Bridging the Gap

Skills to Enhance Positive Relationships
between Teachers and Students
with Challenging Behaviour

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work submitted in this dissertation is original except where indicated by special reference in the text. No part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree.

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Date: 2012
Dedication

Dedicated to all the teachers whose profession entails the challenge of educating all pupils, including those who manifest a challenging behaviour.
Abstract

Should teachers build a caring relationship with their students as an essential part of their practice? If yes, how should they achieve this? Which skills do they need to have, to build a positive relationship with students with behavioural difficulties? The quest to answer these questions led the researcher to undertake this project. A state secondary boys’ school was chosen for this research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Head of School and two Assistant Heads, five subject teachers and two guidance teachers. A focus group was conducted with a small group of students with challenging behaviour in Forms Three and Four. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the different themes emerging from students, Senior Management Team (SMT), guidance teachers and subject teachers were compared and analysed. This study underlines the importance of building a positive relationship with all students including those manifesting challenging behaviour as a core element of teaching and learning. It also highlights that both students and teachers benefit from a relationship built on care and respect.
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Bridging the Gap:

Skills to Enhance Positive Relationships

between Teachers and Students with Challenging Behaviour

This research strives to gain a better understanding of the importance of relationships amongst the key stakeholders in Maltese schools, namely staff and students. It also aspires to examine this relationship in the case of students having challenging behaviour, or as commonly addressed, students with Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties (SEBD). The aim of this study is to focus on the ‘teacher-student relationship’, to examine if and how beneficial this relationship is to promote effective teaching and learning as well as positive behaviour. The researcher believes that to understand what happens in schools and classrooms, one should take into account the perspectives of the key stakeholders, including the students themselves. The outcomes of this study can then be used as a mentoring tool for staff to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Teachers often complain that students with challenging behaviour are the most difficult students in class; in fact when it comes to teaching students with individual education needs, teachers prefer to teach students having other forms of physical or intellectual disability, than students with SEBD (Cefai & Cooper, 2011; Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007). Hence the researcher felt the need that these students would be partners in this research process, so that through their views about their learning experience, teachers would also be aware of the most effective and positive ways in responding to challenging behaviour. It is important for the reader to understand the significance of this topic for the researcher; that is, what the researcher herself experienced which brought her to the choice of this particular topic.
Motivation for the Study

When I was in secondary school I remember a number of teachers, whom I looked up to; I was always looking forward for their lesson and I still visualise parts of their lessons. In fact these were the teachers who inspired in me the driving force to engage in the teaching profession. Looking back I ask myself “What was so special with these teachers? Why did I view others differently?” The answers come automatic to me, these teachers knew me well, they were interested in me and they built a relationship with each and every one of us. I can say that their aim, rather than just teaching the subject, was to help me while growing up. Our maths teacher used to tell us jokes during the explanation and laughed with us during the lesson. I remember discussing current issues with our science teacher after the lesson and going for hikes with these two teachers. When I started secondary school I was quite shy and I did not believe much in myself. I remember our science teacher whose perseverance, praise and ongoing empowerment helped me to accept myself and believe more in my potential. I still recall her saying “I believe in you, I know you can achieve, I just want you to start believing in yourself!” This positive experience I had with these teachers during my secondary school years encouraged me to become a teacher. I always dreamt to be this kind of teacher to my students. I really do believe in the potential of a positive teacher-student relationship as I have experienced its academic and social benefits myself.

I have been working as a teacher in a boys’ secondary school for twelve years, however I still clearly recall my first day of school as a teacher. Before I went in the first classroom I was bombarded by different teachers giving me ‘tips’ on how to approach this class in particular, since it had a number of students with challenging behaviour thus rendering it quite difficult to teach. I remember a group of teachers explaining discipline methods commonly used by the school towards students with challenging behaviour. Although a number of years have passed, I still remember quite vividly certain comments
such as “Be very strict...show them that you are in command,” “Toughen up ...by time you will learn...we did!” and “Don’t be their friend...because you will lose class control.” I appreciate the comments of those experienced teachers, which, I believe were all in good faith, however, I must admit that I felt quite overwhelmed about what is best to do and how to do it. While walking to class, I thought “If I were a student in this class what would be my expectations from a new teacher in a secondary school?” and felt better to approach the class through my true self. My main aim was to get to know the students first and when I entered the class I told them to tell me something about themselves. I must admit that in the beginning of my career I found the first stages of relationship building as the most challenging part; students tried to test me and tried to stretch my limits. John, a particular student in this class, known as one of the most troublesome students, used to disrupt the other students or else, though rarely, he would just sleep throughout the lesson. I decided to speak to him informally during break and I found out that his mother was occasionally admitted to a mental hospital and his father had opened a bar for him in order to earn money for his family. I remember him telling me “You are the only one who showed interest in me.”

Having listened to his story and showing him that I cared for him, his behaviour changed drastically. He used to ask me if he could sit next to me in order to pay attention, he never brought paper to write on so I would give him a piece of paper during every lesson. Eventually he started to pay attention during the lesson, write down notes and participate. John and other students like him, whom I have encountered throughout my teaching career, have taught me a very important lesson. By creating a caring atmosphere in class, the respect I show towards my students, is eventually mirrored in their attitude towards me.

Throughout the past twelve years I have been teaching in the same school in which I encountered many students with challenging behaviour who do not get on well with most of the teachers. In certain severe cases, teachers wrote a detailed report about these students’
behaviours to the education directorate, hoping that these students will be transferred to another school. However, these students always remained at school and teachers had to keep them in class. As family problems are increasing, students tend to be more disruptive. So apart from the usual challenges of overloaded syllabi and large number of students in class, teachers have to face this growing problem of students with challenging behaviour. Most teachers argue that they are fed up of teaching and are ready to change their job.

Consequently, I feel that teachers need a guide of how to get on with these students whom they claim “disrupt the lesson and other students in class.” In spite of these difficulties, a number of teachers manage to build a positive relationship with such students.

Being a guidance teacher myself, through the students’ stories, I learnt that a particular student may have a negative relationship with some teachers and a positive relationship with others. This dynamic intrigued me to conduct this study in the school I teach in, as I felt that this would be a great opportunity to examine different teacher-student relationships and their effect on both parties. The implications of doing research in the school in which I am teaching will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

Objectives of the Study

One may ask, is it the teachers’ responsibility to build a sound relationship with these students? According to the National Minimum Curriculum, the strengthening of emotional development…through the development of self esteem and through the development of a positive attitude towards life….should be the responsibility of the entire educational community (Ministry of Education, 1999). Hence, students should be provided with a holistic education in which they receive and engage in both cognitive and affective education (Cefai & Cooper, 2011). However, studies conducted in Malta as well as in other countries indicate that the educational system does not adequately address the needs of
students with SEBD. Students with SEBD “often feel excluded, victimised and abused by a system that labels them as antisocial, deviant and failures” (Cefai & Cooper, 2010, p.195). These studies also present the urgency that something should be done in order to prevent the exacerbation of the problem (Cefai & Cooper, 2006; Mihalas, Morse, Allsopp, & Alvarez McHatton, 2009).

Schools should help students feel safe and secure so that they would become independent and creative learners, helping them to build an attachment with school through which they can feel supported and develop healthily (Cefai & Cooper, 2006). Success should be related to each student’s needs and the student’s involvement in the school community such that through care and respect, students should be helped to develop their positive qualities and be valued for them (Cooper, 2006). Educating students with SEBD effectively is a multifaceted issue for which there is not a single solution. (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Mihalas et al., 2009). However, instead of ignoring or punishing these students, schools need to try to understand them and fulfil their need of connecting with others by building a positive relationship with them (Schaubman, Stetson, & Plog, 2011). Mihalas et al. (2009) argued that “the cultivation of caring teacher-student relationships can be a strong mechanism for guiding and supporting students’ social-emotional, behavioural, and academic growth” (p. 110).

The objectives of this study is to examine the relationship, between teachers and students with challenging behaviour in a particular secondary school, the benefits, if any, of such a relationship, and the skills needed to build a positive relationship. The researcher endeavours to answer the following questions: “What are the benefits of a caring student-teacher relationship for students with challenging behaviour? How can such a relationship be fostered? What are its constituents? Which are the skills needed to build a positive
relationship with students, leading to effective teaching and learning and positive behaviour?”
The answers to these questions will be found in the following chapters.

Outline of the Dissertation

The next chapter discusses the literature on challenging behaviour and teacher-student relationships and the relationship between the two, with a focus on how teachers can build such relationships. The third chapter presents the methodology behind this research. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the researcher tries to understand the lived experiences of the Senior Management Team, teachers and students taking part in this study and how the participants themselves make sense of their experiences. In the fourth chapter the data collected is discussed, analysed and interpreted through the themes emerging from the focus group and interviews separately and then finally through the common themes emerging from the two data collection tools. In the fifth concluding chapter, the researcher gathers a summary of the findings together with the recommendations and the limitations of the study as well as the recommendations for further research.
Literature Review

This chapter is divided into two parts; the first part discusses students with challenging behaviours in schools, the nature and prevalence of this, and its effects and causes. The second part deals with the importance of relationships in schools, between teachers and students in general and in particular the relationship between teachers and students manifesting challenging behaviour, or as commonly addressed, students with SEBD. What follows is a discussion on the importance of the teacher’s role in building such relationships, and on who will benefit from them. Finally, the students’ needs addressed through positive relationships with teachers are examined in more detail.

Challenging Behaviour in Schools

Nature and prevalence of SEBD.

One of the most challenging and demanding aspects of teaching is dealing with students with behavioural problems (Cefai & Cooper, 2011; Landers, Alter, & Servilio, 2008; Mihalas et al., 2009; Westling, 2010). The concern among professionals in education and psychology regarding behavioural adjustment problems in schools is increasing (Estevez & Emler, 2009). Teachers stated that the most common types of challenging behaviour are defiance and non-compliance, disruption, and socially inappropriate behaviour (Westling, 2010). Landers et al., (2008) argued that if teachers are asked what the most challenging aspect of teaching is, they would probably mention students’ behaviours. In fact Westling (2010) claimed that the greatest obstacle in today’s public schools is that presented by students manifesting challenging behaviour. Likewise Mihalas et al. (2009) stated that “educating secondary students with emotional and behavioural disorders…is often an overwhelming task that places high demands on teachers” (p.108).
In a study conducted in Maltese schools, teachers pointed out that SEBD is a major issue of concern and indicated that 9.7% of school children have SEBD (Cefai, Cooper, & Camilleri, 2009). This is very close to the 10% proportion established by Goodman (Goodman, 1997) in the UK as well as other studies based on teacher perceptions, such as Denmark (10%) (Egelund & Hansen, 2000) and the Netherlands (11%) (Smeets, Van der Veen, Derriks, & Roeleveld, 2007). There is a lower estimate of American students with serious behaviour difficulties (3% to 6%) but these figures resulted from other diagnostic criteria apart from teachers’ perceptions (Kauffman, 2004). So it can be said that local statistics are quite close to the international prevalence rates based on teacher perceptions.

The study conducted in Malta, shows that more difficulties are found in secondary (10.27%) than primary schools (9.05%), with a ratio of 7:6, and more difficulties amongst boys (10.46%) than girls (8.86%) (Cefai et al., 2009). The prevalence of problems regarding challenging behaviour reaches its peak in the adolescent years (Cooper, 2001; Olsen & Cooper, 2001). Adolescence is a stage where the individual is exposed to new relations with significant others, apart from parents, mainly peers and teachers, and to new social contexts such as the school (Estevez & Emler, 2009).

