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Making a Difference in the Classroom: Effective Teaching Practice in Low Decile, Multicultural Schools

AIMHI report to the Ministry of Education

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RESEARCH DIVISION

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Making a Difference in the Classroom:

Effective Teaching Practice in Low Decile, Multicultural Schools

Jan Hill and Kay Hawk

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Report prepared for the Ministry of Education and the AIMHI Forum

By the Institute for Professional Development and Educational Research,
Massey University, Albany Campus

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The AIMHI Project is a School Support initiative set up to raise the achievement of Maori and Pacific Island students in eight low decile secondary schools. The project began in 1996 and since that time major collective and individual school developments have been undertaken. Alongside this programme of development, there have been a number of research activities. In 1996, a baseline report identified the factors that influence achievement for these students. A mid-project report was prepared in 1998, evaluating the progress being made by the schools and the AIMHI group as a whole. In 1999 the researchers were commissioned to constructively critique actual teaching practice by identifying effective teaching and learning strategies used in the classrooms of teachers in the AIMHI schools.

Over a six-month period, the researchers observed 100 lessons involving eighty- nine teachers in broad range of subjects across year levels 7 to 13, most of which were in classes of year 9 to year 13 students. Close to twelve 'effective' teachers were selected from each school on the basis of their credibility with their colleagues and students, for the quality of their classroom management skills as well as their classroom instruction, social interactions and teaching and learning interactions. To make it possible to triangulate the data gathered in the observations, each was followed by an interview with the teacher and a group discussion with approximately six students from each of the classes observed. The work carried out by the researchers in the classrooms was guided by data from the original baseline document that outlined the qualities and skills of the teachers as perceived by teachers and students. The observations provided an opportunity to make links between what was perceived to be happening in classrooms (espoused practice) and what was actually observed (actual practice).

There was a high degree of consistency in the way the teachers in the sample thought and felt about their work as teachers. As well as being professional and highly skilled they are very positive and optimistic. They perform with a confidence that gives their students a confidence in them and they want to solve problems rather than putting up barriers to progress. These teachers are hard working and bring a certain energy to their teaching that creates a sense of urgency and purpose in their classrooms. They are not afraid to share power with students and work hard to divest the locus of control to students rather than keep it to themselves.

The data show that these students have particular needs that students in other schools do not have. The relationship that students in these schools form with their teachers is crucial. While the relationship that forms between a student and a teacher in any school is important, the data in this study show that it is not only important to these students but is a prerequisite for learning. If a teacher has not been able to form a positive relationship of reciprocal respect the students in that class will find it very, very difficult to be motivated to learn. The teachers in this study had particular understandings and attitudes that make it easier for these relationships to be positive and strong. One of the most important dimensions to the relationship is the respect the teachers have for the students. The students described how the body language, tone of voice and the actions of these teachers showed the students that these teachers did not want a 'power over' relationship but 'power with' their students. The students felt that these teachers treated them as people and adults rather than students or children and, because their relationships are based on notions of reciprocity, the students respected these teachers in return. These teachers understood the various worlds the students live in and how they manage the tensions and conflicts between them, they were fair and patient, enjoyed participating in activities with the students, and were prepared to give of themselves - sharing their lives, feelings, failings and vulnerabilities with the students.

While the relationships with teachers are critical, positive relationships amongst the students in a class are also important. Positive student relationships made it safer for students to contribute, take risks with their learning and learn from each other. In other words, the data suggest that the group dynamics of the classroom make a difference to student motivation and attitudes towards learning. The really cohesive classrooms were a result of a planned team-building strategy that was put into effect right from the beginning of the year. The teachers in these classrooms planned so that high levels of class-based control were achieved for such things as classroom behaviour, student support and other learning activities. They took time to teach relationship skills and created situations where it was safe for the students to take risks. Some of the teachers made the most of opportunities to model risk-taking and supportive behaviour themselves.

The overall impression of most of the classes was one of busyness, focussed activity at a high pace, a relaxed atmosphere and an ethos of mutual respect and enjoyment. An important contribution to this climate was the use positive and constructive behaviour management strategies. These teachers each had their own routines that they expected students to follow. Several teachers who had taught in other schools felt that students in the AIMHI schools responded well to routines and were more important than in other schools they had taught in. The students expect, and respect, a teacher who is 'strict', which the students described as positive and not letting them get away with inappropriate behaviour or to flouting ground rules that had been established in the class. It was the norm in these classrooms that behaviour issues were handled very quietly and in a non-confrontational way. Humour is of great importance also. It is not the teacher who has to be funny but rather all class participants being allowed to enjoy each other's humour. This results in a relaxed learning atmosphere that the students said reduced their stress levels and made learning fun.

Some remarkable teaching and learning was observed occurring in the classrooms and several key pedagogical approaches and strategies emerged as being effective in meeting the particular learning needs of these students. The approaches and strategies were used across all subjects and year levels with **none** observed that were subject specific or not transferable to another learning area. Many of the teachers used sophisticated skills in their dialogue with students that encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning and to think at a deeper level. Regardless of the subject, these teachers worked hard at making the learning process transparent and understandable for the students. They spent time on vocabulary and language and planned for differentiated activities and in many classrooms that took account of different styles of learning and actively engaged students in their learning. Another crucial strategy was ensuring that direct instruction was taken in small steps, pausing to check students' understanding, providing opportunities to practice and requiring students to construct their own meaning of new information and ideas.

In the 1996 report, teachers were divided about providing students with such things as pens and paper. Many believed that supplying them with this type of equipment created a dependency that would not be helpful in building life skills in the long-term. Most of the teachers in the research provided their students with gear, when necessary, and did not let a lack of gear create a barrier to getting on with learning. Their focus was on promoting students self-efficacy and helping students learn how to learn.

There are clear implications for teachers and schools from the research. Firstly, schools must have the best possible recruitment processes in place to ensure that new teachers have the appropriate attitudes and qualities as well as the skills required for teaching in these schools, or at least, the strong potential to develop them. Once appointed, these teachers should have access

to an expert teacher and an induction programme that gives them intensive personal and professional support.

One of the keys to effecting change in the classrooms is teacher self-efficacy, accurate identification of development needs, the provision of a comprehensive professional development programme and ensuring that this development translates into practice. The targeted development can be delivered at several levels. Some needs will be specific to individual teachers but whole school development can occur, as well as (AIMHI) cluster-wide programmes.

Student feedback indicated that each of the schools has a number of teachers whose performance is not meeting students' needs. It is important that teacher needs are accurately identified through a comprehensive appraisal process, using methods such as observations and student feedback. This needs to be followed up with targeted development and careful monitoring. It is argued strongly that, based on the research findings, a number of performance standards should be developed that become a part of what is required of teachers who work in these schools.

Professional development should focus on the pedagogical approaches and strategies that work for these students rather than on subject content and organisation. It is important that other key development areas, such as relationship and group development, are also included in the professional development programmes.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Achievement in Multicultural High Schools Project (AIMHI) was the first collective and proactive project established by the Ministry of Education¹ as part of its schooling improvement policy. The Project was based on the strategic plan for Pacific islands Education, 'Ko e Ako 'a e Kakai Pasifika' and was officially launched in 1995.

The Ministry selected and then invited eight secondary schools to participate in the Project. The participation criteria included being in the decile one² category and having a high proportion of Pacific Island students. The data collected on the ethnicity of the students in the schools made it immediately clear that all the schools also had significant numbers of students who were Maori. Seven of the schools are located in Auckland and one in Wellington. In 1999 a ninth school was included in the Project. It was in the same area as the other Auckland schools and had dropped from a decile two to a decile one school in the previous year. Because it was the first year of the Project, the research work in that schools concentrated on the preparation of a baseline report. No data for this report were collected from that school.

The aims of the project are to:

- Increase the market share of students attending the participating schools
- Raise the levels of performance of the schools and students in the following areas:
 - high student achievement
 - strong governance and management
 - strong school/community relationships
 - integrated social services support
- Achieve sustainable self-managing schools

To date, two Project reports have been written as part of a longitudinal AIMHI Project evaluation. The first report (Hawk and Hill, 1996) was written at the end of 1996 and was a baseline study of the factors influencing student achievement and under-achievement in the eight schools. A second mid-project report (Hawk and Hill, 1998) was written at the end of 1998. It evaluates the AIMHI Project as an entity and the changes and progress made in the eight schools over the first three years. At the end of 1998, the Principals of the eight schools requested that the primary research task for the 1999 year would focus on teaching and learning and, in particular, on 'best classroom practice'. The aim of this aspect of the research, as prepared by the Ministry and the AIMHI Forum³ that oversee the Project, was to:

'Constructively critique 'actual practice' by identifying effective teaching and learning strategies used in classrooms in relation to the contractors' knowledge of the literature on teaching and learning best practice'.

¹ From now on, the Ministry of Education will be referred to in the text as the Ministry.

² All New Zealand schools are ranked on a decile scale of one to ten. It is a measure of socio-economic position with decile one having the lowest status. Some school funding is allocated on the basis of decile ranking in an attempt to provide for equity.

³ Up until the end of 1997, the project was organised by a Steering Committee comprising Ministry officials, the Principals and a number of representatives of Pacific Island groups. Day-to-day running of the project was coordinated by a part-time Ministry employee. By the end of the year, successful negotiations with the Ministry resulted in the establishment of the AIMHI Forum with autonomy to run the Project. It comprises the Principals, the Chairpersons of the Boards of Trustees and up to four Ministry representatives. The Forum provides services to the AIMHI schools, some funded by the Ministry, with the intention of making demonstrable improvements to student achievement, school performance and school/community relationships.

Format of the report

The researchers have organised the data into a number of chapters and sub-chapters but, quite clearly, there are many inseparable links between them. Where appropriate, the researchers have cross-referenced between the sections. There are two types of quotation used in the body of the report. For all the quotations from the teachers and students recorded in the classrooms, interviews and group discussions, bold print and italics have been used. The second set of quotations is taken from the literature relating to the different topics. These are in the normal print style, are indented and in speech marks.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research questions and describes the research design used. In addition to relating how data were collected and analysed, it provides a detailed description of the sample and discusses the key ethical issues that had to be addressed.

2.1 The research questions

Of the ten days the researchers spent in each school over 1999, six days were allocated to the study of 'best teaching and learning practice'. The methodological design was based on classroom observations in each of the eight schools. The four questions that guided the study were:

- What are the effective teaching practices observed in the eight schools?
- What are the key features of these good practices?
- What factors hinder and enhance good teaching and learning practices?
- How can schools best facilitate more effective teaching practices?

2.2 Methodological approach

There is very little New Zealand-based research into the best classroom practice of teachers in multi-cultural secondary schools. A literature search using key words such as New Zealand, secondary, multi-cultural, effective and classroom practice revealed very few references that were able to guide this particular study. For this reason, the research project was largely exploratory. The 1996 AIMHI baseline report (Hawk and Hill, 1996) outlined the qualities and skills of teachers, as described by the teachers and students, that contribute or act as a barrier to achievement. The data for this initial study were collected during interviews with teachers and group discussions with students. The current study was designed to validate and extend that data through an important extension to the methodology, namely full lesson observations. Argyris (1990) stresses the importance of researchers collecting documentary evidence of practitioners enacting their roles, discussing with them what they are trying to do and why, setting those accounts against those of other people and comparing and contrasting the available evidence. The researchers were able to make links between what teachers and students perceived as occurring in the classrooms (espoused practice) and what the researchers observed (actual practice).

2.3 Data collection

The data were collected between June and November (Terms 2, 3 and 4), 1999. There were three main sources of data: classroom observation, interviews with the teachers observed and group discussions with students from each of the lessons observed. A detailed description of each of these data collection strategies and the observation schedules is outlined in the section below.

Teacher selection

Each school was asked to select a number of effective teachers to provide the researchers with no less than twelve full lesson observations. While it was important that a cross-section of subjects and teachers were observed, the over-riding criteria for selection was the perceived ability of each teacher. An 'effective' teacher was defined as having credibility with their colleagues and with students for the quality of their classroom management skills as well as the quality of their classroom instruction, social interactions and teaching and learning interactions. In six of the schools the Senior Management Teams or the Heads of Departments selected the teachers after which each teacher was approached individually and asked if they would be happy to progress to the next phase. Two schools began by providing the criteria and asking for volunteers and combined this with a selection process like that adopted in the other schools.

Gaining informed consent

The next phase involved the researchers seeking the informed consent of the teachers. An informed consent form was prepared (See Appendix 1) which set out the research questions to be answered and explained how the data would be used. It informed the teachers that a report would be written and, although it would be a public document, the schools, staff and students involved would not be identified. It was also made clear that the observation notes and the interview and group discussion notes would remain confidential to the researchers. In six of the schools, the informed consent process forms were distributed and collected in by members of the Senior Management Teams. In one of the schools, the researcher spoke to the teachers as a group and briefed them on the process to be followed. In the eighth school, the distribution and collection was carried out by the researcher. Across the eight schools, only one teacher who was selected to participate declined to do so and a substitute was found.

Because of the large numbers of students involved, in this case 600, and because many of their parents speak a language other than English, gaining the permission of the parents for their children to participate in the research has been problematic in all the phases of the AIMHI research. In the past letters have been sent out to each parent in English, Maori and a range of Pacific languages. Because the schools are now posting out their newsletters, it was agreed that, this time, each school would place a notice in a newsletter with a tear-off slip for parents to return if they did not wish their child to participate. In addition, the researchers had a carefully constructed introduction that they worked through with the students at the beginning of every group discussion. This introduction explained the relevant parts of the AIMHI project and research to the students and the purpose of the group discussions. Students were given the opportunity to withdraw from the group after this explanation. If they chose to remain they were also given permission to contribute to the discussion to the extent that they chose. Overall, the students were very enthusiastic participants. A number of them wanted to continue talking at the end of the period and were happy to continue into the morning break or the lunch hour. Some students asked if they could return later and continue the discussion.

Organisation of the observations

Six days in each school were set aside to carry out the observations. Altogether, 100 observations involving 89 teachers were completed. Each of the two researchers observed the teachers in four schools. An interview with each teacher and a student group discussion followed in the period immediately following the observation. In a few cases, the follow-up occurred the following day. In most instances, the students were informed of when the researchers would be working in the classrooms. In some instances, the researchers were introduced to the class and, in others their presence was not commented on and was just accepted as being routine. Where possible, the researchers sat out of the direct view of the students in order to lessen the possibility of intruding into the lesson.

The observation checklist

As outlined in an earlier section, the 1996 baseline report identified a number of qualities and skills of teachers that were described by both teachers and students as either contributing or creating barriers to achievement. These findings were used as a basis for the observation checklist drawn up by the researchers (See Appendix 2) which was constantly refined and added to as new themes emerged. These new themes, or sub-themes, were identified in an ongoing way as the researchers discussed what they had observed, analysed their observation notes, compared the analyses and alerted each other to areas that appeared important.

In each lesson, the researchers recorded detailed notes of interactions between the teacher and the students and between students. In quiet times during the lesson, notes and diagrams were made of such things as classroom layout, what was displayed around the room, how it was displayed and whether students referred to them. A code of abbreviations was used to assist in the taking of the notes. A fold was made down the right-hand side of each page to leave space for the analysis at a later stage.

Teacher interviews

After each observation, the teachers were interviewed for half a period. The interviews ranged in length from twenty-five to forty-five minutes. Because the data collection took place between June and November, relationships and routines were well embedded and it was not possible to observe how these teachers began to work with their classes at the beginning of the year. The interviews gave the researchers the opportunity to talk with the teachers about:

- why certain things happened in the lesson
- why they made certain decisions or took certain action
- why classrooms were set up in a particular way
- what their expectations were for the lesson planned
- how they planned for the lesson and made links with other lessons in the unit
- how they planned to follow-up in the subsequent lesson
- why they managed student behaviour in certain ways
- how routines and relationships were established
- anything else they thought was important

Student group discussions

Six students⁴ from each class participated in a group discussion for the other half of the period. In seven of the schools the teachers selected the students. In the eighth school both teachers and a member of the Senior Management Team chose the participants. The researchers asked that, whenever possible, the students be selected on the following basis - an equal number of boys and girls, and a range of abilities, ethnic groups and attitudes.

As with the teachers, this provided an opportunity for the researchers to gather more in-depth data based on what the researchers had observed in the classroom. The group discussions focussed on such things as:

- why certain things happened in the lesson
- the objective of the lesson
- what they found helpful in the lesson and why
- what aspects they found difficult and why
- what the teacher normally does in the lessons
- how that teacher compared with other teachers in terms of interactions and teaching strategies
- what happened in the class at the beginning of the year

2.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed in an ongoing way throughout the six-month observation period. At the end of each observation, the informed consent form and a cover sheet with the name of the teacher, the subject, the year level, number of students and their gender were attached to the field notes taken during the lesson (See Appendix 3). Each page of observation, interview and group discussion notes had a folded column on the right-hand side that was used to analyse what had been recorded (See Appendix 4). The researchers used three colours of pens in the data collection and analysis. The observation notes were written in black, the follow-up notes that analysed what had been observed were written in red, and a blue pen was

⁴ A very small number of groups had 5 or more than 6 participants. Sometimes more than six students asked to be included.

used to record explanatory notes in the observation data that were gathered during the interview with the teacher. The latter allowed the researchers to distinguish between what they had observed and the teachers' interpretations.

As the researchers identified the themes and sub-themes, a numerical code was developed that the researchers used to categorise the data. The codes were recorded on each relevant section of a page and, as this was done, examples and quotations were identified. The data were then sorted into the appropriate categories, discussed, and some fine-tuning undertaken. During this process, observation data was triangulated with the teacher interviews and student group discussion data.

2.5 The Sample

In total, 100 observations were carried out, involving 89 teachers and 1,645 students. Each observation was followed by an interview with the teacher and a group discussion with approximately six students from the class. Because 11 teachers were observed twice, the total number of teachers interviewed was 89. The number of students who participated in the group discussions was 600, representing 36% of the total number of students observed.

