

Running head: TEACHER / STUDENT INTERACTION

Exploring teacher perspectives on the relationship between teacher-student interactions and
the classroom engagement of students with behavioural difficulties

Phillip Good

Bachelor Arts, majors in Psychology and Education (Macquarie University)

Master of Social Health and Counselling (Macquarie University)

Supervisor: Dr Rebekah Grace

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Research, Department of Psychology Macquarie University.

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Abstract

This research employed a qualitative design to examine two dimensions of teachers' experiences with students presenting with challenging behaviours: teachers-student interaction, and classroom engagement. A total of 15 teachers from three Catholic schools were involved in the study, five teachers from each participating school. The three schools included: (1) a coeducational primary school; (2) a mainstream secondary school for boys; and (3) a special behavioural secondary school for boys. The study employed one-on-one semi-structured teacher interviews. Teachers' own classroom experiences, along with their perceptions of the impact of the wider school context on outcomes for students with behavioural difficulties, were examined. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used in the analysis of interview data. *Findings:* A narrative of caring for the wellbeing of students with challenging behaviour was embedded in the interview data from all fifteen teachers. The teachers reported the complexity of student behavioural challenges and factors that inhibited positive teacher-student interaction and relationships, as well as consequences for not meeting school expectations. However, developing caring and positive relationships with students - giving them a voice, providing students with clear expectations, rules and boundaries – was seen as key to the formation of positive teacher-student interactions, positive student classroom engagement, and an optimal environment for learning. *Limitations:* This research was limited by the relatively small participant numbers, and it may be that the emphasis on caring reflected a philosophical approach emphasised and reinforced within the Catholic school system.

Declaration of Originality

This assignment is my own work, based on my own personal study and / or research. The works found within this thesis are original and have not been submitted for publication, written by another person, nor submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. The qualitative research within this thesis was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Macquarie University: Approved (5201600660) (Con/Met) Amendment (5201600660).

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Introduction

Position statement

The current research was prompted by observing the difficulties encountered by school teachers of students with behavioural challenges. As a counsellor working at a special school for children with behavioural difficulties, I observed that establishing trust and applying a caring approach when working with troubled students was essential to improving their outcomes. Such an approach is supported by researchers Green (2014) and Noddings (2005). Discipline driven approaches to managing the behaviours of challenging students may result in persistent non-conforming and at times aggressive responses, which often lead to entrenched behavioural problems for teachers to address. While consequences for actions are important, I have observed that successful specialist teachers of behaviourally challenged students give more focus to building positive relationships with their students and to seeking an understanding of the causes for their challenging behaviours, rather than enforcing punitive methods. However, integrating a caring and non-punitive approach with behaviourally challenged students can be extremely difficult even for the most experienced teachers. These observations prompted an interest in the ways teachers in different settings approached working with children with behavioural difficulties, and the extent to which relationship building was prioritised.

Introduction to the project focus

This study will explore teacher perspectives on the relationship between teacher-student interactions and the classroom engagement of students with behavioural difficulties. The literature review will examine children's relationships, applying an attachment theory frame that view relationships as providing the foundation on which learning is built. Children's early development is primarily through their relationships with the important

people in their lives, their parents and families, their peers and, in later years, well-trained early childhood professionals (Bennett, 2004). In primary and secondary school, relationships for learning take place by way of teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement. If these relationships are positive, they are active influences leading to healthy human development and education (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child [NSCDC], 2004). Positive teacher-student interactions have been shown to impact directly on students' academic, social and emotional experiences at school (Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995; Zee & de Bree, 2016).

Nevertheless, there is widespread agreement that one of the greatest daily stressors experienced by school teachers is students' disruptive and challenging behaviours (Burnett & Gittins, 2011; Nash, Schlösser & Scarr, 2016). There is a recognition that initiatives that teach and reinforce identified positive behaviours and minimise punishment are more effective than corrective or punitive approaches for improving students' behaviour (Kupchik & Catlaw, 2015).

Moreover, recognising the progress various approaches have contributed to effective behaviour management, Nash et al. (2016) contend that teacher-student relationships in schools also play an important part in teachers' ability and willingness to manage behaviour, and in students' willingness to participate in positive classroom engagement. To this end, the present study focused on teacher-student relationships and how fifteen teachers from three different school environments perceived their influence on positive teacher-student interaction and positive student classroom engagement as well as their perceptions of the wider school environment on their experiences.

Literature review

Foundations of care: Relationships for learning from infancy to young adulthood

The following literature review draws on attachment theory and the underlying premise that relationships provide the foundation on which learning is built. This review gives particular focus to the relationships that support engagement and learning for children and young people with behavioural difficulties. A child's relationships for learning are many and varied, ranging from their attachment to their primary carer from birth, through to relationships with peers and other adults in their lives, as well as teachers in formal preschool, primary and secondary education settings.

Attachment in infancy, a foundation of caring

The crucial points of life transition include birth, the preschool years, primary and secondary schooling, work or further education (Reid, 2009). Importantly, what a person learns throughout their preschool years and during their primary and secondary education has a significant influence of an individual's life trajectory. Bowlby (1958) argues that learning begins at birth in the context of relational bonds between mother and child. Therefore, children's learning and social development starts with their parents or significant carers from their earliest days of life. In 1958, John Bowlby prepared a revised edition of his earlier report entitled *Maternal Care and Mental Health* (1951). The report was the World Health Organisation's (WHO) contribution to the United Nations program for the welfare of homeless children (Douglas, 1952). Bowlby's comments, published in *The Lancet* (1958), restated his belief that the separation of a child from his/her mother should not be undertaken without substantial reason, because of the importance of this bond to the child's learning and development. At the same time, Bowlby accepted that the medical community had only partial understanding of personality disorders, the incidence

of residual disability due to separation, or reliable methods for estimating the degree of harm to a child following a separation from their mother.

By 1982 evidence had been accumulated and a new conceptual framework for attachment theory had been formulated to understand personality development and psychopathology (Bowlby, 1982). Bowlby's attachment theory revolutionised the view of mother- infant bonding, and research demonstrated positive correlations between the strength of a child's attachment, and their later self-esteem and self-confidence (Field, Gewirtz, Cohen, Garcia, Greenberg & Collins, 1984), all of which have implications for learning.

Further research has supported Bowlby's findings and attachment theory is recognised today as an important psychological paradigm. The clinical application of this theory is expanding rapidly, particularly in programmatic responses to behavioural difficulties in children (Holmes, 2014). Studies have reported that confidence and self-esteem, which are developed in the early years of mother-infant bonding, sets a child on a trajectory that can have an impact across their lifespan (Fitton, 2012; Troop, 2011). A child's self-confidence and self-esteem will lead to an increase in exploratory play activities and the development of cognitive skills which have strong associations with achievement in primary school (Baydar, Brooks-Gunn & Furstenberg Jr., 1993; Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). These important early relationships lay the foundations for the other significant relationships that facilitate learning, not the least of these being relationships with their future school teachers.

Birth to age 3 is argued to be a critical period of time in the establishment of positive life trajectories, hence the home learning environment is a primary site for children's learning and development (Tayler, 2015). Research has consistently shown that early secure attachment with caregivers predicts a child's positive feelings and beliefs about themselves

(Bohlin, Hagekull, & Rydell, 2000). A positive history of caregiver availability and responsiveness appears to promote feelings of self-worth in a child, which in turn are related to peer-competence, school adjustment, perceptions of social acceptance and classmate support (Psouni, DiFolco & Zavattini, 2015).

Learning and early childhood

Children's early language development offers an excellent example of how children can learn through keen observation and listening, and indicates the vital role of adults to children's learning processes through their everyday conversations with infants and toddlers (Tayler, 2015). A study of 14 to 58-month-old children by Cartmill, Armstrong, Gleitman, Goldin-Meadow, Medina, & Trueswell (2013) reported that adults who provided a greater number of high-quality word-learning opportunities, by way of inferring the meaning of the word from the context, produced better vocabulary for their children prior to preschool. These acquired literacy skills contributed to a positive preschool experience.

A young child's development will be adversely affected if a secure and safe environment is absent. In early childhood, children are most vulnerable to the impact of complex trauma, particularly when it occurs within the family or with trusted caregivers. Trauma affects the neurodevelopment of children and may impact a child's brain on a structural level, a biological level and a functional level (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010). Furthermore, the disruption to a safe and predictable environment undermines healthy child development and the foundation of self-regulation, which in turn has adverse consequences for learning and behaviour management (Blaustien & Kinniburgh, 2010). The importance of significant adult caregivers for older children's learning experience will now be discussed.

The influence of parents and other adults in middle childhood and adolescence

A study by Flouri and Buchanan (2004) examined father and mother involvement in the lives of children aged 7 and their educational attainment by age 20. The authors reported that parental involvement is one of the major influences on attainment. A more recent study by Keown and Palmer (2014) reported that parent/child conversations were a rich source of parental involvement during middle childhood. While the study only examined parent's interactions with their male children, the study's findings suggest that future research on parental involvement should pay greater attention to the nature and frequency of parent/child conversations which, in middle childhood, appear to be a major form of parent-child engagement. Keown and Palmer (2014) suggest that this type of information may provide further insights into children's later educational and behavioural outcomes.

The adolescent years

While several studies have reported greater parental involvement in primary school than in high school (Jeynes, 2012; Lam, McHale & Crouter, 2012), parental care for adolescents' wellbeing and educational progress remains essential for good educational outcomes. While direct forms of parental involvement with school programs are more prevalent in the middle childhood years, (Park & Holloway, 2013; Seginer, 2006), lesser direct parental involvement in school programs may be largely due to normative development and cognitive changes during adolescence, where their autonomy and decision-making is boosted, leading to an increasingly active role in their own education.

However, Park and Holloway (2013) point out that parents may adopt new forms of involvement centred in and around the home environment. Effective parental involvement included active monitoring of their children's school activities and homework, and calming them when they became distressed by the demands of high school. A study by Falbo, Lein &

Amador (2001) of 26 students and their parents, before and after entering high school, reported that the adolescents with the least problems were the ones whose parents consistently spent time every day in direct or indirect monitoring of child tasks and emotional wellbeing.

