirms that appropriate learning programmes enhance learning and development.

The other contribution is the use of Benner's interpretive phenomenological design from the health sciences in a unique way to understand everyday complex phenomena in ECE. According to Tracy (2013:242), methodological significance pertains to the researcher's ability to use a research method in a unique way and it is achieved when methodology is approached in a new, creative and insightful way. In this study, the use of Benner's interpretive phenomenological method, using the SDT and BPNT within positive psychology, as well as the use of NVivo 12 Pro, constituted methodological significance. To understand the teachers' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase, I used Benner's interpretive phenomenology which emphasises how specific groups in a specific context understand everyday concepts or skilled practice. It thus contributes to both theoretical and practical understanding of the phenomenon under study to generate knowledge for practice. Thus, the teachers' contextual practical knowledge was essential in informing practical everyday practice.

The use of Benner's interpretive phenomenology promotes research methods where investigating every day professional practice needs the use of "scientific explanation and practical reasoning" (Benner, Stannard & Hooper, 1996:70), rather than the widely used methods which may not fully address the practical everyday situations. Quite often, general education emphasises educational theories without incorporating the teachers' experiential skilled knowledge. In other words, it is important to understand the teachers' practice of fostering self-regulation not only as a personal knowledge or moral reasoning, but a scientific professional practice embedded within experiential expertise that could add valuable information to the existing body of knowledge. In this way, methodological significance could provide insight in terms of the researcher's craftiness in data collection, management and analysis (Tracy, 2013:242).

The study has discussed and applied SDT and BPNT as relevant a theoretical framework for understanding the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education. The most central distinctive feature in the BPNT is the three basic needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness, which are assumed to be innate and universal (Martela & Ryan, 2020:116; Rogers & Tannock, 2013:1; Tian *et al.*, 2018:2). The contribution to theory entails proposing extending the list of basic psychological needs in the BPNT from the current three to four, by adding mindfulness. Mindfulness allows people to have enhanced access to



“both internal and external stimuli” that influence their regulatory processes and actions (Ryan & Deci, 2017:648). This finding adds voice to the propositions to consider mindfulness as a basic psychological need.

The knowledge generated from this study could expand the knowledge on how school discipline is perceived in line with the competency-based curriculum that has been recently phased in. This study has clarified the meaning of “child-led” and “child-centred” learning. The fact that the curriculum is child-centred does not mean that all activities are learner-led but emphasise that the learning process is interactive. Learners are regarded as active participants while teachers are responsible facilitators. Presenting the participants’ descriptions and interpretations make the information relevant for a wide range of primary schools around the country.

Conclusively, the study contributed a substantial knowledge base for the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. Helpful information that various stakeholders can use to enhance their ability to help learners develop better self-regulation skills in the ECD phase is discussed in the next section. According to Tracy (2013:241), practical significant research contribution offers helpful recommendations to key stakeholders.

## **7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS**

The recommendations are given as actions that various stakeholders could take to enhance quality ECE. The recommendations are based on the findings of the study and in consideration that the competency-based play-based curriculum is new in Zimbabwe and presents an array of challenges for ECD phase teachers and learners. The focus of this study was on understanding how teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

### **7.5.1 International Level**

Concerning lack of universal definitions of positive discipline, extrinsic regulation and free play, it is recommended that these concepts be defined in line with child development and programmes that influence ECE, such as, the CRC and the SDGs. This would reduce misunderstanding when discussing issues pertaining to sustainable child development through positive disciplinary practices so that all forms of

disciplinary violence and other harmful practices may be excluded in school discipline. It is thus a priority that a universal definition of positive discipline be established.

While there is consensus on the definition of self-regulation, most of the discussion is on two types, external regulation and intrinsic regulation. Various forms of extrinsically motivated regulation (introjected, identified and integrated) have neither been clearly articulated nor differentiated from external regulation. This also needs to be clarified in international literature.

Although ICT is a subject area in the ECD phase internationally, the free play activities associated with the development of self-regulation has not gone beyond socio-dramatic play, indoor and outdoor play. Virtual play needs to be explored as a form of free play. In this regard, toys are defined as objects that encourage learners' expression, fantasy, interest, exploration, construction, education and cognitive development (Cagiltay *et al.*, 2013:2). This suggests that some toys for free play may not necessarily be tangible like those used with the common types of free play such as indoor play, outdoor and socio-dramatic play. Some toys can be played virtually using relevant computer software for instance, smart toys.