The American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (APA, 1994) divides SEBD into two main categories, externalising and internalising difficulties. Externalising difficulties include disaffection, conduct disorder, delinquency, attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder, autistic spectrum disorders and oppositional defiance. Internalising difficulties include truancy and school refusal, separation anxiety, withdrawn behaviour, elective/selective mutism, substance misuse and abuse, anxiety disorders and depression. Externalising difficulties or ‘acting out’ behaviours are more obvious since they negatively disrupt others so they tend to receive more attention from parents and teachers. Internalising difficulties or ‘acting in’ behaviours on the other hand, are generally hidden from others or
even intentionally masked by the individual, consequently they tend to be ignored (Cooper, 2006). Henricsson and Rydell stated that “students with more internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety) show greater dependency on their teachers than their average counterparts,” whereas Murray and Murray argued that “students with more externalizing problems (e.g., aggression, problem behaviors) show more conflict with teachers” (as cited in American Psychological Association [APA], 2011).

**Impact of SEBD.**

The effect of SEBD in the form of internalising difficulties is mostly on the individuals themselves. This can be portrayed through low self-esteem, self-harm or even suicidal behaviour. The person with acting-in behaviour may effect significant others such that they may feel frustrated that they cannot help or offer their support and may also feel guilty that they may be part of the cause of the problem (Cooper, 2006). However, the aim of this study is to speak about the effects of the more apparent difficulties, the externalising difficulties.

Students with externalised difficulties challenge the formal educational functions of schools (Olsen & Cooper, 2001), and provide a direct threat to the schools’ attempts to achieve educational targets for academic excellence (Farrell & Humphrey, 2009). These students may disturb all those who are in contact with them (Olsen & Cooper, 2001), disrupt classrooms and playgrounds (Cooper, 2001) and interfere with the learning and teaching process (Westling, 2010). They provide a direct threat to the teacher’s own competence and authority (Cefai & Cooper, 2011) by placing great stress on teachers who may become less effective in their work (Westling, 2010). In an OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009) study on teacher effectiveness, Maltese teachers reported that about 14% of their time is taken up by dealing with challenging behaviour. Teaching
students with challenging behaviour is a demanding task since teachers have to be equipped with professional skills to deliver successful lessons as well as be endowed with emotional energy to deal with them (Swinson & Knight, 2007). Challenging behaviour also reduces the learning of other students in class (Westling, 2010) besides that of the students with challenging behaviour themselves, hindering both their social and academic engagement (Mihalas et al., 2009; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Westling, 2010).

It comes as no surprise therefore that students with SEBD are usually the least liked and understood students (Kalambouka et al., 2007). Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) argued that, feeling ignored, these students are more likely to be bored, unhappy, and angry. They are the only group of pupils with individual education needs that are at a great risk of being excluded (Fergusson, Horwood, & Ridder, 2005) as well as the only group for whom punitive exclusionary responses are still permitted by law (Cooper, 2001). Consequently they are at an increased risk to end up as school failures and drop out of school (Westling, 2010). Challenging behaviour also causes stress within families, rejection by peers and social isolation, thus inhibiting the individual from enjoying the benefits of a typical, productive life (Westling, 2010). It may also result in mental health difficulties in childhood and later life (Fergusson et al., 2005; Maes & Lievens, 2003).

**Causes of SEBD.**

Adolescents tend to involve themselves in antisocial activities, but research explains why the problem of SEBD is present or is more severe in some adolescents than in others (Estevez & Emler, 2009). There is an association between antisocial behaviour in adolescence and individual and social factors, the latter relating to family and school contexts (Cooper, 2006; Estevez & Emler, 2009). The bio-psychosocial approach explains how individual biology might interact with psychological, social and educational factors (Olsen &
Cooper, 2001) in the development of challenging behaviour. Hence, behaviour would not get better just by simply changing the student (Pickles, 1994).

Individual factors which might give rise to challenging behaviour include students having high-incidence disabilities (Westling, 2010), emotional difficulties (Murray & Greenberg, 2001), poor communication skills (Cefai et al., 2009, Rudasill, Rimm-Kaufman, Justice, Pence, 2006), “cognitive deficits” as a result of the developmental process (Cooper, 2006), and unresolved emotional difficulties caused by a traumatic event (ibid.). SEBD may be the result of socialization factors such as neglect, abuse or modelling (Cooper, 2006), disproportionate exposure to poverty, social dissonance, and violence (Westling, 2010).

Cooper (2006) stated that according to Bowlby’s (1975) attachment theory, those infants who experience an insecure attachment with their primary carer may develop an “attachment disorder,” characterised through SEBD. Similarly, Cooper (2006) maintained that as declared by Maslow’s (1970) hierarchy of needs, SEBD may be seen as the manifestation of unmet needs. SEBD may be the result of family turmoil and problematic relationships with family members (Cooper, 2006; O’Connor & McCartney, 2006). Rutter and Smith (1995) argued that behavioural difficulties arise from increasing breakdown in family structure, increasing time parent/s spend at work away from home, together with the increase of the use of media and information technology, exposing children and adolescents to youth cultures which may not be contributing to pro social values. The offspring of one parent families, and those coming from a low socio-economic status, are also more likely to exhibit SEBD (Cefai et al., 2009).

As mentioned above, there are various non-school factors contributing to SEBD in schools. However schools may also contribute to this problem’s creation and exacerbation (Cefai & Cooper, 2006). Challenging student behaviours “reflect complex social and cultural dynamics” including issues related to “teachers’ and students’ social identities, classroom
context, socialization and the organizational structure of schools” (McCready & Soloway, 2010, p.121). In low-streamed classrooms with average or limited space and with unattractive environments, students are more likely to exhibit SEBD; students with poor attendance and those receiving educational interventions are also at a higher risk of having SEBD (Cefai, et al., 2009). Cefai and Cooper (2009) noted that attainment difficulties are a very strong predictor of SEBD in Maltese schools. Students’ difficulty “to engage with a system which they may find rigid, academically oriented and with limited relevance to their daily lives…might turn a learning problem into a behavioural one” (Cefai, et al., 2009, p.28, 30). Students may find their own way to subvert the system by making the school experience enjoyable and exciting through misbehaviour (Cefai & Cooper, 2010).

Teachers may aggravate the problem of SEBD, if they fail to employ positive behaviour management strategies (Cefai & Cooper, 2006). For instance, authoritarian educational practices based on an autocratic, rigid behaviour management, blaming and punitive approach, contribute to behaviour difficulties; such that “acting out behaviours are often modelled on coercive management styles” (ibid., p.20). Teachers may also intensify challenging behaviours if they fail to “actively promote positive social and academic engagement in schooling and feelings of self worth in vulnerable students” (Cefai & Cooper, 2006; p.20). This process may take place through labelling (Hargreaves, Hester, & Mellor, 1975); the students being labelled as “trouble makers” might experience a self-fulfilling prophecy, such that they start to believe the label given to them and in order to “live up” to it, their behaviour gets worse (Cefai & Cooper, 2006; 2010). Also Swinson and Knight (2007) argued that teachers might treat the labelled pupils, who are “known” to be “trouble makers” differently (p.251). The findings of a study conducted by Cefai stated that “When asked about the causes of behaviour problems in a school facing serious behavioural difficulties, the teachers blamed pupil characteristics such as personality, attention seeking family problems,
while the students underlined school-related factors such as teasing and bullying by peers, teachers’ attitude and learning difficulties” (as cited in Cefai & Cooper, 2010, p. 183).

Another significant contributing factor to challenging behaviour in young people is the lack of adequate, ongoing relationships with caring and concerned adults during late childhood through adolescence (Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Knight, 2010). Murray and Murray specifically stated that internalizing and externalizing behaviours are strongly associated with the “closeness of teacher-student relationships” (as cited in Mihalas et al., 2009 p.112). In various studies carried out in Maltese schools, students with challenging behaviour in secondary schools identified poor relationships with teachers as one of the main attributes to their misbehaviour. Some of these students described teachers with whom they find difficulty to interact as those being not respectful or not understanding, unfair, unsupportive and unresponsive (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). Victimisation by teachers, such as being treated unfairly and picked on by teachers, and teachers’ labelling and stigmatisation were common school-related themes associated with students’ difficulties, disaffection and disengagement (ibid., 2010). In other studies, students said that one of the main reasons they stopped going to school is due to poor relationships with their teachers (Cassar as cited in Cefai & Cooper, 2006; Clark, Borg, Calleja, Chircop, & Portelli, 2005). Clearly the student-teacher relationship is one of the most important factors related to challenging behaviour. This will be discussed in more detail in the following sections.

**The Teacher-Student Relationship**

Schools need to develop communities that value and promote social and moral development as well as understanding of and respect for others, and that are inclusive and open with permeable boundaries (Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002). The quality of relationships in schools is crucial to the concept of school community (Battistich, Solomon,
Watson, & Schaps, 1997). Pelta (2007) argued that the building of strong relationships is the “ultimate measure of our success in the world”, thus teaching the “ethic of caring” is imperative (p.14).

**Why is the teacher-student relationship important?**

Adults having significant relationships with students carry a great responsibility since they influence students’ expectancies and values (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Teachers are considered as an “underused and underdeveloped” source of supportive non-parental adult mentors with whom youths can build relationships which are both valuable and scarce (Pianta et al., 2002, p.92). Mihalas et al (2009) argued that the amount of time teachers spend with students over one scholastic year predisposes them to be “primary relationship builders with youth” (p. 111). Pianta stated that this relationship has “affordance value” as teachers may be the only adults present for the student to “support intellectual, social, and emotional development” (as cited in Mihalas et al., 2009 p.111). Students themselves single out teachers from other adults, increasing teachers’ potential to promote a caring relationship with their students (Pianta & Nimetz, 1991). A supportive teacher-student relationship, apart from being “a key element of a caring and inclusive classroom climate” is “at the heart of teaching and learning” (Cefai, 2008, p.67). As stated by Hoffman and Leak (2004), “We cannot teach students well if we do not know them well.”

**Importance of building teacher-student relationships throughout school age.**

Teacher-student relationships have been examined at all levels of education. In a study conducted by Hamre and Pianta (2001), in the USA, students who had more conflict with their teachers or showed more dependency towards their teachers in kindergarten had lower academic achievement and more behavioural problems through secondary school.
Also those students having challenging behaviour, who were mostly boys in kindergarten, statistically found it difficult to build a relationship with their teacher. Children with more closeness and less conflict with teachers developed better social skills as they approached the secondary school years than those with more conflictual relationships in kindergarten (Berry & O’Connor, 2009). These studies showed that teacher-student relationships have carry over effects for all children and young people. According to Bowlby’s Attachment theory (1969), teachers who build close relationships with their students act as a “secure base” enabling pupils to feel safe and comfortable to accept the academic challenges they will encounter (APA, 2011).

As children move through primary school and into secondary school, the school becomes more departmentalized and the climate becomes more impersonal. As a result, Harter stated that teacher-student relationships become “less personal, more formal, more evaluative and more competitive” (as cited in Pianta et al., 2002, p.99). Mihalas et al., 2009, argued that teachers may interpret students’ developmental desire for independence as a diminished need for close and caring relationships with teachers. However, these changes do not match with the developmental needs of the child, such as active engagement and intrinsic motivation, a very powerful drive toward autonomy and a sense of competence (Pianta & Hamre, 2009); as well as the formation of “functional, effective, supportive relationships with adults in the school setting” (Pianta et al., 2002, p.99). Consequently, students experience the transition to secondary school as quite stressful, showing declines in self-esteem, academic motivation and achievement, as well as increasing drop outs (Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

Secondary teachers are also negatively affected by these changes such that they feel unknown and stereotyped by their students (Hargreaves, 2000). Being aware that preadolescents and adolescents normally experience “disengagement and lack of connection to school values and social ethos,” schools should work even more at secondary levels to achieve a caring
community by dealing with caring relationships, students’ autonomy and values both at theschool and classroom levels (Pianta et al., 2002, p.100). “Supportive teacher-student
relationships can offset the risk of emotional and behavioural adjustment difficulties of
middle school students” (Fredrickson & Rhodes, as cited in Mihalas et al., 2009, p.112).

As shown above, theory and research show that the teacher-student relationship
influences the students’ experience in general and is beneficial to all students across gender
and age (Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green, & Dowson, 2007).