Learning areas/subjects and year levels

The following table sets out the learning areas and subjects observed, how many observations were made in each learning area or subject and how many were made at each year level.

Table 1: Summary of observations

Subject	Year 7	8	9	10	11	12	13	Total
English	x	x	xxxxxx	xx	xxxxx	x	xxxxxx	22
Maths	x		xxxxx	xxxx	xx	x		13
Science			xxx	xxxx	xxx	xxxx	x	15
Social Sciences			xxx	xxxx	xx	x	xxx	13
Technology		x	x	xxx	xxx		x	9
Arts			x	xx	x		x	5
Music			xx	x	x			4
PE/Sport		x		xx		xx	x	6
Comp. Studies			x			x	x	3
Accounting/ Bus Studies					x	x		2
Languages			x	xx				3
Life Skills			x		x		x	3
Religious Education			x					1
Classical Studies						x		1
	2	3	25	24	19	12	15	100

The table shows that the successful teachers teach across a wide range of subject areas. In all, 14 learning areas or subjects were observed with 72% of the observations in English, Maths, Science, Social Sciences

and Technology. It should not be surprising that more observations were made in these areas as these are core curriculum areas, all are compulsory in the junior school and form the basis for most senior programmes. The majority of the teachers in the schools would teach in these areas. 22% of the observations were in PE/Sport, the Arts, Music, Computer Studies, Accounting/Business, Languages, Life Skills, Religious Education and Classics.

The five observations in years 7 and 8 classes were made in two of the schools. Forty-nine observations were made in the junior secondary school area (years 9 and 10) and forty-six were made in the senior school (years 11 to 13). Except for Accounting/Business Studies, Languages, Religious Education and Classics, all other learning areas and subjects were observed in both junior and senior year levels.

The cross-section of year levels and the wide range of subjects observed means that the data can be applied to the junior and senior areas of the schools and across the secondary curriculum.

The gender and ethnicity of the teachers

Of the 89 teachers observed, 57 were female and 32 were male, approximately equating with the overall ratio of females and males across the total teaching staff at the schools.

The following table shows the ethnicity of the teachers observed.

Table 2: Ethnicity of the teachers

	No.	%
Pakeha/European	57	64
Pacific Islander	18	20
Asian	8	9
Maori	5	6
Other	1	1
Total	89	100

64% of the teachers observed were Pakeha or European and 20% were Pacific Islanders. Smaller numbers of Asian (9%) and Maori (6%) teachers were observed.

The single, most important factor in the selection of the teachers to be observed was successful practice. Nonetheless, both these sets of data show that while more females and Pakeha/Europeans were involved, a cross-section of staff in terms of gender and ethnicity was observed. This cross-section mirrors the gender and ethnic percentages of the teaching staff across the eight schools.

Type of pre-service training received by the teachers

The type of pre-service training of the teachers was not taken into consideration when the teachers were selected. However, some of the teachers talked to the researchers about how they believed their primary training helped them work with these students. The researchers then decided to find out what training the teachers had received and asked each school to submit a list of their staff indicating whether they were primary or secondary trained. When the observations were completed a comparison was made between the type of training received by those observed and that of all teachers from the eight schools. The next table shows these data.

Table 3: Type of pre-service training

Type of pre-service training received	Teachers Observed		All teachers in the 8 schools	
	No.	%	No.	%
Secondary	70	79	272	84
Primary	19	21	51	16
Total	89	100	323	100

While 16% of the teachers across all eight schools are primary-trained, 21% of them were included in the sample of successful practitioners to be observed. This is a slight increase (although this is not statistically significant) in the ratio of those observed when compared with the ratio across all teachers in the eight schools.

2.6 Ethical considerations

The issues of gaining informed consent and confidentiality have already been fully discussed in section 2.3. It is important to note that the researchers have been working in the schools since 1996. Over the four-year period, almost all of the teachers, including members of the senior management teams, and many support staff have been interviewed and close to three thousand students have been involved in group discussions. The researchers have taken staff meetings and smaller group meetings where reports have been presented or feedback has been given as part of the formative evaluation process. Over the three years the researchers have come to know the schools very well, they have established positive professional rapport with the staff in each of the schools and are familiar faces to many of the students. This familiarity made it easier for the teachers and the students to accept having the researchers in their classrooms and enhanced the validity of the informed consent process.

3.0 TEACHER ATTITUDES AND PHILOSOPHY

There was a high degree of consistency in the way the teachers in the sample thought and felt about their work as teachers. The observations and the student comments supported this. As well as being professional and highly skilled, they are teachers who smile, laugh, listen, care and work hard.

3.1 Positivity

The positive approach to life that these teachers have is evident in all interactions with them. In interacting with us as researchers, the teachers went out of their way to welcome us, make our job easier and to help in any way they could. They seemed very comfortable about having an outsider in their classroom, introduced us positively to the students, gave us copies of handouts and tests and went out of their way to make their precious time available for talking.

Most smile easily and spontaneously. There is obvious energy in all they do. They enjoy their job, their school and their students.

His face smiles and his whole body smiles. He is just a positive person and we look forward to his classes because the study is positive as well. (Student)

In the interviews, many indicated that they were generally very happy people with their professional and their personal lives.

Because of their positivity and the frequent positive feedback they receive from students and staff, they perform with a confidence that gives their students confidence in them. They know they are good teachers because students give them positive feedback, as do others (colleagues, parents and friends) in the school community.

This does not mean that they do not encounter problems and frustrations, or that they do not have ‘*down times*’. It does not mean that they are uncritical or unchallenged. Even when difficulties arise, they generally approach these in a constructive way with a view to seeking positive outcomes rather than putting up barriers to progress.

Wubbels, Levy and Brekelmans expressed a belief, based on fifteen years of research with more than 50,000 students and teachers in Netherlands, USA and Australia, that

“According to students the best teachers are strong classroom leaders who are friendlier and more understanding and less uncertain, dissatisfied and critical than most teachers.” (Wubbels, Levy and Brekelmans, 1997:83)

3.2 Optimism

Teachers believe they can, and are, making a difference for their students. They, at times, have the same concerns that other teachers have about getting the students to the levels required to achieve external qualifications. They know, however, that they are making a positive difference to student learning and well being. Most importantly, they tell the students frequently about their optimism.

She really wants us to pass. She puts in the extra effort and goes over and over things. She says she will not give up on us, she will not go away. She makes you work. We give her a hard time about it sometimes but we need to know she thinks we can do it. (Students)

Here’s something to get your teeth into. I want to see you in the homework centre getting this together. (Teacher)

“All research concludes that at-risk youth have poorer self-concepts than other students, higher insecurity about their ability to fit in at school, and higher subjective perceptions that school is not for them. Staff must be the kind of people who are not only committed to, but optimistic about, reaching these youth.” (McCombs and Pope, 1994:17)

The types of comments teachers made would indicate their general agreement with Babbage (1998:ix) who said “Every teacher can cause everyone of his or her students to learn. Every teacher must cause every one of his or her students to learn”.

3.3 Hard working

These teachers expect to work hard in order to deliver to the standards they set for themselves. The detail of their preparation is described elsewhere, but it was immediately obvious that they were extremely well prepared for their lesson and their class. The students said they are always like this and they told the researchers that the lessons observed were typical of the usual way the teachers delivered their lessons. Students were very aware of the effort that their teachers put into lesson preparation, providing exemplars, marking, feedback, room displays, extra support and co-curricular activities.

She always puts a lot of effort in. She expects us to work 80% as hard as she works. That is quite a lot to ask of us because she is such a hard worker. (Student)

In describing their work patterns to the researchers it became evident that the teachers enjoy their work, and this includes the preparation and marking outside of classroom hours. They do, at times, feel pressured by it and have to take stock of their self-management, time management and selected priorities. Most, however, do not complain about workload because they choose to work this hard.

I run after-school classes two evenings from 6-8pm and Saturday afternoon classes from the beginning of the year. I take my family with me. (Teacher)

3.4 Philosophy

We did not ask teachers to describe their teaching philosophy. Rather we deduced it from their actions and comments, and from what the students told us about their teachers. The following themes were prevalent.

Most of the teachers clearly see **themselves as learners** and convey this to their students. They are learners through professional development, through professional interactions, through reading and by listening to their students. They are happy to be learners alongside and with their students and they expect to learn from the students. They are definitely power sharers in the classroom.

I respect their knowledge of themselves and I am encouraging them to think about it and to admit to themselves what they need help with. Then I can listen to them about what they need me to do. (Teacher)

They aim for the **locus of control to be with the students** rather than with them as teacher. Aspects of this are discussed throughout the chapter on teaching strategies. While this is something that must be continually worked on, and is often far from a reality, the teachers are clear that it is a goal they are striving for. One of the ways this is partly achieved is through creating a class climate of shared responsibility. The other way they strive to achieve it is with each individual student.

Another frequently observed philosophical approach is that of seeing everyone as a **lifelong learner**. This has a direct influence on the approach a teacher takes. If the goal is lifelong learning, and not just to be an effective teacher for the current class over this year, then they need to instill a deep-seated desire for, and love of, learning generally. Because it is a belief the teachers hold for themselves, it naturally showed through in their enthusiasm, their modelled behaviour and the things they tell students.

Name some of the magazines you know of ----- OK you know lots more than I do. Let's talk about some of those. (Teacher)

3.5 Reflective practitioners

These teachers are self-evaluating and reflective in an ongoing way. They are constantly aware of the reactions of their students and their own observations and intuition about how things are going. They have the confidence to change a planned lesson part-way through if they feel it is important.

Sometimes I am all planned but I see from the students that, that day, there is no point in using it – so I just do something on the spot, like an icebreaker. I take a youth group so I sometimes use activities from there. (Teacher)

They will go home and adapt a unit or lesson plan as a result of the way the lesson went that day. They reflect on learning and on behaviour. They reflect on what the students do, and on their (teacher) own behaviour and approaches to issues.

“Skillful classroom behaviour management requires that teachers first engage in careful reflection about the nature of the problem. Before attempting to analyse a management problem in detail or develop a management strategy, teachers must consider their own behaviour, values, sensitivities, and knowledge about pupil behaviour.” (Kauffman, 1998:18)

The teachers welcome, and are not threatened by, student feedback about what is happening or has happened in class. They seek ideas from colleagues and discuss problems with them and/or with their partners.

I tell them we are equal and I tell them to tell me if I make a mistake because that's how I learn from them. They help me as much as I help them. (Teacher)

They welcomed the opportunity for feedback from the researchers and wanted to know if the students had identified areas for improvement. Because they view themselves as learners, they do not take feedback as a personal criticism, but as an opportunity to grow and improve practice.

They reflect on experiences outside of school and the classroom as well. Many had a wide range of activities in their own lives from which they derive learning that they transfer to their teaching. Williams and Woods tell us that –

“New evidence (Knapp et al 1993, MacLeod 1991, Moll et al 1992, Sylvester 1994, Villegas 1991) suggests that teachers who continually learn about and consistently use out of school learner experience are able to create caring classroom environments where urban students are more motivated and able to learn, and have positive feelings about themselves.” (Williams and Woods, 1997:30)

3.6 Motivation

It is frequently acknowledged that because of the diverse needs (Hawk and Hill, 1996) presented by the students, teaching in low decile schools is particularly challenging. It can test a teacher's skills and motivation to the limits.

The motivation for these effective teachers comes from

- Their own love of learning and the desire to encourage others to feel the same way
- A love of their subject

- The desire to contribute to improving the lives of their students. These teachers really care and feel this is a way they can help.
- Feedback from students and other teachers
-
- A desire to do their own job well

The students knew the teachers who were motivated and loved their work and their subject. They knew because sometimes the teachers told them so, and because they demonstrated through their behaviour that they were enthusiasts. These teachers want the students to enjoy the subject also.

He gets excited when he talks. He loves his subject (Chemistry). When he gets excited, we get excited and then he gets pleasure when he sees us learning. (Student)

She talks slow and clear. We look at her talk. We like watching her expression. She feels what she's reading. She smiles a lot. She loves us and she is excited about what she's doing. (Students)

A senior American student called Lorien Belton wrote –

“I believe that if teachers can motivate themselves to teach, then the students will want to learn. Teacher motivation can make or break a learning situation.” (Belton, 1996:66) and –

“The teachers who love their material and teach with the goal of making the subject alive for the students, whether the subject is English 101 or History of World wars, will excel at their job.” (Ibid:67)

Teachers were honest about times they have felt things have not gone as well as they would have liked but they did not give themselves a hard time over it and did not let it de-motivate them.

I have learned that not every day is a great day and that's OK. (Teacher)

Several of the teachers interviewed spontaneously mentioned their personal spiritual or religious beliefs as playing a major role in their positivity, determination and motivation to help students learn.

I am a Christian. I am surrounded by people with positive attitudes who encourage and support me. I have friends who support me to be here teaching. (Teacher)

3.7 Being part of the whole school

These teachers do not see themselves as working in isolation. They feel part of the school and actively promote pride in the school. Classroom walls displayed many examples of attempts to generate pride in the school.

I set out to build pride in the school. I praise our school and say what is positive about it. I talk to them about what other people think the reputation is and we discuss the way it really is and what they can do to help the reputation. (Teacher)

They contribute actively to the wider life of the school. They did not see their job as just being a classroom teacher. As well as active participation in professional roles and committees, they participated in school socials and other activities⁵. This was done in a purposeful way and with the belief that they are one part of an important collective for which all members need to share collective responsibility. Students

⁵ Other activities include sport, culture groups, drama, clubs, fundraising, music groups and homework groups

were aware of most of the extra-classroom activities their teachers participated in and respected them for it.

When these teachers encourage students to participate in activities, they have credibility because they are seen to model this in their own behaviour.

The teachers are loyal and supportive professional colleagues. They do not let students badmouth other teachers. They actively promote school activities for their colleagues. They attempt to be aware of what other teachers are doing in their classrooms and make connections with their own programme when possible.

I know when assignments are due, not only in my own subject. I try to keep up with what they have in other subjects so that I can remind them. (Teacher)

School rules and expectations are actively promoted and enforced. These teachers take their responsibility seriously to keep a check on uniform, behaviour and out-of-class activities. They do not confine their monitoring to their own class or their own room. They are conscientious about following up on things and taking responsibility for dealing with problems that arise in their own classroom. They do not expect to have to pass on student behaviour problems to other staff to deal with.

We saw, or heard about, a number of examples of initiatives teachers had taken to foster the wider life of the school. The following are examples –

- e.g. A food technology teacher, with her catering class, provided regular hot healthy lunches for the staff at a low cost
- e.g. Two teachers set up a homework programme for students in a struggling class. They held it after school two afternoons a week
- e.g. Two teachers set up an ongoing fundraising venture to raise money for students who could not afford special trips

3.8 Implications

It became evident early in the observation process that most of these teachers are positive and happy people both in and out of school. When we listened to the students describe the behaviour and attitudes of teachers that they have difficulty working with, it became evident that many crucial factors are not those that are teachable. One of the biggest issues that this research has raised is that of teacher selection rather than of teacher training. One of the biggest questions is how is it possible to help all teachers to approach students with the attitudes, energy and enthusiasm of these teachers?

4.0 TEACHER/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

It is to be expected that the relationship that forms between a student and teacher is important. If it is a good relationship, there will be less friction and more enjoyable interactions than there will be if the relationship is not good.

An important new insight we gained through this research was just how critical this relationship is for these students in low decile schools. It is our conclusion that the forming of the right kind of relationship is, for these students, a pre-requisite for learning to take place. It is our opinion, from work we have done in a wide range of school types, that students in higher decile schools will generally learn from teachers they don't like and are likely to achieve regardless of the relationships they have with their teachers. In contrast, the students in this sample described how critical it is for their motivation, to work with a teacher with whom they have established a special relationship.

This chapter outlines the things teachers in this sample did to ensure the relationship was appropriate and strong. It also describes the students' responses to the teachers' efforts.

4.1 Understand the worlds of the students

The 1996 AIMHI research report (Hawk and Hill, 1996) outlines the various worlds the students live in and how they manage the tensions and conflicts between the worlds. All students live in the worlds of their family, their school, their culture and their peers. Many also live in the worlds of the church and the workplace.

These teachers have a very good understanding of the lives of their students and the students know that they have and value that highly. Teachers make an effort to ask and talk about students' lives outside of school and most of the students want to share that with them.

It is essential that we get the relationship right. I try to understand them as teenagers. I try to remember how I felt when I was a teenager and it makes me more careful working with them. (Teacher)

The teachers appeared to have a good knowledge and understanding of and empathy with the cultural worlds of their students. In these schools the students were almost always Maori and/or Pacific Islanders. Some of the teachers were themselves Maori or Pacific Islanders or had a partner who was. Others had been students at the school or lived in the local community. Students often commented that their teachers understood and respected their cultures. It was obvious to the researchers that teachers pronounced names and words from Maori and the Pacific correctly. They also used words and concepts from those cultures.

“The teacher must understand how classroom language is different from the language students use at home or in the community. Particular care is required to develop communication skills that are sensitive to cultural differences.” (Kauffman et al, 1998:91)

There were teachers who had come from very different communities or countries who had taken time and made the effort to understand their students. As our previous AIMHI research indicated, the age, gender, socio-economic status and/or ethnicity of teachers were not what mattered to students. Teacher attitudes were what were important.

Gordon (1997:56) says “The teacher must have a sense of the students' culture as well as an understanding of student behaviour.” He goes on to outline the strategies he believes ensure the teacher's being in touch with student culture. He uses 'culture' to describe their world rather than ethnicity.

These strategies are –

- expose yourself to adolescent culture
- affirm students' 'weather' (where they are at)
- relate content to students' outside interests
- know your students
- share your humanity with your students (Gordon, 1997:58)

4.2 Respect

This was probably the most important dimension of the relationship and it was one that both teachers and students talked about, although they sometimes described and demonstrated it in different ways.