To summarise, children's learning begins in their infant years and is dependent on the relationships and secure attachments with the significant adults in their lives. Positive relationships with significant caregivers remain crucial for learning outcomes as they progress through to mainstream education. Nevertheless, there are factors that may inhibit these relationships or inhibit learning and contribute to the development of behaviour challenges for a child in the school environment. Several crucial influences on behaviour will be discussed below.

Self-regulation and social adjustment in the early school years

A study by Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell (2003) gathered responses from 3,305 teachers, and reported a strong emphasis on the social aspects of learning. The non-academic skills of self-regulation and social competence were identified by kindergarten teachers as more important to early school success than academic skills such as letter recognition or numerical knowledge (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003). Findings from two other studies of kindergarten children with a mean age of 5.47 years (Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999) indicated that behaviours at entry to kindergarten, including either a prosocial or antisocial orientation, predicted children's engagement in the classroom and their relationships with teachers and peers.

For a typically developing child, self-regulation and social competence develops very early in their life, well before preschool and primary school age. Between the ages of 12 and 18 months children become capable of personal control, which involves the awareness of

social demands and the ability to initiate, maintain and cease behaviours related to physiological arousal, emotions and attention, and compliance with caregivers' requests (Blair & Raver, 2015; Kopp, 1982; Ursache, Blair, Stifter, & Voegtline, 2013). By 24 months children's self-control further includes the ability to delay or regulate behaviour even in the absence of external influences. At 36 months children begin to be capable of self-regulation that meets changing situational demands. The second and third years are where the onset of other control behaviours indirectly or directly relate to the child's adoption of family and social standards. In these years, there appears to be a shift in emphasis from external sources of control to internal child factors, which have a direct influence on how children adjust to teacher-student interactions and classroom engagement in their early school years (Blair & Raver, 2015; Kopp, 1982; Ursache, Blair, Stifter, & Voegtline, 2013).

The influence carers have on these early years of self-regulation has a lasting effect on what and how children develop, learn and understand, hence this influence is critical, not only for children's self-regulation, but also for their social development and learning in the years prior to preschool and primary school education (UNESCO, 2007). Moffitt et al. (2011) followed the lives of 1000 children from birth to age 3. They found that childhood self-control predicted later outcomes relating to physical health, substance dependence, personal finances and criminal offending behaviours.

Factors that disrupt the development of self-regulation and social adjustment and contribute to behavioural challenges at school

Evidence over recent decades from developmental psychology has clearly supported the role of children's self-regulation in learning (Raver, 2012). Many personal and social factors may adversely affect a child's self-regulation and social adjustment. Social factors include influences on development as the result of environmental context. Personal factors

include child characteristics, such as neurological disorders or genetic conditions or predispositions.

An example of a social factor that has been shown in research to have a significant relationship with child self-regulation and social adjustment is family socioeconomic disadvantage. Increasing evidence supports the premise that chronic stress associated with family poverty-related hardship adversely influences children's behavioural and emotional self-control, increasing the risk that children may find it difficult to meet the expectations of educational settings (Raver, 2012). The struggle they have with identifying their own emotions may present in many ways. Difficulty with identifying their own affect can lead to a limited emotional vocabulary, limited awareness of their internal experience, and a restricted range of tolerance (Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Green, 2014a).

An example of a personal or child factor that impacts on self-regulation and social adjustment is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). For children with ASD, the classroom environment, with its constant background noise and movement, can make academic activities and routines difficult (Umeda & Deitz, 2011). Children with ASD may experience higher levels of distraction and inattention than their typically developing peers (Dunn, 2001). Children with ASD can face a range of anxieties at school, not the least being their socialisation with other students. A study by Dean et al. (2014) reported that girls and boys with ASD experienced higher rates of social exclusion than their typically developing peers. In addition, boys with ASD were more overtly socially excluded compared to girls with ASD. When transitioning to secondary school, Foulder-Hughes & Prior (2014) reported that students with ASD showed increased concern about having sufficient support services at school. Children in the study also recounted that taking part in physical exercise was a major cause of stress. Any consequent behavioural challenges for these children can be formidable

barriers to their achievement because they hinder participation and the ability to access vital learning opportunities.

In summary, the period from infancy to preschool is an important preparation time for children's engagement with formal education commencing in kindergarten. Positive relationships with the significant carers in their lives are crucial for their future social and formal learning. There is an array of personal and social factors that children may bring into formal educational settings which can result in oppositional and aggressive classroom behaviours directed towards teachers and those around them.

The importance of preschool for primary school and secondary school education will now be discussed.

The effectiveness of preschool education for primary and secondary education

Research supports the potentially valuable role of early childhood preschool education in improving developmental and school attainment outcomes for children, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds or who are developmentally vulnerable (Sylva et al., 2003). From an attachment perspective, young children's relationships with teachers reflect the quality of the emotional connection between the two parties, and these relationships play an important role in shaping children's experience and adjustment in school (Zhang & Sun, 2011). Furthermore, Davis (2003) points out that there is strong evidence to suggest teacher-student relationships influence these outcomes as early as preschool and continue to influence students' social and intellectual development throughout their school years to adolescence.

Not surprisingly, the extent to which children exhibit behaviour problems is strongly associated with their relationships with teachers (Zhang & Sun, 2011). As Hamre and Pianta (2001) report, children's ability to form relationships with their teachers forecasts later academic and behavioural adjustment in school. More specifically, a negative teacher-child

relationship marked by conflict or overdependency, developed as an important predictor of a wide range of academic and behavioural outcomes, even when controlling for other early indicators of these outcomes. From a relationship perspective, the quality of teacher–child relationships is a stronger predictor of behavioural than of academic outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

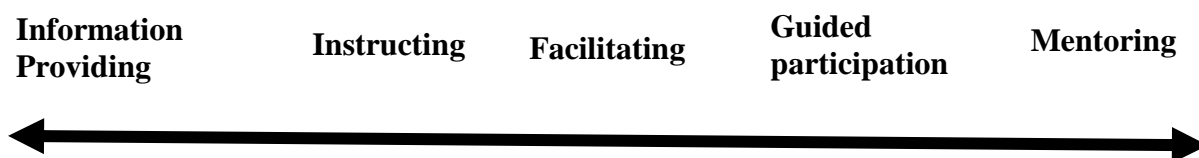
Findings from the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study (Sylva et al., 2003) found that high quality preschool education and care at age three and four can reduce the risk of anti-social behaviour for disadvantaged children. In general, children in high quality preschool centres show reduced anti-social and worried behaviour by the time they get to school. Sylva et al. (2003) point out that continued shared thinking is a prerequisite for the most effective early engagement with children in preschool practice. Furthermore, the quality of the interactions between staff and children were particularly important. Children showed better social behavioural outcomes where staff showed warmth and were responsive to the individual needs of children (Sylva et al., 2003). A review of thirty-six studies that examined the long-term effects of early childhood programs (Barnett, 1995) reported that the long term positive effects on socialisation were evident in teacher ratings and, in one study, by parent ratings.

Positive teacher-student relationships for primary and secondary school children's classroom engagement - a foundation of care

Studies indicate that teachers' pedagogic interactions with students exist on a continuum that increases in complexity from information providing to mentoring. At one end of the continuum, direct instruction of students who are passive receivers of information, moving along to mentoring of students and substantive teacher-student relationships at the other end (Beutel, 2010). At the mentoring end of the continuum, the teacher instils a love of

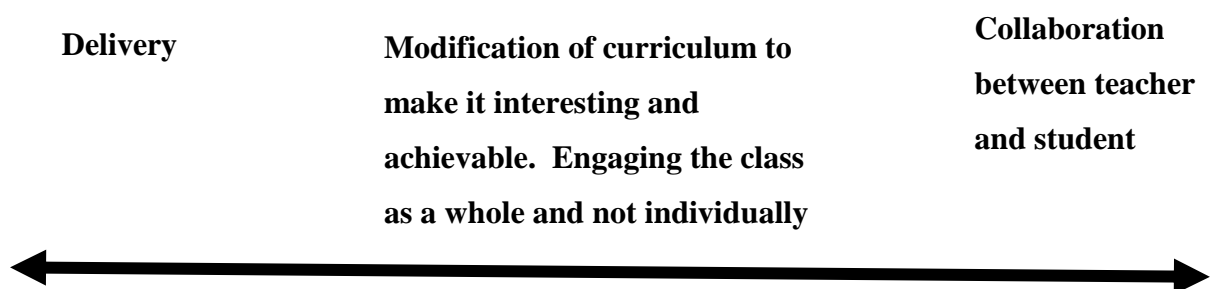
learning in the student, where learning is viewed as part of an ongoing lifelong journey, rather than merely being a focus during the years of schooling.

Figure 1. Pedagogic continuum of interactions with students (Beutel, 2010).



A study by Harris (2010) also found that teachers try to engage their students in complex and divergent ways. At one end of Harris's continuum was delivery, and at the other end collaboration.

Figure 2. Pedagogic continuum of interactions with students (Harris, 2010).



There is strong support for a teacher-student collaborative approach as most effective in supporting student engagement (Harris, 2010; Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair & Lehr, 2004). However, there is renewed support for the reintroduction of Direct Instruction at the 'chalk and talk' end of the continuum, particularly for literacy and numeracy (Binder & Watkins, 2013; Ziegler & Stern, 2016). The following is a clarification of each end of the teaching continuum.

Direct Instruction (teacher-centred)

Direct Instruction, which is also referred to as teacher-centred instruction, is probably the oldest form of school-based teaching (Lindsay, 2014). The key emphasis of teachers' pedagogic interactions with students is on delivering a body of knowledge for students to

reproduce when required (Beutel, 2010). Direct instruction is a pedagogic strategy in which the main flow of classroom interaction is from the teacher to the student who is conceptualised as a passive receiver of information (Harris, 2010). The underlying theory posits that the most effective way to teach is by explicit, guided instructions (Lindsay, 2014). With Direct Instruction, the nature of teacher-student interactions is impersonal, with the focus on teaching a subject through content delivery rather than relationship building. Teachers favouring this approach perceive that learning happens when instruction is structured and specific (Beutel, 2010). As Harris (2010) comments further, the teacher-centred approach is viewed by some teachers as the best way to facilitate student engagement by delivering class activities to students and disciplining those who behave inappropriately. Essentially what is often described as the 'chalk and talk' approach is intended to maintain order in the classroom and ensure that students will participate in the lesson.

