Effective classroom management strategies for relief teachers and how school leaders can support them with student misbehaviour.

PRO 6100: Assessment 2

Research Report

# ****Abstract****

Challenges hinder a relief teacher’s ability to confidently manage the classroom and student behaviour. Such challenges can include, entering schools and classrooms that they are unfamiliar with and teaching students that they have no relationship with. Relief teachers do not have time to build routines, rules, or relationships with students, which research states are the fundamentals of classroom management. The purpose of this study was to examine the most effective classroom management strategies used by relief teachers and how school leaders can support them in managing student behaviour. The methodology was qualitative, with 72 relief teachers from primary and secondary schools in Western Australia responding to a questionnaire posted on social media. The results identified the following effective classroom management strategies for relief teachers: positive rewards, winning over, setting expectations, having prior knowledge of the school's behaviour management policy, being firm but fair and sending a student to buddy class. The challenges identified by relief teachers were not having access to information regarding students' behaviour, no prior relationship with students, lack of support from administration, disrespect from students and no school behaviour policy. Recommendations that do not rely on building rapport with students over time are provided for relief teachers to support them with classroom management. Additionally, recommendations are provided for school leaders who support relief teachers to help reduce the negative impact misbehaviours have on teaching and learning.

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# ****Introduction****

When student misbehaviour is left and not effectively managed, the class can, over time, develop into what Bennett and Smilanich (2013) call “the class from hell” (p. 191). He identifies ineffective teachers, new teachers, and guest teachers as requiring support with classroom management to ensure that these difficult classes are not created (Bennett & Smilanich, 2013). This paper will focus on the guest teacher or relief teacher, as they are referred to in Western Australia, and which classroom management strategies are most effective in their unique context to manage student behaviour. Investigating what schools can do to support relief teachers with managing student behaviour is essential to prevent the negative impact misbehaviour has on learning and ensure an environment conducive to teaching and learning is created.

The structure of this introduction identifies types and frequencies of misbehaviours in classrooms and why misbehaviours are problematic. Then identifies the methods and strategies teachers use to minimise misbehaviours and teachers who need support with these classroom management strategies. This review will then discuss the classroom management strategies that relief teachers cannot use due to the temporary nature of their role, leading to the research question: what are the most effective classroom management strategies relief teachers can use to minimise student misbehaviour?

## Background

Problematic student behaviour in schools and classrooms worldwide often makes the headlines of the media with stories of student violence. In Western Australia on the 1st of November 2021, a Year 8 student stabbed a teacher in the arm in an attempt to kill the teacher (9 News, 2021). On the 25th of February 2021, students from another school in Western Australia were filmed physically attacking tradespeople on school grounds and ignoring staff instructions to stop (7 News, 2021). These are both extreme levels of behaviour. However, there are many levels of student misbehaviour in schools that do not make the national media, but which are still disruptive to teaching and learning.

## ****Student misbehaviour: types and frequency****

Thompson (2009) lists disruptive behaviours that hamper teaching and learning as classroom disconformity, verbal and physical hostility, defiance of authority, task avoidance, inappropriate use of school property, inconsiderate interpersonal relationships, over-reactions to normal situations, and technological related factors. Each of these can have a level of seriousness regarding the significance of disruption to teaching and learning and the amount of stress experienced by the teacher and other students. For example, defiance of authority could range from a student refusing to sit in an assigned seat to a student ignoring the teacher's instructions to “do not punch that student”.

This continuum of minor to major or more serious misbehaviours is directly related to the frequency of misbehaviours seen in classrooms. There are higher levels of minor misbehaviours than major misbehaviours in classrooms (Elton, 1989). For example, in the Elton report (1989), a study of 3500 teachers, most teachers reported minor misbehaviours in most lessons in an average week. However for more serious misbehaviours, one in 10 teachers reported verbal abuse and only one in 200 reported a more serious incident occurring within the last week (Elton, 1989, p. 62).

As suggested in the Elton Report (1989) it is unusual for a major or more serious behaviour to occur without the build-up of minor behaviours. Therefore, if minor misbehaviours are not addressed early enough, they can potentially escalate into major misbehaviours. Research findings have shown that school misbehaviour not only escalated with time when not addressed, but also lowered academic achievement and increased delinquent behaviour (Bryant et al., 2000; Weerman et al., 2007).

## ****Why student misbehaviour is a problem****

One of the many concerns with significant misbehaviours such as verbal and physical assaults is that it causes vast disruption to the daily running of a school (Western Australian Auditor General’s Report, 2014). Staff members must investigate, document, and communicate to all stakeholders when such incidents occur. In the Western Australian Auditor General’s Report (2014), 39% of teachers identified that student misbehaviour accounts for more than 20% of their time each week and 61% of teachers identifying student misbehaviour taking up at least 10% of their time. Such time-consuming follow up is resources taken away from teaching and learning.

Student misbehaviour is also problematic because it disrupts the flow of teaching and learning. Teachers spend their time dealing with student misbehaviour instead of supporting student learning (Hattie, 2003; Marzano et al., 2009; Overto & Sullivan, 2008). One study found student achievement to be greater in classrooms where the teacher maintained control of student behaviour (Fidler, 2002).

Misbehaviour can have a detrimental effect on teacher retention. Decades of research on teacher wellbeing and burnout have documented that students' misbehaviour is a concerning factor for teacher burnout and is also a common cause of why teachers leave the profession (Blase, 1986; Borg & Riding, 1991; Carlos et al., 2020; Evers et al., 2004; Ingersoll, 2001; Kyriacou, 1987; Russell et al., 1987). Student misbehaviour has a particularly negative impact on preservice and beginning teachers with increased stress and decreased job satisfaction (Sullivan et al., 2014).

Student misbehaviours are stressful for teachers, but they can also be stressful and frustrating for other students in the class. A study of how students perceived other students' misbehaviour revealed that students could be affected psychologically, become more agitated, quickly lose their temper, and become inattentive in class when others' noise level becomes excessive and disturbs them (Sun & Shek, 2013). In another study, students’ motivation and levels of engagement were negatively impacted by being exposed to numerous interruptions while the teacher manages a non-compliant student’s behaviour (Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006).

## Minimising student misbehaviour

Research shows that problematic behaviours can be reduced to a manageable level, to ensure teachers and students can learn in calm environments, when teachers effectively apply Classroom Management Strategies and Classroom Management Programs (Korpershoek et al., 2016). Therefore, ensuring all teachers have the skills to manage student misbehaviour is paramount in minimising problematic student behaviour (Johansen et al., 2011).

The quality of the leadership team is also a determining factor on the quality of whole school student behaviour (Nooruddin & Baig, 2014). The leadership team (in Western Australia the leadership of a school is referred to, interchangeable, as administration) is responsible for the processes of the school, the quality of the behaviour policy, the curriculum, the pastoral care, buildings and physical environment, the timetable and the engagement with the community and parents. The Elton Report (1989), identified seven aspects of school management which is important for student behaviour these were, " staff management; establishing and maintaining internal and external communication systems; fostering a sense of community; taking the lead in setting aims and standards; encouraging collective responsibility; supporting staff; and directing overall curriculum and organisational planning" (p. 90). If these aspects of school management are poorly managed then this negatively impacts student behaviour.

## Defining classroom management

**Froyen and Iverson (1999) defined classroom management as the methods and strategies an educator uses to maintain a classroom environment that is conducive to student success and learning. This includes managing the student** Content, Conduct and Covenant*.* For **example, the content includes space, materials, equipment, movement, and lesson content. The student** conduct is managing the **discipline problems, and** covenant, **social dynamics and interpersonal relationships.** In comparison, Jones and Sikula (1996, p. 507) emphasise the comprehensive nature of classroom management by identifying five main features:

1. An understanding of current research and theory in classroom management and students’ psychological and learning needs.
2. The creation of positive teacher–student and peer relationships.
3. The use of instructional methods that facilitate optimal learning by responding to the academic needs of individual students and the classroom group.
4. The use of organizational and group management methods that maximize on-task behaviour.
5. The ability to use a range of counselling and behavioural methods to assist students who demonstrate persistent or serious behaviour problems.