Students said that these teachers treat them as *people* and *adults* rather than as *students* or *children*. This 'treatment' includes what teachers say and do and how they do it. It is reflected in their body language and the tone of their voice as much as in their actions. Students frequently used their own body language to demonstrate the difference between these teachers and others. They used the position of their hands to show that some of the teachers in their school think of themselves as 'above' the students. In contrast these teachers were described as putting students at the same level as themselves.

Knowing their names is critical and something about their history and their interests. It is important to be in their space and to talk at their level. (Teacher)

He communicates well. He talks like us and makes it easy for us to know he respects us. He laughs with us and teases us like we tease him. (Students)

"Pupils want respect. They want us to treat them in a way that indicates we value them first as people and then as learners." (Relf et al, 1998b:18)

The teachers did not articulate the respect to the researchers as much as demonstrating it, although many talked about *valuing the contribution* of students. They listened with interest and attention when a student spoke. They enjoyed the company of the students and regarded them as having valid knowledge and perspectives to contribute. They were friendly and they were not defensive when challenged by a student.

Relf et al (1998) provide a list of teacher behaviours that they believe contribute to the way teachers build the respect. We observed all of these behaviours in the classrooms.

"Display body language which gives positive messages e.g. a smile, arms unfolded. Talk in a friendly manner and use a friendly tone of voice with pupils. Remember what pupils have talked with us about previously. Say a genuine please and thank you. Be sincere and professional... Accept that we may be wrong, mistaken. Be ready to apologise for our own behaviour as a gesture of friendship." (Relf et al, 1998b:30)

The telephone went during a lesson. The teacher said to the class "Excuse me, I'm sorry for the interruption. I won't be a minute". Students continued to work while she went into the resource room to take the phone. (Observation)

I want to apologise for yesterday's lesson because I did it the wrong way around. Some of you have talked to me about it. So today I need you to be patient with me this period while we sort it out. (Teacher)

Both students and teachers were aware of the importance of mutual respect and how directly it related to student motivation, effort and confidence.

He just knows us. We know he knows. He says 'have you had a quick puff?' and we can be honest with him because we trust him. He sorts us out himself and we need him to do that. We like him and we work for him. (Students)

“- students work harder, achieve more and attribute more importance to school work in classes in which they feel liked, accepted and respected by the teacher and fellow students. Warm supportive relationships also enable students to risk the new ideas and mistakes so critical to intellectual growth.” (Lewis et al, 1996:20)

The following are some of the reasons students gave for not respecting a teacher:

- when they don't get to know you
- they don't try to understand
- they ignore you
- have favourites
- hurt your feelings
- compare you to others (siblings, classes, forms)
- put you down
- are lazy
- pick on you
- growl at you for laughing
- has an 'attitude'
- makes 'facials'
- make you scared
- growl over trivial things
- lessons are boring
- they don't believe you can do it
- have no fun
- think they are always right
- won't explain things carefully
- don't listen to us
- are not strict enough
- use big words and don't explain
- puts down our school
- is racist
- is selfish

4.3 Fairness

Students need to trust that a teacher will be fair to them and to everyone else in order to have respect for them. This means giving all students in the class attention and affirmation. The students gave examples of teachers who give preferential treatment to *the bright kids, the scholars, the girls, the ones with no reputation, the dumb kids or the boys who are good at sport.*

Students reported other teachers (not any of the teachers in this sample) saying things like *“I’m here for the students who want to learn”, or “If they don’t make an effort I can’t help them.”*

“In an environment of respect and rapport, **all** students feel valued. When students are encouraged in discussion of a concept, **all** students are invited and encouraged to participate. When feedback is provided to students on their learning, it is provided to **all** students.”
(Danielson, 1996:33)

The students want teachers who will not give up on any of them. They also want teachers who do not unfairly target one or two students because of their reputation rather than because of specific inappropriate behaviour.

When a teacher is perceived to be fair, students are very tolerant of their exercising discipline.

If we are not working she moves us away from our group but it's OK. We may feel angry but she explains why she is doing it and we understand. She is the same to everyone. (Students)

4.4 Giving of themselves

This does not refer to tangible gifts, but to the ways the teachers shared aspects of their lives, their feelings, their failings and their vulnerabilities with the students. It generally happened from the first encounters with the class when the teacher, in introducing themselves, would include some personal information about their background and their family.

I tell them about me first, before I expect them to open up to me. I start with myself, my husband and children. I talk about my interests outside of school. They are very impressed at my frankness. Otherwise, why should I expect them to be. (Teacher)

At the beginning of the year, she told us about her life and her family. We ask her about herself and she tells us about her holidays and weekends. (Student)

Students have a high regard for a teacher who will apologise, admit they made a mistake, will say they do not know the answer or will acknowledge feeling unsure about an issue. Such behaviours make the teacher vulnerable and human and students can relate to those positions. It makes the teacher a person of equal worth and gives students personal worth and confidence.

Sometimes there were opportunities during lessons to share aspects of themselves either formally or informally. One teacher read parts from her personal diary that she wrote as a teenager. It was about a relationship she was involved in and it described her feelings at the time. The learning outcomes were related to writing style and the students were greatly motivated to participate in the lesson and could relate to the teaching messages.

Telling personal stories with a message is a strategy many teachers used and was one frequently recalled and described by the students. The positive messages gave them hope and motivation to *work hard because it is worth it later.* They were readily remembered and made an impact because *it is a real thing that happened to Sir.*

4.5 Caring

The students felt cared for and cared about because these teachers show them that they do and tell them frequently.

They show them in a wide range of ways including –

- giving extra personal time
- listening to their ideas
- supporting them with personal problems
- buying them things out of their own money, e.g. rewards, gear
- following up after a difficult time
- driving them to or from an event
- supporting them in co-curricular activities
- organising trips
- tutorials
- marking and returning work quickly
- letting them borrow gear

The talk about caring can be direct such as

I treat them as if they were my own daughter or son. I tell them that is how I feel. I love them but I am strict as well. (Teacher)

- or it can be indirect and interpreted as such by the students

She told us that her son is sitting exams soon and she wants us to pass just as much as she wants him to pass. (Student)

Pierce describes an effective teacher of at-risk students as nurturing the emotional needs of her students and creating a safe and secure classroom climate “primarily through her exhibited behaviours”.

“Showing care, respect and physical closeness demonstrated these qualities. The classroom organisation that she developed diminished the possibility of failure and --- these results helped to increase the students’ level of academic achievement and their formation of more positive attitudes towards school and self. These outcomes were demonstrated both quantitatively and qualitatively.” (Pierce, 1994. Cited in set special No 10:4)

Danielson (1996:31) said that students remembered and felt safe with teachers who were warm and caring. Seelye (1994:290) identifies two teacher factors that were associated with student success. One was the establishment of an atmosphere of emotional warmth and the other was a demand for high quality academic work.

Meixner, who worked with at-risk students in a small Michigan secondary school, goes further by recommending teachers "care to give love".

“We involve ourselves at an emotional level to nurture and strengthen our students growth. We believe this willingness to give our students love, something many of them have been deprived of, is an essential ingredient to their success.” (Meixner, 1997: 14)

Only a small number of the teachers in this sample used the word 'love' but they all involved themselves at an emotional level in a giving way.

Students expected caring teachers to discipline them if necessary and they saw no dissonance in both things happening. Several times student groups explained to the researchers that a respected teacher will **growl, discipline or punish you (when you deserve it)** but they are careful to re-establish the caring relationship as soon as possible afterwards and they do not bear grudges.

She respects us and treats us equally. When she growls someone you know it is for a good reason. Then she comes back quickly after that to talk nicely to them. That way we don't hold a grudge. (Student)

4.6 Participation

Students really appreciate and enjoy their teacher joining in an activity. Not all teaching activities lend themselves to this but it is not the frequency that matters. For the students it demonstrates teacher attitudes towards them and their learning. The following paragraph is a greatly abridged example of a student group discussion that demonstrates the effect on them of teacher participation -

We were learning about bacteria and she got us into two groups but before we had to be the bacteria, she showed us how to be one. She was flinging her arms around and then she lay down on the floor and wriggled her legs. (Lots of laughter and body language) We all really got into it after that. When she has a go, we have a go --- and we remember all the things in the lesson because it was so funny. (Students)

Another area of participation is when the teacher helps the class tidy up or prepare for an activity. In participating, they are modelling a willingness to be part of the class and **to do myself what I expect them to do**.

Some teachers actually did some of the class work with the students as a means of demonstrating various outcomes. An art teacher, for example, instructed the class and then sat at one of the desks in the middle of the room and followed his own instructions -

I find that if I do the work with them, it shows them how much they can do and need to do in a period. They watch me and increase their pace. It's better than telling them to hurry up. (Teacher)

Teacher attitude and language often indicated that they perceived themselves as part of the class. Many of the teachers used "we" when they were talking about activities that the students were doing.

As long as all the drafts are written by the end of next week, we will be happy. (Teacher)
Let's list what we have done -
We will draw the diagram later.
Let's all focus now and really concentrate. (Teacher during observation)

4.7 Patience

It has been said that most of the teachers worked the class at quite a fast pace, but they knew when it was important to take time and be patient both with individuals and with the class. Individual students said how important it was to them that they could ask for help in the safe knowledge that the teacher would give it, and keep giving it, as long as they needed the support.

Some teachers make you feel stink when you say you don't know how to do it. They say 'you should have listened' or 'you wouldn't have to ask if you had been concentrating'. Then we

don't ask again and we don't know what to do. Sir will go over it again slow enough for me to get it. He doesn't growl us. (Students)

He finds another way to say the same thing so if we don't get the first one then we will work it out with the next example, or the next, or the next. (Student)

4.8 Perseverance

Students want teachers who will persist and not give up on them. The teachers know this and tell their students.

He (the teacher) says I can do it and he will keep waiting until I do. I know I have to keep on trying even when I don't feel like it. (Student)

I tell them I am not going to give up on them and I am counting on them to come up with the goods. I say if it's good enough for me, its good enough for them. (Teacher)

This perseverance applies to production of work, quality of work, getting assignments and homework in on time and demonstrating desirable learning and behavioural qualities.

“Researchers at the Institute for Research on Teaching at the University of Michigan analysed how teachers dealt with failure-avoiding behaviour in their classrooms. Although these students had rejected school and had stopped working, these highly competent teachers refused to cave in to these students by reducing expectations and treating them as if they were really unable to succeed.” (Raffini, 1993:61)

4.9 Keeping their word

Students described how much they trust and respect teachers who keep their word. This applies to such promises as giving treats, going on trips, being allowed to do enjoyable things, marking homework, following up on requests, bringing gear from home, conveying a message to another staff member and including a popular activity in a lesson. It also applies to carrying out the stated consequences for inappropriate behaviours.

Teachers who keep their word and are consistent are respected because there is no ambiguity and their word can be trusted.

4.10 Extra-curricula

When a teacher and student interact outside of the formal school programme and the classroom, another dimension of the relationship develops. Both teachers and students talked about the value in working with students in extra-curricular activities.

I appreciate young people and where they are coming from. I get to know them outside of the class as well. For me it is choir, band and concerts. Then they come into the class and they transfer that relationship to you as the teacher in class. (Teacher)

She coaches our soccer because it helps her relate to us. She knows everybody and she talks to everybody. (Student)

What the activities are does not matter. What matters is spending the extra time in a relaxed, and almost social, way. It extends the knowledge each person has of the other and it takes them outside of the formal requirements of the classroom. The students clearly enjoyed meeting their teachers in these ways. Even talking to them in a shopping mall was felt to be a positive experience. In particular, students gained a lot of respect for teachers who were actively involved in extra-curricular activities.

The next best thing is for a teacher to talk with the students about their extra- curricular activities. It extends the teachers knowledge of the students and demonstrates an interest beyond the immediate teaching function.

Every lesson I stand at the door and chat with them as they come in. I get to know their sport and culture group activities. They love it. I give them five minutes to settle in and joke and then it is down to business. (Teacher)

4.11 Parental contact

Some of the teachers in the sample placed a high value on being in contact with parents and caregivers. None of them indicated any reluctance to contact parents when they felt it was necessary. Some were very pro-active in contacting parents, even when there was no issue of concern. Some examples of the types of contact include:

- sending a letter to parents of the form class introducing themselves and the goals set by the class for the year
- phoning parents to remind and encourage them to come to student report evenings
- asking for parental support for a class activity
- inviting whanau to a class activity
- sending student self assessment sheets home for parents to see and sign
- involving parents in class projects or learning activities

As can be seen from the list, most parental contact was for positive rather than negative reasons. Some teachers mentioned the reluctance of their students to have their parents involved or informed. The teachers were prepared to work through the reasons with the students, and contact the parents anyway.

The kids know I will ring parents at the beginning of the year. I talk with them and give them the school number for them to call me anytime. If parents come in I always meet them. The kids accept that I do that whether they like it or not because I tell them why. (Teacher)

Most of the teachers were also prepared to contact parents if there were concerns and they preferred to do this at an early stage of a problem developing.

4.12 Reciprocity

As we said at the beginning of this chapter, the successful establishment of a relationship with most of the components described above is, for most of these students, a pre-requisite for learning to take place. Students work on a relationship of reciprocity. If a teacher respects them, they will respect the teacher. A similar approach applies to the other aspects of the relationship.

When I know she has done all that work for us, I want to work hard for her. (Student)

He really cares about us and does lots of extra things for us. He's "the Man." (Student)

Belton summed it up as –

“If a student likes a teacher – regardless of the grades they receive- they will want to perform to please the teacher and this encourages honesty.” (Belton, 1996: 67)

4.13 Summary

Evans (1996) views “encouragement” as central to learning and argues that teachers must be trained to encourage their students through the use of the following practices:

- Making relationships a priority
- Carrying on respectful dialogue
- Practicing encouragement and affirmation daily
- Making decisions through shared involvement
- Resolving conflict
- Having fun on a regular basis (Evans, 1996:81)

In this report, we have chosen to organise the presentation of the data in different chapters, but the similarity between the above list and our findings is unmistakable.

5.0 PEDAGOGICAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

This chapter analyses the teaching and learning strategies the researchers observed being used by the teachers. Not all the strategies were observed in any one lesson but, overall, were observed many times. The strategies were used across all subjects and year levels with none observed that were subject specific and not transferable to another learning area. Each teacher had their own individual style and used the strategies in different ways that suited their particular way of operating and the needs of the students.

5.1 Preparation

The importance of being well-prepared is described by Relf et al:

“Everybody in the classroom feels more secure when lessons are well planned, with a clear purpose expressed as a learning outcome. We can take action for a well structured lesson by making a set pattern of work the normal way we start a lesson, setting up a safe system for pupils themselves to access equipment and resources with minimum fuss and being able to explain what we expect pupils to learn, not just what they will be doing.” (Relf et al, 1998, 12)

Almost without exception, the teachers observed were very well organised. They almost always started their lessons on time, unless there was an unforeseen circumstance beyond their control. It could be argued that the teachers knew they were to be observed and made sure that they had planned well for the lesson. Nonetheless, most teachers said they liked to be well-prepared and the students reinforced this with their own examples of careful teacher preparation which they reported as being usual for these teachers.

You can tell that he puts in the extra effort. He’s always well prepared and has heaps for us to do. He makes us work. And he’s never away. (Students)

Miss is always set up. She has notes on the board, an outline of the lesson, handouts and an overhead. You can just tell she’s organised and hasn’t just walked in thinking about what she’s going to do. It’s obvious. She’s cool. You can tell she loves English. (Students)

Rather than being well organised for just one lesson, the teachers appeared to have systems in place that made it easier to be well organised. The following are examples of strategies they used:

- Ready access to a paper of varying sizes.
- Textbooks collected in and kept in one place ready to be distributed in the next lesson or to the next class.
- Trays or boxes of felt tips, glue pens and other equipment ready to distribute.
- Great care was usually taken to make sure classroom gear was returned and, invariably, this responsibility was handed over to between one and three students. Some of these students were expert at making sure no gear went missing.
- A routine for the beginning of the lesson, often not directly involving the teacher so students could begin working as soon as they entered the classroom. This meant that if the teacher was busy talking to a student or welcoming students as they came in or if other students were late, the rest of the class did not waste time.
- Ready-made resources for the teacher or the students to use that had been a success when the unit had been taught previously.

5.2 Energy and hard work

Most of these teachers demonstrated high levels of energy and an ability to work very hard. From the moment the students entered the classrooms until they left at the end of the period, these teachers were interacting with students as a class, in a group or as individual students. None of these teachers sat down during the lesson unless it was to sit beside a student to discuss their work. They were highly mobile and moved around the entire classroom, not only to mark the roll or maintain a presence to keep students on task, but primarily to work alongside the students. They only stood at the front of the class at formal instruction times, usually when they needed to record information on the board.

I walk around the room a lot. I always ask them to show me their work and they do it now without thinking. I walk and talk and check and mark. As I do this I can set them up to do the things they need to do. Each of them is an individual and often they'll be working on different things or maybe different things within a topic. (Teacher)

A number of the teachers commented that moving around the classroom helped them and the students in a number of ways:

- Ability to diagnose students' work and provide individual feedback more readily.
- Identification of common problems by looking at students' work as it was being completed and then addressing the issue with the whole class or with a particular group.
- Greater accessibility to the teacher for students to ask questions and seek support.
- Opportunities to give individual feedback to students in a non-obtrusive manner.
- Ability to minimise off-task behaviour by working alongside students known to need help or who, at any point, are off-task.
- In some lessons the change from one activity to another added purpose to the lesson. The students were given clear timeframes to complete a task and were given constant feedback as a class and as individuals about how far through the activity they should be and what to do if they needed help in order to complete the activity.

I want to use all my time for teaching and I do. The students know that. I will not spend time on behaviour or let them distract me from my role. We are busy the whole time. (Teacher)

Tomlinson (1999) describes it in this way:

“In healthy classrooms you hear continual talk about the importance of what is being undertaken. There is a consistent sense of urgency about what is being learned. It isn't a sense of hurriedness but a sense that time and topic are valuable and are to be treated as such. (Tomlinson, 1999: 34)

The lessons observed by the researchers in this study gained a clear sense of purpose because the teachers were well organised, because it was clear what needed to be achieved in the lesson and because the teachers modelled hard work.