Collaborative teacher-student interaction

While presently there are different understandings by teachers of how best to facilitate engagement in learning (Harris, 2010), there is general support throughout the academic literature for a mentoring and collaborative approach to teacher-student relationships as the most effective way to facilitate student engagement. Students report that they adopt a deeper approach to learning when taught in a predominantly collaborative classroom environment (Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse, 1999), and that a collaborative approach supports their active engagement, which in turn assists them to retain the presented knowledge (Laal, 2013). Additionally, collaborative learning aims at cooperation between the teacher and the student and stands against the approach followed in a traditional classroom (RaneeKaur, 2012). Therefore, in collaborative classrooms, students and teachers are treated as equal partners. They can actively interact by sharing experiences, skills, and at times take on reverse roles evaluating each other's ideas (Mitnik, Recabarren, Nussbaum & Soto, 2009).

Regarding children with difficult behaviours, others extend the collaborative concept by advocating a non-adversarial, non-punitive, and proactive approach, equally inclusive of all their students, not just the ones who are already achieving (Dweck, 2006). Furthermore, Noddings (2005) believes that as well as collaboration, the importance of care needs to be realised in schools, as caring relationships have not been a priority in the hierarchy of curricula and policy concerns in schools since the late 1980s.

An important question remains as to which end of the continuum is best for children with behavioural challenges. For teachers and students in general, Sfard (1998) comments, no two students have the same needs and no two teachers arrive at their best performance in the same way. Therefore, judgement is required and didactic single-mindedness for either end of the teaching continuum can be expected to make even the best educational approach fail (Sfard, 1998).

Regardless of which approach is suitable, teachers who work in learning support roles in mainstream educational settings and special behavioural education, see the challenge of caring as central to good educational outcomes for students at educational risk (Noddings, 2005; Green, 2014a). This is especially true for students who struggle to function effectively in mainstream school environments due to social, emotional or mental health difficulties (Green, 2014a). Aligned with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1958, 1982), regardless of whether it is a teacher centred or a collaborative approach, the aim is to have students feel safe and secure in their learning environments and provide scaffolding for important social and academic skills (O'Connor, Dearing & Collins, 2011; Zee & Bree, 2016).

According to Masten (2001), research indicates that the best asset of resilient children is a strong bond with a competent and caring adult, who need not be a parent. For many school students, in both primary and secondary education, relationships with school staff are among the most leading and important relationships in students' lives (Anderson,

Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr, 2004). To this end, Noblit et al. (1995) argue that instruction, discipline, classroom organisation, and all instructional facets of classroom engagement should be based on a foundation of caring.

Primary school

In research conducted by Merritt et al. (2012), once entering primary school, children's positive relationships with their teachers were more predictive of children's end of year academic skills than were the children's entry level cognitive abilities. Teacher-student interactions that provided emotional support and behaviour management during the early years of school were argued to provide a framework for children's growth in self-regulation and social competence (Merritt et al., 2012). To achieve these outcomes, it has been reported that emotionally supportive teachers offer gentle guidance to students, engaging them in positive communication and demonstrating respect through eye contact and respectful language (Pianta, LaParo & Hamre, 2008; Merritt et al., 2012).

Studies have indicated that early teacher-student relationships are unique predictors of long-term student academic and behavioural outcomes, both positive and negative (Hamre & Pianta, 2001, 2005). First-grade children, when they commence schooling, require a variety of skills to meet the complex demands of classrooms (Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman & Cameron, 2012). One of the difficulties faced by teachers, and for that matter their students, is that some children function at a much younger developmental level than others (Green, 2014b). Teachers can play a key role in social development for this age group (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 1993). Teachers' emotional as well as instructional support for children's positive social behaviours and self-regulatory skills may compensate for those children with behavioural difficulties who are behind in these areas or who have limited family and social resources to support them (Brody, Dorsey, Forehand & Armistead, 2002).

There are students who need the emotional and instructional support of a teacher for their self-regulatory behaviours and such support will enable those children who are lagging in these skills to engage well with teachers and other children (Merritt et al., 2012; Green, 2014a). A study by Hamre and Pianta (2005) with 910 children aged 5 to 6 years, reported that emotional and instructional support from their teachers made a difference in achievement scores for those who had been identified at risk of school failure. At entry into first-grade, the students participating in the study presented with multiple functional behavioural, attention, academic and social problems. By the end of first-grade the children who had been placed in classrooms offering strong instructional and emotional support had similar achievement scores and good teacher-student relationships when compared to the children who presented as low risk at the commencement of first-grade.

Secondary school

Positive teacher-student relationships remain important for secondary school, as older students' confidence in their ability to learn in part reflects their willingness to engage with teachers and receive their feedback positively (Roeser, Eccles & Sameroff, 1998). The authors indicate that, for this age group, positive relationships between students and teachers are associated with student motivation, achievement and feelings of belonging at school. The study by Wilkins (2014) of 274 students from grades 9 to 12 indicated that good teacher-student relationships have multiple components and should therefore be viewed as a multidimensional construct. Wilkins's (2014) study from the students' perspective indicates these to be: (i) Providing academic and personal support, (ii) Showing concern and interest in students, (iii) Motivating and attending to student's personal interests, (iv) Treating students respectfully, (v) Being compassionate, (vi) Being accessible to students, and (vii) Understanding and valuing students' opinions and feelings. To add to this complexity, it is in secondary school that students typically experience significant physical, psychological and

social changes (Green, Arief, Martin, Colmar, Marsh & McInerney, 2012). While these changes occur throughout a child's life, with many being able to navigate these changes (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, MacIver & Feldlaufer, 1993), it is generally recognized that many academic challenges such as diminished motivation, poor self-perceptions and disengagement are prevalent during these adolescent years (Green et al., 2012), all of which impact on teacher-student relationships. Nevertheless, Skinner, Kindermann, Connell, & Wellborn (2009) point out that students who are engaged in school, especially since early primary, are both more successful academically and more likely to avoid the pitfalls of the adolescent years.

The next section of this review will discuss teacher-student interaction approaches that are thought to produce the best educational outcomes for children who are excluded from mainstream schools.

Special education for primary and secondary students with behavioural challenges

Described as lagging skills by Green (2014b), some children lack the appropriate skills for their age to react adaptively to stressful situations with flexibility, adaptability, frustration tolerance, and problem solving skills. According to Green (2014a), these students require individualised programs aimed at developing or building on students' skills which are often behind their same aged peers.

Consequences for actions both good and bad are part of mainstream school engagement for children. However, Walsh (2015), Green (2014a) and Atkins et al. (2002) suggests that consequences, especially severe forms such as suspension or expulsion, do not work for children who are behaviourally challenged. A state-wide study of New York schools (Fabelo et. al., 2011) reported that students who were suspended or expelled for a

discretionary violation were twice as likely to repeat their grade compared to students with the same characteristics, attending a similar school, who had not been suspended or expelled. On the other hand, The Positive Behaviour for Learning (PBL) initiative, which reinforces identified positive behaviours and minimises the use of punishment, was introduced in the Western Sydney Region by the Department of Education and Training (Barker, Yeung, Dobia & Mooney, 2009). Implementing PBL was shown to help shift teachers' perception of behaviour and to have an influence on students' behaviour and learning and to provide an opportunity for changes to school culture (Barker et al., 2009).

As Green (2014a) explains, children do well when they can do well, but many children who are difficult in the classroom are lagging their peers in coping skills. Challenging behaviours most likely occur when the demands being placed on them exceed their capacity to respond adaptively. Traditional discipline, with its heavy emphasis on rewarding and punishing, will not prove effective for children who have difficulty managing emotional responses to frustration (Atkins et al., 2002). Green (2014a, 2014b) advises a non-adversarial, non-punitive, proactive, collaborative, and relationship enhancing approach for these children. Such an approach will seek to collaboratively identify the emotional triggers or reasons that challenge students at educational risk and who have poor self-regulation. As Reid (2009) observed in a study with school leaders, schools were in many instances a place of knowledge as part of the resources available to parents and students in the form of emotional capital.

Conclusion

Children begin to learn from infancy in the context of early mother-child bonding. Parental relationships play a crucial role in children's development and their preparedness to learn. What happens in the first months and years of life matters significantly because early damage, whether by way of physical injury or personal experience, can seriously compromise

children's life prospects (Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, 2000a). There are other factors that hinder children's self-regulation, attachment and relationship building, such as, ADHD and ASD that may result in challenging behaviours and poor educational outcomes. Aligned with attachment theory, the experiences that infants and toddlers have as they grow influences the interactions they will have with their teachers in preschool, primary school and beyond. These important early relationships lay the foundations for the other significant adult relationships, related to learning, that children will encounter later in life. Children's relationships with preschool teachers can be an important contribution to children's successful entry into kindergarten and primary school. In the early school years, teachers can play an important role in supporting the development of children's self-regulation and social competence, and reducing poor behaviour.

Teacher-student interactions that provide emotional support and behaviour management during early primary school may provide a framework for children's growth in self-regulation and social competence (Merritt et al., 2012). Teacher-student relationships in secondary school have multiple components (Wilkins, 2014) as secondary school students may undergo considerable physical, psychological and social changes (Green et al, 2012). In special education for students with behavioural challenges, these complexities are also present when teachers endeavour to develop positive teacher-student interactions and classroom engagement, with the added difficulty of students' constant challenging behaviours.

At every level of schooling teacher-student interaction strategies move along a continuum of direct instruction and collaboration with students (Harris, 2010). There is general support throughout the academic literature that a mentoring and collaborative approach to teacher-student relationships is the most effective way to facilitate student classroom engagement, and that a collaborative approach has significant benefits for student

educational outcomes and for their socialisation (Le, Janssen, & Wubbels, 2017; Sorensen, Twidle & Childs, 2014). All instructional facets of classroom engagement should be based on a foundation of care (Noddings, 2005), whether it be teacher centred learning, a collaborative teacher-student approach or a mix of both approaches.