The definition used for this paper is adapted from Froyen and Iverson (1999) as this definition included not only the organisation of the classroom space and materials, but the teachers response to student behaviour using the school policies and the complex relationships between peers and teacher. I have added the knowledge of the students learning needs from Jones and Sikula (1996) to complete the definition as follows. Classroom management is the methods and strategies an educator uses to maintain a classroom environment that is conducive to student success and learning. Including the management of the student *Content*(space, materials, equipment, movement, and lessons), *Conduct*(discipline problems, following school behaviour plan), *Covenant*(social dynamics and interpersonal relationships between students and teacher) and *Student Individual Needs* (learning and psychological).

## Classroom Management Strategies

As the definition Froyen and Iverson (1999) and Jones and Sikula (1996) suggests, there are a range of strategies and methods used when managing the classroom. This section will review some of the strategies that promote appropriate classroom behaviour identified in a literature review by Kern and Clemens (2007) these include:

* Clear, simple rules and expectations which are consistently and fairly applied.
* Predictability of events and activities through establishing routines, as well as predictability of consequences.
* Frequent use of praise, both verbal and non-verbal.
* Because disruptive behaviour is often associated with learning deficits, task difficulty needs to be monitored.
* Opportunities to respond and participate in the classroom activities
* Strategies to increase the engagement of all students include having everyone write answers to some teacher questions rather than just seeking one correct response.
* Seating arrangements: for older students seating in rows works better than group seating.
* Effective instructions and commands need to be preceded by getting the pupils’ attention, and then presented clearly one at a time as “do’s”, in a firm (not angry) voice, with time to comply and praise for compliance.
* Pace of instruction is best if it is brisk.
* Choice and access to preferred activities increases engagement and reduces problem behaviour. Using children’s own special interests as the basis for activities can significantly increase engagement.

#### Positive rewards / praise

Kern and Clemens (2007) identify the use of positive praise as a prevention of misbehaviour and a means to encourage positive behaviour. Sutherland et al. (2000) researched the effects of increased behaviour specific praise with a class of students with emotional and behaviour disorders. They found that as the rate of specific praise statements delivered by the teacher increased, so did the on-task behaviour of the class. Bennett and Smilanich (2013) use the terminology ‘Modelling Appropriate Behaviour’, which is public praising of a specific appropriate behaviour of a student, to influence the behaviours of others. This encourages the students close by to follow the same behaviour and relies on the ripple effect (Kounin, 1977).

#### The Bump Theory

The Western Australian Department of Education strongly favours the Bump Theory by Bennett and Smilanich (1994). The Department delivers Classroom Management Strategy (CMS) training to teachers, and the content of this course explicitly references the work of Bennett Bennett and Smilanich (1994). The Bump Theory is a series of ‘bumps’ the teacher can use when managing student behaviour. The seriousness of the behaviour depends on which bump is used. The first bump is Low-Key Skills: these skills are preventative strategies, for example, winning over, transitions, rules, and creating a seating plan.

### Winning over

Jones and Sikula (1996) added more depth to their definition of classroom management by mentioning the relationship between teacher and students. Research has shown that teachers who build up a rapport with students have fewer behavioural problems in the classroom. Kounin (1977) called this ‘winning over’. Bennett and Smilanich (1994) further broke this down into strategies such as greeting pupils at the door, smiling, and being polite.

Using student voice is another method of identifying effective classroom management strategies. One study that researched students' beliefs about effective classroom management identified that students are aware of effective teachers and what they believed made them effective (Egeberg et al., 2017). The research by Egeberg et al. (2017, p. 195) identified that students "provided consistent reports that effective classroom managers meet students' needs by developing caring relationships and controlling the classroom environment while developing student responsibility and engaging students in their learning”.

### Other Low-Key Skills

The other category of Low-Key Skills from Bennett and Smilanich (1994) is ‘remind and respond’. Examples include signal to begin, teacher proximity, the teacher 'look', using student's name, the 'pause' and dealing with any allies. All of these Low-Key Skills are used whilst the teaching continues. The next bump is called 'squaring off'. The teacher stops teaching and turns toward the students and gives them a verbal request to stop. Bumps three and four are used when the behaviours continue, and the teacher uses the language of choice. For example, 'Jimmy, take part in the discussion with your group appropriately or choose to work by yourself at a desk’. Bumps 5 to 10 escalate to administration involvement with individual students (Bennett & Smilanich, 2013).

#### Zone of proximal development

Continual monitoring of the task difficulty and ensuring the work does not become too hard is paramount (Kern & Clemens, 2007). This is also the true for work that is too easy, finding each student’s individual zone of proximal development is important to ensure pupils feel challenged but not too overwhelmed and thus safe in their learning (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978). If students are too bored because the work is too easy or if the work is too difficult for them, they may misbehave (Kern et al., 2006).

## ****Teachers who need support****

Bennett and Smilanich (2013) identifies ineffective teachers, new teachers and guest teachers as needing support with behaviour management (p. 191). These are discussed below.

### Ineffective teachers

Defining an effective teacher is a difficult task, as is defining an ineffective one. Lewis et al. (1999, p. 57) noted that this was because "teacher quality is a complex phenomenon, and there is little consensus on what it is or how to measure it". Over the decades, researchers have used teacher qualifications, student attainment, peer ratings or student responses to measure teacher effectiveness.

One study by Stronge et al. (2011) rated 307 year five teachers by student attainment gains labelling the top quartile as effective and the bottom quartile as less effective teachers. The researchers then conducted classroom observations, recording the number of students on task every five minutes and the teachers' responses to misbehaviours. Stronge et al. (2011) found ineffective teachers had three times more disruptions and effective teachers scored significantly higher in classroom management. For example, effective teachers established routines, closely monitored student behaviour, and used time efficiently and effectively. Effective teachers also scored higher regarding teacher qualities such as fairness, respect, and having positive relationships with students. Research concluded that having a string of effective or ineffective teachers would enormously impact a child's learning trajectory (Palardy & Rumberger, 2008; Stronge et al., 2011). That is students who have effective teachers year on year will gain more academically, due to the effective classroom management skills of the teacher.

Understanding factors related to teacher effectiveness is important for teachers and school leaders. But categorising these factors of effectiveness is important for federal, state and local education policy and discussions about qualities to promote in future teachers, whom to recruit and hire, and which qualities to base future pay scales on (Croninger, 2007). The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSAL, 2022) produce the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. The focus areas and descriptors identify the components of quality teaching at each career stage. They constitute agreed characteristics of the complex process of teaching. This document is used by institutes when training teachers and it is used when teachers are setting goals for professional development, so can be used to identify who needs support with classroom management.

### New teachers

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) identified that between 40% and 50% of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first five years. More recent Western Australia data found that, *“since 2004, the proportion of all early career teachers who left within the specified 5-year periods has steadily decreased, from 37.0 % in 2004–2008 to 16.2 % in 2014–2018*” (Wyatt & O’Neill, 2021). More recent data on teacher attrition would be a useful area to research. Surveys have identified some key issues causing job dissatisfaction for teachers, including teacher pay and student behaviour (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Classroom management is one aspect of teaching cited as most challenging for preservice and graduate teachers and an area they feel they are not trained effectively in (Peters, 2012; Putman, 2009; Ritter & Hancock, 2007).

As many as 30% of new graduate teachers start their teaching career as a relief teachers (Preston, 2019). Relief teachers have additional stress from student misbehaviour due to their temporary role (Cardon et al., 2003). This cumulative aspect may be a concerning factor contributing to graduate teacher retention.