**What is the teacher’s role in relationship building with students?**

A child-adult relationship is asymmetrical such that the responsibility for the
relationship’s quality is disproportionately placed on the adult (Pianta et al., 2002). Hence, it
is the teachers’ responsibility, that when they initially meet their students, their primary aim
is to start positive interactions with them to promote the development of positive
relationships (Felix, 2011). The way a teacher interacts with the students “during the initial
period of relationship building, is the determining factor for promoting either a positive or a
negative relationship” (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garragy, as cited in Mihalas et al., 2009, p.112).

Studies show that students expressed the desire for caring and concerned teachers
with whom they can personally connect through relationships based on “respect” and “trust”
secondary teachers’ relationships with students may be “relatively impersonal and still
promote positive individual outcomes” (p.297); these relationships should be based on
acknowledgement and respect (Hargreaves, 2000) through which they communicate care and
personal support, thus corresponding to dimensions of effective parenting (Wentzel, 2002).
Caring “establishes an effective culture for learning and success” in which the students are
provided with “attention, adequate support, with help when in difficulty and opportunities to
work collaboratively and construct knowledge together with peers and teacher” (Bartolo et al., 2007, p.76). Furthermore, Sergiovanni (1994) described the teachers’ care towards their pupils as “substantive caring” which is demonstrated as a core value, an end in itself rather than as a tool to get better results.

Who will benefit from the teacher-student relationship?

Teachers who foster positive relationships with their students create a classroom environment contributing to learning. Caring relationships help students to adjust to the school culture (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2001), and display high levels of comfort and enjoyment (Hopper & Murphy, 2010). These positive relationships and a caring community environment enable students to become interested and motivated in classroom activities thus they are more engaged in the learning process (Cefai, 2008; Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Mihalas et al., 2009; Wentzel, 2002). Students who benefit from a positive relationship with their teacher achieve at higher levels academically and in overall educational success (Bartolo et al., 2007; Cefai, 2008; Felix, 2011; Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Wentzel, 2002). Although class size, teacher experience or availability of instructional supplies are important factors predicting student achievement, positive relationships is an even more important factor (APA, 2011). “When schools focus on what really matters in life, the cognitive ends we now pursue so painfully and artificially will be achieved somewhat more naturally… children will work harder and do things…for people they love and trust” (Noddings, 1988, p.32).

A positive teacher-student relationship enhances positive feelings of self-worth and self-esteem; these help to develop greater confidence in the students (Martin & Dowson, 2009). A caring relationship with teachers enables students to believe in themselves and aspire to develop mastery (ibid.). “Student perceptions of emotional support provided by
teachers was found to be the greatest predictor of students’ social skills and academic competence…” (Malecki & Demaray, as cited in Mihalas et al., 2009, p.111). The care and support students receive from teachers enable them to develop a stronger sense of community, as well as contribute to their social skills (Battistich et al., 2004; Cefai, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hopper & Murphy 2010; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Wentzel, 2002). Pianta and Hamre (2009) stated that “students’ interactions with teachers either produce or inhibit developmental change to the extent that they engage, meaningfully challenge, and provide social and relational supports for youth” (p.33). The teacher-student relationship is a highly protective factor, that buffers risk, taps resilience and “provides a psychological structure within which individuals can grow and thrive as healthy human beings” (Cefai, 2008, p. 56). Positive teacher-student relationships meet students’ academic, emotional and developmental needs. Thus these relationships are the foundations promoting healthy intellectual, affective and social functioning.

Literature shows that, apart from students, the teachers who build positive relationships with their students benefit from these relationships themselves. The building of these relationships intrinsically reward teachers by helping them believe in themselves, enhancing their confidence and giving meaning to their work (Pianta et al., 2002; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Studies show that relationships with students are ranked by staff as being the most important source of staff enjoyment and motivation (Spilt et al., 2011).

The Teacher’s Relationship with Students having Challenging Behaviour

As seen above close interpersonal teacher-student relationships are beneficial both to students and teachers; however for students at risk of academic failure, social-behavioural problems, and dropout, these relationships are crucial (Battistich, et al., 1997; Felix, 2011; Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Pianta, 1999). The following section describes the various aspects
of the teacher’s relationship with students having challenging behaviour such as the importance and benefits of the teacher’s role in building this relationship.

**Why is the teacher’s relationship with students with challenging behaviour important?**

“Teacher-student negativity is more strongly predictive of child outcomes for children with problematic behaviour, thus demonstrating that the value of relationships may be even more important for vulnerable children” (Pianta, et al., 2002, p.97). However, students with SEBD find it difficult to form and maintain social relationships; it might be that as a result of what they have been through, such as abuse or neglect, they are unable to internalize the care and support offered to them in an effective way (Knight, 2010). Consequently these students reject their teachers and the latter feel threatened and frustrated; and they tend to look at students with challenging behaviour as “unwanted irritations” (Crowe, 2010, p.67). It is argued that these students who reject their teachers are the ones most in need of caring supportive relationships (Knight, 2010) such that they have a desire to get to know their teachers and their teachers get to know them (Lowenthal, 2001; Whitney et al., 2005).

As Mihalas et al. (2009) argued, students with SEBD often have not experienced prior successful relationships with adults and they lack an adult role model in their life, as a result, developing “failing” patterns of behaviour and becoming isolated. Landers et al. (2008) pointed out that teachers might expect that teaching students how to behave respectfully towards others should be the parents’ responsibility. Nonetheless, if this is not happening at home, this teaching would be even more beneficial at school. Teachers are primary sources through which these students begin to learn to trust and engage with others; thereby obtaining their self-concept and sense of confidence (Cooper, 2001; Felix, 2011).
These relationships also help students make initial judgements about themselves as learners and about their potential to be successful in educational environments (Felix, 2011). “Deprived and troubled children are more dependant than others upon their teachers to show them and lead them into the terrain of possibility upon which they might lead their lives” (Greenhalgh, 2001, p.27).

**What is the teacher’s role in relationship building with students with challenging behaviour?**

“The task of building productive relationships with these students is a very important, albeit complex, endeavour” (Mihalas et al., 2009, p.111). Teachers’ professional role entails social and emotional education together with academic instruction (ibid). Hence, “desired academic and social behaviors must be given equal priority and taught with equal pedagogical vigor” (Scott, Nelson, & Liaupsin, 2001, p. 317). Apart from helping them achieve academically, these students should “be provided with an experience which helps them construct and reaffirm meaning in their lives, to develop meaning through which the story of their lives can be lived” (Greenhalgh, 2001, p.27). In order to help students gain control of their emotions, teachers need to get to know them first (Crowe, 2010).

Teachers should be proactive to students’ resistance to engagement by offering social and emotional support thus enhancing a personal connection through which they can meet the challenges they face at school (Knight, 2010). In the case of students who have “learned poor, inadequate, inappropriate, or dysfunctional” behavioural patterns teachers can make a difference by creating new, structured and positive learning contexts through which they are directly taught “appropriate self-coping behaviours that will strengthen a positive sense of self, learning and relationship at school” (Felix 2011 p.135). Teachers, whose management is fair, corrective and includes therapeutic relationship-building with students
decrease further discipline problems (Canter & Wright, 2005). Also, teachers who focus on what the student is doing right and acknowledge students’ respectful behaviour, enhance more of this behaviour (Landers et al., 2008). Moreover, Pianta (1996) maintained that it is the teachers’ role to provide instruction to decrease incidences of disrespect.

Cooper (2006) believed that teachers need to employ Rogers’ (1980) three core conditions of therapeutic relationships in order to be able to build positive relationships with their students. These entail being empathic by validating the students’ perceptions; showing unconditional positive regard by disapproving challenging behaviours but accepting the students as persons, and showing respect and personal warmth towards them; as well as being honest and direct with students regarding dysfunctional aspects of their behaviour. Cooper (2006) also adopted Rogers’s non-directive approach to the classroom context, such that:

…the teacher avoids offering explicit advice about how the pupil should behave, but rather acts as a sounding board for the pupil enabling him/her to reveal their own ways of thinking and feeling, take ownership of these, and therefore, become well placed to make decisions and changes (p.67).

Who will benefit from the teacher’s relationship with students having challenging behaviour?

“A strong relationship with a caring adult enables at-risk youth to make life-altering changes” (Werner & Smith, 1992). A caring teacher-student relationship acts as a protective and remedial factor (Cooper, 2006), compensates for risk factors such as socio-economic disadvantage (Bernard, 1991; Pianta & Walsh, 1998) and enhances students’ capability to “overcome personal vulnerabilities and environmental adversities” (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Mihalas et al. (2009) argued that “…teacher-student relationships may help
to reduce aggression among both students who have experienced negative adult-child interactions (e.g., abuse) and who represent minority populations” (p.112).

If students believe that the teacher is their “ally”, and they feel part of the classroom community they engage themselves more in academic tasks (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Through positive relationships with students with SEBD, teachers, buffer impact of negative factors effecting academic outcome; consequently, the students’ academic achievement improves (Hopper & Murphy, 2010). A caring teacher-student relationship help students form positive interactions with teachers and peers, and enable them to have a sense of belonging to their group and feel accepted (Cefai, 2008; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Hughes, Cavell and Wilson (2001), found that aggressive students having positive relationships with teachers are more likely to be accepted by peers than aggressive students who lack these relationships.

A positive teacher-student relationship also helps students develop their self-concept, which affects classroom discipline, by regulating their emotions, learning control and exhibiting socially acceptable behaviour with fewer behavioural problems (Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Landers et al., 2008). Students who feel that teachers trust and value them tend to internalise these values and goals and become more trustful to these teachers, are willing to participate in the lesson and display expected behaviours (Cefai, 2008; Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Landers et al., 2008; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Students having a good relationship with their teachers are also less likely to avoid school, like school more and experience less loneliness (APA, 2011).

A trusting teacher-student relationship is the foundation of an effective approach to classroom management (McCready & Soloway, 2010). Teacher-student relationships determine students’ perceptions including their attitudes about teachers (Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Pianta et al., 2002). Students claim that they change their behaviour according to the
teacher’s attitude, such that they obey classroom rules only if the teacher is caring (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Mihalas et al., 2009). Pianta et al. (2002), argued that irrespective of the student’s problematic behaviour or teachers’ lack of skills, if teachers support their students, their teaching will be more effective. Conflictual, disrespectful or alienated relationships with students exert a threat to teachers’ professional and personal wellbeing; on the other hand, “teachers’ relationships with specific students can be primary sources of teachers’ everyday emotional experiences and wellbeing” because they “contribute to a basic need for relatedness” (Spilt et al., 2011, p. 17). Also, the time, energy and extra efforts teachers invest, in the beginning of the year, to get to know students with challenging behaviour will in turn make the year progress more smoothly (Crowe, 2010).

**Students’ Needs addressed through Positive Relationships with Teachers**

Students come to class with three basic psychological needs which are competence, autonomy and relatedness; all these needs can be met through students’ interactions with their teachers and with the learning environment (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

The need for relatedness, referring to the students’ need of being connected to teachers and peers can be met through teachers who build a caring relationship with them and promote positive interactions within the class. Competence which implies the need of feeling capable of academic work can be achieved through teachers’ feedback. “Teachers who provide reinforcement and feedback that are commensurate with students’ performance enhance students’ perceived control over educational outcomes” as well as “evoke positive affect and feelings of pride in the student” (Martin & Dowson, 2009, p.333-4).

Autonomy entails the need of being involved in decision making; this can be supported with the help of teachers who know their students’ interests and inclinations and subsequently offer opportunities for students to be active participants, through discussion and
suggestions, about the negotiation of rules and the general life of the school (Felix, 2011). This can be achieved by adopting what Fielding (2001) calls a ‘dialogic democracy’ where teachers communicate with all the students about how to achieve a culture of mutual respect. Cefai and Cooper (2010) argued that if teachers empower their students by allowing them to have a meaningful and influential voice at school, they are more likely to get closer to their students and in turn enhance more positive social behaviour. This is even more important at the secondary level, where students will be going through adolescence which is characterised by the strong need to belong and to make meaningful contributions to the group (Battistich et al., 1997; Pianta et al., 2002).