#### **7.5.2 National Level: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Curriculum Development Unit - Zimbabwe**

In a competency-based play-based curriculum, teachers should consider free play as brief free play sessions within subject teaching rather than long free play sessions that characterise the thematic based curriculum.

It is also crucial that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should consider the teachers' concerns pertaining to the use of workbooks. The amount of written work in the workbooks has been regarded as contributing to work overload for both teachers and learners, especially at this phase.

It is also recommended that the Ministry put measures in place that are sensitive to both pre-academic subject competencies and the psychosocial development skills programmes that will include moral education, mindfulness programmes and gender equality education in the ECD phase.

The objectives in the ECD phase curriculum need to be two-pronged to address both general subject competencies and important developmental aspects. According to the findings of this study, participants regard the fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play as an everyday important activity in the ECD phase. The side-lining of behavioural and psychosocial learning objectives in the ECD competency-based play-based curriculum is a concerning issue that endangers the fostering of self-regulation skills in the ECD phase. The Curriculum Development Unit's need to introduce social, emotional and moral development in the ECD phase is seen as a genuine concern.

There is a need for explicit guidelines that articulate what teachers should know about self-regulation, free play, and positive discipline, as well as the links between each area of development and the subject competencies outlined in the new competency-based curriculum.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should work with the other relevant ministries (for instance, health, social development and child welfare, women and people with disabilities) to provide training to parents and teachers on the importance of free play, self-regulation and positive discipline in child development. Inputs from various ministries would ensure not only quality service delivery but promote consistency and common understandings of pertinent issues that pertain to fostering self-regulation, positive discipline and free play.

I also recommend that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should work with the Ministry of Higher Education to ensure that teacher training incorporates aspects of free play, positive discipline and self-regulation in teacher training curricula. Of importance is the need for understanding that teachers are role models for the learners and parents. Teachers thus need to be mindful how their behaviour can be interpreted when representing and demonstrating the concepts of self-regulation and positive discipline.

### **7.5.3 Provincial Level: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Bulawayo Metropolitan Province**

Teachers need contextual knowledge and training to use strategies for positive discipline and fostering self-regulation skills effectively (UNICEF) Headquarters,

2015b:1; Winner, 2019:4). Reading the interpretive descriptions, exemplars and paradigm cases on the fostering of self-regulation could assist officers in the Ministry (ZMoPSE) to provide anticipatory guidance or offer strategies and workshops that are relevant to teaching practice. This recommendation is supported by findings of research done by Luciani *et al.* (2019:66).

The alignment of the competency-based curriculum to the SDGs should be emphasised to ensure sustainable learner development. According to UNICEF Headquarters (2018a:7; 2018b:6-9), the satisfaction of the learners' physiological and psychological needs is important in achieving the SDGs. Based on the above, it is recommended that the province addresses the issue of high teacher: learner ratios as a contributing factor to teachers' capacity to satisfy learners' needs adequately.

Based on the above recommendations, the province needs to provide workshops where the development of self-regulation is discussed as a lifelong process as postulated in the OIT (Brown & Ryan, 2015:141). In this theory it is important to understand that the type of regulation depends on age, developmental level and the extent to which autonomy is present (see Section 2.2.1.2). There is thus a need to define all forms of regulation as postulated in the OIT, particularly the types of extrinsic regulation, introjected, identified and integrated regulation, which may be more relevant in the context of the ECD phase. The ECD phase is promoted as a critical time or window of opportunity for the development of self-regulation skills (Berk, 2018:1; Ziv *et al.*, 2018:15). This can be interpreted as that learners need to be taught self-regulation and will attain adequate regulation (not necessarily autonomous intrinsically motivated regulation) for school readiness by the end of the two years in the ECD phase.

#### **7.5.4 School Level**

Schools should have discipline policies that guide teachers on how to foster positive child development, which highlight positive discipline strategies and practical examples of their application.

School policies should provide a clear definition of punishment and highlight the negative effects it may have on the learners' psychosocial development. Schools should not only adhere to regulations pertaining to the ban of corporal punishment, but

all forms of damaging discipline as outlined in Section 51 and 53 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) and Section 68A in the Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act 2019.