### Guest teachers / relief teachers

Bennett and Smilanich (1994) uses the term guest teacher for a teacher replacement when the regular teacher is off work sick or away for other reasons such as professional learning. Literature from the United Kingdom and United States of America use the terms supply teacher and substitute teacher when describing casual relief teachers (Duggleby & Badali, 2007). This research project will use the term relief teacher. The Western Australian Department of Education defines casual, or relief, teaching as "casual teaching work in a public school for less than 20 consecutive days" (Government of Western Australia Department of Education, cited 2022).

Research has identified that student misbehaviour increases when they have a relief teacher and relief teachers find managing student behaviour difficult for many reasons we will discuss (Hamann et al., 2003; Jenkins et al., 2009; Lunay et al., 2006; McCormack & Thomas, 2005; Nidds & McGerald, 1994; Uchida et al., 2020; Uchida, Cavanagh, et al., 2021; Uchida, Lane, et al., 2021). Relief teachers are faced with challenges, such as the inability to find things that are meant to be there, and being called too late, so students are already disorderly have a direct impact on student misbehaviour (Cardon et al., 2003).

Relief teachers can work across numerous schools and classrooms that they are not familiar with (Gonzales, 2002), teaching subjects they are not trained in (Webb, 2002) or have only just been given the lesson plan, if they get a lesson plan (Duggleby & Badali, 2007). Another problem relief teachers are faced with is a lack of information on class timetables, student specific behaviour management plans and students at behaviour risk (Lunay et al., 2006; Nidds & McGerald, 1994). These challenges hinder the relief teacher’s ability to confidently manage the classroom.

Other challenges relief teachers face may include unfamiliarity with the school's behaviour policies and procedures, which are essential for classroom management (McCormack & Thomas, 2005). However, even if relief teachers are given the behaviour policy with details on how to access support for student behaviour, some relief teachers feel it is too risky to request help from the executive as it may bring into question their competence and may jeopardise future work (Jenkins et al., 2009; McCormack & Thomas, 2005; Uchida, Lane, et al., 2021).

Due to the transient nature of the role of relief teacher’s, they do not have the time to build routines and classroom norms which is an important classroom management strategy to reduce misbehaviour (Kern & Clemens, 2007). Research highlights the importance of classroom teachers laying the foundations of the school year in the first three weeks of school by ensuring rules and routines are explicitly taught facilitates reducing behaviour disruptions (Emmer et al., 1980; Korinek et al., 1999). Relief teachers enter classrooms every day expected to teach students whom they only just met (Jenkins et al., 2009; McCormack & Thomas, 2005) resulting in an increase in student misbehaviour.

During the systematic qualitative review of the research (see Appendix D), no research on relief teachers' use of classroom management strategies was found, suggesting a knowledge gap. This was supported by other researchers stating a limited amount of research on relief teaching (Galloway, 1993; Shilling, 1991). However, there were references to classroom management strategies that relief teachers cannot use. For example, relief teachers need more reactive and immediate behaviour management strategies that cannot rely on building rapport with students due to the temporary nature of the role of relief teachers (Duggleby & Badali, 2007; Jenkins et al., 2009; McCormack & Thomas, 2005). This indicates that relief teachers are using specific classroom management strategies that are effective that don’t rely on time to build rapport or routines.

To upskill relief teachers, first it is necessary to know which of all the complex classroom management strategies are most effective in the unique context of relief teachers. If misbehaviours can be reduced using effective classroom management strategies, then this will reduce the chances of the class becoming the “class from hell” and reduce the chance of more major behaviours occurring. Additionally, if inexperienced relief teachers are not supported or given guidance, then like Jenkins warned in 2009, “potentially very effective teachers will be lost to the profession”, demoralised by no long term positive experiences, and having the view that teaching is too challenging (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 76).

## Research Questions

The research questions for this project have been designed to limit the inquiry by only having a few questions, however these questions are open ended allowing for a broad scope of responses. The questions asked aim to answer the following questions.

1. Which classroom management strategies are effective and used by relief teachers to manage student behaviour?
2. What are relief teachers’ biggest challenges and how can school leaders support relief teachers with managing student behaviour?

## Significance

Researching this topic will significantly impact relief teachers who find classroom management a challenge. The findings of this research will assist relief teachers who struggle to manage student behaviour by giving guidance as to which classroom strategies are most effective. Additionally, this research can assist school leaders in supporting relief teachers with managing student behaviour.

If all teachers, including relief teachers, are equipped with effective classroom management strategies, this will reduce the number of minor misbehaviours in classrooms. If there are fewer minor misbehaviours, then there will be fewer major misbehaviours. Reducing the frequency of minor and major misbehaviours, teachers will have less stress, more job satisfaction, and ultimately less teacher burnout.

Supporting relief teachers with professional learning and upskilling their classroom management strategies, particularly strategies that are most effective in their unique setting, would reduce classroom misbehaviour. Students will be able to focus more with fewer distractions and increased wellbeing. Thus, resulting in higher attainment and success of students. Students potentially have up to 5-10% of their teaching and learning delivered by a relief teacher over their school career from K-12, which is a significant amount of lost learning if relief teachers do not have the skills to manage the classroom or they are not supported and set up for success (Abdal-Haqq, 1997, p. 2).

In the current times of Covid-19 and the high levels of teacher absences through isolation and time off unwell, there is an unprecedented level of relief teachers in Western Australian schools. As discussed, students' behaviour deteriorates with the absence of their permanent teacher, this unprecedented high level of relief teachers in our schools could cause long term problems with student behaviour and school culture.

# Methodology

## Approach

To answer the research questions, a qualitative research methodology was adopted. Qualitative research involves, collecting and analysing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences and can be used to gather in-depth understandings into a problem or create new ideas (Bhari, 2022). Open ended questions were used to ensure the researcher did not unintendedly limit the enquiry with a bias from the literature review. Data was then coded and themed by organising key words into different categorises, this type of approach is called thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Research Instrument

Below are the three open-ended questions asked to participants. Keeping the questionnaire short was purposeful to encourage participants to participate and complete the questionnaire in full. A copy of the full questionnaire, consent and demographic questions can be seen in Appendix A, B and C.

1. If you were asked to give advice on classroom management to a relief teacher who was struggling to manage student behaviour - what advice would you give?
2. What are your biggest challenges as a relief teacher when it comes to managing student behaviour?
3. In your opinion what can schools do to support relief teachers with managing student behaviour?

Question one was used to encourage relief teachers to reflect on classroom management strategies they found most effective and would share with other relief teachers who were struggling with student behaviour. Question two highlights their biggest challenges in their role and this links to what they believe schools can do to support these challenges for question three. The questionnaire was created in Google forms and was anonymous. The reasoning for the anonymous nature of the online questionnaire was to encourage honest and open answers.

## Participants

There were 72 participants in total that consisted of a range of experience and school settings see below figures for details.

Chart, pie chart

Description automatically generated

Figure 1: Number of years participants have been teachers.

Chart, pie chart

Description automatically generated

Figure 2: School setting.

## Procedure

### Ethics

Approval was received from ECU’s Human Research Ethics Department (see Appendix E). Research involving humans needs to comply with research ethics of the University. This research is deemed low risk as all teachers involved are anonymous and answers cannot directly be linked to an individual. Participants may find thinking about student misbehaviour stressful, depending on their history of classroom management and experiences. Participants were asked to read the information letter and consent form (see Appendix A, B and C) and were reminded that the questionnaire was optional, and they could withdraw their participation at any time whilst they were completing the questionnaire.

### Implementation

Once ethics was received the questionnaire was shared by a link via social media. The questionnaire was advertised on Facebook pages, Perth Relief Teacher, and Western Australia Teachers. Facebook relief teacher pages were chosen because social media platforms provide an opportunity to reach diverse populations that would otherwise be difficult to identify (Franz et al., 2019). The posts invited relief teachers or teachers with relief teacher experience from Western Australia to participate in the study.