The question remains as to what strategies are employed in today's classrooms that create positive teacher-student relationships and students' sense of belonging to their school and community. As Magson, Craven, Munns and Yeung, (2015) comment, with a few exceptions higher levels of social capital and belongingness within the school and community were generally associated with decreases in risky behaviour and physical violence for students. There is a need for more research that looks at the role of teacher-student relationships in student outcomes.

The current research

Behaviourally challenged children require an educational approach that considers their difficulties to respond adaptively (Green, 2014a; Noddings, 2005). Recent studies report that teachers face behavioural challenges not only in special education but increasingly in mainstream education settings as well (Simpson & Sacken, 2016; McCluskey, 2014). Asking teachers about their perceptions and experience of developing positive teacher-student interactions and relationships is important, as it is essential to understand how teachers approach those children who are difficult to engage and who are often disruptive.

The current study examines teachers' perceptions and experience of their interactions with students, and the extent to which they believe that positive relationships enhance student classroom engagement. The teachers who participated in the study are from three diverse Catholic school populations. Namely, a mainstream coeducational primary school, a mainstream secondary school for boys, and a special secondary school for boys at educational

risk due to their behavioural challenges which have excluded them from the mainstream school setting.

The research presented in this thesis is guided by the following research questions:

Classroom environment

1. What are the difficulties you face with the students in your class that are at educational risk or who have behavioural problems? How do you approach these difficulties in terms of teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement?
2. Is supporting or fostering good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement a priority in your teaching? I would like to hear your view on these issues.
3. How do you balance classroom control and discipline with supporting good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement with the educational and emotional demands some students present with? For example, disruptive students who may present with poor self-control, self-regulating skills, or poor coping mechanisms.

School environment

4. What, in your view, are the top three things that need to happen or be in place in school settings to support good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement.
5. Could you explain to me your school's approach to students who are at educational risk or who have behavioural problems, in terms of teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement?
6. What are the things that you would like to change and the things that you wish to support?

Methods

The research employed a qualitative design, taking an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis approach in the examination of teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement. The study focused on how teachers perceive their influence on teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement as well as teachers' perceptions of the wider school environment on the phenomena. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen because this methodology is concerned with how people make sense of their lived experiences, how they perceive and talk about objects and events (Braun and Clarke, 2014; Harris, 2010) and give meaning to their experiences.

The core idiographic features of IPA balance phenomenological description of an event or experience with interpretation, always grounded in the participant's account. IPA takes both a thematic approach, exploring themes across participants, and is equally concerned with the specifics of individual experiences (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). In the current study this means exploring themes that span the teacher interviews, as well as exploring the meaning making of individual teachers based on their own experiences. Qualitative interviews were employed because they can be an effective method for understanding people in context, their lived experiences, and the meanings they attach to those experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

The research employed case study approach, treating each school as a case, followed by individual qualitative teacher interviews. A case study approach was chosen to present an account of teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement because a case study methodology supports an understanding of how the complexities of real life influence decisions (University of NSW, 2017). For this research, each case study captures the complexities that are encountered in the classroom of mainstream and special school settings.

Researchers have used the case study research method for many years across a variety of disciplines to examine contemporary real-life situations and provide the basis for the application of ideas and extension of qualitative methods. The case study research method is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear or evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984, p. 23, cited in Soy, 2006). In the present study, the experiences of school teachers in three diverse school settings where behavioural challenged students are encountered provided the context. The tactics used in case study analysis force researchers to move beyond initial impressions to improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable findings. Data is sorted in many ways to expose or create new insights and will deliberately look for conflicting data to disconfirm the analysis (Yin, 2009).

Participants

To capture a wide range of teacher experiences with diverse student populations, three schools were selected as target schools for the research, including: (1) a coeducational primary school; (2) a mainstream secondary school for boys; and (3) a special coeducational behavioural high school, at which only male students were enrolled at the time of the study. These schools were operating under the Catholic school system.

A total of fifteen teachers were involved in the study. Five female teachers participated from the primary school; five teachers (two males and three females) participated from the secondary mainstream school; and 5 teachers (one female and four males) participated from the special school. All participants held tertiary qualifications in education and their classroom experience ranged from 2 years through to 37 years.

Disclosure

The researcher is employed as a casual school counsellor at the special behavioural school and volunteers in a non-teaching role with the primary school's Learning Assistance Program. The researcher's role at both schools does not involve a teaching role or academic involvement.

Instruments:**The Teacher Interview**

The interview was comprised of two sets of questions. One set focused specifically on teacher experiences within the classroom, and the other focused on the school environment more broadly.

Teacher/Classroom focused questions

In line with the IPA approach (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), semi-structured interview questions were developed and designed to guide the face-to-face, in-depth interviews. Care was taken not to include any assumptions in the questions and to maintain a contextualised approach, keeping the focus on the teachers and students in the classroom. Teachers were also asked to respond to three Likert scales. The measures selected were acceptable and in line with each school's ethos and approved by the Principals and Deputy Principals of the three target schools.

The teacher directed questions focused on:

- The experiences of teachers in creating positive teacher-student interactions and supporting student classroom engagement for those students who are at educational risk due to their behaviour or their lack of classroom engagement;

- How teachers perceive whether students have been supported by their strategies; and
- The role of discipline versus caring on the continuum of classroom management strategies.

Example question:

Is supporting or fostering good teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement a priority in your teaching?

School environment questions

The school directed questions focused on the school's general approach and specific strategies aimed at supporting good teacher-student interaction and student engagement.

Example question:

What, in your view, are the top three things that need to happen or be in place in school settings to support good teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement?

Likert scales

Three Likert-type scales were designed to capture teachers' attitudes towards, and understanding of, discipline, positive teacher-student interaction, educational outcomes, and student achievement.

Example question:

Q: It is difficult to maintain discipline and develop a good teacher-student relationship with my students.

Where 1 indicates very difficult and 10 indicates not difficult at all.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

The full interview schedule is attached to this thesis as Appendix A

Procedures

Face to face meetings were arranged with the three Catholic school principals in order to explain the research aims and format of the study. *Expression of Interest* and *Teacher Information and Consent forms* were given to the school principals for staff dissemination. The school principals informed their staff of the research at their regular staff meetings. The assistants to the principals organised the meeting times for the teachers who consented to be involved in the research. The fifteen teachers who participated in the study were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research prior to the commencement of their interviews. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and all interviews were undertaken at each participant's school within school hours, except for one who was interviewed off site after school hours. The teachers were given a \$20.00 gift card to thank them for their participation. The interviews were fully transcribed using all words spoken.

Analysis

A qualitative approach, by way of interpretive phenomenological analysis, was used for the examination of teachers' perceptions regarding their interactions with students and how their students engage in the classroom. An orthographic transcription of the sixteen teacher interviews produced a thorough record of the words spoken, allowing for an analysis that was derived from data or in vivo codes (the interviewee's language). Thematic analysis was undertaken to identify and bring to light experiential patterns within the data. It was the researcher's aim, by way of thematic analysis, to have the research claims grounded in the data. Initial coding, in which labels are applied to segments of data, provided an initial identifier of unique data segments. The study examined how each teacher constructed

meaning based on their own experiences. Memo writing recorded insights that afforded more depth and complexity than information provided by coding, and supported the interpreted phenomenological analysis of the phenomena being studied. Codes were then refined to obtain the best fit with the data, and codes were linked with other codes to identify themes and sub- themes. Both codes and themes were intended to capture concepts or ideas identified from the teacher responses. Three interviews were dual coded and checked for inter-rater reliability. The remainder of the interviews were all coded by the research student.

Ethics

Ethics approval was obtained from the Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee Approval No: (5201600660) (Con/Met); FHS Ethics - Amendment (5201600660) (19-11-2016) and the Principals from each of the three independent Catholic schools. Following this research the researcher will personally disseminate the study findings as a written summary back to the school principals and their communities in a timely way. The full thesis will be offered to all three school principals and the teachers who participated in the study.

Results: Case Studies

This section presents each of the three participating schools as a case study to explore differences across the three school environments. A brief description of each school is presented and followed by an analysis of three likert scale ratings.

Primary co-educational school

The primary school, which is in suburban Sydney, was originally opened by an order of Catholic sisters who were the first teachers and administrators of the school. The school today is administered under lay leadership.

The school is co-educational from Kindergarten to Year 6. It is a relatively small primary school with a strong emphasis on socialisation and parental involvement for the students. Free lunchtime activities are available as well as private lessons for extra curricula subjects. Out of School Hours (OOSH) care is available for the students.

The school has approximately 18 teaching staff for approximately 260 students for ages 5 to 11 and employs specialist teachers in several subject areas including Learning Support. The range of teacher classroom experience for participants in this study spans 5 to 37 years.

School population. The students live mostly in the local area. It is not unusual for children's parents, and even their grandparents, to be former students at the school. This contributes to the large parent involvement at the school.

Question 1. Should academic achievement be prioritised over teacher-student relationships?

The primary school teachers average rating was 1.6 out of 10 (where 10 means academic achievement is the priority), clearly demonstrating a shared belief that priority

should be given to relationship building with students. Compared to the other two school environments, both of which were secondary schools, the primary school teachers had the strongest focus on building positive teacher-student relationships. This reflects the emphasis in the narratives of the primary school teachers relating to socialisation. As one senior teacher commented, "To me, the biggest thing is the children's development of their social skills and development of their emotional intelligence and their empathy . . . Assessing children's readiness for school, is the social and the emotional development. Yes, their cutting out skills, yes, their pencil holding, those things can come".

Question 2. Is good teacher-student interaction a prerequisite for good educational outcomes?

The primary school teachers average rating was 10 out of 10 (where 10 means strong agreement that good teacher-student interactions are essential to positive educational outcomes). This question was given the highest rating by the primary school teachers, consistent with their emphasis on socialisation described above.

Question 3. Is it difficult to maintain discipline and also develop good teacher-student relationships?