As part of understanding the importance of gender education as fostering child development and fostering self-regulation, the punitive consequences for breaking school rules in the code of conduct, should portray gender equity. It is thus recommended that schools should not have disciplinary policies that discriminate against boys and girls on a gender basis; for example, boys as more capable of tolerating disciplinary violence than girls. Schools should have workshops or outreach programmes for parents and community organisations (for instance, churches) on understanding the connection between positive discipline and gender education. Gender equality education is an important foundation on which to build self-regulation skills, resilience and gender-free societies. Workshops on positive discipline for teachers need to incorporate gender equality education and mindfulness activities which promote self-awareness and self-management skills.

Schools' guidance and counselling departments or other professionals should provide workshops on positive psychology to teachers. Such workshops will help teachers view positive discipline as important for identifying and enhancing learners' strengths for enhancing positive self-awareness and positive relationships.

Schools could promote calmness, positive mood and positive classroom environments through encouraging mindfulness activities which do not require a vast number of resources, such as meditation and yoga. In positive psychology, mindfulness is recommended as good for developing self-regulation for everyone (Brown *et al.*, 2007:212; Maloney *et al.*, 2016:314). This could be beneficial to learners' mental health and wellbeing, as well as, being incorporated in the ECD phase subject syllabus to enhance the development of self-regulation.

#### **7.5.5 Classroom Level**

It is recommended that teachers should use positive discipline methods, for instance, time-out and logical consequences cautiously, bearing in mind that learners can perceive them as punishment. The use of punishment has negative effects on the learners' development of self-regulation skills.

Teachers' support for autonomy, competence, relatedness and mindfulness need to be ongoing and integrated in all subjects. The development of self-regulation should not be confined to the free play stand-alone sessions.

It is recommended that teachers should familiarise themselves with positive psychology and perceive teaching as a mindfulness-based practice for satisfying the learners' psychological and educational needs, as well as for holistic child development. The focus on mindfulness, autonomy, relatedness and competency as key factors in fostering self-regulation skills in the ECD phase is not only in line with the SDT and positive psychology framework (Deci & Ryan, 2008:184), but also with the SDGs (UNICEF Headquarters, 2018b:6). The school or Department of Education could also help with workshops and training in this regard through inputs of professional people or by getting training in programmes available on relevant topics.

Teachers should teach self-regulation skills and apply positive discipline with the aim of developing positive character traits and resilience. Recognising and responding to early signs of gender-based violence is key to ensuring the prevalence of gender-based violence is reduced, as envisaged in the 2030 SDGs.

The methods that are effective with deaf learners need to be investigated, especially using "ignoring" in combination with natural consequences, for behaviour that is not dangerous. Using natural consequences should encourage teachers to be mindful and patient to allow learners to experience the natural consequences of their actions. This would teach self-regulation as well as reduce the teachers' need to be constantly imposing consequences for every learner's mistakes. Such methods teach learners to be responsible for their actions from a young age, with minimal teacher involvement.

## **7.6 AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in ECE is an aspect of discipline and punishment in schools which has received little attention in research. The use of positive psychology, SDT and BPNT as the theoretical frameworks of the study provide a view that regards the fostering of self-regulation during free play and positive discipline as the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) and mindfulness. In this section, I provide avenues for future research that have been generated from the study. I used the

themes from thematic analysis and the theoretical framework as references in proposing the avenues for future research. Future research is thus suggested as follows:

#### **7.6.1 Theme 1: Understanding Child Development as Fostering Autonomy, Competence, Relatedness and Mindfulness**

As a follow-up to this research, there should be a study that reviews current definitions of self-regulation, intrinsic regulation, extrinsic regulation and free play, that would be in line with child development and the recent changes in the ECD phase curriculum. After defining and articulating the key components of each phenomenon, I would suggest further research to ascertain how each phenomenon contributes educational value in the ECD phase.

Further research needs to answer the question why there is still no universal definition of positive discipline. Clarity on the definition of positive discipline is necessary for minimising the risks of disguising disciplinary violence as positive discipline. This will avoid unnecessary harm to the learners' psychosocial development in the ECD phase.

There is also a need to explore the implications of teachers' understanding of gender equality education as part of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase.

#### **7.6.2 Theme 2: Fostering Skills and Positive Strategies for different types of Regulation**

Further research is needed to determine different types of skills and positive discipline strategies that are associated with different types of regulation during free play in the ECD phase. There are other types of extrinsic regulation, namely, identified, introjected and integrated regulation, in addition to external regulation.