### Analysis

Data was downloaded to Microsoft Excel for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first step of thematic analysis is familiarisation of the data. This was achieved by reading all the data and examining the data. The second step taken was coding the data, certain phrases and sentences were highlighted and assigned labels or “codes” to describe their content (Caulfield, 2022). The codes were then examined for common patterns or themes. After closely reviewing the themes, each theme was given a name that allowed for the analysis of the data.

# Results

## Effective classroom management strategies for relief teachers

Many participants’ responses contained more than one strategy, some containing numerous in one paragraph. When coding the data each strategy was coded as an individual strategy. An example of how the data was coded, can be seen in the below response. The coded strategies have been bolded and comprises of the following classroom management strategies, winning over, the signal to begin, the pause, the look, positive reward, get support or buddy student, seating plan, planned ignore, and proximity. See the below underlined and in bold.

**Smile, greet students with enthusiasm**, look relaxed and like this is the best class you've had all day (fake it till you make it). Speak respectfully, use humour to deflect tricky situations. Tell them your "whole class attention getter/**signal to begin** (STB)" at the start of the lesson and use it consistently. After using your STB, **wait for silence** before giving instructions - **stare pointedly** at the oblivious students and the rest of the class will shush them for you. Never yell over the noise - follow up with a **reward** if they can work quietly, 2mins silent ball at end of lessons etc. Or give points for minutes staying back at recess, good class behaviour earns off the points. Know what **buddy class** to send students to, or what consequences you can give for disobedience or misbehaviour. Use the **seating plan**. Use all the Bumps, especially **planned ignore**. **Walk around constantly** and praise students doing work, reward them if possible, raffle tickets, free time, drawing, stickers, lollies etc. (Participant 58)

The participants’ responses could be classified into 15 main categories. The most frequent strategies mentioned by the relief teachers were: positive rewards/praise, winning over, expectations set at the start, behaviour plan of school, firm but fair, get support if needed, follow through with consequences, using names of students, using a seating plan, showing calm and confidence, being prepared with equipment, using planned ignore, proximity, signal to begin, and the look.

Table 1 summarises the categorisation of responses based on relief teachers’ answers to question one: If you were asked to give advice on classroom management to a relief teacher who was struggling to manage student behaviour - what advice would you give?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Table 1 – strategies relief teachers believed to be most effective | | |
| CMS suggested for relief teachers | Frequency | % |
| Positive rewards / praise | 30 | 16 |
| Winning over | 27 | 15 |
| Expectations set at start | 23 | 13 |
| Behaviour plan of school | 21 | 11 |
| Firm but fare | 19 | 10 |
| Get support or buddy if needed | 14 | 8 |
| Follow through with consequences | 13 | 7 |
| Names of students | 7 | 4 |
| Seating plan | 6 | 3 |
| Show confidence and calm | 6 | 3 |
| Be prepared equipment/scripts | 4 | 2 |
| Planned ignore | 4 | 2 |
| Proximity | 4 | 2 |
| Signal to begin | 4 | 2 |
| The look | 2 | 1 |
|  | 184 | 100 |

### Positive rewards and praise

Relief teachers mentioned positive rewards and positive praise more than any other strategy. Comments mentioned extrinsic rewards, for example one participant wrote “*Walk around constantly and praise students doing work, reward them if possible, raffle tickets, free time, drawing, stickers, lollies”* (Participant 58).Some comments mentioned using the schools or classroom teachers own positive reward system, for example, “*Check what rewards/behaviour management the classroom teacher has in place and use this frequently to reinforce behaviour and expectations”* (Participant 22). Other participants stated they used their own positive reward system if they had not managed to access the school’s. Alternatively, they would use both, their own, as well as the school’s. One method used by participant 35 is noted below:

*Share a competitive incentive system (I got the kids to put their names on a numbered sheet (in two columns odd and even) to create two teams and give out rewards during the day to each team with a prize at the end, e.g., a video clip, game, etc, to choose, gave lots of positive feedback, good low-key monitoring, esp. proximity, and then be firm but fair*.

### Winning Over

The next most common strategy was winning over. Relief teachers try to quickly build up relationships with students within the small amount of time they are with them. Relief teachers commented on welcoming students with a smile and using humour for example, “*smile, greet students with enthusiasm, look relaxed and like this is the best class you've had all day fake it till you make it. Speak respectfully, use humour to deflect tricky situations”* (Participant 58).A few participants mentioned identifying the students who display behaviours that identify them as potentially a student that misbehaves and specifically to try and win them over. For example:

Look out for any info that tells you who the difficult kids might be and take a personal interest in them as soon as they come in’ and ‘get the curly kids on side first. Find something to compliment them on- shoes, hair, bag or something that you notice about them taking an interest in them as individuals. (Participant 35)

### Set expectations at the start

Setting the expectations from the beginning of the lesson was important for relief teachers when managing student behaviour. Sometimes using a preprepared PowerPoint to introduce themselves and ensuring they informed the students that they were aware of the school’s behaviour policy, was a common theme. Some examples are below:

Let the student know what your classroom and behavioural expectations are for the lesson, i.e. no talking while others are sharing, names on board for unacceptable behaviours or letting the students know you are aware of the school's policy whatever it is you need them to know. When the students know you know and will implement the school's behaviour policy and let the classroom teacher, plus other stakeholders know of their behaviour desirable or otherwise. (Participant 33)

Set clear expectations of behaviour at the beginning, ask students what makes a good relief teacher and tell them that you are committed to doing those things, politely point out undesirable behaviour and nicely let students know that it is below the expected standard, catch students doing the right thing and publicly praise them for it. (Participant 50)

### School Behaviour Policy

The fourth most referred to strategy was locating and implementing the school’s behaviour policy or plan. Asking for the document from administration or checking in with other teachers to ask them for the policy was recommended. The idea that the students are familiar with the schools behaviour policy and procedures was important, and relief teachers should use these was important and not to make up their own. For example, *“you do not make your own rules. Consistently follow the established expectations and consequences the core teachers follows & school supports”* (Participant 63)*.* Another common theme was that it is the relief teacher responsibility to locate the behaviour policy.

If this is not provided to you [Behaviour Policy], you chase it up BEFORE you start. It’s the school’s responsibility to support you in carrying out their behaviour support systems but it is YOUR responsibility to make sure you know & understand it. (Participant 63)

### Firm but fair

Being firm was a common theme, especially at the start of the lesson or day for primary teachers, “*be firm but fair and pull back a little as you gain their trust and respect”* (Participant 62). The idea that it is easier to start with firmness and ease off, is easier than starting off not firm and when behaviour escalates you do not have control because it is harder to become firm after being lenient.

Outline expectations and consequences as soon as the day begins. Be extremely firm and strict and follow through. Do not use empty threats. It’s easier to pull back once you have control rather than scrambling to gain control when you don’t have it. (Participant 37)

### Get support or use the buddy class if needed

One strategy was to ask for support if needed, from either neighbouring classrooms or from administration with the removal of a student from class if the student’s misbehaviour escalates. One participant noted, *“send to buddy class if messing around. Don't be lenient (learned this the hard way) just kick the misbehaving ones out asap (I give 2 warnings then out they go). Let the HoD [Head of Department] deal with those ones”* (Participant 32). The phrase, “do not be afraid to use a buddy class” was used four times, this is where a student is removed from the original class and put into another teacher’s class.

### Names of students and seating plans

Using students’ names was important for classroom management because it builds teacher-student rapport but can also keep students accountable with work output and behaviour*.* Participant 33 explained*, “knowing names when addressing students who have questions or who might be working well or are off task has much more power than addressing a student whose name you do not know”.*

To help with knowing students’ names writing a seating plan was suggested. One participant noted, *“write a brief seating plan. Walk around and ask each student their name, if they have found the required lesson work and if they require assistance”* (Participant 33). Other methods suggested to learn names in this temporary capacity was name badges was suggested by participant 3, *“I always pop names on strip of masking tape and pop on name badges”*.