Thus, teachers who use more learner-centred practices – by showing sensitivity to students’ individual differences, including students in the decision-making and acknowledging students’ developmental, personal and relational needs – enhance the importance of students’ motivation, brought about in self-system theory (APA, 2011). If students feel that they are trusted, apart from being more willing to learn, they are also more likely to conform to the positive social norms of the classroom (Wentzel, 2002).

Conclusion

This chapter explored the effect of the SEBD phenomenon in schools as well as its causes. One of the main causes of challenging behaviour was found to be the lack of positive relationships students experience with adults, particularly their classroom teachers. The importance and the benefits of a positive teacher-student relationship were discussed, both generally and specifically, taking into consideration relationships with students exhibiting challenging behaviour. The teachers’ role in building a trusting relationship with students as well as students’ needs addressed through this relationship were examined.
Methodology

This chapter discusses the methods used in collecting and analysing data of the study. It starts with a discussion regarding why Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as a qualitative approach to examine the relationship between teachers and students with challenging behaviour. The choice of the participants, as well as the method of data collection is explained. The ethical issues which arose throughout the process as well as ways with which the researcher sought to obtain reliability and validity in this research follows. Finally, a step by step description of how the data collected was analysed is described.

Research Approach and Design

The objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between teachers and students with challenging behaviour, the benefits, if any, of such a relationship, and the teachers’ role in building this relationship. A qualitative approach is chosen for this study; however the researcher is aware of the disadvantages brought about by this approach. For instance, the researcher delivering qualitative research needs to focus on particular issues and delve deep into them. In doing so, breadth would be lost such that certain relevant important issues would be left out. Since qualitative research entails having a small number of participants, the results obtained from this study incorporate the opinion of a small number of people in a particular school. Hence the results cannot be generalised for other students and/or other teachers in the same school and/or in other schools. Another disadvantage of qualitative approach is that the research instrument is the researcher herself. This brings about the issue of bias such that the researcher’s opinion might not be the same as that of the participant/s, and this might affect the whole process. In this study the issue of bias presents a larger problem as the researcher conducted the research in the same school where she
works. The researcher for instance might have a positive or negative opinion of the participant or of the people mentioned during data collection process and also, the participants themselves might have a positive or negative opinion of the researcher.

In spite of the disadvantages mentioned above, the researcher still believes that a qualitative approach would be the most suitable method to address the research question, since it enables in depth exploration and investigation of the kind of relationships between teachers and students with challenging behaviour, as well as between the Senior Management Team and students. This approach embraces individuality such that it deals with personal histories, unique needs, challenges, struggles and distinctive ways of coping with particular situations in schools. Rather than just finding the facts and causes behind challenging behaviour, the researcher wanted to delve into the phenomenological experience of the stakeholders involved. This is because teacher-student relationships could best be understood and examined through the participants’ point of view and the meaning they give to the interactions between them. As stated by Bogdan and Biklen (2003) “phenomenologists ….attempt to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects (Geertz, 1973) in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives…..it is the meaning of our experiences that constitutes reality (Greene, 1978)” (p.23).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which was developed by Jonathan Smith in the 1990’s, was chosen for this study. IPA has emerged as an alternative to descriptive phenomenological psychology; it gives “less emphasis on description and greater interpretation than in descriptive phenomenology, as well as greater engagement with mainstream (principally social-cognitive) psychological literature” (Langdridge, 2007, p.55). Researchers choosing IPA, start their research process with a general question which they wish to explore rather than with a predetermined research hypothesis. The focus of IPA studies is on the “lifeworld” of the participants, that is, on a particular experience of the
participants and how they perceive this experience. The aim of an IPA study is to explore the participant’s view whilst the role of the researcher is to interpret the participant’s understanding (ibid. p. 107). Through IPA, the researcher makes use of a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003), by trying to make sense of the participants who tried to make sense of what is happening to them (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2011). Hence, using IPA, the researcher attempts to understand the meaning of interactions between school personnel and students and to interpret their understanding of this interaction (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

Being aware of the potential bias resulting from carrying out the study in the same school in which the researcher works, care was taken to avoid bias as much as possible through anonymity, confidentiality, as well as, the avoidance of any personal and leading questions, and making the participants at ease as much as possible during data collection. These are discussed in depth in the ethical issues section in this chapter. The advantages of using the same school in which the researcher works include easier access to the school itself, the Senior Management Team, the teachers and the students. Also, the researcher being familiar with the school knows and understands its context. The fact that the researcher knew the participants enhanced their participation. Moreover knowing the needs of the school in which the study took place, enabled the researcher to formulate the questions used in data collection in relation to these needs. The above advantages render the study more practicable and manageable. Also, the school in question, being a secondary boys school, makes the study more relevant, as literature shows that the frequency of challenging behaviour is highest in these schools (Cefai et al., 2009). This is further explained in the following section.
Participants

The researcher decided to focus this research on one school, as already mentioned, in order to be able to delve deeper into the investigation of the relationships present with students with challenging behaviour within this school. A secondary boys’ school was chosen since according to the first national study of SEBD in Maltese schools, challenging behaviour is more frequent in such schools. There are more difficulties in secondary (10.27%) than primary schools (9.05%) and more difficulties amongst boys (10.46%) than girls (8.86%) (Cefai et al., 2009). The researcher in consultation with the Head of the school identified the students and school staff who participated in this study. In order to decrease bias as much as possible, the researcher gave the Head a number of criteria how to choose these students. It was made clear that the chosen students had to be reported to the Head of School more than once, by more than one teacher, in the last six months for misbehaving.

Langdridge (2007) stated that IPA researchers usually employ small-sized fairly homogeneous samples “to gather detailed information about the experience of a fairly specific group on a fairly specific topic” (p. 110). The Head and two Assistant Heads in charge of discipline and special needs respectively took part. The teachers were chosen as follows: two guidance teachers, and four subject teachers - two who get on well with students with challenging behaviour and another two who do not cope quite effectively with these students. Care was taken so that gender was equally represented with four males and five females. The Head of school also identified eight students known to manifest challenging behaviour in school. The chosen students were from the third and fourth form, such that their ages range from 13 to 15 years. The students in the fifth year of secondary school were not included in this study, since by the time of the research these students would have already completed their last year of secondary education.
Data Collection and Procedures

Data from the eight students identified with challenging behaviour was obtained through a one-session focus group of one hour. The researcher wanted to find out if students value having a relationship with their teachers, and what type of relationship they would like to have. It was investigated if the students behave differently with different teachers and which teacher qualities they viewed positively or negatively. The researcher wanted to explore how the students themselves would deal with students with challenging behaviour if they were a teacher or SMT member themselves, as well as the type of behaviour measures they would adopt (See Appendix A for the focus group questions).

The rest of the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Data collected through such interviews, consist of a number of open-ended questions, which “enable the participant to articulate as much detail about the experience as possible” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 110). A semi-structured interview was conducted with the three members of the SMT and another one with the six chosen teachers. All interviewees were asked questions about the prevalence and the causes of challenging behaviour, whether they felt trained to deal with students manifesting challenging behaviour, and their ways of dealing with these students. The interviewees’ opinion regarding how teachers can be helped in dealing with these students was elicited. Questions were also asked about the teachers’ classroom management and how they responded to challenging behaviour in their classroom. Teachers were asked if they believed in building a relationship with students with challenging behaviour, the type of this relationship, if any, and how they achieved this (See Appendix B and Appendix C for the interviewing questions).

The interviews and focus group session all took place on the school premises in a quiet room. Teachers’ questionnaires took place during the participants’ free time. The focus
group was conducted at school hours on a day in which students did not miss any lessons. All sessions were recorded and transcribed with the permission of the participants.

A pilot study was carried out prior to the actual study. The Head chose the students and teachers taking part in the pilot study. The focus group was conducted on a smaller scale with a small number of students. A Head of Department and a teacher were chosen to answer the questions prepared for the SMT and the teachers respectively. Following the pilot study, the researcher thought of asking students more in depth questions regarding the teacher-student relationship, such that rather than just asking them if they agree with such a relationship, they were asked to describe this relationship. Another question exploring students’ views was changed, that is, instead of asking them how teachers or SMT should deal with students having challenging behaviour, they were asked what they would do if they were teachers or SMT members themselves. Additionally the researcher felt that apart from asking students what punishments they agree with, if any, the students’ opinion regarding the effect of these punishments would be elicited. As a result of the pilot SMT interview, the researcher chose to delve more in depth when asking questions regarding ways of dealing with students with challenging behaviour, as well as the punishments they used, if any. Thus, rather than just asking teachers the best way of dealing with these students, they were asked if they should be helped or punished, in what ways and how effective would this be. When asking about the teacher-student relationship and how to build this relationship, if any, an additional question was asked to elicit the sort of relationship they believe that teachers should have with these students. Both teachers and SMT were also asked another question regarding how teachers could specifically be helped both during their initial training course as well as during actual practice in building healthy relationships with students.
Ethical Issues

The researcher forming part of the school in which the study took place, took a number of steps to ensure that all ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the process of data collection and analysis. Anonymity was respected such that fictitious names were used for all students and interviewees. The researcher informed the participants not to talk about third parties, however when this happened, the names of certain people mentioned were also changed. The researcher felt the importance of protecting everyone’s identities so that the information they gave will not embarrass or harm them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

All participants were given an information sheet (See Appendix D) with a short description and the purpose of the research project, as well as the methods, duration and venue of data collection. The participants were informed that all sessions will be recorded. All participants were asked to sign a consent form (See Appendix E) which stated that they may not directly benefit from taking part in this research; they are free to decline to answer particular questions as well as free to withdraw from the project at any time. Teachers and students participating, as well as the parents of these students, were informed that whether they participated or not, or if they withdraw after participating, this will not have any effect on their employment or their school progress. All participants were told that the information collected in this study will be published, however the school in which the study took place as well as the participants will not be identified and individual information will remain confidential. The students participating in the study, as well as their parents, were told how they were chosen to take part in this project; the parents were also asked to give their signed consent in order to approve of their son’s participation. Since the researcher knew the people who were approached to take part in the study, she ensured that participation was strictly
voluntary. One of the teachers chosen to take part, refused to be recorded, so another teacher was chosen instead.

The researcher was cautious not to ask any personal questions both during the focus group session with students as well as the interviews conducted with the SMT and teachers who participated.

**Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research**

“Qualitative researchers tend to view reliability as a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study….” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.36). The researcher was aware that her beliefs regarding the subject being researched might influence the participants’ responses during the data collection process; however she knew that it was impossible to remove all her biases. In order to influence the participants in the least possible way, the researcher started this project by identifying and distinguishing her beliefs and ideas regarding relationships between teachers and students with challenging behaviour. This self-reflective exercise helped the researcher not to speak about or give hints of her own opinions and beliefs, thus adopting the role of a research instrument. When formulating the questions for the interviews and the focus group, as well as during data collection, the researcher made it a point not to ask leading or loaded questions; on the other hand the questions were quite open-ended. Through open-ended questions, the participants may include more information, regarding their perception towards the subject as well as their feelings and attitudes. This enabled the researcher to better access the participants’ true feelings on the issue discussed (http://writing.colostate).

The researcher sought to obtain validity throughout data collection and analysis using a number of ways. This will be hereby discussed through Yardley’s four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research (Yardley, 2000).
During data collection, the researcher showed sensitivity to context (ibid., 2000) by enabling the participants to feel comfortable to say the truth by ensuring anonymity. When the participants’ stories unfolded, the researcher was empathic and paid attention to the meaning that the participant gave to the account told, in order to be able to make sense of how the participant answered. When compiling the data, the researcher made use of a number of the participants’ quotes in order to present a true authentic picture of what they said and thus remain grounded in their reality.

Commitment and rigour (Yardley, 2000) were demonstrated by attending closely to what the participant said as well as observing the participants’ non-verbal behaviour. When the need arose the participants were asked to explain their non-verbal behaviour or to rephrase or delve deeper in their responses in order to clarify their opinion.