5.3 Structuring lessons

Starting the lesson

In many of the classes, the students have a set routine once they arrive in the classroom. For example, one teacher always starts with an informal quiz, another always has at least one mathematical 'brain teaser' up on the board for the students to solve, another teacher always has one or two key points on his whiteboard

for the students to write into their books. Other examples of this are described in 6.2. This gave the teachers time to greet students, talk to any latecomers, give out any equipment needed and make sure that students were settling down to work. Relf et al (1998) and Harlan (1996) both emphasise the importance of routines in maintaining an effective learning environment.

“We need to use routine in moderation if we are to avoid teaching predictable, monotonous lessons. Instead, we use routine to help the smooth running and completion of a lesson. This way we spend less time on classroom management and more time on learning. It leaves us time to stimulate interest in learning itself. (Relf et al, 1998: 35)

Lesson outlines

There were some teachers who always had a lesson outline on the board. The outline articulated what would be happening in the lesson and, sometimes, this was taken a step further to include what students were expected to learn in the lesson. Three examples are provided below.

Figure 1

(Class name) English (Week 3)

- ***Transactional Writing***
- ***Today's Aim: to practice making strong points with explanations and examples.***
 - *Transactional writing is structured and has a pattern.*
 - *Transactional writing should have 3 strong, clear, different points with explanations and examples.*
- ***Programme:***
 - *'Round da World' to get us thinking.*
 - *Write what you think about the statement on your desk*
 - *Rotate and report back.*
- ***Debates (to practice SEE)***
- ***Form a group of 3***
Prepare your own argument using the resource sheet
Set it out like a paragraph

SEE = Statement
Explanation
Example

Figure 2

26 July, 1999

Heat and Eat Products

- **Food labeling**
 - What are food labels?
 - The role of food labeling

- **Consumer communication on the food products**
 - Placement of consumer information
 - Colour and shape of lettering
 - Colour and shape of labels

- **Green books P6, P7, P22**
 - Homework, P6, P7 due 4/8
 - Revision worksheet due 2/8

- **Reminders**
 - Revision worksheet – must be ready for checking 28/9
 - Collect pamphlets on stoves and microwave ovens due 4/8
 - Test on proteins, carbohydrates and lipids on 5/8

Figure 3

By the end of this period I will have:

- Learned about Josef Mengele
- Learned about some of the experiments that are carried out by the Nazis
- Discovered the actual detail of process that was carried out for those that were told to go to the right from the trains
- Completed or started
 - notes on sections to be read
 - comprehension questions
 - a cloze exercise
 - a flow chart
- Given 100%

Most teachers who had lesson outlines on the board, talked the class through it initially. After that, they did not expect to have to keep telling the students what to do, they simply referred them to the board. There were examples where students were able to move from one task to the next without waiting for the teacher's instruction because the outline told them what to do next. For these teachers, it was another deliberate strategy to get the students taking responsibility for their learning.

The outline also became a reference point for some teachers to make links between what had happened in the previous lesson and where it was leading to in a subsequent lesson. It meant that the students not only heard the links but could also see them.

Key learning activities in a lesson

It was evident that, in most cases, the lesson had not been planned as a series of activities just to keep the students occupied. There was logic to the timing and sequence of activities that suggested that teachers had put thought into how they would construct the learning for the students. They put energy into making the lessons stimulating and meaningful.

There's never a day when we don't do something different. We had a kush ball and each time it was thrown to us we had to make up a question for the next person we threw the ball to. We had statues where we had to guess which book it belonged to. We had lollies yesterday. There's always something happening. (Student)

Every lesson there's something new. We wonder what's going to be happening the next time. We discuss, we read, we do things, we get into groups. She never lectures us! (Students)

There is considerable evidence (Babbage, 1998; Relf et al 1998; Oddleifson, 1994; Reglin, 1993; Farmer and Payne, 1992) that students thrive when as much thought goes into how they learn as what they learn.

“During the last twenty years, cognitive psychologists studying how people really do learn have established that children do not absorb knowledge passively, they construct it actively...As knowledge is constructed, it must be made meaningful.” (Oddleifson, 1994: 447)

“Pupils naturally give attention to what is new and interesting. When a lesson has appropriate pace, challenge and interest then they are more likely to give attention to learning. Not only is difficult behaviour reduced, but pupils are less likely to give attention to it.” (Relf et al, 1998: 23)

There was little time wasting between activities. The teachers were prepared for the next activity before the students needed to move onto it and this, in conjunction with classroom routines such as giving out texts or equipment, made for an easy transition.

In spite of the planning, the teachers were responsive to the teachable moment. There were times when teachers had to think immediately of a different activity to get a point across either because a planned strategy had not worked or because there was a gap in the students’ learning that the teacher had not anticipated.

Danielson (1996: 18) describes this ability to make good choices and decisions about what will work with students at any given time as representing “the heart of professionalism”. One teacher had expected his students to remember the different kinds of energy they had discussed the previous week. Very quickly, it became clear that they were struggling, so the teacher got some of the students to get out of their chairs and got them doing certain actions to demonstrate the different types of energy. The students had a great deal of fun, it got them motivated and, at the same time, refreshed their memories of what they had covered in the previous lesson. Another teacher used the breakdown of a printer as a learning opportunity for the whole class as she showed them how she was going to fix the problem.

Some of these teachers were very happy to get student input into how things were done. They were not threatened when students said they were bored. Rather, they saw this comment as a challenge for them as the teacher.

They tell me when they don't like something and I listen to them. I mean we have to do the real stuff (the curriculum) but I find another way to do it. If they don't like what they're doing they won't learn it. I understand when they get tired of something or when it isn't working for them. (Teacher)

If a kid says it's boring I don't tell them it's their fault and they'd better get interested. I ask myself how I can make it more interesting. (Teacher)

I like being the teacher but teachers don't have to run every single thing. We were doing a film unit and I was going to show them 'The Man From Snowy River'. They said to me, "Does 'Scream' fit?" I got them to look at the Curriculum document and we made a decision together that it did. So we did it! Then they asked if they could make a horror movie. They were right into it. It took us a week but it was great. The kids loved it and so did I. You have to acknowledge when they have good ideas. You have to say more than 'well done', you have to use their ideas. Otherwise it all comes from you. (Teacher)

Revision

Links with previous learning were made through specially designed revision activities and were included in a number of the lessons observed. These included:

- A quick written quiz. In most cases students did not record their results. One teacher regularly gave the same quiz each day for a week to revise work covered in the previous week. In this case

students were asked to jot down their results and a discussion about improvements being made followed each quiz session.

- A whole class discussion. Sometimes the discussion centred around a chart, a diagram, an item on display or a model. These were used to jog students' memories as well as to provide a visual focus.
- Giving feedback to the class about common errors after marking a piece of work.
- Getting into a small group to recall things that had been learned in the last lesson.

Homework

Some teachers always began their lessons by checking homework. In one class the students knew that the teacher roved the room as homework was discussed or marked. Those that had completed it were praised and their homework signed or commented on. In one senior class, the teacher kept a record for each student of when homework was completed. There was a reward for students with an almost faultless record at the end of the term.

The type of homework varied and teachers were very mindful that many of the students would not have resources at home to which they could refer or use. The teachers made sure that any references that needed to be looked up were accessible. These included such things as the local newspaper, a television programme, a class textbook or a set of class notes. If they had to go to the school library, some teachers gave the students more than one day to complete the task or let them go to the library during class, with a note.

One teacher said he had learned never to give the students a loose piece of paper to take home, whether it was a homework or a classroom exercise, as inevitably the pieces of paper would get lost. He always got the students to glue the sheets into their books. One school has a Maths workbook prepared by the teachers that students buy at the beginning of the year with their stationery order. Teachers set exercises from this to match the units of work being taught and report that it gives homework a status that, previously, had been difficult to achieve.

Overwhelmingly, the data show that students are more likely to do homework if teachers check that it has been completed and if it is marked. If it is collected in, then it needs to be returned to the students very quickly. Many of the teachers get marked homework back the next day.

At the beginning of every lesson he comes around and checks that we've done it. He signs it or writes a special comment so we always do it. Well, most of the time. And usually it's something we already know how to do. He always says, "Practice, practice". (Students)

If they (teachers) don't mark it then it feels like a waste of time.

One teacher models doing homework by setting herself tasks to complete that night and telling the class what they are. Sometimes, she does the same homework as the students.

We don't always do our homework (in other subjects) but we always do what she gives us because she does the homework too, to help us. (Student)

Use of equipment

Many of the teachers used the whiteboard in ways that helped the students. Many of them use one side of the board for lesson outlines, reminders and homework notes. Some teachers used different colours to help students distinguish between main ideas and sub-ideas. Others built up a word list to one side of the board. Sometimes, these were used for revision towards the end of the lesson.

There were some teachers, especially Maths teachers, who developed class discussions around an overhead projector transparency. The framework of an example, such as a graph or a table or a computation, was written up on a transparency and projected onto the whiteboard. Teachers then wrote on the whiteboard, adding more information as the students and the teacher discussed the concept. By erasing the writing on the whiteboard, the teachers had a ready-made and carefully-drawn outline on the transparency to repeat with another example.

One teacher had her entire lesson on a set of overheads. The students found them very easy to follow and learn from because they were well set out in clear, sequential steps with different colours used to highlight certain points. It was also easy to cover up sections and show sections without rubbing out and rewriting. Because teachers did not have to spend time writing and drawing on the whiteboard it enabled lessons to move a faster pace and more work was done. The overheads were also used for revision purposes at a later date. One teacher commented that she thinks the bright screen helps the students to focus. When it is turned off, it helps in getting their attention for the next activity.

Many of the teachers had ready-made resources to use in the lessons. These included cards for a sorting exercise, instructions for group tasks, puzzles, games, worksheets and discussion handouts. One teacher had prepared a set of six worksheets, each of which comprised a collage of newspaper headings, cartoons and articles that were used as a discussion starter. Another teacher had made a model of a package with string linking the different parts of the package to an envelope that contained the name of each part. Students worked in groups to identify each one and looked in the envelope for the answer as they worked through them. This game made the students do the thinking, gave them a self-checking mechanism and provided an exemplar for the task the teacher planned to give them for homework.

Some of the resources had been prepared for other classes but had been laminated or stored in such a way that they did not look secondhand. If it was a unit outline, an activity sheet or a 'how to' sheet, a template had been kept so it could be photocopied when the unit was taught to another class. These teachers were keen to save themselves time and capitalise on activities that had proved to be very successful with students in the past.

Most of the lessons did not include the use of electronic equipment. The use of computers was predominantly confined to word processing classes. In an Art class, video clips from a classic movie and the second World War were used to initiate a student discussion on violence.

5.4 Differentiated Learning

Tomlinson (1999) describes the differentiated classroom as one where teachers begin where students are, not necessarily at the beginning of a prescribed curriculum. They accept and build on the premise that learners are different in important ways.

“Teachers must be ready to engage students in instruction through different modalities, by appealing to differing interests, and by using varied degrees of complexity. They provide specific ways for each individual to learn as deeply as possible and as quickly as possible, without assuming one student’s road map for learning is identical to anyone else’s.” (ibid: 2)

As described in 5.3, teachers generally put considerable thought into providing a range of activities in each lesson and it was common to observe a mix of talking, writing, making and doing within the one lesson. The work of educationalists such as Dunn, R. (1997), Harlan (1996) and Dunn, Dunn and Treffinger (1992) have documented the benefits to student achievement, and particularly for students in multi-cultural settings, of including activities that take cognizance of students’ preferred ways of learning.

“Individualisation of instruction to meet each and every student’s learning styles and modality strengths is another integral component of instructional management. Extensive data verify the existence of individual differences among youngsters – differences so extreme that identical methods, resources or grouping procedures can prevent or block learning for the majority of

students. There are visual learners, auditory learners and kinesthetic and tactile learners.” (Harlan, 1996: 154)

Some of the teachers talked about accommodating different learning styles but it was more common for teachers to talk about *providing variety* and *making learning fun*. Some of these teachers had not had formal training in this area but were instinctively making professional judgements about what worked and what did not work.

He looks after all our learning needs. We talk, we write, we have music sometimes. And in double periods he feeds us with a snack. (Students)

She works on learning power – different ways for us to learn. We have mindmaps, summaries, colour coding, diagrams, role plays. (Students)

The researchers observed a wide range of activities within each of the broad areas of talking, writing, making and doing. A number of teachers included a mix of working as a class, working on their own, working with another student or as a group. In one lesson, the teacher alternated two class discussions around the whiteboard and the overhead projector. In between times, the students worked on their own, then in pairs and, at one stage, in groups of four. In another one lesson, for example, the class worked together for most of the time but there was a mix of class discussion interspersed with a written activity and each written activity was different. There was a quick quiz, making a list, writing a paragraph and then drawing and illustrating a table. In another lesson, the students worked in groups after a formal instruction time. Each group worked on making something completely different. The variety came from the series of steps the students had to work through in order to complete the task and from the interest generated in what the other groups were doing. Sometimes students were encouraged to record information in a way that suited them. One teacher used an overhead and a handout as he guided his senior students through a key teaching point. At the same time, the students were writing and drawing their interpretation of the information.

Do it in any way you will understand it. It's not me who has to remember or understand, it's you. (Teacher)

There were some lessons observed where much of the lesson was taken up with students working on a major project. In most instances, the students were very absorbed in their work. The students created their own variety, if they needed to, by working on another section of their work or on another task. Some teachers commented that, when students were working on a major written project, they sometimes needed a break in the lesson to help maintain concentration. This break was sometimes taken as a class and, at other times, was organised by the teacher with individual students.

5.5 Small steps

The importance of clear and organised direct instruction is described by Hattie (1999) and Wang et al (1993/4) in their extensive investigations of how students learn. One of the ways that teachers in this study did this was by making sure that, when there were new and important concepts for the students to learn, they carefully structured the process for the students. This kind of 'explicit teaching' comprises presenting material in small steps, pausing to check for student understanding and requiring active participation from all students.

You have to make them work. You have to make it possible for them to do things they think they can't do. You have to take little steps and build bridges so that they can get to where they need to be. (Teacher)

These teachers helped the students to take little steps and build bridges by questioning, providing good explanations, giving many examples taking time to work on vocabulary and giving the students

opportunities to practise each step rather than expecting them to absorb several steps at once and then practising.

If you don't get it then he tries something else. Lots of questions and answers. Then there might be a cover-up (on the OHT) and then we get to practise. (Students)

He starts us off with shading and then heaps of drawings. We practise and practise. Just little steps. He starts us off by doing just little strokes and then we go from there. (Students)

There were smaller rather than larger steps between the students working, with a teacher and then working on their own or in a group without the teacher's help. For example, in a year 9 Maths class, the objective was to collect and analyse some data and present it in a graph. After a discussion on tallying, the teacher then gave the students a two minute exercise translating numbers to tally marks and tally marks to numbers. As they worked on this the teacher was able to walk around the room and check that the concept had been understood. Later, in the group discussion, four of the students said that they had learned how to tally in primary school but it helped to have a reminder and two students had no experience of tallying at all. All six students said it gave them confidence having practised this step on their own before moving on to the next stage.

Taking small steps was also used to draw students into a topic, to gain their participation and to motivate. In an English class the teacher was introducing the students to a unit based on 'Romeo and Juliet'. They talked about Shakespeare and where he lived and worked. There was a discussion about when he lived and the teacher drew a timeline on the board. They discussed the word century and how centuries relate to years (20th century = 1900's). They had a quick quiz to practise this conversion. The students were then asked if they had ever been to a live play. Students related some of their experiences. The teacher then talked about a solo play by the Aboriginal woman and how it had made her cry. The discussion then focussed on sad events and the death of Princess Diana and was related to the story of Romeo and Juliet. By the time the books were given out, the students could not wait to get started.

Several students: Can we start reading now?

Several students: Can we start?

Teacher: If you want to.

At this point every student began to read and later, in the group discussion, a student made the following comment:

It's (Romeo and Juliet) going to be cool. She always makes it seem exciting and you always want to do what she asks you. Like reading the play. (Student)

5.6 Encouraging dialogue

Questioning techniques and engaging students in discussions

The art of questioning has been well researched and documented (Latham, 1997; Danielson, 1996). There is consensus that no single approach to questioning works best in every classroom all of the time. Teachers need to consider numerous factors such as the lesson objectives, the context of the discussion, the strength of the students' answers, and adapt their answers accordingly (Barden in Latham, 1997). In Danielson's view -

“The best questioners have a repertoire of techniques to select in response to their ever-changing classroom environment. They use these techniques not only for students' assessment, but also to engage students in higher-order thinking, pique their curiosity, and spur them to consider new possibilities.” (Danielson, 1996: 18)

There is common agreement among these educationalists, however, that asking the right questions is about getting students to think.

“The hard work goes toward focussing and eliciting student thinking rather than providing information.” (McKeown and Beck, 1999:27)

Questions are so important but you’ve got to remember to ask, “Why?” You’ve got to remember to ask, “How did you get that answer?” Otherwise, it’s just about getting the right answer. (Teacher)

a. Questioning in whole class discussions

A number of strategies were observed for involving students whole class discussions. There were some teachers who preferred students to put their hands up when they wanted to give an answer or contribute to the discussion in some way. The teacher would then choose one student to respond. There were teachers who deliberately made sure that as many students as possible had an opportunity to have their say and who constantly used their knowledge of the individual students to make decisions about what questions were asked and who answered them. They asked questions that everybody could answer as well as those that they knew only a few could respond to but which were important to building the discussion.

I try to get all students to answer things. I notice who doesn’t contribute but I don’t necessarily focus on them as an individual in a public way. They all have to say something but it can be one to one, with me. (Teacher)

There were some teachers who did not ask the students to put up their hands and were happy for students to ‘call out’. This was done in a controlled and positive way and was used, in particular, if the discussion required more closed questions and relatively short responses.