### Follow through with consequences

Following through with consequences was important for relief teachers when the expectations have been set at the beginning of class and if a consequence has been given. The emphasis was on no empty threats and always following through with what you have said. Participants 37 commented, *“be extremely firm and strict and follow through. Do not use empty threats”.* Additional comments include, *“Follow through!!! No empty threats”* (Participants 69)*.*

### Show confidence and calm

The participants noted that relief teachers should present themselves as confident and calm and occasionally reference to the relief teacher’s own emotions such as described by this participant “*resist the urge to be aggressive - remain calm at all times and find ways to remove distractions that might trigger poor behaviour in some students”* (Participant 44)*.* Participant 44 continued saying, “*acknowledge feelings and assist self regulation. Accept that you’ll have terrible days and don’t take it personally”.* Staying clam was important when responding to misbehaviours, participant 44 stating, “*STAY CALM, smile, say “I’d like you to blah blah blah” and finish with thank you, then walk away. It’s effective”.*

### Planned ignore

Relief teachers commented that using the planned ignore was a strategy they used. Participants commented on “*not sweating the small stuff”* and “*picking their battels”* (Participant 18)*.* Participants also commented on how important to understand the school’s individual approach and standards towards specific behaviours, that is in one school ignoring a particular behaviour would be acceptable and in another it may not. Participant 45 explains, “*have a clear and concise outline of their school’s approach and specific language/expectations. Have a clear outline of behaviours which are planned ignore or unacceptable with specific students”*.

### Be prepared equipment/scripts

Ensuring relief teachers are organised and have all the equipment they need for the lesson was important, with participants suggesting they bring extra pens and photocopies of worksheets. Participant 42 stating, “*spare pens, hardcopies of work if it’s a BYD school, for the student whose laptop is flat or a home”.* Being prepared with some teacher scripts in response to some common behaviours presented by students was also commented on. With the same participant explaining, “*have some catch phrases prepared for common behaviour you’ll encounter e.g., numerous requests to go to the toilet ’Ask me again in 5 minutes‘ if not desperate, they generally forget”* (Participant 42)*.*

### Low Key Skills - Signal to Begin /Pause/The Look

Gaining the attention of the class with a signal to begin was noted by the participants. Teaching the signal to begin was important, as well as keeping it fun and not talking until everyone was quiet, participants expressing the importance in detail, *“wait for attention, whisper rather than raise your voice, sing instructions rather than talk, use humour”* (Participant 10). Using other low-key skills with the signal to begin such as the pause and the look were suggested:

Tell them your ‘whole class attention getter/signal to begin (STB)’ at the start of the lesson and use it consistently. After using your STB, wait for silence before giving instructions - stare pointedly at the oblivious students and the rest of the class will shush them for you. Never yell over the noise - follow up with a reward if they can work quietly. (Participant 32)

## Challenges for relief teachers

The biggest challenge for relief teachers was the lack of information given to them regarding students with significant behavioural concerns. Other significant challenges for relief teachers was having no relationship with students, a perceived lack of support from the leadership team, disrespect from students and no access to the school’s behaviour policy.

Table 2 summarises the categorisation of responses based on relief teachers’ answers to question two – What are your biggest challenges as a relief teacher when it comes to managing student behaviour?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Table 2 – Relief teachers’ biggest challenges |  |  |
| Question 2 | Frequency | % | |
| Not given student behaviour/medical details | 28 | 31 | |
| No relationship with students | 17 | 19 | |
| Lack of support from admin | 14 | 16 | |
| Student disrespect - not my real teacher | 14 | 16 | |
| No school behaviour plan | 13 | 14 | |
| Lack of peer understanding | 2 | 2 | |
| Lesson plan not detailed enough | 2 | 2 | |
|  | 90 | 100 | |

### Not given student behaviour/medical details

Relief teachers found the biggest challenge was not having access to students’ details. Specifically, information that may affect their behaviour in class. For example, one participant clarified, “*teachers should ensure that students with additional needs like ADHD or Tourette’s are mentioned in relief notes so that their behaviour can be better understood and relief teacher can respond appropriately in consideration of their condition, instead of blindly”* (Participant 11)*.* Participant 66 explains their challenges as, *“not knowing which kids will explode, who will eventually get to work under pressure and which just need gentle encouragement”.*

### No relationship with students

Having no relationship with students was also a challenge for relief teachers, with participant 11 clarifying that, *“since student-teacher relationships are so centric to student behaviour management this makes it challenging, since you only have a short period of time to build rapport”* (Participant 11). Although relief teachers are only with students for a short period of time, they still try to build relationships by asking questions about things that interest them and paying students complements, an example given below:

As a relief teacher your often meeting the children for the first time so it is important that you try and forge relationships with the students. Creating good relationships has a positive impact on being able to manage student behaviour. (Participant 18)

### Lack of support from admin

A perceived lack of support from administration was reported, one participant's comment explains, “*not meeting admin before start of day and having no support in the school.*” (Participant 47). It was also mentioned that they felt unsupported after student have misbehaved, with participant 59 remarking that, “*lack of admin support (both pre-emptive and after the fact) a belief by some teachers that relief get paid enough and should just deal with it”.*

### Student disrespect – not my ‘real’ teacher

Student behaviour changes when students are presented with a relief teacher, as explained one participant, “*I often find that students tend to 'act up' in the presence of relief teachers, myself included”* (Participant 6)*.* Participants reported that students can be disrespectful towards relief teachers with an attitude of ‘you’re not my real teacher’ and test the boundary’s trying to get away with behaviours they normally would not with one participant commenting, “*children trying to disrespect you because you are not their 'real' teacher”* (Participant 36)*.*

### No school behaviour policy / plan

Having no school behaviour policy or plan was a challenge, or a plan that was not in their opinion ‘strong enough’, one participant commented their biggest challenge was that they were, *“unsure of school behaviour management policy/strategies/options”* (Participant 53). Another participant clarified more details below:

The biggest challenge is actually the school policy itself. Schools that don't have a strong behaviour management policy, including rewards, are doing themselves a disservice. They are also not schools I returned to. These schools struggle to get relief, because they don't support their teachers. With none, or a poor, behaviour management policy, managing behaviour is almost impossible as a relief teacher. The school needs to back up relief, and with little to no policy, they can't. (Participant 33)

### Lack of peer understanding

A few comments were made on peers not being supportive or understanding, participants comments commented on how it made them feel and how challenging it was not getting support from peers, one example was, “*when you get it [classroom management] inevitably wrong, not having understanding permanent staff who see you as a peer instead of an incompetent stranger”* (Participant 34)*.* Another participant commented that it is the *“same with teaching staff [welcoming and supportive], they need to remember how to be respectful of relief staff”* (Participant 3)*.*

## What schools can do to support relief teachers

Table 3 summarises the categorisation of responses based on relief teachers’ answers to question three – In your opinion what can schools do to support relief teachers with managing student behaviour?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Table 3 – showing frequency of *school supports recommended* | |  |
| Recommendations | Frequency | % |
| Handout with support details | 30 | 24 |
| Student behaviour / medical information | 23 | 18 |
| Admin walk/check in | 22 | 17 |
| Behaviour plan | 21 | 17 |
| Raise profile of relief teachers | 6 | 5 |
| Schools positive rewards system | 5 | 4 |
| Follow up on behaviours recorded | 5 | 4 |
| Clear lesson instructions and equipment | 5 | 4 |
| Reduce duty time for behaviour follow up | 4 | 3 |
| Induction | 3 | 2 |
| Hire regular or perm relief teachers | 3 | 2 |
|  | 127 | 100 |

The most commented on support for relief teachers was to give relief teachers a handout with support details on. This support handout would include either information on who and how to call for support or a flow chart of supports to follow. Additionally, a copy of the school’s behaviour policy should be given to the relief teacher. Having a school behaviour policy that is short and easy to read is important, one participant explaining what supports would be beneficial as, “*strong and clear behaviour management policy. Strong HoD, clear buddy class system or behaviour management flow chart, so you know what consequences or rewards you can use”* (Participant 32)*.* Additional information was suggested on the school’s response to certain behaviours, that is, some schools’ tolerance for mobiles phones is higher than others.