Transparency and coherence (ibid., 2000) were obtained through the thorough description of each step taken during the participants’ selection, data collection as well as data analysis. Readers of the results of this research are made aware that, through IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis), the researcher attempted to make sense of the participants’ experience.

The researcher aspired to achieve validity through impact and importance (ibid., 2000) in believing that the conclusions resulting from this study would be beneficial to both teachers and students alike. Moreover, throughout the course of the compilation of this research project, the researcher discussed the emergent themes in relation to the data obtained with the supervisor, who also monitored and conducted mini audits of the researcher’s work.

**Analysis of the Process**

The focus group session and the interviews were all audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. When all data was collected, the researcher transcribed the data through a
verbatim record of the data collection event (See Appendix F for one of the transcripts). Having read the transcripts twice the researcher started the process of engaging with the data as explained by Smith et al. (2011) by going through the transcripts again whilst highlighting important findings. For each piece of highlighted text, descriptive comments were added in the margin, noting objects which structured the participants’ thoughts and experiences. The researcher was involved in an analytical dialogue with the transcripts by asking questions regarding what each phrase meant to her and trying to analyse what it meant to the participant. Tackling one transcript at a time, the researcher managed to treat each participant individually, thus bracketing ideas emerging from previous cases’ analysis and allowing new themes to emerge in each case. The researcher then attempted to turn notes taken into themes through a concise statement capturing crucial points reflecting both on the participants’ words as well as the researcher’s interpretation. In order to look for patterns and connections which lead to emergent themes, the researcher adopted a number of ways, mainly abstraction, subsumption, numeration and polarization. Abstraction involved putting like themes together and grouping them under a new name; while subsumption was used when a particular theme brought together a series of related themes. The researcher used numeration in taking account the frequency with which a theme was supported both in the same transcript as well as between transcripts and included this in the write up of each theme as one way of indicating the importance of a particular theme. When looking for patterns across cases and when dealing with oppositional relationships between emergent themes of the conducted interviews, numeration was used in conjunction with polarization. For example, four out of the six teachers interviewed were in favour of a teacher-student relationship while the other two teachers did not agree with such a relationship, hence ‘a caring teacher-student relationship’ was chosen as one of the main themes. The data collected from the students’ focus group and the data collected from the SMT’s and teachers’ interviews were analysed
separately. The next chapter presents the emergent themes and subthemes of students and school staff; these themes are separately tabulated, discussed and analysed. Finally the common themes emerging both from the focus group and the interviews are identified and examined.
Analysis of Data and Discussion

In this chapter the researcher presents the findings emerging from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the students’ focus group and the staff’s interviews. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part deals with the themes resulting from the focus group of eight students with challenging behaviour. The second part encompasses the themes developed from the interviews with the school’s staff, including the SMT, guidance teachers and subject teachers. The third part discusses the common themes resulting from both the students as well as from the staff’s interviews. Actual quotes from transcripts of participants are presented to substantiate the arguments discussed.

Students’ Focus Group Themes

Table 1 shows the four themes and their respective sub-themes which were developed from the data.

Table 1

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
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<td>Responding to teachers’ attitude</td>
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<td>Labelling and discrimination</td>
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<td>Positive classroom management</td>
<td>Flexible classroom management</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sense of humour</td>
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<td>Positive punishments</td>
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<td>Punishments for learning</td>
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<td>Negative impact of exclusion</td>
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<td>A safe learning environment</td>
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Responding to teachers’ attitude.

The eight students constituting the focus group all agreed that their behaviour in class varies according to the teacher’s attitude, such that they behave well with teachers who respect them, while with those teachers whom they perceive as showing lack of respect and care, they do their utmost to misbehave (Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Mihalas et al., 2009).

Paul

Timxi bhalu hux, kif jimxi hu nimxi jien You do the same, the way he treats you, you treat him.

This may imply that the teacher’s attitude may intensify the problem of challenging behaviour, such that the teacher’s way of dealing with the behaviour is seen as a cause of misbehaviour. Likewise, in a study carried out by Cefai (as cited in Cefai & Cooper, 2010), students also underlined teachers’ attitude as one of the factors attributing to challenging behaviour.

Labelling and discrimination.

The students were all in agreement that teachers discuss students with challenging behaviour in the staffroom. They feel that they are being prejudged by other teachers who subsequently, treat them differently without giving the chance of getting to know them (Swinson & Knight, 2007).

Kurt

Teachers jitkellmu fl-istaff room, jghidu Teachers speak in the staffroom, they say
ezempju “Dak kiesah” u tidhol teacher ohra for example “He is rude” and another
u lilek ma tkunx tqisek daqs l-ohrajn
eżempju inti għaliha kiesaħ, ma ttikx ċans
fhint, eżempju ha tara kif ha ġġib ruhek
magħha.

teacher comes in and she does not treat you
the same as she treats others, for her you are
rude, she does not give you a chance, for
eexample to see how you behave with her.

Paul

Hafna drabi t-teachers kif jidħlu huma
jibagħtuni barra lili lanqas jaraw x’se jiġri.
Xi kultant it-teachers juruk li ma jkollhomx
grazzja miegħek lanqas ituk ċans jaraw kif
ha tmur…ikollok bad name.

Many times when teachers get into class
they send me out without giving the chance
to see what will happen. Sometimes
teachers show you that they do not like you,
they do not even give you the chance to see
how you will behave…you have a bad
name.

During the focus group, the researcher could feel the students’ sensitivity about being
labelled. Through labelling, the teacher would be probably instilling frustration in students
thus exacerbating the manifestation of challenging behaviour. In a study conducted by Cefai
and Cooper (2010), labelling is one of the themes associated with students’ difficulties,
disaffection and disengagement. Also being labelled as ‘trouble makers’, students might
experience a self-fulfilling prophecy and in order to live up to the label given to them they
misbehave even more (Cefai & Cooper, 2006, 2010).
Positive classroom management.

Flexible classroom management.

Although the students making up the focus group were identified as having challenging behaviour, they were all of the opinion that discipline is crucial in class. However, they argued that if teachers are too strict, the lesson becomes boring and they are easily fed up (cf. Cefai & Cooper, 2010).

Kurt

Il-lesson issir boring lanqs tista’ ddawwar wiċċek. The lesson becomes boring you cannot even look around.

Carl

Li tghid kelma lil ta’ hdejk u ttik report ma naqbilx. Getting a report just for saying a word to the one next to you, I do not agree.

One student also mentioned a vindictive approach towards teachers who are too strict.

Stephan

Naghmlulha barxa mal-bieba tal-karozza. We will scratch the door of her car.

This shows that a very strict classroom environment, apart from inducing a very rigid atmosphere which students find unnatural and difficult to adapt to, may exert a negative attitude towards the teacher, with consequent misbehaviour.
**Sense of humour.**

All eight students were in favour that the teacher should be patient and understanding. They mentioned the importance of teachers telling a joke during the lesson in order to enhance a positive atmosphere.

Kurt

…imma kif iġġib ruħha t-teacher hux, titfa’ …but it’s the way the teacher behaves, you xi ċajta, ma tiġix boring. pass a joke, not to be boring.

Students also stated that teachers should accept students who share a joke during the lesson.

Paul

Ehe li tista’ tiċċajta magħhom mhux tiċċajta u jqallghuk xi haġa. Yep you can joke with the teachers rather than being punished for joking.

One of the students, Carl, mentioned the importance that teachers should keep joking during the lesson up to a limit, that this does not impede the delivery of the lesson.

Carl

Tiċċajta imma mbaghad mhux tqażżiżha You joke but not too much that you cannot lanqas tista’ tagħmel lesson, il-hin kollu even do the lesson, all the time talking. tparla.

However, the other seven students, as eloquently said by John, expressed their belief that by being humorous at certain times the lesson can still be delivered in an effective way.
John

Għax tiċċajta ma tfissirx li toqghod tpaċpaċ il-hin kollu. By saying a joke it does not mean that you keep talking all the time.

Reid stated that teachers should have a sense of humour and be understanding in their dealings with students (as cited in Cooper, 2006). The students’ wish that teachers should have a sense of humour may be interpreted as their need of having a humane teacher-student relationship.

Positive punishments.

Private reprimands.

All eight students, agreed that before a punishment is given, the teacher should first speak to the students on their own, listen actively to them (Bartolo et al., 2007) and find the reason why they are behaving in that way. Students also argued that rather than correcting them in front of other students, teachers should speak to them privately. Dasho et al., stated that just by listening, teachers can help students by “meeting their needs for attention, self-expression, and human connection” (as cited in Bartolo et al., 2007, p. 80).

Paul

Issibu wahdu u tkellmu… You speak to him alone…

Kurt

Trid tara ghaliex jaghmel hekk hux. You have to see why he behaves in such a way.
They also agreed that if the Headmaster or Assistant Headmaster receives a complaint regarding a student with challenging behaviour, the former has to approach both the student and the teacher concerned and listen to what they have to say rather than complying with what the teacher says without listening to the student’s point of view.

John

*Tisma’ lill-ghaliem, tara r-raquni,*

 imbaghad issib lill-istudent tara r-raquni
ghalix ghamel hekk…imbaghad tara xi jkun haqqu.

You listen to the teacher, you find the reason, then you speak to the student, you find the reason why he behaved like that…then see what he deserves.

Carl

*Jiena l-ewwel inkellmu…mhux bhal Mr. Calleja (l-Assistant Headmaster), lanqas biss jisimghek…l-ewwel inkellmu, intih tliet chances…*

I would speak to him first…not like Mr. Calleja (the Assistant Headmaster), he does not even listen to you…first I would speak to him, and I give him three chances…

The above conveys the students’ belief that there might be a reason behind their misbehaviour (cf. Cefai & Cooper, 2006). The students’ comments sounded like a cry to be heard and listened to, and for their needs to be attended to. In a study conducted by Whitney et al. (2005) students stated that they want teachers with whom they can communicate by being listened to. Literature shows that active listening to students’ ideas, needs, interests and concerns is an essential characteristic of relationship building with the students (Cefai, 2008; Mihalas et al., 2009).
Avoiding third parties.

All students argued that if a behavioural problem crops up in class, teachers should be responsible to deal with the students themselves rather than reporting them to the SMT.

Michael

Issib il-problema u tipprova tghinu u tkellmu bil-mod mhux jaqbdu jghajtu mieghu ghand is-Surmast...jekk tiehdu ghand is-Surmast ha jiġi ma jahmlekx, jaghmillek aghar.

You find the problem and try to help him and speak to him slowly rather than shouting at him in the Headmaster’s office…if you take him to the Headmaster he will start to despise you which makes matters worse.

The students had different views about the involvement of parents if a student misbehaves. All but one student agreed that parents should only be involved if the need arises.

Luke

Jekk jibqghu sejrin b’xi haġa jekk ikun tifel żghir ingiblu l-ġenituri, jekk ikun raġel biżżejjed u jammetti li ghamel żball u li ghamel xi haġa, nsolvuha wahedna.

If they keep on with the same thing if he behaves like a small child the parents will be called, if he behaves like a man and admits his mistake, we solve it on our own.

Pianta et al., (2002) suggested that teachers should keep their communication with the students’ parents a priority however Peter was very resistant to including parents as he believed that the problem may escalate.
Parents should not know, because there will be trouble when the student arrives home, they start picking on their child, the child will be more on edge and would want to air his disapproval…

The above indicates that all eight students agreed that classroom behavioural issues should ideally be resolved between the student and the teacher, without including any SMT members or parents; this may best be achieved if students have a good relationship with their teachers.

**Punishments in proportion to misbehaviour.**

The eight students agreed that punishments should start from small ones and increase to larger ones accordingly, such that the latter would have quite serious repercussions.

Paul

…I will start with a small punishment then if he keeps behaving disgustingly and he does not want to learn, I will show him his school conduct and if he keeps behaving disgustingly, yes I will ruin it for him.
Carl

…I-‘after schools’ nagħmilhom li jitniżżlu...I will record the after schools on his
fil kondotta biex dak li jkun jibża iktar...conduct so that the student will be more
cautious...