The primary school teachers' average rating was 9.8 out of 10 (where 10 means it is not difficult to maintain discipline whilst also developing good teacher-student relationships). The disciplinary approach of the participating teachers was underpinned by a school policy to understand behavioural causes as much as possible. As one teacher remarked, "It's a lot of communication with parents, especially if the learning support teacher is involved". The teacher went on to say:

“All behaviour has a root cause. Sometimes it is a physical condition but sometimes it's not and that's what we're looking at all the time, is the why behind the behaviour so that then we can support the child with strategies to help them to handle that behaviour”.

As the school is a relatively small primary school, most students were well known to every teacher regardless of whether they have taught the student or not. By way of staff meetings, all teachers were made aware of children who needed support for behavioural issues.

Secondary school for boys

The secondary school is situated in suburban Sydney and caters for boys in Year 7 through to Year 12. Originally founded by a Catholic order of teaching brothers the school is now administered by a lay principal and lay teachers both male and female. Students follow a mainstream curriculum in accordance with the NSW Board of Studies' requirements and electives are provided for the senior students. Learning support is provided to students with learning difficulties with the school having a strong emphasis on pastoral care. The school has approximately 60 teaching staff and provides education for over 650 students from ages 11 to 18. The teacher classroom experience for this study spans 1 to 42 years.

School population. Being one of the few Catholic boys high schools in the wider geographical area, the student population is made up from boys who live in the local area and boys from the neighbouring suburbs. This results in a varied socio-economic and cultural mix of students. The diversity of students is viewed as an asset by the school's teachers and administrators.

Question 1. Should academic achievement be prioritised over teacher-student relationships?

The secondary school teachers average rating was 2.8 out of 10 (where 10 means academic achievement is the priority). The teachers gave slightly more emphasis to academic achievement than the primary school teachers, however positive teacher-student relationships remained the most important factor. In their narratives, it became clear that this view was underpinned by an understanding that many of the students came from disadvantaged backgrounds. The following statement provides an example of one teachers' intent to address the social needs of students ahead of their academic achievement.

“If he leaves in Year 12, with having us as a school having turned around and prevented him from a life of crime, or becoming a perpetrator himself of violent actions, and he doesn't get a good ATAR, I think we've done wonders. That is more important”.

Question 2. Is good teacher-student interaction a prerequisite for good educational outcomes?

The secondary school teachers average rating was 9.8 out of 10 (where 10 means strong agreement that good teacher-student interactions are essential to positive educational outcomes). The following is a typical comment from this group of teachers, “Yeah, I think relationships with students is key...that's the foundation, and without that good teacher student relationship, there's not a mutual respect and just nothing works”.

Question 3. Is it difficult to maintain discipline and also develop good teacher-student relationships?

The secondary school teacher's average rating was 9.2 out of 10 (where 10 means not difficult). Considering the students came from varying cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, ranging from economically disadvantaged to high income families, the secondary school teachers reported a mainly harmonious school environment and that they

had little difficulty in maintaining discipline whilst also fostering positive relationships with their students. They expressed a strong interest in the life experiences of their students and a desire to understand them. As one comment indicates,

“I get to know a lot of the background of the students. . . So before I go into a classroom, I'll look at my roll, I call them my red flag students and they could be all for various reason, it might be just a home issue, it might be a special needs issue. I think you've really got to cater for individual needs”.

Special school for children at educational risk

The special school caters for students who may be experiencing problems due to physical, psychological, emotional and /or familial reasons. They may also have learning difficulties and disorders. Their placement at the school may be short term, where the aim is to work on the student's behavioural or emotional issues to transition them back into their mainstream school, or long term, where the aim is to continue to educate them to achieve the Report of School Achievement (RoSA).

Comparable to other special schools in the wider geographical area (approximately 6) the school's culture has been designed to defuse a lot of the behavioural triggers the students were experiencing in mainstream schools. For example, there is no uniform or set homework. The teacher–student relationship is atypical compared to mainstream schools. Students address staff by their first name, and even eat meals together at lunchtime. All staff are expected to get involved in all school activities, such as camps, excursions and personal development activities. Counselling is provided to all students by registered psychologists and counsellors.

There is a strong focus on reducing the derailing effects of learning difficulties and disorders by having small class sizes (of about five to six students per class) and by

differentiating students based on ability. The school has approximately 15 teaching staff for up to 45 students from ages 11 to 17. At the time of the study only boys were enrolled at the school. The teacher classroom experience for participants in this study spans 2 to 17 years.

School population. Of the three schools, the special school had the smallest number of students. The students generally reside away from the school's location as they are generally referred to the special school by their former mainstream schools located throughout suburban Sydney. While the population is small, there is a varied socio-economic and cultural mix of students.

Question 1. Should academic achievement be prioritised over teacher-student relationships?

The special school teachers' average rating was 3.7 out of 10 (where 10 means achievement is the priority), the highest of the three groups of teachers. The responses gave some indication of the difficulty for their educational task, as most students were well behind in literacy and numeracy for their age groups. The students at the special school were at significant educational risk and were judged by their mainstream school teachers to be not coping in the mainstream school setting and so there was more of an imperative to focus on their academic achievement. Nonetheless, the aim to achieve positive teacher-student relationships was still rated as more important than academic achievement.

Question 2. Is good teacher-student interaction a prerequisite for good educational outcomes?

The special school teachers' average rating was 9.3 out of 10. Good teacher-student interaction was given a high rating, similar to the other two teacher cohorts, as a prerequisite for good educational outcomes.

Question 3. Is it difficult to maintain discipline and also develop good teacher-student relationships?

The special school teachers' average rating, (where 10 means not difficult) was 7.1 out of 10. The special school teachers' average ratings indicated that they had more difficulty maintaining discipline whilst also maintaining positive relationships with the students than the other two schools. This is to be expected due to the high incidence of behavioural difficulties among the student population at the school.

Summary

The three school populations were diverse in the number of enrolled students and the various suburban area from where the students were drawn. For the three questions:

1. Should academic achievement be prioritised over teacher-student relationships?
2. Is good teacher-student interaction a prerequisite for good educational outcomes?
3. Is it difficult to maintain discipline and also develop good teacher-student relationships?

The most varied teachers' average ratings were for question 1, however all teachers placed a higher importance on good teacher-student relationships. All the teachers' average ratings were similar for question 2, with the teachers rating highly the importance of good teacher-student interaction. For question 3, the special school teachers' average rating varied from the other two schools, where the ratings were similar. The special school indicating the most difficulty compared to the primary and secondary schools.

Results: Thematic Analysis

This section explores the themes and sub-themes across the interviews that emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data. Three themes and thirteen sub-themes are presented that relate to the classroom environment and the wider school community.

The power of positive relationships

Building trust

All teachers spoke of the importance of supporting positive relationships with students. A support teacher at the primary school stated, “I kind of believe that if you haven’t got the positive relationship you could teach them until the cows come home” [and have nothing to show for it]. Together with developing an optimum learning environment, the primary school teachers saw their relationships with students as a way of assisting them in socialisation and relationship building, particularly in the early years of their schooling. One teacher pointed out that she had four or five “hands on boys” in her class, “they come out of kindergarten still very self-centred and self - egocentric around themselves, and that’s okay”. The teacher recounted her conversation with one of the boys, “but - why did you do it? [because] he looked at me”. She remarked that “it’s probably [about] talking them through it and trying to get them to understand about life skills, that you should treat people the way you’d like to be treated”.

The approaches used by the secondary school teachers were fundamentally the same as the primary school teachers, showing interest in their students’ lives and building trust. As one secondary school teacher noted, “so I always try to initiate a conversation about something they have done on the weekend to try and build that relationship... but that comes over time, I guess you have to build that trust”.

In the special school, it was evident that there was a huge emphasis on relationship building. The belief throughout the school was that relationships were critical for engaging students who were difficult to reach. A special teacher expressed the view that relationship building and trust go hand in hand. He gave the following commentary:

“The challenge is to motivate those students that have experienced lots of failure in the classroom. I guess for me the focus is to engage the students to learn. To do that I feel that we need to build a really close relationship with them so they can start to trust us. I try to use the relationship to then work with the students. I try to role model positive relationships. I try to role model positive behaviours”.

Relationships versus academic achievement

While building relationships with students was a priority over academic achievement for all teachers, there were slight variances. All teachers rejected the notion that academic achievement should take priority over teacher-student relationships, but academic achievement was not dismissed completely. As discussed earlier, the focus of primary school teachers was more on socialisation, “to me [as a senior primary school teacher], the biggest thing is the children's development of their social skills and [the] development of their emotional intelligence and their empathy”. Academic achievement gained somewhat more prominence for older students in secondary education. As one teacher remarked, “so I'll interview every student in my class to see what their targets are and to set their targets and goals for the year”. For the special school, academic achievement was a slightly higher priority compared to the other two schools because of the students' educational risk, “I think we try to alleviate a lot of the problems so the students can be here to learn and they are ready to learn”.

Someone cares

A primary school teacher commented that “when a child knows you actually care about them, that makes a big difference to them”. The teacher reported that she would often say to one of her students who was on medication for challenging behaviour “it was not about being naughty, but I want you to know that I’m concerned how you are reacting to situations”. A support teacher in the same school added that it was extremely important for a child to know that someone cares about them.

A former secondary school student, who returned to visit his former teacher at the high school, reminded her of a promise she made to the student when he was at school. Apparently, she had said to this student: “I’m not coming to your funeral and I’m not coming to visit you in jail... but I expect to come to your wedding”. When the student graduated from high school in Year 12, a close family member came up to the teacher and said briefly [in ‘colourful’ language], “if it wasn’t for you, I know where he would be, he’d be with his three brothers out at [*jail not identified*]”.

In a similar forgiving and caring approach, a special school teacher commented that students will still do inappropriate things but it did not have to mean the teacher-student relationships must be damaged. “They know I trust them and they know that I care for them... like my children, they know I love them, but I’m not going to let them burn their hand in the oven because I don’t want to discipline them... they [students] know that I’m doing it for them to be a better person, because I care about them”.