#### **7.6.3 Theme 3: Supporting Positive Relationships in the Early Childhood Development Phase Classrooms**

Future research needs to be guided by an Afro-centric theoretical framework and African child development theories to understand specific cultural norms and practices that describe the sense of belonging and positive relationships within an African

context. An Afrocentric view might provide a different perspective of practical knowledge for addressing the learners' psychosocial needs that are sensitive to the African context, rather than Eurocentric context.

#### **7.6.4 Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology needs to be embraced as a psychology branch that focuses on the development and sustaining of inner strengths and virtues that enable learners to flourish (Seligman, 2008:4). The ways in which teachers foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play were identified in this study. Additional research into how teachers sustain the learners' self-regulation skills is proposed as an avenue for future research.

#### **7.6.5 Self-Determination Theory**

The SDT could be used to investigate the transition from a thematic curriculum to a competency-based play-based curriculum. Future research can thus investigate the process of curriculum change to understand the meaning of these changes from the perspective of the SDT.

#### **7.7.6 Basic Psychological Needs Theory**

Previous studies have investigated self-regulation through the framework of the BPNT (autonomy, competence and relatedness) (see Orkibi & Ronen, 2017:3). A future literature meta-analysis of studies that is framed by the BPNT can provide information on whether mindfulness can be recognised as the fourth basic psychological need, as suggested by the findings of this current research. The inclusion of mindfulness as a basic psychological need in the BPNT may address the concept of self-regulation more broadly so that learners and teachers in schools are not only able to "act on their own behalf but also but also with others in mind" (Ryan & Deci, 2017:648).

#### **7.6.7 Mindfulness**

The development of self-awareness is regarded as the key factor in mindfulness in the school context because it is associated with intrinsically motivated regulation (Brown & Ryan, 2003:833; Brown *et al.*, 2007:212). In positive psychology, specific training techniques to develop self-awareness aim to enhance, for instance self-care and care



for others, curiosity, kindness, patience and perseverance (Maloney *et al.*, 2016:313). It is important that future research should explore how mindfulness programmes can be incorporated into the different phases in the education system to enhance support for the learners' psychosocial needs. Future research can focus on identifying appropriate vocabulary and programmes for mindfulness for each phase, taking into consideration the contextual factors and levels of maturity of the learners.

## **7.7 A REFLECTION ON THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Methodological issues constituted fundamental limitations of the study. The first limitation concerned the use of Benner's interpretive phenomenology which consisted of multiple interrelated methods of data presentation and analysis, which included exemplars, thematic analysis, paradigm case as well as the consensual validation of themes by multiple researchers. Benner's interpretive phenomenology is relatively unfamiliar in psychology of education research (see Section 4.3.3.3). There could have been some additional procedures to the method as I tried to meet some of the demands for qualitative study. In so doing, I could have interfered with the rigour of Benner's interpretive phenomenology. To resolve this methodological issue, I observed key aspects of Benner's interpretive phenomenological method in many respects, particularly in the data analysis through presenting findings using a paradigm case, exemplars and themes, as well as conducting the consensual validation of the themes.

The second issue pertained to the use of the paradigm case analysis. Multiple stages of interpretation in Benner's interpretive phenomenological method is done "for bias control by exposing contradictions, conflicts or surprises that cannot be accommodated for by an earlier or later interpretation" (Benner, 1999:311). The use of paradigm case analysis in the first stage of analysis presents challenges of imposing meanings from one participant's understanding. To address this limitation, I read all the transcripts several times and used exemplars from other participants, as suggested in Benner's interpretive phenomenology.

The third issue pertained to the time of engagement in the field. The last school term proved to be the best time for me to do the field work since teachers could reflect on their experiences with the current learners from the beginning of the year, a full school

year, without much speculation. However, because of the time frame, principals would only allow one interview per participant because of examinations and preparations for graduations and parties. Having one chance to interview each participant did not allow me opportunities to clarify additional information during a second interview or multiple interviews with the same participant where necessary, as suggested in Benner's interpretive phenomenology (Benner, 1999:311). I thought I had addressed this limitation by ensuring that the data I collected during interviews would yield adequate data pertaining to the phenomenon under study. However, during data analysis I identified some important information that I needed to follow up, for instance, the duration of the free play time. It could thus not establish whether the teachers' experiences of fostering of self-regulation through positive discipline during free play happened during brief free play sessions or long free play sessions.