It is noted that the students expect teachers to be strict with them, even stricter than the
current situation; as long as they speak to them first. This implies the importance students
give to teacher-student communication. Through active listening the teacher is seen as being
authentic and trustworthy and also asserts the student’s dignity (Mihalas et al., 2009).

Punishments for learning.

Most of the students mentioned that they have been given a number of copies as
punishment from which they did not learn anything; they suggested that essays should be
given rather than copies.

Michael

…mhux ser noqghod nagħti l-copies…, ...I would not give copies…what are you
dawk x’ser tiehu minnhom? kieku… going to benefit from them? I will tell him
ngħidlu jagħmilli composition, ha to do a composition, he will learn
jitghallem xi haغا… something...

Teachers usually argue that students with challenging behaviour do not want to learn, it is
interesting to note that these students prefer to be given a more challenging task rather than
just a copy.
Negative impact of exclusion.

All students argued that being given an afterschool detention is more boring for students than being excluded. They said that exclusions should not be given at all since excluded students enjoy spending three days at home.

Peter

It-tfal jieħdu pjaċir meta ttihom exclusion  Children enjoy it when you exclude them
għax ikunu d-dar u joqoghdu tlett ijiem  because they would be at home and they
jixxalaw…  will stay three days having fun…

Paul insisted that the disadvantage of excluding students is only if this is written on the conduct certificate, however none of the students knew if this is actually done or not.

Paul

Jekk tinkiteb fuq il-kondotta biss ma nihux  I do not like being excluded only if it’s
gost b’exclusion.  written on the conduct.

The students were thus quite honest, saying that exclusions should not be given since rather than being punished, they will be enjoying three days away from school.

A safe learning environment.

The students found it difficult to express themselves when asked to describe the ideal classroom environment. All students agreed that they like the environment during Personal and Social Development (PSD) lessons most. Carl argued that most of the subjects cannot be taught in the same manner as PSD. However, all the other students agreed that all
lessons can be delivered in a similar environment to PSD lessons, in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere where teachers are patient, helpful and treat the students well.

Michael

Bhal ma tista’ tghallem il-PSD, tista’ tghallem il-Maths, it-teacher tkun iktar relaxed u l-istudenti jkunu iktar komdi waqt il-lesson. Same as you can teach PSD, you can teach Maths, the teacher will be more relaxed and the students will be more comfortable during lessons.

The importance of student participation as well as an environment where they can express themselves safely was also underlined.

John

Il-lezzjoni tkun active, iktar parteċipazzjoni. The lesson would be more active, more participation.

Kurt

Ghandha paċenzja, eżempju titkellem qisek qed titkellem ma siehbek u tista’ tghid dak li thoss. She is patient, for example you speak to her like you are speaking to your friend and you can say whatever you feel.

Similarly, Bartolo et al. (2007) stated that in order to build a positive relationship with their students, teachers should “allow safe expression of feelings, thoughts and opinions….” as well as “….establishing a classroom rule that everybody’s opinions are valid” (p. 79). In a study conducted by Whitney et al. (2005), students expressed their wish that teachers teach
with “a sense of fun” (p.33). Clearly, teachers who insist on strict and rigid classroom atmosphere for one reason or another will be creating an environment more conducive to misbehaviour.

**School Staff Interview Themes**

Table 2 presents the eight themes and respective sub-themes which emerged from the data.

Table 2

_Themes from Staff’s Interviews_

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A within child model of misbehaviour.

Staff identified inadequate upbringing as the main cause of challenging behaviour; this was mentioned by eight out of nine participants. Students coming from difficult home backgrounds tend to be deprived of adequate parenting and may experience neglect which may contribute to SEBD (Cooper, 2006; O’Connor & McCartney, 2006).
Headmaster

…jkollok tfal illi tant ghandhom tharbit id-dar illi ma jaraw l-ebda sens fil-hajja u allura lanqas ha jaraw sens illi jiġu l-iskola u jitghallmu… m’hemm motivazzjoni ta’ xejn.

…there are children that have so much devastation at home that they do not see any significance in life so they don’t find sense in coming to school and learn…there is no motivation altogether.

Ms. Grech (Assistant Head)

Ħafna drabi jekk ikunu ġejjin minn familji li l-parents ikunu wkoll daqsxejn unsettled, tirrifletti hafna iżjed...u s-sens ta’ ribelljoni jikber u s-sens ta’ rabja magħhom infushom ghax huma inkapaċi jaffaċċjaw dis-sitwazzjoni tikber iżjed allura jkun hawn conflicting behaviour.

Many times if they are coming from families where the parents are also a bit unsettled, it reflects a lot more…and the sense of rebellion grows and the sense of anger with themselves, because they are incapable of facing this situation, grows even more so there would be conflicting behaviour.

Challenging behaviour may also be the result of parents who tend to spoil their children, in certain cases, to compensate for their absence from home while they are at work (cf. Rutter & Smith, 1995).

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Ma rridx inkun ġeneralizzat imma hafna parents żgħar, ikunu xogħol...hekk nahseb jien...dak il-ftit hin li jkollhom magħhom, I do not want to generalise, but many young parents, would be at work…this is what I think…the little amount of time they have
biex jirkupraw il-hin li tilfu, ifissduhom, with them, to compensate for the time they
ituhom li jridu...U jahasra iktar hsara lilhom lost, they spoil them and give them
innifishom qed jaghmlu ghax hawn hafna whatever they want…it’s a pity because this
tfal jidhru li huma spoilt. is causing more harm to themselves because

there are a lot of spoilt children.

Mr. Calleja (Assistant Head)

Ikun hemm min defiant hafna, propja There are those who are very defiant,
ghaliex missierhom jew ommhom ituhom simply because their father or mother spoils
ir-rih. them.

Three of the nine interviewees blamed students’ misbehaviour simply on their difficult character.

Ms. Gatt (subject teacher)

Issib dawk it-tfal li ma jkunu interessati You find those children who are not
f’xejn...ghax fil-karattru taghhom huma interested in anything...because their
keshin. character is nasty.

Two of the interviewees stated that misbehaviour may be the result of an internal condition of the child such as hyperactivity or lack of control.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Jaf’t kun xi hağa interna ...forsi ikun If it is something internal he maybe slightly
daqsxejn hyperactive. hyperactive.
The researcher noted that most of the causes of challenging behaviour mentioned by the staff are based on the medical model in which the problem is seen as coming from the child himself. Similarly, in a study conducted by Cefai (as cited in Cefai & Cooper, 2010), teachers also attributed pupil characteristics such as personality, attention seeking and family problems as the cause of behavioural difficulties. Consequently, teachers and SMT may believe that students have to change in order for their behaviour to improve. However, the biopsychosocial approach states that no change in behaviour would take place just by changing the student since misbehaviour is not only the result of individual pathology, but due also to institutional or community factors, which include school-related factors (Pickles, 1994).

**Students’ difficulty to engage with a rigid school system.**

Five out of the nine interviewees referred to students’ difficulty to fit in and engage with a rigid school system (Cefai et al., 2009) as a cause of misbehaviour. Students may adopt a rebellious attitude towards the organisational structure of schools as well as the classroom context resulting in a challenging behaviour (McCready & Soloway, 2010).

Ms. Pace (guidance teacher)

I-istruttura ta’ l-iskola hija…ma tapplikax ghalihom…ma jaddatawx ghas-sistema, il-fatt li jridu joqghodu bilqeghda ghal hinijiet twal, jiehdu instructions minghand nies differenti…

…the school structure…does not apply to them…they do not adapt to the system, the fact that they have to sit down for long hours, take instructions from different people…
A meaningful, flexible curriculum adapted to students’ educational needs is one of the key mechanisms which promote positive behaviour and engagement amongst students (Cooper, 2006; Daniels, Cole, & Reykebill, 1999)

**A humane and caring approach.**

**Avoiding confrontation and praising students.**

Two interviewees spoke about the negative impact when teachers respond to challenging behaviour by cornering, confronting or deploring the students, as well as attacking them personally. Teachers should avoid humiliation and public repudiation (Cooper, 2006) because in so doing they may be underlining the students’ weaknesses and misbehaviour may increase. As the Headmaster pointed out, such strategies may trigger student revenge.

Headmaster

Ghandna numru ta’ tfal…li kif tikkonfrontahom, hloqt bomba…u t-tfal kapaçi jpattuhielek b’mod sottili hafna. We have a number of children that when you confront them, you create a very difficult situation…and children are capable of paying it back in a very subtle way.
Three out of the nine interviewees spoke about the importance of praising students with challenging behaviour. They underlined the need to tell their students that they are proud of them in front of their peers and parents and also tell them that they speak positively about them to other teachers. Through positive feedback, teachers enable students to believe more in their academic capabilities, thus they would be fulfilling one of the students’ basic psychological needs of competence (Martin & Dowson, 2009). However, an interesting aspect which emerged from the interviews is that rather than simply praising academic achievement, students with challenging behaviour should be praised for their effort, motivation and desirable behaviour. Literature shows that by focusing on what students do right and acknowledging their respectful behaviour, teachers would be enhancing more positive behaviour (Bartolo et al., 2007; Landers, et al., 2008; Swinson & Knight, 2007). Praising positive behaviour is encouraging to the students and empowers them to keep moving forward.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Inti trid tfahharhom jekk ghamel nofs ta’ pass minnija, aghfas fuqu. Hu hassu li mhux dejjem naqla’ fuq rasi, bhal speċi dan gholieni lili. You need to praise them if he does half a step from hundred, insist on it. He feels that I am not the one who’s always criticised, he feels empowered.

One teacher mentioned that praise can also be used to put students with challenging behaviour back on track by trusting that they are capable of behaving better as they used to do before.
Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Per eżempju nibda nara li l-attenzjoni tibda tmajna bil-mod il-mod nghidlu int fil-bidu kont hafna ahjar...xorta qed infahbru, dak hu t-trick...turih li temmen fih. If for example I realise that his attention starts lacking bit by bit I tell him that in the beginning he was much better…I’m still praising him, that’s the trick…you show him that you believe in him.

Ms. Grech, the Assistant Headmaster, talked about the significance of empowering the students manifesting challenging behaviour by believing that they have a positive side, although this may not be very conspicuous, and emphasizing it in order to help them believe in their potential.

Ms. Grech (Assistant Head)

Nibqa’ nghidilhom sa l-ahhar…“Qatt ma naqta’ qalbi minnek”…ghaliex it-tfal hija重要因素 li jibqghu jisimghuha dik, importanti li jibqghu jisimghuha dik, importanti hafna…ghax dejjem hemm potenzjal.

I keep on telling them till the very end…“I will never lose hope in you”…because it is important that children keep on listening to this…because there is always potential.

Hence, praise may be used as an effective tool with students with challenging behaviour. It may enable students to break the self fulfilling prophecy of living up to their label of having a challenging behaviour by helping them to focus on their positive qualities rather than their negative ones.
Humour, honesty and respect.

The two guidance teachers underlined the importance of being kind and humorous with their students, but on the other hand keeping the necessary boundaries. One of these teachers gave an example of when she finds the need of telling a joke to students with challenging behaviour.

Ms. Pace (guidance teacher)

Hafna drabi I try to make it a point li jekk student ikkoreġejtu, wara ftit iċċajtajt mieghu. Many times I try to keep in mind that if I corrected a student, after some time I joke with him.

The two teachers mentioned that if teachers are honest and respectful towards students with challenging behaviour, the latter would reciprocate this behaviour towards their teacher. By showing respect and personal warmth towards their students as well as being honest and direct with them regarding dysfunctional aspects of their behaviour, teachers would be using Rogers’ core conditions of therapeutic relationships (Cooper, 2006).