I don’t mind calling out. It feels more relaxed to me. But when I want to see who knows or to check on specific kids then I start a question with, "Hands up". (Teacher)

Sometimes lots of kids call out. It’s OK but it’s good if he repeats the answer. He sometimes does but it’s hard to hear (the answer) sometimes. (Students)

Another rationale provided by these teachers for using this method was that many students could have a say and it was less threatening if their answer was not right. However, there were a number of instances when the teacher would acknowledge the right answer in amongst other answers given but would not get a student to repeat it or repeat it themselves. This was a missed opportunity because, invariably, when this happened, there would some students who would not have heard the correct answer before the discussion moved on. Sometimes, those answers were crucial to understanding the next section of work.

Nonetheless, there were some classes where some students did not put up their hands, did not get chosen, gave the wrong answer or were not heard in the chorus. Their body language in the lessons or comments in the group discussions clearly indicated that they did not feel good about it.

It’s stink. She hardly ever asks me. (Student)

Some kids get to answer all the time. (Student)

For these reasons, Danielson (1996) and Kagan (1990) warn of the dangers of relying totally on this type of whole-class communication.

b. Paired or group discussions

There were a number of teachers who used a range of cooperative learning techniques during class discussions to which, overall, students responded very well. In Kagan’s view:

“Teachers who are well versed in a variety of team structures can create skillful lessons that engage and enlighten their students”. (Kagan, 1990: 12)

The techniques the researchers observed included:

- round robins where students take it in turns to share something with a class or a group
- working in pairs
- working in pairs then teaming up with another pair
- structured group discussions of up to six students
- students thinking to themselves (some jotted down ideas), pairing up with another student and then sharing with the rest of the class

The students need each other – to check their answers, to talk about their answers. They need to process things. Sometimes I let them pick their own groups like I did today. Sometimes I get to choose if I have a special reason. Like if I need experts in with those that are struggling. Or I mix them up so they’re not working with their mates all the time. So I number them and the same numbers join together. (Teacher)

c. Students using their own languages

There were times when students spoke in their own languages, for some of the time, when they worked in pairs or groups. The researchers did not observe any teacher discouraging that practice and most regarded it as normal. Some teachers actively encouraged it and deliberately seated some students together, if they spoke the same language, so that they could help each other. When teachers could speak or knew key words in an ethnic language, the researchers saw this knowledge used to good effect in helping students understand particular words or concepts. Sometimes teachers who did not know the languages asked the students to come up with synonyms for important words from the different languages represented in the class. The students clearly enjoyed this activity.

d. Other contributions to whole class discussions

There were some teachers who were reluctant about encouraging individual students to demonstrate on the whiteboard, read out loud, speak formally to the whole class or contribute in individual and public ways. On the other hand, some teachers put a great deal of time and energy into building a climate that was safe enough for the students to take those kinds of public risks.

OK. Could I please have two volunteers? You don’t have to read out your own one. You can read someone else’s. (Teacher)

Can you come up and try that on the board (student’s name)? We’ll all help if you get stuck. (Teacher)

He makes us come to the board. You feel OK about it. He doesn’t do it too much. He asks for volunteers and gets the boys and the girls to come up. He wants everyone to feel equal. He has (what the teacher calls) ‘a magic pen’ and it helps when we write on the board. It’s like the pen helps us. (Students)

The teacher of this last group of students uses the notion of ‘the magic pen’ or ‘the power of the pen’ as a deliberate strategy to give students confidence to put their ideas forward in front of others.

Those students in classes where they were supported to respond independently in a whole class forum responded well to the encouragement and gained in confidence as a result.

Explanations

The earlier AIMHI research (Hawk and Hill, 1996) documented the importance of teachers' attitudes towards giving explanations, their skill in providing them and ability to actively engage students in the process. The crucial importance of these attitudes and skills was very evident in the classrooms.

Many teachers demonstrated infinite patience when interacting with the students. They had created a climate in their rooms where it was safe to seek help if they were 'stuck' and where teachers would take the time to respond to questions and give further explanations.

You need to take time to go through something with them. You can't just rely on them seeing something or reading something and understanding it. The explaining is crucial. You talk, then they talk and eventually they say – Oh, I get it. They just have to process it. They know me well enough to say that I'm going too fast and to say – What does this mean? You need to take time until they've got it. Time invested saves time later on. (Teacher)

They constantly sought ways of engaging the students in the discussion and ensuring that they were active participants.

They are very good at giving one word answers. I get round that by giving an example and then getting them to give some. Once they've contributed, it's easier to build the discussion. They are doing the thinking as well as you. And then they get into it. (Teacher)

There were examples where teachers had taught a unit of work before or anticipated which concepts and words students might struggle to understand. They had ready-made overhead transparencies or key messages that they wrote on the whiteboard and had special activities designed, as one teacher put it, to ensure ***comprehensible input***. Some teachers had even gone as far as rewriting crucial texts, or parts of texts, to ensure that material would be understood. Examples of planned strategies to make explanations relevant included:

- Working in small groups to reconstruct cut up handouts of a lifesaving process
- Using examples on a video clip to expand students' thinking about violence
- Using licorice allsorts to show how coal forms in seams (the students, later, got to eat them)
- Using a cloze activity to reconstruct what students had learned about life in New Guinea
- Using doll's furniture and utensils to help students learn household vocabulary and how to use words related to a position e.g. over, under, beside.

Nonetheless, in every lesson, there were examples where teachers used impromptu, 'off-the-cuff' techniques with their whole class, a group or individuals to help students grasp the meaning of key concepts and words and make links with previous learning. They used stories, diagrams, items in the room, classroom displays, role-playing and demonstrations to get the message across to the students.

While we're talking (the teacher and the students), I find something that will help, we'll pin it up or bring it out. We use things around the walls, the 'how to' charts, anything to help them understand. (Teacher)

I try to provide interesting experiences throughout the lessons. Sometimes, maybe interesting at the expense of being educational. I work tangentially. There are moments that you can focus on and they will remember because of it. (Teacher)

It was common for these teachers to tell stories to expand on and explain words and ideas to students. In relation to a lesson on digestion, a teacher told the story of the lead singer, Mama Cass from 'The Mamas and Papas' choking to death and why this had happened. This gave the students a graphic explanation of the workings of the digestive system and sparked real interest in the next section of their work. Sometimes these stories were from the teachers' own experiences.

One male teacher role-played two girls having an argument to help illustrate different levels of anger. He used a high-pitched voice and student slang to illustrate his point and this created a great deal of laughter and subsequent discussion. In the group discussion that followed the observation, this, and the learning it generated, were the students' strongest memories of the lesson.

He wants us to learn and he makes it easy. Like him acting today. He uses real words for us and he's not afraid to use our words. And things we know about. It made me laugh (the role-play). And we remember about that anger. It's true you know, we do get angry about little things. We're like that. (Students)

Throughout many of the lessons, there were examples of teachers taking time to work on vocabulary and language structures. Most teachers expected and demonstrated that they would be teachers of language as well as of their particular subject. Very often, it was not the students asking for an explanation of a particular word that prompted a discussion. These teachers constantly checked for understanding of words, and concepts, throughout the lessons.

I say things in different ways, we write them down and go over them day after day. (Teacher)

OK. Some people have been asking about 'implication'. I will look it up in the dictionary for the exact meaning. (Teacher) (He read it out and then the class discussed examples)

In a senior biology class, the following conversation took place while students were working on labelling a diagram to revise work completed in an earlier unit:

Teacher: Good, you've got the larynx right

Student: Where do these words come from?

A discussion takes place about the origin of some of the words.

Teacher: What's the one that looks like cauliflower?

Then:

Teacher: What do we call this one?

Students: The epiglottis

Teacher: How do you spell this 'e' one?

Students: I don't know, Miss (or similar, no one knew)

Teacher: Spell it like you say it.

The students sound out the word.

Teacher: So, how many syllables do we have here?

Later in the group discussion the students commented on the help the teacher gives them in understanding the language they need to use.

She always helps us with it (language). She sounds out words. She explains and gives examples. She corrects us if we say it incorrectly. (Students)

Another teacher stopped beside two students discussing the meaning of the word 'queue'. After a further discussion and explanation on the teacher's part, the teacher checked that the student understood.

Now, can you tell me again what you think 'queue' means. Or maybe (give) an example?

Teachers checked for the understanding of meanings of words, their origins, synonyms and antonyms. They also discussed the structure of words, for example, breaking words into syllables and identifying prefixes and suffixes. Some teachers kept a list of key words for the unit displayed on the whiteboard or on the wall. Others got the students to set up a vocabulary list at the start of each unit. There were several examples of teachers referring back to these key words and checking that students had remembered their meaning and could use them. One teacher bought class dictionaries with his own money and modelled looking up words with the class.

5.7 Formative assessment

Black and Wiliam's (1998) examination of research in assessment demonstrates the importance of formative assessment practices on student achievement. Hattie (1999) reinforces this in his meta-analysis of literature on influences on student learning where he states that the single most important prescription for improving education is 'dollops of feedback':

"The most fundamental component of teaching is imparting information to students, assessing and evaluating the students' understanding of that information and then matching the next teaching act to the present understandings of the student." (Hattie, 1999:9).

The distinction is being made here between the giving of marks and grades associated with summative or end-point assessment and the formative assessment process that occurs in an ongoing way in every lesson. There were many examples, in every lesson, of teachers providing feedback to students, both verbally and in written form. Some teachers gave more feedback than others and were more expert at making the feedback specific enough to be useful for learning.

I try to be as honest as I can and focus on what they can do better. So I say things like, "You did a really good job on that newspaper, your layout was great and the stories were ideal for your audience. Next time you could think about....you know.....The students say to me that there's always something else! (Teacher)

In the group discussion the students in this teacher's class reinforced the value of getting this kind of feedback.

She gives us heaps of feedback. When she walks around the room. And when she marks our work. She shows that she has really read it. In one of our big assignments she gave us two full pages! She took a lot more time to really think about what we had done, you could tell. And she gave us back more than just a tick and a grade. It made us think about what we had done. We learned a lot from that. We all learned different things. Yes, it's OK if it's constructive. And because she does it for everybody we know it's not personal. (Students)

Latham (1997), citing Danielson (1996) and Silverman (1992), characterises high quality feedback as timely, accurate, substantive, constructive, specific and outcomes-focussed.

"These types of feedback all encourage and guide growth as opposed to explaining past performance. If a teacher limits feedback to explanation - with no clear reward for students who think about and respond to the comments - that teacher has missed an important learning opportunity. (Latham, 1997: 86)

There were many, many instances of teachers giving feedback and students moving on with their learning as a result. There were also examples where students were not afraid to make mistakes or were not

devastated by a poor result because they knew they would get feedback and be given strategies and help to improve.

In another subject, if you do something wrong you think, 'Oh my god'. But in English we never do because we know she will help us. She'll tell us where we went wrong and how to fix it up. We trust her to help us. Sometimes she gets us to do bits of it (the work) again just so we can show her that we know. (Students)

After giving the whole class feedback on an assignment, discussing it with them and making a list of what they needed to do next time the teacher said to the students:

It sounds like we didn't do very well but not all of you did all these things wrong in your essay. This is a collective 'oops'. (Teacher)

All the AIMHI schools are involved in a professional development contract, sponsored by the Ministry, in the area of formative assessment⁶. A few of the teachers were observed using practices typically associated with ABeL practices such as providing unit objectives, giving clear, student-friendly criteria for assignments and self-assessment activities. A number of the teachers provided the students with a cover page for each of their units. These cover pages described what they would learn during the unit, what assignments they would be completing, the criteria for marking and other useful information that made the expectations of the teacher very clear and set out what the students could expect from the teacher.

The teacher gives us a cover sheet for every unit and sometimes for a special topic. Like we got one today to start off static images and that's for the whole thing. Then we might get another one when we get to the bit about planning our own static image. (Students)

There was some evidence of teachers engaging the students in self-assessment activities and working hard at transferring the locus of control to students. Before getting students to complete a self-assessment of their work habits a teacher made the following comment:

Look at the assessment criteria. You know better than me what work has gone on. Next year the work habits will be absolutely critical. (Teacher)

They not only had the students work through the process but took time to get the students to understand why it is important.

Why do we do this? So we get better at our work for next year (Bursary). Why are we assessing the work? To recognise your strengths and the things you can improve on. (Teacher)

The researchers collected more data on the giving of informal verbal feedback and written feedback on students' work rather than the strategies most teachers associate with ABeL. The data suggest that the ABeL programme needs to focus on improving techniques for giving verbal and written feedback as well as the more structured processes associated with formative assessment.

5.8 Praising, encouraging and rewarding learning

Evans makes a clear distinction between praise and encouragement. In his view:

“Praise flatters, rewards, compares, or includes superlatives ('you're the best'). To praise is to commend their worth. Praise can easily lead to discouragement by fortifying the idea that unless

⁶ The contract is called ABeL (Assessment for Better Learning). To begin with, the core subject teachers in year 9 were involved. This has been expanded to include other teachers but the number involved varies from school to school. Only one school, so far, has made it a school-wide goal and included almost all its teachers in the programme.

work is praised it has no value. In contrast, encouraging statements are less judgmental and controlling. They help children appreciate their own work and behaviour while separating their work from their worth.” (Evans, 1996: 82)

So rather than saying ‘Your work is great’, the teacher could say, ‘I noticed you worked hard on this last paragraph’ thus shifting the focus from a students’ worth to a specific behaviour.

The researchers observed many, many examples of teachers praising students (for self-worth) in the general way described by Evans. Following are five examples from five different teachers.

That was awesome.

Choice, good one guys.

Good one. Excellent.

Man, you guys are onto it.

You’ve done a brilliant job!

There were also many, many examples of encouraging students (with a specific focus). Again, five different examples, each from a different teacher illustrate this point.

Yours was a tough one to do but you’ve done a good job of searching out the information.

Très bien. Your accent is spot on.

I couldn’t have got a list as long as this by myself. This is great. (To a whole class)

That was fast. You’ve got the idea of that ‘brushing’ effect.

You’ve measured that shoreline very accurately. Awesome.

The data suggest that these students are not adversely affected by praise as suggested by Evans (ibid). The general praise was as highly appreciated as the encouragement and both created feelings of positivity within the class as well as with individual students. What is crucial is that the praise is genuine.

You have to gear comments positively. You have to give lots of praise but mean it, with a passion. You can’t lie but if there’s a glimmer then I milk it to the max. (Teacher)

There were examples of praise and encouragement being given to a class, a group and on an individual basis. Often the individual encouragement was done quietly and in a step-by-step way, especially if an incorrect answer or explanation had been given or if the class or a particular student was experiencing difficulty.

Teacher: What kind of summarising are we doing?

Student: Flow chart.

Teacher: Are you sure? Weren’t we mindmapping?

It’s good you’ve got your title. What’s your next step? It’s got something to do with... (the students responds)...Then you go from there. Try who, what, why and how. (Teacher to an individual student)

Student: I’m confused.

Teacher: I don’t blame you – it would confuse anyone. Let’s find a way to work it out.

There was ample evidence of encouraging students to take risks, especially the risk of being wrong.

Student: Don't look at it, Sir.

Teacher: It's OK, it's OK. You're on the right track. It's OK to make mistakes.

Student: I'm going to get it wrong.

Teacher: That's OK

Student: I can't write it, Sir - only say it.

Teacher: So, let's say it and then I'll help you write it.

Teacher: You may all have different answers – that's OK – as long as you can justify them.

Student: Do we need to check with you?

Teacher: No, you do what you think.

Student: What say we get it wrong?

Teacher: That's OK. I'm interested in your ideas, not whether it's right or wrong.

Some teachers described using the learning itself as the reinforcer rather than focus on the student. Groups in a physics class were trying to construct a molecule with plastic models. The teacher gave encouragement, clues and support. Then one group finished. The teacher took the model and held it up for the class to see.

The issue was the molecule. That was the achievement. I didn't focus on the students. I depersonalised the praise because it was everybody's property. Then they all wanted a finished one (a molecule) so every group completed it. (Teacher)

Many of the teachers had a special rewards system. Rewards were given out for a work and behaviour and for either progress or achievement. They included:

- free time at the end of a lesson or the end of the last lesson for the week
- time to play a game
- showing a card trick or telling a joke
- an extra session in the library
- extra time in the computer room to complete work
- lunch at McDonalds for a group who had achieved an especially difficult or important goal such as full attendance for a term, completing home-work every night it was set
- extra time in the classroom at lunchtime to complete work and chat with the teacher as he or she worked
- selecting music for the students to listen to while working
- pens, pencils, plastic sleeves to store their work
- a small present and a thank you card for helping set up a special school-wide event with a teacher
- a flip card of study notes prepared by the teacher
- buying a class game (a special reward)

There was no teacher that used edible rewards on a daily, or even a weekly basis. However, teachers and students reported that students loved getting sweets or other edible treats for special reasons.

5.9 Implications

There were a number of effective approaches and strategies used by many of the teachers in the study that helped the students to understand what they are learning, actively involved students in the process and helped them to take ownership of that process. They used strategies that promoted and encouraged student self-efficacy and which differentiated for different abilities and ways of learning. They praised and encouraged and provided students with feedback about their work that motivated and helped them improve on past performance.

All teachers in all the AIMHI schools need opportunities to learn about and understand all these approaches and strategies. They need the kind of professional development and support that allows them to translate these practices into classrooms through their effective planning, delivery and interactions.

6.0 BEHAVIOUR MANAGEMENT

It needs to be remembered that the observations took place from almost mid-year through to the end of the year. We did talk to teachers and students about what it was like at the beginning of the year, but we did not observe it. Teachers and students had, therefore, had some months to get to know each other and learn to work together.

The overall impression of most of the classes was one of busyness, focussed activity at a high pace, a relaxed atmosphere and an ethos of mutual respect and enjoyment.