Creating a safe environment of belonging

The primary school had a policy of safe learning and feeling safe. It was reported that all teachers at the school endeavoured to foster this understanding for their students from a very early age. A teacher for early primary children remarked, “you let them know that they

are safe in what they're going to say, it's all right to make a mistake". As explained further by another teacher, "we essentially aim to have all students feel safe in how they can answer up...that no-one should laugh at them". The school reported setting individual learning goals for all their lessons. There was also a learning intention based on the curriculum outcome. The school also had success criteria so that the students had clear guidelines about the expectations, and what was the purpose of every lesson. The success criteria were mainly teacher constructed but the school worked toward success criteria being co-constructed, so that the children virtually had a checklist to guide them in their learning. Descriptive feedback based on those learning intentions and success criteria were given to individual students in a timely way, generally on completion of a task, which was viewed particularly important for the younger students. As one senior teacher remarked, "you let them know that you believe in them, [and] that they know they are safe".

The comments by the secondary teachers went beyond being safe in their learning to providing students with a sense of emotional safety. A secondary teacher pointed out that for some students, school was in some ways a refuge from a difficult home environment. This teacher remarked that some children arrive at school before the teacher comes in and are still there at five in the afternoon "shooting hoops because they don't want to go home".

Referring to one boy she said: "If we can make this environment a caring, loving, safe environment for [*not identified*], then I'm not going to blast him because his shirt's out". She continued, "maybe I'm too soft, maybe I'm too whatever, but I just believe it's not their fault a lot of the time and if we're just going to build on negativity for them, where have they got to go? School for a lot of these kids is a safe haven".

While teachers were conscious of working towards children being emotionally safe in their learning, teachers were also aware of keeping their students safe from physical harm. In one potentially unsafe incident, a senior teacher made it clear to his students that he

believed he had no control of the room where he was responsible for ensuring everyone's safety, because of the behaviour of two boys. He shut the room down and everyone sat on benches for an hour, such was the serious nature of the incident. The two disruptive boys had an hour's detention for the hour lost for the other students, "[but] the other students missed out".

Belief in the child and giving them a voice

Teachers from the three schools reported the need to listen to students. Listening not only to their words but what the young person's behaviour was telling them. The teachers from the secondary and special schools gave experiential examples of listening to behaviourally challenged students. One teacher recounted how she has had sixteen and seventeen-year-old boys "balling their eyes out in my office apologising and saying [words to the effect], thank you miss for letting me explain what I did – no one else listens to me". The teacher added that when a student knows they are heard, it gives the teacher an opportunity to suggest more appropriate responses to take when they become frustrated or angry. For example, "I understand you did not like what the teacher said - well what you should have said before you said the F-word...", she added that, "it's about [first] giving them a voice". The behavioural school teachers emphasised the same principle, that listening to students enables a corrective conversation. As one teacher mentioned, "the relationship that you build means that [they know] I'm going to be fair... I will take things into consideration, I will listen to the students. I think it is important to listen but at the end of the day all students know that I have some very clear and basic rules". The rules referred to the safety of both teachers and students and having respect for others in the school.

Connecting with family

The primary school teachers said that “it’s all about communication with the parents”, as they see communication as essential not only for children’s successful entry into kindergarten, but also as they progress towards Year 6. The teachers described regularly asking parents about whether there were any changes in family circumstances, as change for younger children can obviously be a trigger for unsettled behaviour. “If there’s, you know, even a grandparent dying or dad’s in hospital or mums lost her job or something, so we seek communication with the parents”. Parents are also asked to advise the school of any psychological assessments, or other relevant paediatric reports. “It’s lots of communication with the parents, [especially] if the learning support teacher is involved”. Quite often they formed an individual learning plan that was co-constructed with the parents and the learning support teacher and the classroom teacher. As one teacher summed up, “all behaviour has a cause, a root cause. Sometimes it is a physical condition but sometimes it’s not and that’s what we’re looking at all the time, the what’s behind the behaviour so that then we can support the child with strategies to help them to handle that behaviour”.

A secondary school teacher suggested that building relationships with parents is equally important to building relationships with his students. “Yeah, I think relationships with students is key, [without it] there is no mutual respect and nothing works...we have tried to do this with our parents as well.”. Another secondary teacher spoke of the school’s regular semester goal setting meeting with parents, “that’s wonderful, you’re getting parents on board, you’re getting the staff on board and the kids are on board”. As one teacher remarked, “Parental relationships are seen by all secondary school teachers as essential for the students’ progress in both educational and behavioural improvement”. Furthermore, as one teacher cautioned, not having parents “on board” creates significant problems for educational and behavioural outcomes. For example, “when it comes to discipline for class

misbehaviour, [it's hard when] the parents are wanting to know why their son's getting in trouble and arguing the point and feeling it's not deserved". In other words, from the teachers' perspective, it was most helpful when teachers and parents cooperated in the care of students. When parents were not willing to be involved it may limit the teacher's effectiveness, but when there was conflict between the teacher and parent it made the teacher's role extremely difficult.

One of the special school class coordinators explained that knowing the parents makes it easier to have a better relationship with the student. "In having contact with their parents they [students] tend to sometimes feel oh, you know my family, or you know my mum, you know my dad, so it helps them feel a bit more comfortable". Before a student is enrolled, the classroom coordinator was one of the first points of contact for parents. Knowing the parents was especially important, as one special teacher remarked, "when something [has to be told to parents that] is negative, it's still okay because they know me".

Bringing parents into their conversations with their students was a common approach employed by special education teachers. As one teacher explained, "if they're confiding something in me about something they've done on the weekends, I'll say 'oh, dad wouldn't be very happy with that behaviour', or 'your mum's lovely - I love talking to your mum', and things like that. It just builds more of the relationship with them and they feel like you're connecting". This approach may seem unusual for a mainstream school setting; however, the special school teachers believed that whenever possible, building strong relationships between parents, teacher and student was crucial for the wellbeing of both parents and child. As the student population was only small, parent/student consultation occurred more readily than in mainstream settings. Furthermore, students were always advised when parents were contacted and students were always advised of what was told to the parent.

Classroom strategies and pedagogical approaches**Learning goals and establishing success criteria**

The primary schools' close collaboration with parents and other specialised support staff, such as the school psychologist and educational behavioural expert, were described as significant factors for addressing students' needs at the school. A differentiation strategy was included in the school's pedagogy, where teaching is tailored to address the range of student abilities. As one primary teacher observed, "I find, often, if they are not being extended, and they are bored, that's where the behaviour problems come in". One of the primary teachers would place students with the same learning needs together so it was easier to move around the classroom to help them at different stages of need. Special learning support was provided for students with learning difficulties. The school aimed for organisational consistency in support of its teachers, not only for the school's overall strategy, but consistency in practice within the classroom. For example, using the same mathematical language, and having uninterrupted literacy and numeracy blocks at the same time.

In support of learning across the school, the primary school had a policy called Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL). There was a different focus in 'language' every week, for example, "safe and caring hands' or 'be in the right place at the right time". The PBL focuses were specific, were explicitly taught every fortnight and the policy language was used by all the teachers and by the children and by the parents. The school involved parents in promoting the PBLs by publishing them in the school's newsletter. Parents were encouraged to use the PBL "language" at home as well. The whole focus of PBL was positive behaviours, it was noticing the children being good rather than correcting them for having done the wrong thing. "It is trying to catch them doing the right thing all the time and that's based on mutual respect all the time"

The secondary school did not employ a streaming approach for students' abilities. The school had classes for high achieving students and comprehensive classes for all others. As one teacher explained, the difficulties teachers faced, especially the previous year, was that the school had a very disruptive Year 7 class. He went on to say, 'I guess the lowest class, that's probably not the best word, our seven-five class, and there were 14 students in that class and seven or eight of them were very disruptive'.

One secondary teacher remarked that "there are going to be some kids in there who are very good at the subject, and then some that aren't so good, and then some who are just struggling with school as a whole - that's your difficulty". Her strategy for dealing with the different needs of her students was to group her class according to the students' level of learning. Another secondary teacher explained the following strategy that she often used for managing students with behavioural needs that may arise in a comprehensive environment. At the beginning of the lesson she would greet one or two behaviourally challenged students at the door and say 'you are my mate; I really want you sit up front today'. If the student felt they were accused of doing something wrong she would reply "I didn't say you did, but I'm just lonely". She "guessed" that if she made them feel in a way special or if she gave them a little bit of extra attention at the door before beginning the lesson, it may moderate or eliminate their attitude before class begins.

For one special school teacher, having students reach their learning goals came down to being organised. "If you're organised what you're going to teach, if your room is organised, your kids are organised". "I think that plays a big part of it, [especially for students with behavioural challenges], if I'm looking organised, I'm in control here". Furthermore, "I know what I'm doing - I'm ready for the lesson". She felt that if a teacher was not organised, then they were indicating to the students that you really don't care about them and you don't want to be here. The teacher explained further, "I always try and paint the picture that I'm in

control, it's organised, if anything is going to go wrong in here, I'm in control of it and you're safe". Teachers also indicated the need to have the students organised. The following teacher experiences demonstrate the need for clear and precise directions as well as actions.

Clear behavioural expectations, rules and boundaries

All teachers from the three schools conveyed the importance of having clear expectations, rules and boundaries for managing their classrooms successfully. In primary school, the teachers' expectations for students were as clearly pointed out to the younger students as they were for the older secondary and special school students. As one primary teacher remarked, "they come in they test you out, and you just need to say from day one this is how we do it". Another teacher stated that "you set them [rules] out at the start of the year and the students know what your expectations are, what their expectations are too, so it goes both ways". It was felt strongly by the fifteen teachers that laying the ground rules for behaviour and learning outcomes was essential.

A secondary school teacher stressed the importance of applying school rules consistently, "if those [school] rules are made clear from the start, from day one, and if teachers don't turn a blind eye, if they hear a student drop the F-bomb, I think it is important that teachers call them on it rather than just pretending not to hear". The teacher went on to explain, "because if you give students an inch, they will take a mile and in my experience, it's much better to set the tone in day one, then everyone knows what the ground rules are". Another secondary teacher commentated that she set her expectations high for her students but also realised that it will, "obviously take different kids a different amount of time to get there". The teacher added that if you "softly" remind them of the expectations, she eventually gets from having to verbalise her expectations to being able just to look at them or just say their name. "They're like okay, yeah, [they realise] I need to pull myself back into line."