Providing relief teachers with a very clear and explicit outline of the behavioural management strategies and policies regarding mobile phone, headphone and device use. Policy for water and toilet breaks; diaries or electronically recorded. Include a flow chart of who the staff are that need to be informed of undesirable behaviours and steps taken ie sending students to student services. (Participant 33)

Closely linked is the suggestion for clear details on the school’s positive reward system, for example participant 65 expanded, *“on the flip side, information regarding positive incentive programs and how they can be applied by the relief staff”.* This positive reward information could be added to the support information and behaviour policy. Ideally, this information could be given during an induction of the school, one participant stated, “*the school I usually work at gave me an induction and the policies and procedures. Other schools have not done this* (Participant 35). If an induction is not possible at the very least a staff member meeting them at the beginning of the day to show them around, one participant further expands:

Meet the relief teacher in person at the beginning of the day. Show them the classroom and give them general info about where the staffroom/toilets etc are. Have a folder ready with contact numbers and a clear behaviour management policy. (Participant 25)

To support relief teachers and to ensure students are aware that misbehaviour will not be tolerated when they have a relief teacher, it is suggested that all behaviours are followed up, either by the teacher or administration. Following up on student behaviour is important one participant explains way, “students feel that they can get away with anything because they know there won’t be consequences. Behaviour needs to be followed up straight away” (Participant 31).

The participants asked for an administration to walk through or check in on them during the day, to see if they need support. Additionally, having a senior member of staff introduce them [the relief teacher] to the class at the start of the day to set expectations was suggested one way to do this is explained by participant 11*, “deputies could check in with the relief teacher in/out of class especially where a class has some known behavioural challenges and provide support if the relief teacher should require it, however should be cautious of undermining the relief teacher”*.

Participants also suggested that the profile of relief teachers should be raised to minimise student misbehaviour. Raising relief teachers’ profile within schools would reduce potential escalated behaviours of students just because ‘they had a relief teacher’ and they thought they could test the boundaries and get away with it. Suggestions of how to raise the relief teachers profile included, a whole school approach of leadership addressing and removing the stigma that *“you are only a relief teacher”* (Participant 11)*.*

Having lesson plans that are easily understood, with engaging content that students will be invested in was important. Some relief teachers suggesting the option of bringing their own lessons and having the option to be flexible with content. Other suggestions include:

Access to whiteboard and passwords makes life easy if you have access to your own hard drive with warm ups and activities. Let relief know prior if they need to bring in own laptop and how it connects to smartboards it's amazing how many different types there are. (Participant 3)

The participants recommendations that relief teacher only have one duty [break time supervision on the yard] during the day was a recommendation. This was to ensure they have access to a break during the day, but also to follow up with various staff members if behaviours have been a problem, one participant explains, “don’t give them a double duty. Give them 15 minutes DOTT [duties other than teaching] to acclimatise to the environment and prepare. This allows the relief teacher to be in a positive mindset before they start” (Participant 23).

Having the same regular relief teachers at the same school is recommended by the participants or hiring permanent relief teachers as part of the staff, “*my school hirers one or two permanent teachers who are part of the staff. They are a member of the school and their only job is relief” (Participant 43).* Another participant said:

Try and build a long term relationship with a group of regular relief teachers. Give these teachers consistent work, show them you appreciate them, give them a reason to want to put your school on the top of their list. The students will build relationships with these teachers over time and you will start to see less issues as students begin to form bonds and relationships with these teachers. (Participant 44)

# Discussion

## Effective strategies

In the current study, the participants identified using positive rewards and praise to encourage positive behaviour and minimise misbehaviour was the most important strategy for relief teachers. Although no research on relief teachers and classroom management strategies was located during the PRISMA literature review, this strategy was supported for teachers in general (Bennett & Smilanich, 2013; Kern & Clemens, 2007; Kounin, 1977; Sutherland et al., 2000).

Other classroom management strategies found to be effective for relief teachers in this study include using winning over, that is building rapport with students. However, having no relationship with students is challenging when managing student behaviour as a relief teacher (Jenkins et al., 2009). Even in the short time with students, relief teachers still use building positive relationships as a classroom management strategy. Building relationships might not have the long-term benefits as their permanent counterparts, but they still gain short term benefits of positive student behaviour. Relief teachers still use winning over with strategies such as greeting pupils at the door, smiling, and being polite to build positive relationships (Bennett & Smilanich, 2013; Kounin, 1977; Stronge et al., 2011).

Setting the expectations at the start of the class was an effective classroom management strategy used by relief teachers in this study. Introducing the expected behaviours and linking the expectations to the school's behaviour management policy was most effective. Again no research specifically on relief teachers was located regarding classroom management strategies, however this was supported by Kern and Clemens (2007) in that having clear, simple rules and expectations which are consistently and fairly applied is an effective classroom management strategy.

## Challenges

The most noted challenge for the participants was not being given student behaviour or medical details prior the teaching. This was supported by the research from Lunay et al. (2006) and Nidds and McGerald (1994) stating that relief teachers not receiving student specific behaviour management plans or information on students at behaviour risk, hinders the relief teacher’s ability to confidently manage the classroom.

Additional challenges noted by participants was not having a relationship with students. This was supported by other researchers with Duggleby and Badali (2007) adding that due to not having relationships with students relief teachers had to use more reactive and immediate strategies. The current research found that relief teachers used more proactive strategies such as setting the expectations at the start of the lesson and following the school’s behaviour management policy if available. However, it must be noted that the respondents to the survey self-selected and was not a random sample of relief teachers. This may create a non-response bias (Sedgwick, 2014). That is, the respondents answers may have been different to the non-responders in some way, their motivation to complete the questionnaire and maybe their view on classroom management strategies.

Lack of support from administration regarding student behaviour was also a common theme noted by the participants. The lack of support was twofold, one with lack of immediate support within the classroom and two, with the lack of follow up support with student consequences. Research supports the findings of this project in that relief teachers find the lack of support inside and outside the classroom a challenge (Gonzales, 2002). Other researchers have discovered that relief teachers additionally found the lack of support with professional learning and growth made the job challenging (Jenkins et al., 2009).

## Recommendations

The recommendations section will be in three categories, information that relief teachers must receive, professional learning, and raising the relief teachers’ profile.

## Information for relief teachers

Recommendations for school leaders to support relief teachers with student behaviour include a summarised school behaviour policy with a clear flow chart of whom to contact if support is needed and clear guidance on the school's positive rewards system. Ideally, this would be received before teaching during an induction to the school. I am suggesting this because the data said participants who do not have access to this information find it challenging managing student behaviour without it.

Another recommendation identified from the data is that school leaders need to ensure relief teachers are given information on the types of behaviours that are not tolerated in the school’s context. Each school has different cultures for example, “Suspending students for misbehaviour, such as fighting or harming other students or school staff, is reasonably consistent across schools. However, tolerance of some behaviour, such as swearing, varies between schools” (Western Australian Auditor General’s Report, 2014, p. 17).

School leaders must ensure relief teachers receive lesson plans that are high quality with engaging content. If this is not possible, allow relief teachers the flexibility to bring their own. Based on the data collected, it is recommended that relief teachers are given a break during the day and not overloaded with yard duties. Additionally, it is advised that schools hire regular staff, enabling relief teachers to build a rapport with the students and staff or even better, permanently hiring teachers for relief teacher duties. This would support relief teachers with building relationships with students and would reduce the student misbehaviour as found in this research. A study by Uchida, Lane, et al. (2021) also recommended this reform.