In the section on the Importance of the Group, the ways in which teachers share responsibility for managing class behaviour are discussed. They are not repeated here but need to be considered alongside the following.

6.1 Induction

The beginning of the year is a time at which these teachers work with the class to establish ground rules. One important reason for this is to encourage group cohesion. The other reason is to ensure the students are very clear about what the teacher's personal expectations are.

Emmer et al (1980) and Evertson and Emmer (1982) discovered in their research that, "in both elementary and secondary classrooms, the start of school is critical to effective management" (Evertson and Harris, 1992:75). They documented the importance of classroom rules and procedures, and the clear communication of teacher expectations. They found that in classrooms where this happens, "there are improved student task engagements, less inappropriate behaviour, smoother transitions between activities, and generally higher academic performance". (Ibid:76) Neville's recent work in one of the AIMHI schools reinforced, for these schools, the importance that "students are clear about the rules and processes" (Neville, 1998:59). Kerr and Nelson (1989:157) stress the establishment of rules and consequences, with the students, well in advance of potential crisis situations. Reglin (1993:53) notes the importance of following up on the expectations by communicating them throughout the school year.

No we don't laugh at other people's mistakes, remember our agreement. Ten points to him for coming up to do it. (Teacher)

There was a high degree of consistency in the teacher expectations, although each teacher expressed it in their own way. They included:

- Getting to class on time
- Beginning work immediately
- Not disrupting other students
- Being polite and well mannered
- Keeping noise to a reasonable level
- Keeping movement around the class appropriate to the task
- Doing best work
- Completing work
- Respecting property
- No put downs

Observations, discussions, and student comparisons of different classes they attend, have enabled us to generate a list of what behaviours some teachers expect but which are **not** expected in these classrooms. They include:

- Silence
- Not talking to each other
- Staying in your seat
- Not asking a question

There appeared to be quite a high level of individual freedom permitted providing it did not adversely affect the student's work or the work of others. We observed students, on occasions, leaving the room with permission, walking around, sharing gear, sharpening pencils, borrowing teachers' gear, sharing jokes and talking about each other's work.

We also occasionally saw students off task, day dreaming, throwing paper and involved in other unproductive learning activities. Teachers were usually aware of their behaviour and intervened if it did not stop reasonably promptly. The intervention was almost always quiet and low key such as taking students aside, talking softly one-to-one, joking and getting them back on task, speaking to them in their home language or the teacher giving a message through body language.

The overall impression was one of the teacher's trusting and giving students the benefit of the doubt until it was evident that they have abused this.

6.2 Routines

Each teacher had their own style and routines were part of this.

There was no pattern, for instance, in when the class roll was taken. Some began the lesson by marking the roll in a formal way by calling out names and greeting each student. Others did it quietly themselves later in the lesson when students were working independently.

Lateness was handled differently by different teachers. Some teachers expected a student who arrived late to come to them immediately either with a note or an explanation. In other rooms a late student would just sit down and get on with the work and the teacher would go to them quietly at a convenient time for the explanation. Whatever the process, it was always followed up.

Some particular activities became routines in some classrooms. These were the individual ideas that teachers had for settling a class down and focussing them on work. Examples included a brief maths quiz revising work from the previous lesson, a few rounds of 'Pictionary', class brainstorming ideas, physical warm-ups for PE, class discussion on the work of the previous lesson or getting out homework and checking it. In each instance they had become part of the expected routine and students knew how to respond to them.

As we have noted elsewhere, these teachers take their school responsibilities seriously and roll taking, absences and lateness are dealt with each lesson. How they choose to do so, however, is a matter of style and preference and varied greatly.

What mattered was not what the routines were, but that there were routines that the students understood and that were consistently implemented.

“Research on the development of expertise shows that novice teachers must master at least the rudiments of classroom management before they can become skilled at instruction. That is, attention to routines and procedures, the physical environment, and the establishment of norms and expectations for student behaviour are prerequisites to good instruction” (Danielson, 1996:123)

Several of the teachers who had taught at different types of schools felt that the students in these AIMHI schools, in particular, liked and responded well to routines and that they were more important in these schools than in others they had taught in.

6.3 Reinforcement, praise and affirmation

Positive reinforcement was a strategy all of the teachers employed but how they did it was again a matter of style.

“There is no universal reinforcer although praise, commendation and positive attention, recognition rewards, are generally reinforcing” (Harlan, 1996:71)

In some classes the teacher frequently said words of praise so the whole class could hear. Sometimes this was directed to the whole class, sometimes to a group and sometimes to individuals.

I tell them all – you are not stupid, keep trying, go hard. Don’t think you are dumb and don’t let others think that. Show me, and them, that you can do it. (Teacher)

Other teachers used a more quiet approach and relied on brief and quietly spoken comments and/or positive body language.

Some praise was very specific and some was more general affirmation. It was given for a wide range of reasons including excellent work, effort, progress, good behaviour, honesty, trying, supporting group values, caring behaviour and achievements outside of the class or school.

Students valued this positive reinforcement highly and some said *we never get sick of hearing it, never!* Students found it easy to describe how it helped them and their learning.

It gives me courage to try again.

It makes you feel good about yourself and then you want to learn.

It shows that he believes in us and then we want to try hard for him.

Teachers understand the power of praise and positive reinforcement and the effect it has on their students. Many try to target particular student needs through the reinforcement.

Her confidence is growing so I make sure I keep telling her that I know she can do it and praise every small step she takes. (Teacher)

6.4 Standards

Most of the teachers set very high standards for themselves. They were usually particular about the way they were personally presented, fussy about the cleanliness and tidiness of the room, on time for class, well prepared and, as much as possible, up to date with marking.

This is not to say that there was any one way of dressing but there were no teachers in the sample, in contrast to a few in the staff rooms, whose clothes were not well groomed. Many of the students noticed these things and commented on them.

She wears cool clothes. Not our sort of clothes, but she is always colour co-ordinated and everything is smart. (Students)

Tidiness in the classroom was the norm (See 7.2). Some teachers had particular rules for their room such as no paper outside of the bin, no food in the bin, desks/tables to be kept clean, books to be cared for and shelves to be kept tidy. Students understood the reasons for these standards and generally respected them.

She always has a tidy room. It is well organised and it looks tidy. It changes the mood of the room and our mood. When it (the room) is tidy, we become tidy. (Students)

In some classes the whole class took a few minutes before the end of the period to tidy the room.

Standards of behaviour and language were clearly understood and enforced. Manners and courtesy are expected at all times.

You people need to show some manners when someone is talking. What do you want people to do when you are talking? (Teacher)

Standards of work presentation were modelled, taught and enforced. Again, reasons were given and understood by students. A barrier to this being achieved was often a lack of gear such as pencils, pens, paper, rulers and other equipment. Most teachers were relaxed about students sharing with each other and most had a supply they loaned to students for the lesson. Students appreciated the teacher doing this for them and were usually careful to give it back before the end of the lesson.

6.5 Good and Bad 'Strict'

When students described a teacher as being 'strict' they regarded it as a positive trait. This is closely related to the previous section on the enforcement of standards. Students expect, and respect, a teacher who is strict and does not let them get away with inappropriate behaviour. They resent teachers who are not strict and find it hard to work in their rooms.

It is difficult to immediately relate this to the observations because the 'strict' behaviour of teachers was not very apparent to an outsider. It became clear that there is a degree of self-fulfilling prophecy in this process. Because students know a teacher will be strict, if necessary, and because a climate of respect has developed in the classroom, those teachers do not often have to be overtly strict. They can afford to allow, and even encourage, a relaxed learning environment because the expectations are clearly understood.

We clown around but only to a limit. He trusts us to know when to stop and get into line. (Student)

Many of the teachers did not need to say much to influence behaviour. Students were very aware and observant of teacher body language.

Good strict is when they are not too strict over small things and they talk afterwards just to us. You can tell by their facials and their voice tone and how they act around you. You can just tell. (Student)

When his face has gone pink we notice when it's time to stop. (Student)

She smiles all the time and when she stops smiling we know it's deadly serious. (Student)

During the student discussions it became evident that some teachers in their school are strict in ways that students find unacceptable. They described 'bad strict' teachers as *yelling, shouting, growling when you ask them a question, putting us down, making us feel shamed, not having fun or jokes and giving us the 'evils' (angry body language and facial expressions)*.

6.6 Sanctions/consequences

There were no examples, during the observations, of a student being sanctioned in a serious way although the students made it clear to the researchers that they were in no doubt these teachers would do what was necessary to maintain a classroom in which the focus was on work and learning.

Most strategies were preventative ones and these have been discussed elsewhere. Teachers tended to use quietly spoken comments to individual students to signal that they were pushing the limits. The following are a small sample of the types of comments that are quietly said to one student:

(Student's name), are you with us now?

I know you will be able to work this out.

You are doing a lot of talking there. What can we put into this paragraph?

I am off hand with reprimands. I make it appear inconsequential to lookers on. I don't make a big deal of things. They know it's important but they don't feel targeted. If they don't respond immediately, I deal with it more directly. They always opt for the quiet option. (Teacher)

The following are comments that were made to a group or to the whole class:

I'm competing with talk, which makes it harder than it should be.

This group must be waiting for their servants to clear up for them.

You lot have jumped the queue. Watch out for them at the bus stop.

Do I remember saying turn to the person next to you and start talking? I don't remember saying that.

Some teachers had a particular strategy they used as a whole class signal that behaviour was going beyond what was reasonable.

e.g. One teacher said clearly to the whole class "The noise is unacceptable". She walked to the front and said "1, 2, 3!". Students were silent and looked at her, and she refocused them on the activities.

e.g. One teacher walked to the front of the class and held up her two hands with her fingers spread. Without saying anything, she began folding down one finger at a time. As students noticed, they nudged each other and the class became silent within about a minute. As with the previous teacher, she immediately talked to them about the task they were doing and re-motivated them to get on with it.

e.g. One teacher had a system of coloured warning cards like a soccer referee.

e.g. Several teachers had a system of writing a student's name up on the board as a warning. Most made no comment when they did this. If a student's behaviour then improved, the name was rubbed off. If not, a further consequence would follow.

Using physical presence and body language is another strategy.

I use eye contact and then a small signal to give them the message. It builds trust with them and achieves results. If it is uniform, I point with my finger. If they are chewing, I make mouth movements. (Teacher)

Some teachers made a student(s) move seats if they were disrupting others or not working themselves. The reason was always explained.

In all of these strategies, the aim is to allow the students to stop the behaviour but not to be shamed in the process. They also aim at the causing the least possible disruption to the lesson.

He is good with his discipline. Some teachers send you out. He makes you stop and think about your behaviour but you are not exposed. (Student)

I use my time to teach. I won't allow them to distract me from my aim and role. If they err, I say their name quietly and they know what that means. It gives them security and predictability knowing that I am monitoring things. (Teacher)

Some teachers did single out individual students and, when questioned by the researchers, explained that this was an issue of timing and trust.

It is not something I would do early in the year because you have to build a relationship with the kids first so that it is safe for it to happen. Usually singling out kids is a turn off for them all but it can be used as a strategy. I use it selectively for a purpose and only with some kids. I can get away with it but I accept it from them also, them having me on I mean. (Teacher)

The students in the class referred to by the teacher in this quotation, verified his opinion.

Sir is a very special teacher. He is the best teacher in the school. We all want to be in his classes. He is 'straight up' with us and we trust him because he does so much for us. We know he would never shame anyone. He wants the best for us all. (Students)

The two more serious sanctions described by the students were being sent outside the door temporarily, or being kept back in class in their own time. Both were preceded with a series of warnings.

If you do it again, you are choosing to go outside. (Teacher)

Having to give up their personal or recreational time was regarded as serious by most students. These teachers usually did their own 'detentions' and many did not call them that. When necessary, they used interval, lunch time or after school to keep students in the classroom. This time is used, by some teachers, as a counselling time with students.

She is strict. We get detention at lunch time if we don't do our work. Sometimes we have to talk about our own behaviour and try to understand why we are being bad. She encourages us to change for our own good. (Teacher)

The most serious sanction described by some teachers was to contact and involve parents.

6.7 Humour

Almost all of the observations included examples, often many, of humorous episodes. Sometimes it was something the teacher said and other times it was students being funny. It is extremely important to students that humour is a frequent part of classroom interactions. They take a great deal of pleasure from humour and feel that it significantly adds to an environment that helps them to learn. It helps them to relax, to enjoy their interactions with each other and motivates them to participate and enjoy their work.

She encourages us and makes jokes. It breaks the ice. Breaks the tension. Loosens everyone up. Gets us active and ready to make an effort. (Students)

This does not mean that the teacher has to be a witty or naturally humorous person and it does not mean that teachers and students use humour in the same way. Students often described a teacher's humour as *dry*. They meant that it was different from their own humour and they often didn't think it was especially funny. What they really appreciated, however, was a teacher's willingness to interact in a fun way with them and for a teacher to allow and enjoy their humour.

We have our own group humour. Miss is really good. She lets us get on with it so long as we do our work and don't interrupt others. (Student)

She makes us laugh so that we will talk and join in the lesson and it works. We don't usually find her jokes funny but we laugh. We laugh at her but not because she is stupid. We laugh in a nice way because she treats us as equals and that's why it's fun. (Students)

Henson (1996:322), an American writing about effective teaching strategies in middle and secondary schools came to the same conclusions. He maintains that students rate very highly the quality of a sense of humour in their teachers. He cautions that too much humour can cross the fine line of control and the teacher may lose it. However, he sees it as a positive attribute, and suggests that rather than trying to consciously use humour, the teacher should rather be alert to the humour generated by the students and welcome that.

In particular, students told us that they appreciated it when a teacher made jokes about, or against, themselves. For a teacher to be willing to laugh at themselves, or their own mistakes, gives important messages to students about taking risks, learning from mistakes and the teacher also being a learner. It helps students to feel safe to try things and take learning risks themselves.

I know when I was in the fifth form at school I often used to hit a block (in thinking). I lost more hair each time and look at me now. (Lots of laughter) What is important is that you don't just sit there and waste time when you hit a block. Ask for help or do something to move past it. (Balding teacher)

Teacher: So what's a polygon?

Student: Don't know

The teacher pretends to cry loudly in front of the class and gets the laughter and attention of them all.

Teacher: I can't have done a good enough job of teaching you that if you don't know. All those who don't know come up here and I will go over it again. The rest -----

In one class there was a student who was a very good break-dancer. He often did a small dance in the classroom before, or between lessons and the class loved it. During one lesson the teacher felt the class was really struggling and were off task. He suddenly said :

"Come on (student's name) do your dance". The student did, and the teacher joined in. (Lots of laughter from all) Then the teacher directed them back to their work and there was a new energy level in the classroom. (Observation)

When there is humour in the classroom, students found the atmosphere to be more relaxed and felt happier about being involved. They described some classrooms in which there is no humour as being *tense, boring, hard to concentrate, unmotivating and tiring*. Having a relaxed atmosphere does not lead to less work or less pressure to work. On the contrary. It means that the students are willing to work harder because they more motivated by the enjoyable atmosphere in the room.

6.8 Avoiding confrontation

Teachers talked about, and demonstrated in their classrooms, the importance of avoiding a confrontational situation with a student. This does not mean that they avoid dealing with any issues or concerns. It means that they do it in a way that allows the student to save face and work through an issue without feeling 'backed into a corner'.

Our students sometimes react defiantly if you confront them face on about something. I try to defuse the situation by handling it very quietly or giving them time to calm down before we talk it through. (Teacher)

I start off at a very low level in the hope they will respond and sort it out themselves. They often do if you give them the chance. If they don't, then I need to turn up the heat a bit, but I pick the time and place so they don't feel shamed. (Teacher)

Kerr and Nelson (1989) in their book on managing behaviour in the classroom suggest that negative teacher interaction with a student who is misbehaving increases the incidence of the inappropriate behaviour. They advocate interventions that are less intrusive and restrictive and may be accomplished without significant interruption of the ongoing activities. Relf et al (1998b:13) suggests several ways of coping with difficult situations including “Ignore a provocation” and “Make light of the situation and do not always seek to conquer”.

Giving **time** and **space** are the two key strategies. Allowing a student, and/or the teacher the time to calm down and be able to talk without being in a highly emotional state is helpful. Teachers and students mentioned the importance of personal space not being invaded or threatened. Literally backing off or walking away is sometimes the first move to resolving an issue.

You have to use your judgement about when to back off and walk away. I go back to it later. I never leave it, but its not about a battle and we both have to win for the student to learn. (Teacher)

When kids come on to you, sidestep. I've got time on my side. I don't want to cause grief. I don't want to fuel it. (Teacher)

Some teachers described how keeping students as partners in the working relationship sometimes means doing pro-active and positive things before insisting on what you want done. This avoids confrontation. It may mean joining in some behaviour briefly, before insisting that it stop.

The students were talking about a TV programme from last night instead of getting on with their work. The teacher stood beside the group and briefly joined the discussion, with a smile and some humour. Then he pointed to their work and, without any words spoken about the need to get back on task, the students began work again. (Observation)

6.9 Not taking things personally

Several teachers mentioned that a strategy they use in relating to their students is not to take issues or criticism personally. They focus on dealing with the behaviour or dealing with the issue.

Relf et al (1998b:6) recommend separating the behaviour from the person and “Talk about the behaviour as if talking about an object”.

The teachers put personal attacks down to a lack of student skills, deal with the issue and try to help the student gain the required communication skills.

I can forgive them their behaviour. It's never so bad that I think they're deliberately sabotaging or being destructive. There is usually a reason so I try to work with that and help them to see there are other ways to deal with their problem. (Teacher)

There were no examples observed of students making personal attacks on their teacher and so this was not discussed with students. Their overall attitudes and feelings towards these teachers would indicate that such an attack would not be intentional and would indicate that the teachers are correct in their interpretation of it.