The special school teachers reported that setting clear expectations, rules and boundaries was essential for their students. As one teacher summed up: “I’m very clear about my expectations [and rules] and the students know that, and I want to build relationships with kids, and kids need boundaries and they are aware of that”. Another teacher who had both special and mainstream experience was asked how the behavioural school was different to a mainstream school and she replied with the following observation:

“With the small number of students in your class [here at special school] you're better able to control what's going on. In mainstream, there is a uniform approach. Here, you tailor it to each of the kids needs in your classroom. You still [should] give them that overall idea of the way you want the classroom to run, and your expectations still need to be clear and they still need to be - they still need to do what's expected of them, but you’ve got that flexibility that you don’t have in mainstream. You can change different things for different years [levels], but still giving your overall expectations – because I’m pretty tight with them. I want them [to be great]. But I just can’t let them get away with everything. You can’t [because] then you’re not teaching them”.

The teachers were asked about the consequences for students who did not comply with the clear expectations, rules and boundaries which they were told were important for an optimal environment for learning. Most teachers commented that success was not always tangible or easy to achieve. The following will examine the teachers’ experience of action when students do not comply with school rules and how they perceive the role of consequences in students’ school life.

Consequence for non-compliance

The view reported from the fifteen teachers indicated that consequences were necessary. However, one teacher qualified his comment by saying, “but they needed to be seen by students as fair and equitable”. Another commented on the need for consistency when applying them.

“You can try lots of different methods... what worked well in my previous school was that students had a merit / demerit card which they had to carry on them and if you got more than three demerits in the week, you got a detention that Wednesday afternoon but a merit would cancel out a demerit. Yeah, so there's no point having these rules and systems in place if there's not consequences and the consequences aren't followed up”.

Primary school was seen by one primary teacher as a time for students to build resilience, responsibility and to help students, albeit in a kindly manner, to realise that there are consequences in life. One teacher reported how she had used gentle humour when a young student told her that “mummy didn’t pack his library bag today” by replying, “no, excuse, your mother has already been to school, this is [now] your responsibility”. Because of the children’s younger age group, parents were readily involved with teachers. The primary school in many cases provided individual behaviour plans for children and consequences would come under the umbrella of the family’s care in partnership with the student’s teacher. On rare occasions, when behavioural issues go beyond the expertise of teachers, specific expertise could be provided by the school’s child psychologist. The school also had access to a behavioural expert within the Catholic education system, who would attend the school to observe children with behavioural issues.

With older behaviourally challenged students in secondary and special education, teachers reported more difficulty in achieving positive teacher-student interactions with students. When a very experienced secondary teacher was asked what he does when he fails to stop disruptive behaviour, he replied: “I don’t have solutions that work [every time] in my particular subject area”. “If a student is unable or unwilling to engage in the learning process, then it’s very difficult to access that”. While his reply was candid, he indicated that he would always keep a purposeful focus on relationship building regardless of the difficulties he encountered with students. He continued by saying, “So what do I do in practical terms? I follow the schools discipline policies, and take the stick line of moving them down the consequences path, but at the same time, I continue with the relationship focus and try to get to the bottom of the reasons for disrupting and destroying the learning”. Another teacher at the same school added that there are students that “one hundred per cent need strict boundaries, consequences, and guidelines, you just have to say you are going home - until you can follow the rules you are not coming back”.

Suspension also occurred at the special school but more chances were given to recalcitrant students before suspension because of the students’ often complex needs. They may have had learning difficulties, physical, psychological, emotional, and /or familial reasons for being removed from the mainstream school environment. However, it was often a dilemma for teachers to know the limits afforded to some students, “Yeah, and I don’t know if some kids are given too many chances”. “Yeah, sometimes I think that a kid can be so disruptive and a negative influence [on the others in the classroom]”. Notwithstanding these difficult choices for teachers, the special school “has a scaffold to work with” and every student was made aware of the school’s behaviour management process. Disruptive students may be removed from their classroom and sent to the “Support Unit” where one-on-one teaching and counselling occurred to de-escalate a student’s behaviour before they were

allowed to return to class. When serious behavioural circumstances occurred that were directed toward other students or teachers, restorative justice meetings were convened and all parties involved in the incident attended the meeting. Following a successful resolution to the conflict, students would be returned to class and normal school activities.

Notwithstanding the classroom difficulties mentioned above, the teachers from the three schools reported that they had significant support from the wider school network.

The need for support staff

The primary schools' close collaboration with parents and other specialised support staff, such as the school psychologist and educational behavioural expert, were significant factors for addressing students' needs at the school. A differentiation strategy was included in the school's pedagogy, where teaching was tailored to address the range of student abilities. Special learning support was provided for students with learning difficulties.

All teachers reported having good supportive senior staff. Typical of the comments was that reported by one of the secondary school teachers. "A good principal and a good executive [set] the tone, lead by example, and [they] support staff. I'm lucky at the school I work at; we've got that, we've always had that since I've been here".

Wellbeing or pastoral policies aimed at encouraging positive behaviours were reported by teachers from the three schools. A secondary teacher commented that approaches to students in today's schools have changed from the old mentality of "if you're not following the rules then you are out". Teachers felt that they were supported in their more caring approach to administering consequences for student's behaviour.

Furthermore, the special school with its unique challenges, strongly encouraged a sense of belonging for each individual student, which in turn encouraged positive teacher-student interaction. As one teacher pointed out, "Our faith formation that we instil in the

whole school community is something that I think is of great benefit". "Even at assemblies and mass we sit student/staff, student/staff - you're sitting together - you're together as a community- you're not just - you're not invisible and everybody's noticed - everybody is somebody."

Additional support needed by teachers

The additional supports identified by teachers reflected more on the intense workload teachers have in today's schools, rather than the lack of support from their executive management. Primary school teachers valued their teacher support staff and teacher aides, but indicated that support staff were required for longer periods in their classrooms, and there were not sufficient numbers at the school to achieve this. As one teacher commented, "That's probably the biggest difficulty we have...we don't have enough - and I'm guessing that comes from funding".

A secondary school teacher spoke of not having time allocated for house leaders to share information about their groups as "it's hard to keep up with 700 kids". Another teacher at the same school expressed concern by saying, "I think our staff; a lot of our staff are working themselves into an early grave". "I think they need to - yeah, I think teaching has changed in the last 20 years". He added that "there's a perception in the community that it's a nine to three [job] and lots of holidays but that's definitely [not the case], since I've started here, I've realised that".

Support staff was also mentioned by a senior teacher from the special behavioural school. "We've got 15 teaching staff. I would say we don't need any more teaching staff". He continued, "The question would be whether we need some youth workers or some teacher's aides or something like that with different skill sets that we don't have. That would be the question that I would ask".

Understanding what lies beneath difficult behaviour

A secondary teacher expressed the need for a process that identifies the underlying cause of student's poor behaviour. "I was told the other day that a lot of schools now have assistant principals, assistant principal of learning, and assistant principal of wellbeing". She felt that on many occasions students are referred to the Year coordinators by teachers, even people in middle management and exec roles, for their behaviour without first looking more deeply into the causes of the behaviour.

Difficult home and life experiences

Teachers from both the secondary and the special school reported similar difficulties with students who came from difficult home environments, but these issues were not reported by the primary school teachers. One secondary teacher acknowledged, "at times teachers fail to take into account a student's background". However, she says that experience had taught her to look at a student's home environment before handing out the consequences for poor behaviour: "I understand that some of these kids come from horrendous backgrounds". A special school teacher added that, for some students, difficult family circumstances and situations of abuse often contributed to their history of absenteeism and gaps in their learning, "it's impossible for them to have a school existence like the kid [without these issues] in mainstream."

Understanding development diversity (ADHD, ASD, cognitive delay, giftedness)

All three schools reported having students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and gifted students who functioned at a high level and who at times lacked appropriate stimulation within the structured school environment.

Primary school could be a challenging time for many young children, especially those with special needs. A primary school teacher reported that she had two students with ASD and received support from teachers specialised in this area. She learnt how important it was to “understand the needs” of these two children and the importance of talking with other teachers with similar children to learn from them.

Within the secondary school, the older student age groups and the larger student population presented teachers with additional problems. A long term secondary teacher remarked that challenging behaviours could be difficult to resolve because of the nature of underlying cause, and more importantly, because teachers did not necessarily have the expertise or time to identify the cause. Additionally, identifying the cause must be based on “really accurate knowledge” and when the cause is identified by others with the expertise to do so, he often did not have the opportunity to find out because of the busy nature of the school environment. The teacher expressed one of his major concerns, namely, those students who find school difficult because of learning difficulties: “you look at the literacy rates in jail, and you go, okay, that’s where we’re [heading] if we don’t put the money in early in the system, then we have to put it late in the system”. The teacher added that these problems were “difficult to resolve, particularly in a learning factory structure like we have in the school”. In support a primary school teacher remarked, “the average reading age for a male inmate at [jail deidentified] was age nine”. She added, “well no wonder these poor people are in jail because if you cannot read to a certain level - I thought, well we're being a pennywise and a pound foolish because wouldn't it be cheaper and easier and make us a better society if we poured more into education and stopped children slipping through”.

Unlike the secondary school where challenging behaviours are limited to a cohort of students, all students at the special school presented with individual behavioural challenges. As one special teacher remarked,

“The difficulties are that they are often quite volatile. They may also be under the influence of some form of drug (medication for disorders] at times. They may have a very broken home, so they come from challenging backgrounds. They have very limited role models. They've experienced some trauma as well. So, I guess there are quite a few differing observable behaviours”.

Discussion

This research examined how teachers perceived and experienced their classroom interactions with their students. Three schools were selected as target schools for the research, to capture a wide range of teacher perceptions and experiences with diverse student populations: (1) a coeducational primary school; (2) a mainstream secondary school for boys; and (3) a special coeducational behavioural high school, at which only male students were enrolled at the time of the study. These schools were operating under the Catholic school system. A total of fifteen teachers, five teachers from each school, participated in the study. Teachers' perceptions and experiences in the classroom were analysed by way of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Thematic Analysis (TA) and Likert scale ratings.