Ms. Pace (guidance teacher)

Jiena xi haġa li nsib li tahdem hafna mat-tfal hija li nurhom li nirispettaħom. U hafna drabi jippruvaw, mhux kollha, ghax mhux kollha jistgħu, imma at least jippruvaw ma jkunux spiteful. Something which I find works a lot with children is to show them that I respect them. And many times they try, not all of them because not all of them can but at least they try not to be spiteful.
One of the teachers identified by the Headmaster as getting on well with students with challenging behaviour explained that she distinguishes between the students and their behaviour, such that she does not accept the behaviour but accepts and respects the students themselves. As argued by Cooper (2006), being able to separate the problem behaviour from the student as a person will help teachers seek solutions to problems that involve the cooperation of the student(s) concerned. Thus by showing unconditional positive regard towards students, teachers would be employing one of Rogers’ (1980) core conditions of therapeutic relationships.

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

...jafu li jien ma nkunx kuntenta bl-affarijiet ...they know that I am not happy with their li jaghmlu ghax nghidilhom, imma fl-istess actions because I tell them but at the same hin trid taċċettahom u tirrispettahom kif time you have to accept them and respect inhumalil dawn in-nies... them as they are these people…

Literature underlines that schools need to develop communities that value and promote understanding of and respect for others (Pianta et al., 2002). Studies show students’ need for a respectful relationship with their teachers, in which they are respected for who they are (Whitney et al. 2005).

**Inclusive classroom management.**

*Adapting to students’ needs.*

Four out of the six teachers interviewed said that they are in favour of a flexible and fair classroom management in dealing with challenging behaviour.
Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

...iktar ma tipprova tissikkahom iktar ha ...the more you are strict with them the
jaghmlulek ghax imbaghad ha ssir battalja more they are going to react in a negative
personali mieghek u jghidu lil din ha way towards you because then it will
nagħmlilha hajjitha nfern... become a personal battle and consciously
they will make your life hell...

Two teachers pointed out that teachers should be firm and assertive and use a strong voice in
the beginning to show that they are in control, then be more lenient, such that students feel
comfortable to approach and speak to them if the need arises. These teachers mentioned that
disciplinary measures also need to be adapted accordingly since students with challenging
behaviour need special management strategies. Two teachers argued that a teacher, rather
than going to class with a set of fixed rules, has to address students according to their
individual needs.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Ma tistax titfa’ blanket u tghid din tużaha You cannot throw a blanket and say I will
ma’ kulhadd...trid tistudja t-tfal wiehed use this with everyone… you have to study
wiehed. children one by one.

Four teachers explained flexibility in different ways; however they all underlined the need to
be just and treat everyone equally as much as possible. Cooper (2006) spoke about the
importance of keeping to the rules consistently but at the same time, teachers should be
flexible when applying these rules as long as they are honouring the values of justice and
respect as well as promoting engagement for all students.
Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Għadek ma tafx kemm japprezzaw li tifel bilgħa qal jiġi punished ukoll. Children really appreciate that a well-behaved child can be punished as well.

Ms. Borg explained that she does not make a big fuss when correcting misbehaviour of students with challenging behaviour. Another teacher, Ms. Pace, said that she tackles these students alone.

Ms. Pace (guidance teacher)

U tfal ohra jkunu jafu li dawk it-tfal ghandhom challenging behaviour allura l-fatt li inti forsi rħejt naqra iżjed, l-ohrajn jafu li inti mhux qed taghmel hekk bi preferenzi. The other children are aware that these children have challenging behaviour so the fact that you may slack a bit more with them, the others know that you are not doing so because you prefer them.

The other two teachers prefer to be flexible in a subtle way.

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Ħa nagħmlu patt... “ġibuli ghada”, pero` trid turihom biex tkun fair mal-ohrajn, “jekk ġigibuli ghada, innaqqasilkom punt mittotal.” We make an agreement “bring your work tomorrow”, but you have to show them that to be fair with the others, “if you get it tomorrow I will deduct a mark from the total.”
Two of the six teachers interviewed spoke about the importance of teachers having realistic academic expectations and adapting themselves accordingly. Abrams stated that if teachers maintain realistic expectations about what students with SEBD can do and about what they will accomplish in a particular period of time, they have a greater chance of establishing positive relationships with these students (as cited in Mihalas, 2009).

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Trid taddatta ruhek, ghalxejn nipprova nasal f’ċertu punt jekk naf li mhux se jaslu, ha jiddejqu u ha jirribellaw. You have to adapt yourself, it is useless trying to reach a certain point if I know that they will not make it, they will get bored and rebel.

On the other hand, the two teachers identified by the Headmaster as not having a good relationship with students with challenging behaviour adopt a controlling and strict classroom management. They use the same disciplinary measures for all students and emphasized that teachers should not have any preferences towards students with challenging behaviour. One teacher pointed out that she manages to keep class control by being rigid and consistent, by keeping her word at all costs. The other teacher mentioned that she threatens these students that she will dismiss them from class and she keeps doing so until they are fed up and stay quiet during the lesson.

Ms. Agius (subject teacher)

Issus fuqhom, tara li ghamlu l-homework ...u tirrabja magħhom biex jagħlqu halqhom. Pay attention to them, see that they do their homework… and be angry at them to keep their mouths shut.
Conforming to this idea was the comment of the Assistant Head in charge of discipline in school where he made it clear that students have to obey the rules first before dealing with them.

Mr. Calleja (Assistant Head)

Jiena l-awtorita` u jrid jobdini...imbaghad meta jissuġġetta ruhu ghar-regoli nibdew nikkellmu.

I am the authority and he has to obey me ...then when he subjects himself to the rules we start talking.

These school staff may be looking at students with SEBD in terms of what Crowe (2010) called “unwanted irritations” (p.67), consequently they might reject these students rather than trying to understand their needs (Mihalas et al., 2009). Research shows that an autocratic, rigid behaviour management contributes to the problem of SEBD, since acting out behaviours may be modelled on coercive management styles (Cefai & Cooper, 2006).

On the other hand, literature shows that teachers, who use learner-centred practices such as being sensitive to students’ individual differences, would be increasing students’ motivation (APA, 2011). Similarly Cooper (2006) argued that “the best educators….are those who seek out and engage with the uniqueness of their pupils as best they can” (p. 86).

**Promoting positive student participation.**

Two classroom teachers spoke about including students with challenging behaviour during the lesson by either telling them to get out of their places to take part in the classroom explanation; or by asking them simple questions which they can easily accomplish in order to make them feel successful (cf. Bartolo et al. 2007). In a study conducted by Whitney et al. (2005), students expressed their wish that teachers engage them in the content of the lesson.
Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Because a lot of children with challenging behaviour do not feel that they belong, they do not feel that they can be on your side, so they will be challenging because they will be fed up…that’s why I include them…

If students feel ignored they tend to become bored, unhappy and angry (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Bartolo et al. (2007) stated that teachers should provide opportunities for students to work and construct knowledge with them and with their peers. Cooper (2001) and Felix (2011) regarded teachers as primary sources through which students with SEBD obtain their self concept and sense of confidence. Through positive participation, students who are more likely to manifest misbehaviour may feel valued and so they tend to interest themselves in the lesson and comply with the teacher by behaving well (APA, 2011; Cefai, 2008; Martin & Dowson, 2009). Besides, Cefai and Cooper (2006) argued that it is the teacher’s duty to actively promote positive engagement both in the social and academic aspects as well as feelings of self worth in vulnerable students; and if they fail to do so they may excacerbate challenging behaviour.

A caring teacher-student relationship.

Relationship building as the basis for teaching.

Four of the six classroom teachers believed in a caring teacher-student relationship based on respect (Pianta et al., 2002), justice and fairness, as already mentioned in this chapter. In this relationship, the teacher should be understanding towards the students (ibid.)
and offer support (Bartolo et al., 2007) or refer students when required. They expressed the importance that teachers should show their students that they care for them and wish them to do well in school, while at the same time keep discipline and clear boundaries. Mihalas et al., (2009) argued that when teachers take time to communicate to students that they care about their well-being, they would enhance the emotional support in class.

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Jien nagħmilha ċara li I care about them, literally I use the words, I tell them that I love them but you have to do your part, I do not perform miracles.

Two of the teachers also expressed their pride when they related the positive relationship they have with students known as manifesting a challenging behaviour. Literature shows that through the building of a positive supportive relationship with their students, teachers are intrinsically rewarded such that they feel more confident and their work becomes more meaningful (Pianta et al., 2002; Spilt et al., 2011). One of the teachers said that the good relationship he had built with a particular student enabled him to manage behaviour just by relying on non-verbal behaviour (Bartolo et al. 2007).

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Jekk inħares lejh qatt ma naf li rrispondieni, If I look at him, he never answered back, I have taught him in form one as well…maybe that’s an advantage as well…
The other teacher said that these students speak to her in a normal respectful way both during the lesson as well as during break.

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

Nipprova nibni relationship with these students...nkun ok magħhom, especially out of class. I try to build a relationship with these students...I would be ok with them, especially out of class.

These two teachers both showed their awareness that students known as manifesting challenging behaviour are not as challenging with them. In fact, literature shows that through positive relationships with their teachers, students learn to control their emotions and manifest socially accepted behaviour, such that discipline problems are reduced (Canter & Wright 2005; Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Landers et al., 2008).

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

Per eżempju Mark ma kellix clash wahda f’sena u kien l-iktar student li kont qed nibża minnu x’hin qaluli li ha nghallmu...imma jien ma kellix clashes mieghu u dejjem thank you, sorry, please, u he was really really nice, mhux qed nghidlek li kien perfett is-sena kollha imma qatt ma tani trouble. Ma kienx jipprova jbaqbaqni imma ma’ ċerta nies xorta anki din is-sena kien jipprova jbaqbaqhom u smajtu jien For example Mark I did not have a single clash with him in a year and he was the student I feared most when I was told that I was going to teach him…but I never had clashes with him and he always used thank you, sorry, please, and he was really really nice, I am not telling you that he was perfect throughout the whole year…but he never gave me trouble. He never gave me any trouble but with other teachers he tried to
b’widnejja jghajjarhom. Meta lili qatt ma and I heard him myself insulting them. He
ghajjarni dan... never insulted me...

Apart from the behavioural aspect, these two teachers also satisfactorily mentioned these
students’ academic improvement since they started teaching them.

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

...fl-English Language, Mark got over 60 ...in the English language exam Mark got
marks u hadmu b’serjeta` kbira l-eżami...hu over 60 marks and he worked very
j hobbu l-Ingliż, xorta mhux se jtik xoghol, seriously...he loves English, still he won’t
xorta mhux ha joqghod attent dejjem, imma give you any work, he won’t always pay
j hobbu. attention, but he loves it.

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Jien is-sena l-ohra bis-serjeta`, l-4C kollha Last year, seriously, all 4C passed….all
ghaddew...all right din is-sena m’ghaddewx right this year not all of them passed but
kollha imma ġahghuha naqra. they managed.

This reflects Noddings’ (1988) comment that “children will work harder and do things for
people...they love and trust” (p.32). Also there is strong evidence that students who have a
positive relationship with their teacher achieve at higher levels academically (Cefai, 2008;
Felix, 2011; Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Martin & Dowson, 2009; Mihalas et al, 2009); this is
also true for students with SEBD (Hopper & Murphy, 2010; Mihalas et al., 2009).

One of the Assistant Heads said that it is the teachers’ role to build a relationship
with their students, which is essential for teaching and learning to take place.
Ms. Grech (Assistant Head)

Jew int se tibni relazzjoni mal-istudenti tieghek jew mhux se taħdem. You are either going to build a relationship with your students or you are not going to work.

The two guidance teachers interviewed expressed their belief in a caring teacher-student relationship which should be the first aim of every teacher (cf. Felix, 2011).

Ms. Pace (guidance teacher)

Għalija qabel nibda nghallimhom, l-ewwel irrid nibni relazzjoni. Before I start teaching them, I need to build a relationship first.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Jiena nahseb li relationship hija importantissima...hija kollox kważi I believe that the relationship is very important...it is almost everything...their kważi...il-karrotta taghhom hija gHALIx motivation is your relationship with them. ghandhom ir-relationship tieghek magghom.