6.10 Taking personal responsibility

These teachers had a range of ways in which they made students accountable for their problematic behaviour. They did not expect other teachers, or senior staff, to do their disciplining for them. Students made it clear that they behave better for these teachers than for some of their other teachers. This is because they enjoy, and are more involved in, their learning in these classes. It is also because of the relationship they have with these teachers. Teachers did discuss how they discipline students, when necessary, and the students confirmed the effectiveness of their methods.

Keeping students under supervision in their own time, such as interval, lunch time or after school, were the most common ways.

6.11 Summary

The main approaches used by teachers centred around the prevention of problems through planned strategies, consistency of messages and follow-up, and the de-escalation of problems at their beginning through non-confrontational and quiet management.

He always speaks quietly, his tone of voice, and usually has a smile. Sometimes he turns it into a joke. We all know that he means it but it's how he does it that makes it OK for us not to feel angry with him. (Students)

'Problem' behaviours were approached from the perspective of finding solutions and changing the behaviours.

I sit the students with behaviour problems close to me so I can give them more help. (Teacher)

Teachers and students know that they need each other to make the learning happen. Ultimately, the teacher has the authority, but these teachers work hard at getting the students to take responsibility for their own behaviour.

I give them a bit of rope, quite a lot sometimes. But I keep hold of one end of it. They know I have the ultimate sanction. (Teacher)

Evertson and Harris cite comprehensive research reviews by Johnson and Brooks 1979, Brophy 1983, and Doyle 1986, and they conclude that :

“As a result of a broadened definition of classroom management, today’s research moves away from a focus on controlling students’ behaviour and looks instead at teachers’ actions to create, implement, and maintain a classroom environment that supports learning.” (Evertson and Harris, 1992:74)

7.0 CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

This section outlines the kind of physical environment that researchers observed and the students described as making classrooms welcoming, comfortable and helpful places in which to learn. Hattie (1999), Danielson (1996) and Goldstein (1995) all cite evidence of the importance of ensuring that the physical environment is conducive to learning. Not all the teachers observed put time and energy into creating the kind of classroom outlined below. However, when many of the features were incorporated into the classroom environment and when, quite clearly, it was important to the teacher, almost all the groups of students interviewed from those rooms voluntarily commented on the positive effects of being in such a classroom. These teachers, from the very beginning of the year, make thoughtful decisions about how they set up their rooms, how they gain ownership of the rooms by the students and how they use the physical environment to support their teaching and learning programmes.

7.1 Ownership of the classroom

Many of these teachers work hard to get the students involved in taking ownership of the classrooms. They use a number of strategies to do this. Several teachers divided the walls into sections, one for each of the classes they taught. Some of these sections included student work as well as displays related to their current topic. This gave students from across the year levels the chance to see the work being done by other classes and provided an opportunity for the teacher to talk to the juniors, in particular, about the work they might be doing in subsequent years.

Several teachers asked the students to bring posters and items from home to decorate the walls. Sometimes they did not relate to the subject being taught but were one way of getting the students to see the classrooms as theirs. One class had a full floor to ceiling mural that had been painted by the class.

We make the charts. We are the teacher. We explain it to the class and then they stay there as a reference. (Student)

Some classrooms had a very Maori and Pacific flavour. Display areas were backed with bright lavalava. There were greetings or words expressing classroom values or mottos displayed in a number of the languages. Some rooms had posters of Maori and Pacific performers or artists and reprints of their work.

Both students and teachers commented on how much these students enjoy looking at photographs of themselves and their classmates. Some teachers used photos to endorse feelings of ownership and to get students used to noticing other items on display, especially those directly related to teaching and learning.

A critical factor in encouraging students to take ownership of the classroom is getting them to put up displays or, at least, getting them to help.

Some teachers say they haven't got time to put up displays. I just can't bear being in a dull and boring classroom and I get the students to put all the displays up. The work (the students' work) is there anyway and I just supply the stapler and the coloured card for the headings. (Teacher)

7.2 Providing a clean, tidy and organised environment

The cleanliness and tidiness of the rooms were a reflection of the high standards expected of the students by many of the teachers and helped to engender pride in, and a respect for, their classrooms. These teachers expected that books and resources would be well cared for, that desks would be kept clean, shelves would be kept tidy and the rubbish put into the bin. These teachers commented when students dropped paper on the floor or fired paper at a bin and it missed. One teacher had a basketball hoop attached directly over the rubbish bin. The students loved it. It reinforced messages of getting paper **in** the bin and made it fun at the same time. It was not abused by the students. Students understood the reasons

for these standards and, sometimes, had been involved in drawing them. Provided they knew the reasons for the standards expected and routines to be followed, most students understood and respected them.

Miss does not let us put food in the bin. We take it to the outside bins. Then the room doesn't smell and we don't get rats. (Students)

These teachers expected the students to leave the rooms tidy and ready for the next class and took a few minutes before the end of the period to tidy the room.

OK everyone. There's four minutes to go before the bell. Once you've copied down your homework you need to straighten up the desks and make sure everything is tidy for the next class. After two minutes the teacher approaches a group of students and softly says...I'm sure these desks were not like that when you came in. We need to get them back in order so the next class can have a smooth start to their lesson. (Teacher)

Many of these teachers provided felt pens, glue sticks and other equipment for the students to use. Sometimes there were class sets of equipment available and, in other instances, teachers had 'spares' to give out when students arrived without the gear they needed. In the AIMHI baseline report (Hawk and Hill, 1996) the data indicated that teachers were divided in their views about supplying students with basic equipment in order that they could participate in the lesson. There were teachers who argued that it created a dependency that was not teaching the students 'skills for life'. The data from the observations shows that the effective teachers in these schools do not allow the lack of equipment to interrupt the teaching and learning process. When students do not have the classroom equipment they need, they have it on hand for them to borrow. If a class set was being used, teachers invariably gave the job of collecting in the materials and checking that all the gear was returned to a student. There were very few instances observed where gear was not returned and if it was not returned the teachers found non-threatening ways of getting it back.

Before we go today, the two pens that are missing off the table need to come back. You can put them back in your own time. (Teacher)

We need the ruler back before any of you can go. If you 'accidentally' took it, please 'accidentally' put it back. (Teacher)

Some schools are now providing a tissue dispenser in each classroom. To begin with teachers were fearful that students would misuse the system and it would become expensive and, therefore, unsustainable. This has not happened and teachers and students report that it saves students having to leave the classrooms to blow their noses in the toilets and missing valuable class time or not using tissues and resorting to sniffing and other unhealthy practices.

7.3 Furniture and seating

There was no single pattern of furniture organisation that emerged from the data as being preferred by teachers or students. What was consistently evident was the thought teachers put into the way they organised the rooms. In most instances, teachers took into consideration the sorts of issues raised by Reglin:

“Seating plans in classrooms have an ‘action zone’ like a triangle whose base is at the front row of desks. According to much literature, high achieving, well-behaved students are in this zone where they are given most of the attention. This reinforces the achievement of the high achievers. Minorities and low achievers tend not to sit in the ‘action zone’: they ‘hide’ in the back rows. (Reglin,1993: 54)

Reglin's response to this is co-operative ability groups and rotating students to avoid the formation of, what he calls, ‘in groups’.

The researchers saw desks organised in groups of between three and six desks and in rows of two, three and sometimes four desks. Sometimes these rows faced the front but, sometimes, the rows faced into the middle of the room. There were some classrooms where there was a combination of groups and rows. Another configuration observed was the horseshoe which become a double horseshoe with the larger classes. In some of the specialist rooms, especially Science, there were larger desks, more like benches, that are difficult to move and to rearrange into any configuration other than in rows facing the front.

Some teachers had quite deliberate seating plans for their classes and particular reasons for seating students where they did.

Last year I created a seating plan, in groups, to split the girls up from their mates. They were in little cliques. And then they bonded. This year they can choose where they want to go provided they work hard together. (Teacher)

Some teachers found a set seating plan helpful when they were learning the students' names at the beginning of the year. Other criteria for organising the furniture and seating in particular ways included the requirements of the unit of work, class dynamics, behaviour and learning needs and, occasionally, physical needs such as eyesight and hearing.

I shift the desks around each lesson sometimes. It depends on the purpose of the lesson and the class behaviour. (Teacher)

I change my room all the time. I had them in small groups a while ago and that worked because we were doing lots of group work. Now we're in rows of three for no special reason. The change keeps us all alive. (Teacher)

Sometimes students were seated according to ability so that teachers could work with groups of students doing the same kind of work. In one of these classes, the groups were rearranged at the beginning of each unit depending on the outcomes of a pre-test. Some teachers preferred to have students who needed a lot of help at the front of the class so the teacher could pay closer attention to their work and give them support.

There were teachers in the sample who allowed the students to sit wherever they liked and made no demands about where students sat unless there was a particular behaviour issue they felt could be resolved by making a seating change.

I let them work in whatever group they like - unless they don't work. (Teacher)

Nonetheless, the students in these classes often went to the same seats each time.

Some teachers had cushions or couches in their rooms. In all cases the teachers made it clear during the lessons when the couches and cushions could be used and the students were always seated at their desks at the beginning of each lesson and for the more formal instruction sections.

7.4 Displays

These classrooms were used well for a range of teacher and student generated displays. Students made comparisons between classrooms where displays remained unchanged or were changed very infrequently and became faded, worn and tired and those which were changed at regular intervals, were appropriate to the work being done at the time and looked colourful and attractive. It is one of the indicators students use to measure whether a teacher cares about them or not and is committed to helping them learn.

Starting a unit

Some of the displays were designed to provide a context for the unit of study and were used by teachers to help bring the topic alive in the classroom, especially at the beginning of a unit. These displays comprised collections of posters, photos, diagrams, models, artefacts and books. Sometimes they invited interaction with questions to ponder or answer as part of an assignment.

Work in progress

Other displays were examples of work in progress. These included summary statements prepared by the class that related to work covered in a lesson, notes from class or student group discussions, brainstorm sheets and lists of key words. Sometimes teachers used these displays to help students to complete tasks in subsequent lessons or to provide a rich source of ideas and vocabulary to which they could refer students or to which students could refer, independently of the teacher.

Encouraging independent learning

Another strategy, used to promote independent learning through the use of displays, was 'how to' posters and 'ready reckoners'. Examples seen in the classrooms were how to set out a letter, construct a story or an essay, set out a science experiment, how to thread a sewing machine, how to present a graph or a table and how to save a life. Examples of the 'ready reckoners' included Maths formulae, basic facts Maths charts, Science tables and formulae and punctuation charts.

There was one example where the teacher had prepared 'how to' sheets for students to take away and use. Students were observed using these when they needed to know how to do something and the teacher was busy with other students.

Student work

There were many examples of teachers displaying students' work. Sometimes, these displays were used to showcase best work when an assignment was finished or at the end of a unit. At other times, teachers used student work as an exemplar before a task or assignment was set to demonstrate what the students could strive to achieve. There were examples of teachers using work from other years for this purpose or from across the current year levels. An art teacher often refers students in senior classes to innovative techniques or interpretations produced by junior students or uses exemplars from senior classes as a motivator for what they might achieve in Art in the longer term. There was one example of a teacher using her own work as an exemplar and students being encouraged to critique it in terms of the criteria set for the students to achieve. The class reached the conclusion that they would be able to produce better work than their teacher had, in this instance. The teacher was delighted.

Wider world education

A number of the classrooms, and not only Social Sciences classrooms, had displays that encouraged the students to think about places and events beyond the classroom, the school and their immediate community. These teachers had globes, or maps of New Zealand or the world on display. In one classroom, student's names were linked to their countries of origin. In some other classrooms, cuttings and articles from community, city, national, and even international, newspapers and magazines had been put on display. One teacher organised his display into 'World news', 'New Zealand news' and 'Manukau City news' and 'College news'. In addition to raising students' awareness of current events, these displays were sometimes set up in relation to a current topic or were used as ideas starters.

Several teachers wrote a new quotation on the whiteboard at the start of each week. The students said that they look for it every Monday when they come into the classroom and it provides an opportunity for reflection and discussion. Examples seen included:

“If you are not looking you are not learning.”

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart.”

“Champions are not just people who never fail but people who never quit.”

The students love the quotes. They remind me if I ever forget to write them up. (Teacher)

Other teachers had quotes from famous people of the past displayed around their rooms, each conveying an important message to the students that could be referred to and discussed from time to time.

“Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm.” Winston Churchill

“Never doubt a small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead

“I’ve failed over and over again in my life - and that’s why I succeed.” Michael Jackson.

7.5 Administration and organisation

Rules and codes of conduct

Most of the teachers observed had school rules or codes of conduct displayed in a prominent place in their classrooms, often above or to either side of the board at the front of the room. In almost every case, these had been supplied by the school as a laminated poster and were in every classroom. Sometimes a teacher had a classroom code or a set of values on display that had been drawn up with students at the beginning of the year. Sometimes they were their own personal expectations of their classes or had been agreed to with students in response to a particular behavioural or learning need (See 8.1).

Lesson briefings

Lesson briefings were used by many of the teachers to help the students, as a reminder for them and the students of the progress being made in the lesson. (See 5.3). Sometimes these were on photocopied sheets but, more often, were recorded on the whiteboard or blackboard. These lesson outlines, often with headings and sub-headings, were written up on the board before the students came into the room. They were discussed at the beginning of the lesson and were often referred to as the lesson progressed. They provided an immediate visual checklist for both teachers and students of the progress being made.

Reminders

A number of the teachers used a particular section of their whiteboard or blackboard to write reminders for their students and record homework. The students commented that they always knew where to look for that particular information. If these teachers taught their classes in the same room, the section was divided into an area for each of their classes.

7.6 Building pride in the school

There were several classrooms where school symbols or items of news about the school were displayed. Sometimes the teachers were responsible for putting them up and in other instances it was the work of the students. Examples included:

- a wooden plaque of the school's crest
- posters of the school's logo and motto
- a copy of the weekend's sports results, posted every Monday
- newspaper articles about the school posted on the class noticeboard
- cut-outs of words representing the school's values

8.0 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GROUP

All the teachers, to some extent, understood the importance and positive potential of the class as a collective. Some placed a very high importance on the development of class cohesion and co-operation and the benefits were obvious and readily described by students.

8.1 Planned strategy

Really cohesive classes were a result of a planned process organised by the teacher. Teachers explained that they believed the positive outcomes were worth putting time and energy into building class climate and they began doing this from the first session they had with the class.

It is the relationship within a class that is crucial. Peers are so crucial, belonging is crucial. The class operates better if that feeling is there. (Teacher)

It is the collective that is important to how well the learning takes place. Classes are like a family. They need to get on well together. (Teacher)

We are the best class. We work well together and the teacher expects it. He talks a lot about working as a group and us being the best class. (Students)

Each teacher had their own way of interacting with a class but the following are examples of strategies they used:

- Introductions where each student is given time to talk about themselves and other things that are important to them
- Ensuring the teacher remembers each name and pronounces it correctly
- The teacher sharing their own story, life or other personal perspectives with the class. Students enjoyed knowing their teacher had his/her own personal interests and family
- Organising social activities together
- Setting up ground rules with the class about behaviour, personal interactions and teacher expectations.
- Decorating the classroom to make it look and feel special. If the class is a form class as well, this is especially important. Even for visiting classes, many teachers had a wall area designated on which work could be displayed.
- Ongoing discussions about class dynamics to reinforce positive patterns of behaviour
- Building team activities into their classroom programmes
- Encouraging words, phrases and activities that are particular to that class only. These 'class jokes' became a symbol of cohesion

It's us together, our class, our work. The teacher gets to know us and we get to know them. Then it's our own special thing. We have our own jokes. (Students)

Most classes spent time at the beginning of the year agreeing on ways to operate together. Some called it ground rules. An example follows:

3 KH Rules

Consideration

Respect

Co-operation

Courtesy

Manners

Common sense

Work as a team

8.2 Group locus of control

As well as wanting to shift the individual locus of control from teacher to individual student, these teachers worked in a planned way to achieve high levels of class based control for classroom behaviour, student support and learning interactions.

Class members help to motivate each other to work and to achieve. They keep each other on task and give each other positive feedback and encouragement.

“Most teachers feel a normal and logical resistance to giving up control. But giving children the opportunity to become autonomous by allowing them to make decisions does not mean losing control; it means providing a framework for learning, having expectations and then adding plenty of wiggle room for times of self direction.” (Zachlod, 1996:51)

An outcome that was not specifically planned for was that the teacher no longer has to do all the work. Class members took over roles such as controlling behaviour, handing out work, setting up groups, monitoring class progress through a task, affirming and praising each other and peer assessment.

“Giving children a sense of ownership in their classroom can lead to the kind of open and cooperative learning environment that most teachers dream about.” (Ibid:50)

8.3 Safe competition

The teachers wanted to encourage their students to take risks and try new challenges with their learning. Many students have become afraid of trying something new in case they ‘fail’ or show themselves up as inadequate. In particular they do not want to be seen to not do well in front of their peers.

“Peer pressure is always present in groups, whether harnessed by the teacher or not. The teacher must attempt to foster positive and humane peer pressure that encourages a sense of togetherness or belonging among members of the class, cooperation and caring of students for each other and better acceptance of those who are at the social fringes of the group.” (Kauffman et al, 1998:108)

She motivates us by telling us we are capable. She tells us how many people passed and how many didn't. It seems like a competition but it's not a real competition, and we know that, because we could all pass. We use it for fun and it can help because it makes us think 'I've got as many brains as they have.' Then we try harder to be in the pass group next time. (Students)

Teachers talked about the importance of taking risks and that to do so demonstrates the level of respect people have for each other. The class is coached in how to respond to each other during an activity. They

are taught how to encourage and support activities. “Put downs” are dealt with immediately. A group of students recalled one of their teachers stopping a class when a student behaved in an unsupportive way and they all spent the rest of the period working on the issue.

Teachers recalled step by step ways of working towards building this safe environment. Students were also aware of the process that had taken place and gave examples of things they had done in class that they had felt nervous about earlier in the year.