## Raising the profile

A challenge noted by participants was a lack of support from administration, to address this ensuring a staff member or administration follows up the misbehaviours, or example if a student's behaviour has escalated or becomes problematic for a relief teacher then that student has a consequence such as a phone call home to parents or reflection time out. Paired with a whole school approach supporting relief teachers with regular check-ins or class introductions of the relief teacher at the start of class would raise the profile of relief teachers and send a message that the school does not tolerate misbehaviour in any classroom.

## Professional Learning

Schools can support relief teachers by providing additional professional learning, explicitly focusing on classroom management strategies for their unique role. Cardon et al. (2003) researched the effectiveness of relief teachers with and without professional development. Those with three or more hours of professional learning rated a higher overall performance by principals than relief teachers with none.

This study has identified the use of positive rewards and praise as an effective strategy however, it is important not underestimate the use of all strategies in the classroom. There are as many classroom management strategies as there are student behaviours and situations, and choosing the one most appropriate and using it effectively is an art. Some strategies will work better than others under certain circumstances. Although strategies such as proximity and ‘the look’ were only mentioned a few times, these subtle skills are used by teachers every day and might not have been mentioned here because they are used without knowing their label names. These low-key skills are also used together when getting the attention of the class, for example the signal to begin is mostly always combined with the pause, the look, modelling behaviours and proximity.

The takeaway from this study should be that if you are a relief teacher and have not had positive praise or rewards in your classroom management repertoire, then you should add it and use it often. Additionally, if you are a school leader and your school does not have a positive rewards system, then it is highly recommended that you establish one to support relief teachers in managing student behaviour as well as other teachers who struggle with classroom management.

## Limitations

Given the time constraints of this project, only seventy-two participants from Western Australia filled out the questionnaire. Although a good size, this is by no means a large sample size, thus giving a limited understanding of what classroom management strategies are most effective for relief teachers. Future studies could increase the number of participants and compare strategies with other parts of the state or world.

The research used only a questionnaire to gain insight into effective classroom management strategies used by relief teachers. This has limitations on the depth of understanding of why they used each strategy and how effective the strategies were in different settings. In future studies, the recommendation of follow-up interviews would allow more profound understanding and enquiry.

# Conclusion

The most effective classroom management strategies identified in this study were using positive praise and rewards, using winning over to build positive relationships and setting behavioural expectations at the beginning of the lesson. Relief teachers’ challenges included, not being given information on students with behavioural concerns, not having prior relationships with students and not being supported by administration. Recommendations for school leaders to support relief teachers with student behaviour include, *providing information* (a flow chart of who to contact for support, clear details on students at behavioural risk, a summary of the school’s behaviour plan with details on the positive reward system), *providing professional learning* (deliver learning on effective classroom management strategies, provide opportunities to learn school processes), *raising the profile* (supporting with student behaviour in the classroom, following up with behaviours, employ regular relief teachers). The significance of this research is important for improving student behaviour which has great benefits for teacher and student wellbeing, and teaching and learning. More research in this area is needed, I recommend follow-up interviews to allow profound understanding and enquiring regarding why relief teachers use specific classroom management strategies in different situations. For my PhD I will grow this enquiry because the implications of doing this well will support numerous teachers and students in our school communities.

# ECU-logoCMYKAppendix A

# ****Participation Information Letter and Consent****

Chief Investigator: Jay Morris

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Phone: 6304 8888

Email: [jmorri37@our.ecu.edu.au](mailto:jmorri37@our.ecu.edu.au)

Participant Information Letter

Project title: Supporting relief teachers with classroom management

Approval Number:

Principal Investigator: Jay Morris and Dr Mandie Shean

An invitation to participate in research

You are invited to participate in a project titled supporting relief teachers with classroom management which seeks to investigate the most effective classroom management strategies used by experienced relief teachers. You are being asked to take part in this project to share your experience as a relief teacher.

This research project is being undertaken as part of the requirements of a PhD at Edith Cowan University.

Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you do not understand or want to know more about. Before deciding whether or not to take part, you might want to talk about it with a relative or friend.

If you decide you want to take part in the research project, you will be asked to tick yes on the consent section. By continuing with the questionnaire, you are telling us that you:

* Understand what you have read;
* Consent to take part in the research project;
* Consent to be involved in the research described;
* Consent to the use of your personal information as described.

**What is this project about?**

This project aims to find out from experienced relief teachers in their opinion what are the most effective classroom management strategies in the unique role of a relief teacher. Relief teachers do not have the luxury of time to develop routines or build rapport, so what are their go to strategies? This project aims to find out these strategies and share this knowledge to support relief teachers and improve student behaviour.

**What does my participation involve?**

Your participation in this research project will involve completing a short questionnaire that will take approximately 10-15 minute. You will be asked a series of questions on classroom management, of which are anonymous. The answers from these questions will be used to investigate the type of strategies and skills relief teachers believe are most effective for temporarily teaching a class.

**Do I have to take part in this research project?**

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any time whilst completing the questionnaire by simply closing the browser screen. Please note that if you change your mind after completion, data cannot be withdrawn once the survey is completed and submitted.

**Your privacy**

By continuing with the questionnaire, you consent to the research team collecting and using the information you have given for the research project. Any information obtained in connection with this research project that can identify you will remain confidential. Any identifiable information will be deleted, for example school names. Your information will only be used for the purpose of this research project and it will only be disclosed with your permission, except as required by law.

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

In accordance with relevant Australian and/or Western Australian privacy and other relevant laws, you have the right to request access to the information about you that is collected and stored by the research team. You also have the right to request that any information with which you disagree be corrected. Please inform the research team member named at the end of this letter if you would like to access your information. Please make a record of these details for future reference.

All data collected will be kept in accordance with ECU’s Data Management Policy. Electronic data will be stored on a secure Microsoft SharePoint site provisioned by ECU’s IT Services. All records will be stored as required in ECU’s Records Management Policy. The data will be retained for five year and destroyed, if appropriate at the end of the retention period. Data will be de-identifiable when stored and at the end of the retention period, the data will be destroyed, if appropriate under the State Records Act.

**Possible Benefits**

This research may not provide benefit to you personally but may provide benefits for relief teachers in the future. Although teaching is a reflective practise and having the opportunity to reflect on our own classroom management may have benefits to our professional development.

**Possible Risks and Risk Management Plan**

If you feel that some of the questions we ask are stressful or upsetting and do not wish to answer, you may skip it and go to the next question, or stop immediately. If you become upset or worried as a result of your participation in the research project please seek the advice of your GP or relevant health professional.

**Has this research been approved?**

This research project has received the approval of Edith Cowan University’s Human Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council’s National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Updated 2018). The approval number is 2022-03258-MORRIS.

Contacts

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this project, please contact the following people.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Chief Investigator | Supervisor |

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If you have any concerns or complaints about the research project and wish to talk to an independent person, you may contact:

Independent Person

Research Ethics Support Officer

Edith Cowan University

P: 6304 2170

E: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

If you wish to participate in this research, please continue to the online questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Jay Morris

Chief Investigator

School of Education

Faculty of Education and Arts

Edith Cowan University

# ECU-logoCMYKAppendix B

# Participant Consent Form

Project title: Self Reflection of Classroom Management

Approval Number: 2022-03258-MORRIS

Principal Investigator: Jay Morris and Dr Mandie Shean

I have read the Participant Information Letter, by continuing with the questionnaire I acknowledge that I:

* have read and understood the Participant Information Letter, explaining the research study
* understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.
* understand that if I have additional questions, I can contact the research team
* have taken up the invitation to ask any questions I may have had and am satisfied with the answers I received
* understand that participation in the research project will involve completing a short questionnaire
* understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that my identity will not be disclosed
* understand that I am free to withdraw from participation before I submit my questionnaire, without explanation or penalty
* understand my data cannot be withdrawn once the survey is completed and submitted
* understand that I can request a summary of findings once the research has been completed
* freely agree to participate in the project.