I had access to CAQDAS very late in the study, during data analysis. This compromised my chances of benefiting optimally from UNISA CAQDAS programmes that are available to students. UNISA had Mendeley and Atlas.ti software for students to access and there were courses offered for students through workshops. However, I did not try finding out what the programmes entailed because of fear surrounding the use of technology and lack of knowledge. The understanding I had that the programme could replace my thinking was misguided. I had to do training on CAQDAS before doing data analysis because Benner's interpretive phenomenology required several cycles of interpretation which were too difficult to do manually. After receiving training in using the NVivo 12 Pro, it was clear to me how the software worked in data management, not data analysis itself (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018:809). I agree with Humble (2015:12-13), who suggests that universities could offer mandatory courses on a variety of software programmes upon initial registration for the study, so that students can use CAQDAS not only during data analysis but throughout the study.

## **7.8 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

When using Benner's interpretive phenomenological research, it is important to answer the main research question that was posed at the beginning of the study. To accomplish this task, I posed four sub-research questions to structurally answer the main research question. The first two research questions were literature review sub-

questions and the last two were empirical study sub-questions. In the conclusion of this research, I answer the main research question:

*How do teachers describe and understand fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Early Childhood Development phase?*

Positive discipline is portrayed as age appropriate and research informed methods of fostering self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase which involve the teachers' effective use of direct instructions, co-regulation, positive guidance, logical consequences, natural consequences, time-out, love, empathy, kindness, fairness as well as firmness, according to Nelsen *et al.* (2007:5-6). The advocates of positive discipline, for instance, Dores (2016:11); McVittie (2003:5) and Nelsen and Gfroerer (2017:1), do not recommend the use of punishment because it is detrimental to the development of self-regulation in the ECD phase.

Regarding the research question, teachers understood fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play as addressing the learners' basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) and the need for mindfulness. The common types of free play were indoor, outdoor and socio-dramatic play. Despite the use of time-out and logical consequences used punitively by some of the participants, learners benefited from the use of positive discipline methods. The self-regulation skills that teachers developed through positive discipline during free play provided learners with opportunities to learn life skills, for instance, sharing, turn taking, gender education and leadership skills.

Although teachers faced many challenges for instance, a lack of resources and high teacher-learner ratios, they found innovative ways of dealing with the problems, for instance, by using small groups. However, some of the strategies included controlling the learners' indoor and outdoor free play in ways that impeded the learners' freedom to choose how to play.

The study contributes to the understanding of discipline and punishment in schools, positive discipline, as well as the understanding of fostering self-regulation during free play in the ECD phase.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



### UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2019/09/11

Dear Mrs Msipha

**Decision:** Ethics Approval from  
2019/09/11 to 2024/09/11

Ref: **2019/09/11/46957294/17/MC**

Name: Mrs Z Msipha

Student No.: 46957294

**Researcher(s):** Name: Mrs Z Msipha  
E-mail address: 46957294@mylife.unisa.ac.za  
Telephone: +263 71 217 2871

**Supervisor(s):** Name: Prof E Venter  
E-mail address: Ventee1@unisa.ac.za  
Telephone: +27 12 429 4751

**Title of research:**

**Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education**

**Qualification:** D. Ed in Psychology of Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2019/09/11 to 2024/09/11.

*The **low risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/09/11 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.



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3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/09/11**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

*Note:*

*The reference number **2019/09/11/46957294/17/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



**Prof AT Motlhabane**  
**CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC**  
motlhat@unisa.ac.za



**Prof PM Sebate**  
**ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN**  
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za



Approved - decision template – updated 16 Feb 2017

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**APPENDIX B: LETTER TO REQUEST PERMISSION FROM BULAWAYO  
METROPOLITAN PROVINCE**



**The Provincial Education Director  
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education  
Box 555  
Bulawayo**

Date: **07 June 2017**

Dear Madam

**REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT:**



**PROVISIONAL TITLE OF THESIS**

*Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education*

I, Zenzile Msipha am doing research under supervision of Professor E. Venter, in the Department of Psychology of Education, towards a Doctor Education (DEd) at the University of South Africa.

I hereby request permission to do a study at the schools mentioned above.

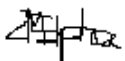
The schools in your province have been selected because it is believed the teachers have the information that is needed in the study. The aim of the study is to generate a better understanding of contextual practical knowledge pertaining to how teachers can foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the early Childhood Development (ECD) Phase. The insights gained from the study may help to better understand the learner discipline processes that can address the developmental needs of the learners in the ECD phase, particularly with regards to fostering self-regulation.