Our class has ‘magic time’ with the pen when we go up to the board and write out an answer. We are all OK about it now. Its our class thing so it feels safe. (Student)

Some teachers were very active in participating themselves and modelling the risk-taking and supportive behaviour. There were several instances when the groups of students recalled the time when their teacher was the first person to ‘give a speech’ or acted out the activity they wanted the class to do.

We each had to prepare a class speech on our ‘location project’. I would have freaked out last year but Sir did one first and got us to discuss it together. We are taking turns and I know I can do it now. (Student)

Students could not speak highly enough of teachers who were willing to make a joke of themselves and they said that it did give them confidence to participate. Of even more importance, it generated a reciprocal loyalty to the teacher and students wanted to give back what the teacher had given to them by making him/herself vulnerable.

Working and ‘competing’ in small groups is a very popular activity. Teachers used this strategy to ‘warm up’ the class and often as a teaching strategy. Revision quizzes, completing group or paired activities to share with the whole class, group projects, rotated activities and brainstorming in groups. Group activities were deliberately planned into units of work. This is discussed in Chapter 5.

8.4 Teach relationship skills

The teachers were active in taking time to teach the students the skills they needed to form and foster good relationships with each other.

Sometimes it is taught formally in a planned way. A group activity, for example, might have a clear set of instructions that include how the group will interact as well as what tasks it will do. Assessment tasks might also include reflecting on the effectiveness of the group and/or the roles of the participants.

Sometimes the ideas are incorporated into lessons in informal ways such as passing reminders about the class code of conduct. Often small comments are made to individual students, or to the class as a whole, that reinforce the messages. Teachers said -

Get into pairs and edit each other’s stories. There are only four dictionaries up there. If you have them at home can you make sure they come back so we can share the resources.

Don’t forget when you get into your groups to make sure everyone has a turn.

I really appreciated the way you helped ----- finish his poster.

When we get to the library, remember that we must be thoughtful of others trying to work so keep the discussion noise level down.

8.5 Behaviour management

Many classes we observed had taken up the responsibility to work as a cooperative group to the extent that it was class members who played the major role in managing the behaviour of the class.

There were many subtle examples, through use of body language or *shushing*, of students giving reminders to each other when behaviour moved outside of the boundaries of what the class viewed as acceptable.

Sometimes students used comment or humour to give a message to another student. Sometimes comments made to the group in general acted as a signal for the class to get back on task. Students said:

Miss will get angry if we don't get on with it, won't you Miss?

Let's get finished so we can get onto our posters.

Pierce (1994) documents effective teaching strategies used by an American teacher in a low socio-economic school with at-risk learners. The teacher, Mary Morgan, got the students to develop classroom rules.

“By soliciting suggestions from the students concerning what the rules of the classroom should be, the rules ceased to be the teacher's rules and became the students' rules. Thus, the students entered into a participatory process for the operation of the classroom for the remainder of the year. (Pierce, 1994. Cited in 'set' special, 10:2)

Several teachers mentioned the importance of not punishing the whole group for the behaviour of one or two. A well functioning group will find ways to ensure the people who are misbehaving are not getting group approval. At the same time they need the teacher to deal with the behaviour.

If a teacher punishes a whole class then the good people get angry at the teacher. If people behaving badly get dealt with, then good people make them behave. (Teacher)

8.6 Summary

Co-operating and working as a collective are, for these Maori and Pacific Island students, familiar ways of getting things done. They respond well to sharing, co-operating, supporting and producing as a group.

When these ways of working are extended to the co-operative group being the whole class, there are additional benefits for the teacher and students, both individually and collectively.

9.0 EDUCATING FOR LIFE

The teachers in this study are extremely knowledgeable about their learning area and feel passionate about teaching it. The major focus of their teaching time is spent on the curriculum. Their view of themselves as teachers, however, is much wider than imparting knowledge in a particular subject. In a range of ways, they are educating their students for the whole of their lives, both now and in the future.

In writing up the 'Achieve' project, Poskitt et al noted that –

“Teachers in Achieve are largely very caring, concerned about individual students and the ‘whole child’ (i.e. wider social issues not just their academic progress). (Poskitt et al, 1992:119)

In some instances these wider lessons are informally interspersed throughout the teaching period. Some are deliberately planned and integrated into the lesson. At other times, the teacher will think an issue is important enough to stop the planned lesson and refocus the teaching on the issue that has presented itself. The following ways in which this process was observed are as follows.

9.1 Teaching skills, values and self worth

All teachers teach skills, values and self worth in both planned and unplanned ways. These teachers feel that the values, in particular, play an important part in the learning process. Students were able to clearly articulate what these teachers expected of them in the ways they behaved and interacted together. There were clear sets of understanding about appropriate and inappropriate values. Frequently mentioned were respect for others and property, caring, taking responsibility for one's actions, honesty, helping and supporting.

She is really tough on people who mock. We get a big growling for knocking because that is how people don't learn. She steps on us if we muck around with other people's learning. (Students)

There are skills related to subject areas that all teachers teach. These teachers also taught life skills and generic learning skills as part of their programme. Some examples include communication, conflict avoidance and resolution, study techniques, memory techniques and time management.

He teaches us lots of things that aren't just geography. Even things for exams and other subjects as well. Different methods for time management. We make little books. He guides us more than our dean on career options and the future. (Students)

Enhancing student self-esteem and self-efficacy was a role that these teachers thought was extremely important and one that they worked on continuously.

(Good teachers) encourage us and build us up. They encourage us by saying you can do better and they do it with no put downs or comparing. They praise us when we try and don't growl us when we need help. (Students)

“Effective teachers are as concerned about increasing their students' self-esteem as they are about increasing their students' knowledge. (Harlan, 1996:125)

9.2 Integrated into the lesson

Sometimes the particular content of a lesson lends itself to the incorporation of skills, values or lessons for life. At other times the teacher has identified a need and has found a way to incorporate it into a lesson. In both these situations, the inclusion is planned in advance. Some teachers went to a lot of trouble to explain to students the relevance of the learning to people's lives.

Our new topic is probability. We do probability in our lives all the time. Think about the World Cup Rugby final and how you put yourself in groups depending on how likely it is that you will go. That is probability. We don't think about it as probability or as Maths but it is. (Teacher)

9.3 The teachable moment

During the observations, there were a few examples of teachers interrupting a lesson to highlight an issue that has arisen and to work on it with the class.

A really important thing has come up that I want to talk about. A boy in my tutor class, who loves sport and works hard, got run down, with the flu. He didn't get enough sleep or eat breakfast and he has ended up in hospital with meningitis. Don't share drink bottles, don't go back to play sport if you are hurt, have breakfast and look after yourselves. (Teacher)

There were also examples of messages that teachers thought were important to discuss before or after the lesson.

It is significant that the teachers regard these issues as important enough to put a planned lesson on hold in order to take up an opportunity that presents itself.

We all make mistakes at school and in the rest of our lives. Making mistakes is a kind of learning. So long as you are brave enough to face your own mistake, you will learn. (Teacher after a student had misunderstood instructions)

At other times an important message or moral was inserted into the teacher's talk. It was not so major as to interrupt the class, but teachers took every opportunity to give students important knowledge and messages.

The box of tissues on the wall is a great thing. I encourage them to blow their noses. It is an important health message that I can reinforce. If they are sniffing I talk to them. The boys are embarrassed about blowing their noses but I'm really blunt about things like that. (Teacher)

Teacher: Visualise your (project) area and think of a problem

Student: Safety

Teacher: Yes that is a key one. It is really important that you don't go there by yourself. Make sure your parents always know where you are going to be. It is hard for teenagers to want their parents to know where they are but it is for your own safety.

9.4 Exam and careers preparation

Students in the AIMHI schools do not generally do well in external exams and they are very fearful of them. Most of the teachers try to prepare them for exams, not only by ensuring they have the content knowledge but also by trying to give them practice, confidence and strategies.

She prepares us for exams by giving us practice questions, by teaching us how to study and remember things. She reminds us about getting prepared in time so it doesn't sneak up on us. (Student)

Remember it (a trial exam question) is to find out how much you know so it doesn't matter if you don't get them right because I can teach you more. Don't rely on talking with a friend to get your answer because you can't do that when you have a real exam. (Teacher)

All the schools have staff who specialise in careers and transition. These classroom teachers feel responsible for supporting all aspects of the students' lives and development. Many discuss future career possibilities with individual students or the class, even as early as in year nine.

In all our class work, at every chance I get, I talk about different sorts of careers because most of them have only heard about doctors and lawyers. It opens up their minds to new ideas. (Teacher)

9.5 Outside of class

As discussed in other chapters of this report, these teachers are very active in the wider life of the school. They frequently referred to the importance of interacting with their students outside of class time. This might be an extra learning opportunity they arrange, such as after-school tuition or lunchtime coaching. It sometimes occurs during a co-curricular activity such as sport, culture group, drama etc. It might also be an unplanned informal interaction such as a chat on the way to class or a chance meeting during shopping.

These opportunities enable a teacher to talk individually with a student, to get to understand them better and to direct discussion towards the individual's needs. Teachers reported being able to get to know their students in a different way because of the informality and relaxed situation. Students enjoyed interacting with teachers outside of class. They were appreciative of teachers giving their time and showing a personal interest.

At school things are always so rushed. It tends to be on other occasions that I talk to them about the things that bother them the most. I often find them talking about their senior years and the future. What will happen to them. It really worries them. (Teacher)

10.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SCHOOLS

We know from the previous AIMHI research⁷ that these decile one multicultural schools have students with particular sets of needs⁸ that are very different from those of students in higher decile schools. It stands to reason that they will need teachers who meet their particular needs.

The teachers in this sample were selected because they were perceived by their colleagues to be highly effective at meeting the needs of these students. The students in the sample endorsed those perceptions. The teachers provided inspirational examples of positive, caring, energetic, hard working, loyal, enthusiastic people who are strongly committed to their schools, their career and their students.

What we do not know from this research is how the data would differ if these teachers were working with students in high decile schools, although some of the teachers had taught in other types of schools and were able to make comparisons with their experiences.

Nor were we observing teachers in the AIMHI schools who were not perceived to be highly effective, although we did learn from the students how they felt about working with those teachers and how they compared with the sample teachers.

We feel confident in suggesting that the sample teachers would be highly effective teachers in any school. Of more importance however, we suggest that teachers who might meet the needs of students in higher decile schools may not, using the same approach, meet the needs of the students in these schools.

How then can these schools work towards having all their teachers performing in similar ways to those described as effective in this report?

The first important learning is that there were no indications that gender, age, ethnicity, learning area, or teaching style, were significant influences. It was the attitudes, values, educational philosophy, approach to life, and interpersonal relationships, that differentiated these teachers from others. There was a high degree of similarity amongst the sample teachers on all of these factors.

Because it is easier to teach knowledge and skills than it is to influence attitudes and approaches to life, the implications for the schools are complex.

10.1 Recruitment, selection and retention

Qualitative data collected in AIMHI schools over the last four years suggest that they do not get the number or quality of applicants for positions that higher decile schools get.⁹ They often do not have a great deal of choice, especially if the learning area is highly specialised. Whenever possible, however, it is critical that the best possible selection occurs.

⁷ Hawk and Hill, 1996; Hawk and Hill, 1998

⁸ They have particular educational needs as well as social and emotional needs

⁹ Data from the PPTA Secondary School and Area Schools Staffing Survey (March 1998) indicate that lower decile schools get fewer applicants for teaching positions than do the higher decile schools. They have more jobs for which there are no applicants, have less applicants per position and have fewer New Zealand trained applicants.

School Decile	Jobs which there were no applicants	Mean applicants per job	Mean NZ trained applicants per job
1 - 3	15.4%	7.46	3.54
4 - 7	5.7%	9.43	4.20
8 -10	9.1%	13.20	9.36

If these schools were able to offer attractive conditions to teachers it would probably be wise to headhunt teachers for vacant positions. However, these schools do not currently have the financial ability to do so¹⁰. We say this on the basis of four years of research observations and what Principals and teachers have reported. One way to get quality applicants may be to offer excellent training and professional development opportunities that will attract conscientious professionals. This is an area the AIMHI Forum could investigate.

Otherwise, the schools must rely on the best possible selection process once a position has been advertised. Information in CVs will give some insights into the balance the candidates have in their own lives but will be of little use in knowing about their attitudes and relationship skills. References and referees comments are probably of more use providing they are asked the right questions, but they are always only as good as the honesty and perceptions of the referees. If the referees' have never worked in low decile schools, it would be hard for them to comprehend the issues. Selection interviews can provide insights but, again, they are only as good as the perceptiveness and the questions put by the interviewers.

The best insights always come from the students themselves. There may be great value in observing the teachers working in a school and listening to student views. It is our impression that, with very few exceptions, the sample teachers would not feel threatened by such a selection process because of their high self-efficacy.

Another excellent opportunity would be to have students in training on teaching practice in the school. This provides the school with an opportunity to watch and offer opportunities to those who are seen to perform well in terms of the attributes outlined in this research.

Retention of good staff is important but difficult for the same reasons mentioned under recruitment. What will be important, is that effective teachers are given affirmation, opportunities for promotion, and leadership opportunities to share their expertise with others.

10.2 Induction

New teachers always need a great deal of professional and personal support and guidance. It will be important that the teachers selected as tutor teachers are those who will be able to help the new teachers with the relationship skills and group building skills as priorities.

They need opportunities to observe and talk with the effective teachers in much the same way that the researchers were able to.

They also need access to, and training on, the contents of the AIMHI Resource Manual¹¹ and of this report.

10.3 Pedagogical approaches and strategies

The research data have indicated a number of key pedagogical approaches and strategies that are critical to meeting the learning needs of the children in these schools. Some teachers are highly skilled in the delivery of most or all of these. Comments from students, and the research that we did in the AIMHI schools in 1996 and 1998 would indicate that some teachers need help to develop their skills in a number of the areas.

¹⁰ Fiske and Ladd (2000 : 159) state that "the additional funding is insufficient to compensate low decile schools for the challenges they face".

¹¹ Produced in 1999 as part of the AIMHI Project. It was funded through a Ministry of Education development contract and compiled and edited by Jim Peters

The following list identifies the key delivery areas for professional development:

- Differentiated learning, both differentiated ways of learning and differentiated teaching for abilities
- Teaching of language
- Direct instruction in a purposefully structured way
- Skills in questioning and giving explanations
- Co-operative learning techniques to encourage deep thinking
- Formative assessment and, in particular, the skills of giving verbal and written feedback
- Aspects of lesson structure and organisation

It is important that the other key development areas of relationship and group development be incorporated into any pedagogical development, as well as being addressed in their own right.

10.4 Teacher professional development

As has already been said, it is easier to teach skills and subject content than it is to change attitudes or ones approach to life. Teaching in a New Zealand secondary school can be a very isolated experience in terms of what actually happens in a classroom. It is often the case that the majority of the professional development that occurs is selected because it meets teachers interests rather than their needs.

We now know, with confidence, what the students need. Therefore, the school professional development programme should be designed around ensuring that teachers are able to meet those needs. The key to this is the ability to accurately identify the particular needs of each teacher and then to find ways to provide the appropriate development.

Some of the teacher performance needs, identified by this research, could be identified by the schools as a school wide development goal and, therefore, be built into the performance goals of all staff. The school could then provide whole school development opportunities for, and with, all the staff. Since the appropriate areas for development are unlikely to be provided externally, this would be a cost-effective way of managing a development programme. Likewise, the AIMHI cluster could co-ordinate a cluster-wide programme for professional development.

At an individual teacher level, it is more complex because the key to effective development will lie in the accurate identification of the particular needs of each individual. This is discussed more fully in 10.5.

In the same way that student self-efficacy¹² is essential for change to occur, teacher self-efficacy is a pre-requisite for teacher change. This is most likely to come from the assurance that the necessary support and expertise will be available through a comprehensive professional development programme.

We know, from this research, that each of the schools already has a number of teachers whose performance is meeting student needs. They can be used as a key development resource by the school(s). Because there is a need for sensitivity in selecting out people who are, or are not, performing well this could be another cluster opportunity for a co-ordinated programme of inter-school teacher observation, mentoring and networking opportunities.

¹² Self-efficacy is the personal belief that it is possible to change and improve performance. The main motivation for doing so comes from the belief that it is possible.

10.5 Performance management

As has already been stated, the keys to effecting change and development for individual teachers are teacher self-efficacy, accurate identification of development needs and the provision of a targeted professional development programme.

The best informants on teacher effectiveness and identifying teacher needs are the students. This research programme has shown us that students are very wise and articulate about their needs and how well they are being met. Effective teachers are also very accurate in their perceptions of their performance. We do not know, however, how perceptive less effective teachers are and cannot assume that they are. While it is accepted that some teachers will feel threatened about student feedback, there is no doubt that it is one of the best ways to identify development needs.

Another method of needs identification would be through lesson observation. There would need to be more than one observation and the observations should not be at pre-planned times. The person observing would need to be a person with a high level of expertise in knowing what to look for. Again, some teachers will feel threatened about being observed in this way.

Methods should be determined that will enable the teachers' needs to be accurately identified, but which will be safe for both them and the students. Students will not feel safe to give some teachers feedback on their performance and it is probably these teachers who need it the most. Ways of collecting student feedback safely involve an intermediate step in the process so individuals retain their anonymity. Teachers need to be provided with feedback in a way that will make it easier for them to receive it and be motivated to make changes.

We would argue that, using these research findings, a number of performance standards should be developed that become part of what is required of teachers who work in these schools.

10.6 Leadership and Monitoring

There are still gaps between what needs to be delivered for students and what is currently being delivered by some teachers. This report identifies the key areas for further development. The AIMHI schools already have programmes for performance management and for professional development, but they are not yet addressing some of the teacher performance issues. More careful needs identification and targeted delivery of a programme to meet those needs are the first steps. What must follow is a monitoring programme that ensures the professional development undertaken translates into changes in classroom practice.

Ensuring that the gap is closed, in each school, is the responsibility of the school leaders, and ultimately the principals. Each school will need to include an organised monitoring programme in its development process.

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