# ****Appendix C****

# Onlinequestionnaire

Graphical user interface, text, application

Description automatically generated

Graphical user interface, application, Teams

Description automatically generatedGraphical user interface, application, Teams

Description automatically generated

# Appendix D

# Systematic research review

Advances key words searched for in ECU World, to perform literature review on relief teachers and student behaviour.

Table 1. Advanced search keywords used in the ECU World Library to perform literature search on supports for relief teachers with student behaviour.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Keywords for search: | (relief teacher OR casual teacher OR supply teacher OR substitute teacher) |
| AND | (student behaviour OR classroom management OR behaviour management OR CMS) |

Diagram

Description automatically generated

Summary table of articles: Met inclusion criteria

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Author (year) | Research Title | Participants (N=x) | Protocol / country | Comment / key findings |
| Hamann et al. (2003) | The Perceptions of Middle and Junior High  School Music Students Toward Substitute  Teachers | N = 1071 | Peer reviewed.  The perceptions of middle and junior high school band, choral, and orchestra students toward substitute teachers was investigated, and the students' perceptions of teacher responsibilities when preparing for substitute teachers was assessed.  Survey.  United States. | The results indicate that the majority of regular music teachers do prepare their students for substitutes. Not only were beneficial lesson plans and instructions left for the substitutes, but also appropriate student behaviour was discussed. Students felt they were on task and helpful in many cases, **yet some disruptive behaviour was perceived to exist in classrooms taught by substitutes.** While a majority of students reported that rehearsals were similar to those held by their regular teacher, they also felt they did not learn as much from the substitute, nor did the substitute bring new ideas or better ways of learning into the classroom. |
| Jenkins et al. (2009) | Challenging experiences faced by beginning casual teachers: here one day and gone the next! | Unknown | Peer reviewed.  The analysis of postings by casual beginning teachers on the University of New England online support page for primary and secondary beginning teachers called the Educational Alumni Support Project (EdASP).  Most beginning teachers posted comments on their challenges of casual relief teaching.  Australia. | The evidence from the EdASP is that CBTs are still experiencing difficulties in initially finding work, having inadequate resources, gaining limited or no school orientation, not feeling like a member of the school community and **experiencing behavioural issues,** all of which are underpinned by the constant dilemma of whether they will get work again tomorrow or in the near future.  Lack of quality lesson plans can decrease student motivation, which leads to students being ‘on-task’, can then become an issue, resulting in inappropriate behaviour erupting.  Requesting help from the school executive is often perceived as risky, as it may bring the casual’s competence into question. Subsequently, future work could be jeopardised. |
| Lunay et al. (2006) | Alienation among relief teachers servicing Government Metropolitan Primary Schools | N = 20 | Study was qualitative in nature and utilised semi-structured interviews. Relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools were interviewed.  Australia, WA. | Seventy five percent of the respondents identified a combination of negative classroom experiences as contributing to feelings of alienation. The three sub-themes to emerge from this data included **behaviour management challenges (quoted by 50% of respondents), and a perceived lack of lesson planning information and/or the resources needed to implement these** (quoted again by 50% of interviewees). A smaller third sub-theme, centring on lack of other important classroom information was quoted by 15% of the respondents. **This included information such as class timetables, student-specific behaviour management plans, students at behavioural risk.** |
| McCormack and Thomas (2005) | The reality of uncertainty: The plight of casual beginning teachers | N = 284 | Peer reviewed.  Graduate teachers experience of casual relief teaching. Qualitative study using questionnaires and focus groups.  Australian study NSW. | Classroom management and discipline problems were common concerns faced by most of the casual teachers in this study. For many this was excerbated when they taught in different schools each day as they did not get the opportunity to get to know the students, staff or procedures.  Other problems such as lack of resources, inability to follow up work, teaching outside the area of specialisation and lack of rapport with staff and students. |
| Nidds and McGerald (1994) | Substitute Teachers: Seeking Meaningful Instruction in the Teachers Absence. | Unknown. | Peer reviewed.  Qualitative study asked four questions to substitute teachers  Discusses difficult problems faced by substitute teachers, what can be done to alleviate those problems, and how a substitute teacher should deal with a hostile student. | Recommendations.  It would be beneficial if they were given opportunities for staff development to familiarise themselves with school routines and disciplinary policy.  Given up-to-date seating chart, classroom rules and history of students with discipline problems.  Department chairperson to meet them and provide necessary equipment.  Lesson design that is not group work unless student are invested prior. |
| Uchida et al. (2020) | Analysing the Experiences of Casual Relief Teachers in Australian Primary Schools Using Practice Architecture Theory | N = 104 | Survey was used to collect responses from casual relief teachers who are teaching or have previously taught in Australian primary schools. They were grouped into three, Early career CRTs, CRTs returning from leave,  Experienced CRTs.  Australia. | Results indicate that many participants saw casual teaching as a negative and alienating experience due to lack of access to school information, lack of support for accreditation and feelings of exclusion from school communities. The need for greater access to information about professional learning was also highlighted. However, others enjoyed the flexibility and sense of belonging they experienced as CRTs.  Knowledge gained from casual teaching by early career CRTs was that of flexibility, behaviour management and faking confidence in the classroom to appear competent in front of students and staff.  CRTs returning from leave revealed how they learnt that no school or career was worth the sacrifice of their mental and physical health. They learnt the importance of work–life balance and walking away from a bad day without it impacting on their wellbeing. For example, a participant reflected that ‘It’s okay to refuse to return to a school if staff/students have been disrespectful. No amount of money is worth risking my mental health’.  The ability to manage student behaviour was a saying which consistently emerged across all three groups. CRTs are usually transient entities in the classroom, who may not have adequate opportunities to build strong rapport with students before moving on. |
| Uchida, Cavanagh, et al. (2021) | "A Casual Teacher Is a Gardener": Metaphors and Identities of Casual Relief Teachers in the Australian Primary School Context | N = 39 | A survey completed by casual relief teachers and categorised according to the tripartite model of self, then thematically analysed to discern any commonalities across the metaphors. | The major themes generated by CRTs include adopting survival strategies while teaching; feelings of diminished status compared to other staff; and taking on a nurturer role with students.  Participants indicated that in order to survive as a casual teacher, they must be able to multi-task, wear a mask to appear calm and confident, cope effectively with the unknowns (e.g. not knowing students’ names), and adapt quickly to unfamiliar or difficult situations.  The umbrella theme of being an animal keeper/herder was also present within the relational category. It reflects challenges that some CRTs have in managing student behaviour and general classroom management when they are unfamiliar with students’ needs, personalities and learning preferences. |
| Uchida, Lane, et al. (2021) | “It takes a whole school to raise a teacher”: examining executive staff support and perception of casual relief teachers in Australian schools | N = 10 | Peer reviewed.  interview transcripts were analysed according to the three elements of practice architecture theory: the sayings (cultural-discursive dimension), the doings (material-economic dimension), and the relating’s (social-political dimension). | Results indicate that executive staff value the contributions of CRTs in ensuring minimal disruption to school routines despite staff absences. Support is provided to CRTs through access to technological and physical resources to conduct their les- sons. However, **the transient nature of work for some CRTs means that access to support for accreditation, professional learning and mentoring can be limited.**  They acknowledged that classroom management can be especially difficult for CRTs who do not have regular **contact to build rapport with students**. They recognised that CRTs may find it difficult to ask for help from other staff for the fear of being perceived as unprofessional, or not wanting to disturb other teachers. |

# Appendix E

# Ethics Approval

Wed 13/04/2022 10:06 AM

Dear Jay MORRIS,  
  
RE: Negligible Risk Review  
PROJECT NAME: Integrated PhD mini-project – Supporting relief teachers with classroom management  
REMS NO: 2022-03258-MORRIS   
Student No: 10417291

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