It is hoped that the findings of the study will establish an in-depth understanding of positive discipline and hopefully provide guidelines for applying positive discipline in the context of Zimbabwe and elsewhere where applicable in the ECD phase.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

The feedback procedure will entail submitting a hard copy and a soft copy of findings of the study to the participants, the Heads of the schools as well as the office of the Provincial Education Director.

Yours sincerely

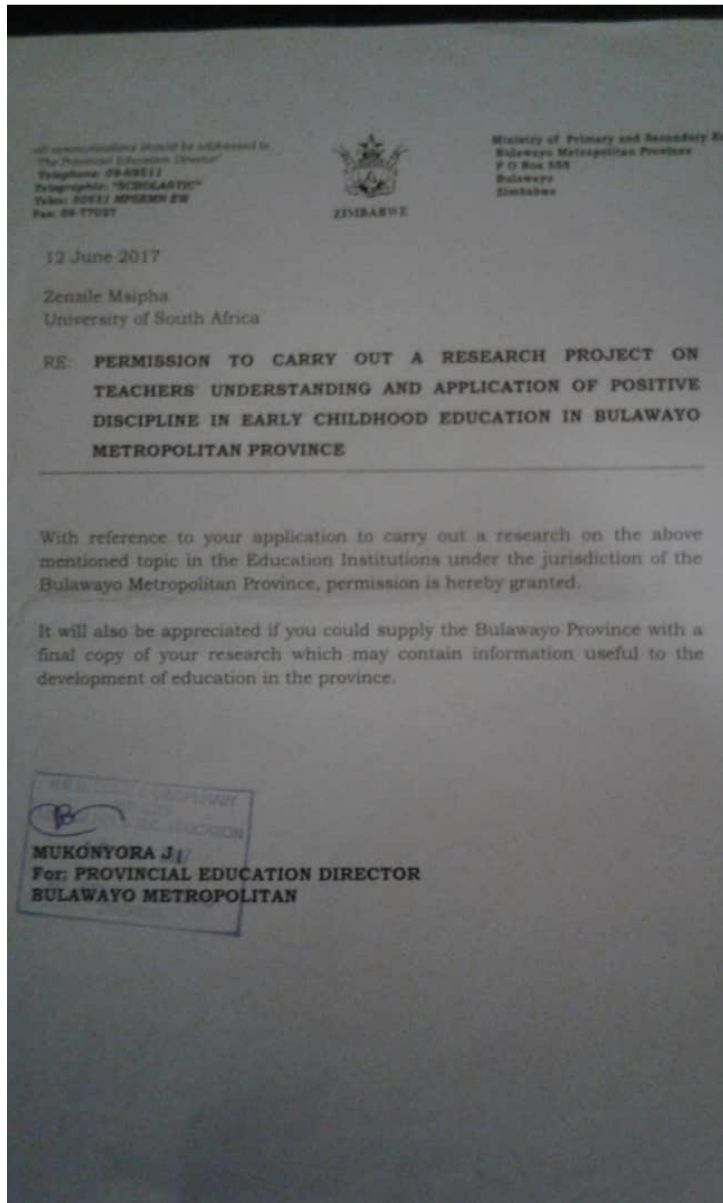


Zenzile Msipha

**Email: msiphaze@gmail.com**

**Physical Address: 600 Scone Drive, Killarney. Bulawayo Zimbabwe**

**APPENDIX C: PERMISSION LETTER FROM BULAWAYO METROPOLITAN PROVINCE**



## APPENDIX D: INFORMED PERMISSION REQUEST TO PRINCIPALS



### REQUESTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH FROM THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Name of research student: Zenzile Msipha

Student Number :46957294

Email address :msiphaze@gmail.com

Cell phone number :+263712172871

**Request for permission to conduct research at \_\_\_\_\_  
Primary School**

#### **Research Topic:**

*Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education*

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

The School Principal  
\_\_\_\_\_ Primary School  
P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_  
Bulawayo  
Zimbabwe.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I, Zenzile Msipha am doing research under supervision of Professor E. Venter, in the Department of Psychology of Education, towards a DEd (Doctor of Psychology of Education) at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education.

The aim of the study is to generate a better understanding of contextual practical knowledge pertaining to how teachers can foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the early Childhood Development (ECD) Phase.