In the present study, teachers from the three schools reported behavioural problems. As one secondary teacher remarked, behavioural issues were “present across the board... just students who weren't ready for high school”. However behavioural issues from students were less prevalent in the primary school. In line with the study by Merritt et al. (2012), all teachers reported the importance of positive teacher-student relationships, not only for academic achievement, but for building children's social competence.

Caring for students, especially for children with behavioural challenges, was always embedded in the narrative from the fifteen teachers. As one secondary teacher remarked, schools today have moved on from the mentality of moving students out if they don't follow

the rules. The emphasis from all teachers was on building positive relationships with their students in order to achieve positive classroom engagement and an optimal learning environment.

The teachers' responses reflected the general support in the literature for the role of positive teacher-student relationships in enabling safe and secure learning environments, and scaffolding important social and academic skills (O'Connor et.al., 2011; Zee & Bree, 2016). The primary, secondary and the special schools, on a scale of 1-10, gave an average rating of 9.3, 9.8 and 10 respectively, for positive teacher-student interaction and positive student classroom engagement as a prerequisite for good educational outcomes. Likewise, building relationships with their students was seen to be more important than academic achievement. As one secondary teacher summed up, "without that good teacher-student relationship- nothing works". As another teacher from the same school remarked, "If you're able to build up a rapport with your students, then you're not just educating them from text books, you're educating them for life".

Studies indicate that teachers' pedagogic interactions with students exist on a continuum that increases in complexity from information providing to mentoring (Harris, 2010; Beutel, 2010). The fifteen teachers were not asked where they would place their pedagogic interaction with students on the continuum. Regardless of an individual teacher's approach, the fifteen teachers who participated in this study saw their students as individuals who had individual needs and had a voice that should be listened to, not only inside but outside the classroom. As Sfard (1998) observed, no two students have the same needs and no two teachers arrive at their best performance in the same way. However, there is renewed interest in the effectiveness of Direct Instruction especially for disadvantaged children (Lindsay, 2014). Further research is needed to investigate how a Direct Instruction approach

impacts on teacher-student relationships with behaviourally challenged students compared to a collaborative approach.

The teachers reported that a caring approach to positive teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement was not without difficulty. Factors beyond teachers' control could have an influence on students and increase the risk that children may find it difficult to meet the expectations of educational settings. These include family stress from socioeconomic disadvantage, a student's difficult home environment or challenges influenced by developmental diversity (ADHD, ASD, cognitive delay and giftedness). Both environmental and developmental factors were reported by the teachers at the secondary school and the special school. Socioeconomic disadvantage was not reported by the primary school, however they did report that several students with ADHD and ASD attended the school.

As behavioural difficulties were present in the three schools, teacher-determined consequences were seen as necessary for correcting disruptive behaviour. The teachers believed that they were a requirement for positive classroom management and maintaining a safe school environment. Nevertheless, teachers believed that consequences, if applied in a consistent, fair and equitable manner, would not damage relationships. The literature reports that extreme consequences such as suspension or expulsion do not encourage change for those with severe behavioural issues (Walsh, 2015; Green 2014a; Atkins, 2002). However, Green (2014a) argues further that even less severe consequences will be counterproductive for behaviourally challenged students. In practice, the teachers from both the secondary and special schools reported the need to suspend some students for critical non-compliance of school rules. As one secondary school teacher recounted from her dealings with a recalcitrant student, "you just have to say you are going home - until you can follow the rules you are not coming back". An experienced special teacher responded to this issue by saying,

“Yeah, and I don’t know if some kids are given too many chances [before being removed]”. However, the vast majority of findings from the available research of exclusionary discipline contradicts the notion that removing disruptive students from school will make it a safer and better place (American Psychological Association, 2008).

The results of this study found that the special school teachers placed slightly more emphasis on educational outcomes over relationships than teachers from the other two schools. This finding contradicts the overall responses from the special school teachers as one typical comment suggests, “students will still do inappropriate things but it does not have to mean the teacher-student relationships must be damaged ... they [students] know that I’m doing it [corrective action] for them to be a better person, because I care about them”. Two reasons may be posited as to why the special school teachers focused somewhat more on educational outcomes than the other school teachers. Firstly, they were aware of their students’ educational disadvantage and its effect on their employment outcomes after leaving school. Secondly, there may be some teacher fatigue in trying to establish relationships and the teachers accepted that getting the students job ready was probably all they could achieve. Nevertheless, even though relationships were still of higher importance in special education, further research into why there was more emphasis on educational outcomes deserves further research.

Limitations

This research was limited by the relatively small participant numbers, and it may be that the focus on caring reflected a pastoral care approach emphasised and reinforced within the Catholic school system, although the values of equity and care also underpin other school systems in Australia. Further research should include teachers from different school systems with a diverse range of underpinning philosophies to examine any differences in values and whether or not these differences impact on the

relationships between teachers and students. The student gender variable was not examined due to the over representation of boys with challenging behaviours in the secondary mainstream and behavioural schools.

Conclusion

While the student populations were diverse, a narrative of caring for the wellbeing of students with challenging behaviour was embedded in the interview data from all fifteen teachers. This narrative facilitated a uniformed approach across the three schools to students, and especially those with behavioural difficulties. Forming positive relationships was seen by all teachers as a prerequisite for good educational outcomes and they expressed the following characteristics of relationship formation. Building trust with their students was essential. The teachers endeavoured to create a safe environment of belonging for students and to demonstrate that someone cared for them, believed in them, and allowed them to have their voice. These components of relationship building were more accessible for teachers if there was a positive connection between them and the students' families.

Classroom strategies and pedagogical approaches involved establishing learning goals and establishing success criteria relevant for their student populations. All teachers deemed it necessary to state clearly the behaviour expected from their students, as well as the need to establish clear rules and boundaries. Applying fair and just consequences for non-compliance was correspondingly important for classroom management.

The teachers reported that a caring approach to positive teacher-student interaction and student classroom engagement was not without difficulty. Factors beyond teachers' control can adversely influence students and increase their risk of not meeting teachers' expectations. These included behaviours that may be influenced by a student's difficult home environment or challenges influenced by developmental diversity (ADHD, ASD, cognitive delay and giftedness).

In the wider school environment, all teachers reported having good supportive senior and executive staff however they expressed a wish for additional resources such as teachers' aides and non-teaching staff who could focus on welfare and pastoral support.

Finally, while positive relationships between teachers and students were seen as critical by the teachers who were in the study, there is a need for more research focus on the importance of supportive relationships to address behavioural issues in schools and how relationship building impacts on student behaviour. Furthermore, research has discussed attachment theory to encompass teacher-student relationships.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW

QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER

Special Ed school ☐

Mainstream school (A) ☐

Mainstream school (B) ☐

Teacher Semi-structured Interview Questions

Classroom environment

1. What are the difficulties you face with the students in your class that are at educational risk or who have behavioural problems? How do you approach these difficulties in terms of teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement?
2. Is supporting or fostering good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement a priority in your teaching? I would like to hear your view on these issues.
3. How do you balance classroom control and discipline with supporting good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement with the educational and emotional demands some students present with? For example, disruptive students who may present with poor self-control, self-regulating skills, or poor coping mechanisms.

School environment

4. What, in your view, are the top three things that need to happen or be in place in school settings to support good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement.
5. Could you explain to me your school's approach to students who are at educational risk or who have behavioural problems, in terms of teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement?
6. What are the things that you would like to change and the things that you wish to support?

Considering what you have told me, on a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 is **very low** and 10 is **very high**, please score the following questions as it applies to you as a teacher.

Q (a): It is difficult to maintain discipline and also develop a good teacher / student relationship with my students.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q (b): To what extent do you think the following statement is true: Supporting good teacher/student interaction and student classroom engagement is a prerequisite for good educational outcomes

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Q (c): Academic achievement should be prioritised over teacher /student positive relationships

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

APPENDIX B

Phillip Good

From: Kay Bowes-Tseng <kay.bowes-tseng@mq.edu.au> on behalf of FHS Ethics<fhs.ethics@mq.edu.au>
Sent: Friday, 23 September 2016 2:07 PM
To: PHILLIP GOOD
Cc: Rebekah Grace
Subject: RE: HS Ethics Application – Approved (5201600660)(Con/Met)

Dear Dr Grace,

Re: "School children in adversity and their sense of self: Teacher strategies employed in educational settings to support children's development of a positive self-concept" (5201600660)

Thank you very much for your response. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and approval has been granted, effective 23rd September 2016. This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research>

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Dr Rebekah Grace

Mr Phil James Good

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 23rd September 2017

Progress Report 2 Due: 23rd September 2018

Progress Report 3 Due: 23rd September 2019

Progress Report 4 Due: 23rd September 2020

Final Report Due: 23rd September 2021

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/application_resources

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/managing_approved_research_projects

5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy>

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/managing_approved_research_projects

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Anthony Miller

Chair

Faculty of Human Sciences

Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee

Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics

C5C-17 Wallys Walk L3

Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia

T: [+61 2 9850 4197](tel:+61298504197) | <http://www.research.mq.edu.au/>

Ethics Forms and Templates

http://www.research.mq.edu.au/current_research_staff/human_research_ethics/resources

The Faculty of Human Sciences acknowledges the traditional custodians of the Macquarie University Land, the Wattamattageal clan of the Darug nation, whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture this land since the Dreamtime. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.



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APPENDIX C

Phillip Good

From: Kay Bowes-Tseng <kay.bowes-tseng@mq.edu.au>
Sent: Friday, 6 January 2017 8:19 AM
To: Phillip Good (HDR)
Subject: Re: FHS Ethics – Amendment 5201600660 (19-11-2016)

Dear Phillip,

Thank you for your amendment request. We apologize for the delay in responding.

I am writing to let you know this amendment has been approved. A formal notification will be sent to you when I return from leave.

Thank you and all the best!

Kind regards,

Kay Bowes-Tseng
Faculty Ethics Officer, Faculty of Human Sciences
Research Office | C5C-17 Wallys Walk L3
Macquarie University, NSW 2109, Australia
T: +61 2 9850 4197 | <http://www.research.mq.edu.au/>

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