Your school has been selected because it has ECD A and ECD B classes and has been recommended by the Provincial ECD Trainer as a school where teachers apply positive non-violent methods when disciplining the learners.

The study will entail audio taping individual face-to face interviews with the ECD phase teachers at your school. The duration of each interview is expected to be between 45 to 60 minutes.

The insights gained from the study may help to better understand the learner discipline processes that can address the developmental needs of the learners in the ECD phase, particularly with regards to fostering self-regulation.

Potential risks for participation in the research are not foreseeable. However, you may let the researcher know of any risks or discomfort you think the teachers, or your school may experience because of participating in the study.

In consideration of your right to privacy and confidentiality, your name, the names of the teachers and the name of your school will not be recorded anywhere in the thesis and no one, apart from the researcher will know about the details of your school's involvement in this research. No one will be able to connect you or the teachers to the answers that teachers give. The teachers' answers will be given code numbers, or a pseudonym and they will be referred to in this way in the data, and in any publications, or other research reporting methods such as journal articles and/or conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants or schools will not be identifiable in such a report.

There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research.

Feedback procedure will entail sharing my findings with the teachers and school principals of the participating schools, and the officer at the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to give the researcher permission to conduct the study at your school. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign this permission letter. The teachers are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, even after having agreed to participate.



## APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR REQUESTING CONSENT FROM TEACHERS



Name of research student: Zenzile Msipha

Student Number :46957294

Email address :msiphaze@gmail.com

Cell phone number :+263712172871

### CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

*This consent form is directed at teachers. Please read this consent form carefully before you decide to fill it in. This consent form may contain words that you may not be familiar with. Please feel free to ask the researcher for clarification.*

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

**Title : *Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education***

### DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Zenzile Msipha and I am doing research under the supervision of Professor E. Venter, in the Department of Psychology of Education, towards a DEd at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is expected to generate important information that could be regarded as contextual practical knowledge of how teachers can foster self-regulation through

positive discipline during free play in the Early Childhood Development phase. The insights gained from the study may help to better understand the learner discipline processes that can address the developmental needs of the learners in the ECD phase, particularly with regards to positive discipline and fostering self-regulation.

### **REASON FOR BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY**

You are invited to participate in the study because you are a teacher in the ECD phase, in a primary school in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. Your school has been selected because it has ECD A and ECD B classes and has been recommended by the Provincial ECD Trainer as a school where teachers apply positive non-violent methods when disciplining the learners. Your experience as a teacher in the ECD phase can contribute important information to an understanding of how teachers can foster self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase. I obtained your contact details from your principal. Approximately ten qualified ECD phase teachers from primary schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province will be selected to participate in the study.

### **NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY**

Your actual role as a participant in the study is to describe your experiences of disciplining the learners using positive discipline methods during free play. Your story telling will include the descriptions and meanings you give and the actions you take to foster self-regulation, with focus on teaching skills that assist learners to develop independence, skills for managing emotions and solving conflicts, as well as developing a sense of belonging.

The study involves audio-taping semi-structured interviews. An interview guide with open-ended questions will be used during the interviews. The time allocated to conduct interviews is between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in schools, in the ECD classrooms or another convenient place of your choice.

### **RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE**

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign this consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, even after having agreed to participate.

### **THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY**

No financial or other incentive will be offered to the participant, the learners, the principal or the school. Consent for participation is freely given. There are no penalties or any need to give reasons for not giving consent or withdrawing the previous given consent at any point in the study.

The potential benefits of taking part in this study is to contribute to the body of knowledge relating to learner discipline in the ECD phase. The insights gained from the study may help to better understand learner discipline processes that can address the developmental needs of learners in the ECD phase, particularly with regards to fostering self-regulation. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from the study will become part of the solution for disciplinary problems in schools.

### **FORESEEABLE RISKS OF HARM TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

Inconvenience and/or discomfort is the only possible or reasonably foreseeable risk of harm to participants. You are free to let the researcher know if you feel any discomfort or inconvenience.

### **RIGHT TO PRIVACY, ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

In consideration of your right to privacy and confidentiality, your name will not be recorded anywhere in the thesis and no one, apart from the researcher will know about the details of your involvement in this research. No one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, and in any publications, or other research reporting methods such as journal articles and/or conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

## **DATA STORAGE, PROTECTION AND SECURITY**

Hard copies of your interview transcripts will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the researcher's home, for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval. After five years, hard copies of interview transcripts will be shredded and the electronic copies and audio-recorded information permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer with a relevant software programme. The researcher will also delete back up information on USB memory stick and memory cards.

## **APPROVAL FROM THE RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Education, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

## **FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH AND HOW PARTICIPANTS WILL BE INFORMED**

The feedback will consist of a summary of the practical knowledge and corresponding examples based on the participants' experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play. Recommendations for teachers and other stakeholders will also be included in the feedback. The same feedback and recommendations will be given to the principals of the participating schools and the officer at the Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

You need to inform the researcher how you would like to be informed of the final research findings. Please contact Zenzile Msipha on +263712172871 or email [msiphaze@gmail.com](mailto:msiphaze@gmail.com). The following options will be available: the researcher can phone you, provide a printed document, or send the findings to your email.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research will be conducted, you may contact Professor E Venter (Telephone number: +27124294751; Email Address: [Ventee1@unisa.ac.za](mailto:Ventee1@unisa.ac.za) ).

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

Zenzile Msipha (contact phone number: +263712172871 or email [msiphaze@gmail.com](mailto:msiphaze@gmail.com))

### DECLARATION BY PARTICIPANT

I declare as follows:

*(Please tick appropriate box)*

I have read this information in the consent form. In addition, it is written in the language with which I am fluent	agree	Disagree
I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered adequately	agree	Disagree
I understand that taking part in the study is voluntary and I have not been forced to take part	agree	Disagree
I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalized or prejudiced in any way	agree	Disagree
I understand that the interviews will be audio-taped as part of the research.	agree	disagree
I understand my right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality as written in the consent form	agree	disagree
I am aware of and agree to the data storage, security and protection as set out in the consent form	agree	disagree
I am aware of foreseeable risks of harm to the participants in the research project and will be free to let the researcher know if I feel any discomfort or inconvenience	agree	disagree

I am aware of how the researcher can inform me of the final research findings. I have selected the following option:	1. Phone 2. Printed document 3. Send email		
I am aware that there are no financial or other incentive that will be offered to me, the learners, the principal or the school	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>agree</td> <td>disagree</td> </tr> </table>	agree	disagree
agree	disagree		

**SIGNING OF DECLARATION**

By signing below I \_\_\_\_\_  
agree to participate in a research study entitled: ***Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education.***

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed at (Place):** \_\_\_\_\_

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



## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

*This interview guide is for semi-structured interviews using open ended questions that generate narratives from the participants, with the aim of understanding teachers' knowledge and practices of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in early childhood education*

**Name of student:** Zenzile Msipha

**Research Topic:** *Fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education*

**Main research question:**

How do teachers understand their lived experiences of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in Early Childhood Education?

#### ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

Could you please tell me about yourself and your experience of being an ECE teacher?

#### LEAD/ FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTION

How would you describe your experience of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) phase?

#### OTHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH PROBES

- Based on the information you got from the workshop, what is your understanding of the connection between positive discipline and addressing the developmental needs for acquiring self-regulation skills during free play in the in the ECD phase? (*Do you think you have adequate knowledge to foster self-regulation through positive discipline strategies in ECD learners? What other type of educational preparation or professional development opportunities do you see as enhancing your capabilities of fostering self-regulation through positive discipline? How did they enhance your competencies?*).
- Reflecting on your day-to-day experiences, can you describe how the self-regulation skills training you have, helped your learners to gain skills through using positive discipline during free play? (*Can you please describe in detail and give practical examples?*)

- Giving practical examples, can you tell me about your understanding of how positive discipline strategies promoted the development of self-regulation in the ECD phase? *(What did the experience mean to you?)*
- Based on your experiences, what is your understanding of the most important knowledge you need to have when fostering self-regulation through positive discipline during free play in the ECD phase? *(Please describe in detail with examples; Are there any supports/ challenges- please give details).*

## **CLOSING**

I appreciate your participation and contribution in the study. If you need to talk more about this issue, please free to get in touch with me. Thank you very much.

## APPENDIX G: PROOF OF EDITING

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that editing and proofreading was done for:

Zenzile Msipha

Department of Psychology of Education

University of South Africa

Doctoral Thesis:

Fostering Self-Regulation through Positive Discipline during Free Play in Early Childhood Education



Cilla Dowse

25 January 2021

Cilla Dowse	Rosedale Farm
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