One of these guidance teachers agreed with Cothran et al. (as cited in Mihalas et al., 2009), who underlined the importance of the primary encounters with students as a determining factor on the building of a positive teacher-student relationship.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Jiena nemmen ħafna fl-ewwel ġurnata jew l-ewwel ġimgħa...first encounter, first I believe a lot in the first day or the first week...First encounter, first impressions
impressions tend to persist, dik nemminha ħafna. I believe in it a lot.

In contrast, the two teachers identified by the Headmaster as those not having a good relationship with students with challenging behaviour, made it very clear that they do not agree with having a personal relationship with their students. They both declared that their job is to teach the subject to the students who want to learn. It seemed that they might indirectly be implying that it is not their responsibility to teach students how to behave respectfully (cf. Landers et al., 2008). Mihalas et al., (2009) noted that teachers may think that secondary school students who have a desire for independence, no longer are in need of a caring teacher-student relationship. However literature shows that one of adolescents’ developmental needs is “….to form functional, effective, supportive relationship with adults in the school setting” (Pianta et al., 2002, p. 99), thus through building a caring relationship with students, teachers would be meeting students’ need for relatedness (APA, 2011). Moreover, teachers might think that students with challenging behaviour do not care about their teachers. However Knight (2010) argued that those students rejecting their teachers are the ones who mostly need a caring supportive relationship with their teachers.

*Individual communication and personal interest.*

Four out of the six classroom teachers communicated in an individual manner with students with challenging behaviour in and out of class both formally and informally depending on the situation. One of these teachers stated the effectiveness of speaking to these students individually.
Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)  

He felt guilty…because I spoke to him alone, I gave him the importance, found time to speak to him alone and I showed him that I believe in him and they appreciate this a lot.

Mr. Caruana, stated how he always tries to build a relationship with his students by getting to know them and sharing conversations about the things they like during lessons as well as by getting involved in extracurricular activities with them during break.

If teachers know their students’ interests, they can tailor their instruction to their interests; in doing so, they would be showing their students that they care for them (APA, 2011).

Likewise, Allsopp, Kyger, and Lovin (as cited in Mihalas, 2009) stated that in order for teachers to connect with particular students, they use individual student comments through informal conversations whenever they encounter them both inside and outside of class.
Conversely, two teachers, made it clear that they only speak to students in a formal way. These two teachers were those identified by the Headmaster as those who do not get on well with students with challenging behaviour. One teacher stated that only in certain rare instances she speaks to these students individually after class but the other one insisted that she always speaks to students with challenging behaviour in front of their peers, during the lesson.

Ms. Agius (subject teacher)

Le, jien inkellimhom fil-klassi, li ghandi nghidilhom, nghidilhom dak il-hin waqt il-lezzjoni...jien inkellimhom u nghidilhom li haddiehor irid il-lezzjoni.

I speak to them during class, what I have to tell them I tell them during the lesson…I tell them that others want the lesson.

Literature shows that teachers should find the appropriate place and time conducive to speak to students individually in and out of class (McCready & Soloway, 2010; Mihalas et al., 2009). Teachers, who make an effort to spend time individually with difficult students, enable students to develop trust in their teachers and hence create a positive relationship with them (Pianta, 1999; Rudasill et al., 2006). Gregory and Ripski (2008) argued that if students perceive their teachers as trustworthy people, they manifest less defiant behaviour.

**Getting to know students in dealing with misbehaviour.**

Six out of the nine interviewees declared that the best way of dealing with students with challenging behaviour is by getting to know them and finding out why they are behaving in that manner. Mihalas et al. (2009) argued that if students, especially those with SEBD,
believe that their teachers really know them and show interest in them, they would be more willing to establish a collaborative relationship with them.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

To know which tactics you have to use with children with challenging behaviour one needs to know what they need, because if you know where the problem is, you will know which problem to address...and you will know how to help them.

Through empathy, which is one of Rogers’ (1980) core conditions of therapeutic relationships, as well as an essential foundation block in making positive connections with students, teachers would be validating the perception of the particular student (Cooper, 2006). The teacher’s target is to win these students with challenging behaviour by providing attention and support (cf. Bartolo et. al., 2007; Pianta, 1999).

The majority of the teachers interviewed mentioned the importance that teachers should be aware of students having difficulties and approach them in order to find the best way to help them. This may be achieved by discussions and negotiations leading to an agreement. Although as the Headmaster stated, this may be quite time consuming, a guidance teacher remarked that through this way, teachers should manage to win the majority of these students.
Headmaster

Tiskopri daqsxejn x’inhi r-рагuni, x’hemm wara din il-behaviour...trid it-tul, trid il-hin ghax dana mhux switch.

You discover a little what the reason is, what’s there behind this behaviour...you need time because this is not just a switch.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

95% għandek jirnexxilek iġġibhom miegħek...bil-mod insib mod kif indur magħhom u nġibhom mieghi.

You should manage to get 95% of them on your side...Slowly I find a way how to go around them and bring them on my side.

Likewise, Crowe (2010) argued that getting to know students with challenging behaviour implies time and energy investment as well as extra efforts from the teachers’ side; however this will help students gain control of their emotions; hence it will consequently induce a smoother progression throughout the year. Cooper (2006) also stated that if teachers know their students well they are more likely to respond fairly and both the student and his peers benefit.

Moreover, literature shows that in order to build a positive relationship with their students, teachers should also self-disclose or share their interests with their students (Bartolo et al. 2007; Cefai, 2008). In a study conducted by Whitney et al. (2005), “students ask for teachers who care enough to understand students’ lives, backgrounds and cultures” as well as “to share their personal lives, stories and experiences” (p.34).
Cautious use of punishment.

Although students with SEBD are the only group of pupils with Individual Education Needs for whom punitive exclusionary responses are still permitted by law (Cooper, 2001), six out of the nine interviewees avoid using punishment and exclusions. The two guidance teachers as well as the Headmaster stated that punishments are ineffective, especially if used with students having challenging behaviour.

Headmaster

Jekk ma tasalx bil-kelma t-tajba jien nemmen li lanqas bil-kastig ma tasal. If the behaviour does not change by speaking to him I believe that you would not change the situation by giving punishments.

One of the guidance teachers as well as the Headmaster agreed that punishments may only be effective if used for academic benefits, such as helping students who are starting to lose interest by putting them on track. One of the Assistant Headmasters explained that she punishes students only when constrained to do so, but makes it a point to discuss this thoroughly with the students themselves first. She always explains to students that every action attracts a particular consequence, if this is positive, a reward would be achieved, if it is negative, it is as if the student is choosing to be punished.

Ms. Grech (Assistant Head)

Qatt ma nuża l-kelma punishment, hi dak li inti qed titlob minni, konsegwenza ta’ regoli li inti jew se żżomm maghhom jew le. I never use the word punishment, it is what you are asking from me, consequence of rules that you either abide to or not.
Two classroom teachers said that when students misbehave during the lesson, they attract their attention; or if the need arises, they allow them to have some time out from class so as to remove the student from sources of reinforcement of undesirable behaviour (cf. Cooper, 2006). They stated that they only report students, to the SMT or their parents in very extreme cases, when behaviour is really unacceptable but they always inform the students before reporting them. One of these two teachers also expressed her belief that the use of excessive punishments has a negative impact on the teacher.

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

Min jaghti għalxejn imbagħad tigi tahdem kontra t-teacher. Teachers who give punishments loosely create a situation which turns against them.

Another teacher commented on the negative effect of excluding students.

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Jien naf ċert, mija fil-mija, dawn jekk tkeċċihom, jew ittihom exclusion, qed tagħmlilhom pjaċir. I am sure that if these children are sent out of class, or you exclude them, you are doing them a favour.

Indeed Cooper (2006) maintained that for a student who has already been rejected or neglected, exclusions reinforce the “….sense of being unworthy, unwanted and a social and academic failure” (p. 82).

On the other hand, the two teachers who were identified by the Headmaster as those who do not get on well with students with challenging behaviour said that they use punishments regularly to deal with challenging behaviour. One teacher said that after
warning the students to behave in the beginning of the year, she punishes misbehaviour by giving copies or a lot of extra work which has to be done in class during the lesson, then if misbehaviour persists, the students are given a detention or kept after school.

Ms. Gatt (subject teacher)

(smiling) Ikollhom mhux hażin extra work allura ġeneralment tahdem...meta jibqghu (smiles) They have quite a lot of extra work so generally it works…if they keep on ma jġibux ruhhom tajjeb, ikolli jew intihom misbehaving…then I have to give them xi detention jew inkella nghidilhom li ha either a detention or after school. jibqghu wara l-hin tal-iskola.

The other teacher believed that detentions are not effective so instead she reports students with challenging behaviour to the SMT. The Assistant Headmaster in charge of discipline stated that he gives students all types of punishments, according to the type of misbehaviour.

Mr. Calleja (Assistant Head)

Definitely, if he does not want to reason l-ewwel bil-punishments… imbaghad kif things out, first I use punishments… then jibda l-punishments joghrok u jibda jidhol when the punishment starts to be rubbed in ġewwa u t-tifel ikun ċeda, imbaghad tibda and the boy gives in, then you start to tirraġuna mieghu…il-punishments ivarjaw, reason with him…punishments vary, you tista’ tibda minn ghajta, taghti verbal can start with a scolding, give a verbal warning, detention, after school…jista’ gażja warning, detention, afterschool…it may be lill-parents biss u tieqaf hemm… jiddependi that you just talk to his parents only and it skont il-każ. stops there…depends according to the case.
Research shows that a blaming and punitive approach contributes to the problem of SEBD (Cefai & Cooper 2010; Patterson et al., 1992). Hence, it is not surprising that teachers who use punishments regularly are identified by the Headmaster as those who do not get on well with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

**Inadequate teacher education.**

Eight of the nine interviewees complained that they did not receive any training in teaching students with challenging behaviour, so they had to learn through experience. The only teacher who had received this kind of training at University was the youngest one; however, he criticized this training as being inadequate and he explained it as the reciting of psychological theories.

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

Ifhimni l-universita’ kellna course...imma... At university we attended a mhux effettiv xejn hux...teoriji u course…but…it’s really not psychology. effective…theories and psychology.

Adequate teacher education in this regard is essential since teachers dealing with students with challenging behaviour need to have professional skills and emotional energy to deliver lessons successfully (Pianta et al., 2002; Swinson & Knight, 2007). A study with elementary school teachers, showed that when “…teachers are trained to provide students with warmth and support, clear expectations for behaviour, and developmentally appropriate autonomy”, their students’ academic achievement improves and they increase the manifestation of socially accepted behaviour (Schaps, Battistich, & Solomon, as cited in Wentzel, 2002, p.297).
**Gaps in teacher education.**

Three interviewees declared that they do not believe that the university lecturers are capable of helping teachers how to deal with students with challenging behaviour. They said that most lecturers are not really aware of the problems brought about by students with challenging behaviour, as they either have never taught in class themselves, or if they have, it was a long time ago; so it might be that they have never applied the theories they themselves teach.

Mr. Calleja (Assistant Head)

Il-lecturers stess, they are not aware of these problems, dan kif jista’ jkun jiġi lecturer u jghid lill-istudent teachers jagħmlu group work…group work meta hu għadu lanqas ghandu l-feel tal-klassi? Heqq dak huwa lok għal sfrattu…il-lecturers… nahseb milli nifhem u mill-mod kif nitkellem magħhom meta jiġu jistaqsuna biex jaraw l-istudent teachers fil-klassijiet, nahseb illi ghandhom background fqir hafna ta’ klassi, x’jiġifieri klassi.

The lecturers themselves are not aware of these problems, how can a lecturer tell the student teachers to use group work…group work if he has not yet got the classroom feel? That brings about chaos…the lecturers…according to my understanding and from what I gather from them when they visit student teachers in class, I believe they have a very poor understanding of classroom management.

Two teachers argued that at university they heard a lot about positive reinforcement, however they believe that this is not effective. One said that using eye contact to attract the attention of the student is only effective with students who are well behaved, another stated that praising students is not enough.
Ms. Gatt (subject teacher)

Ahna fil-kors taghna dejjem speċi kienu jghidulna, positive reinforcement, imma jiena nahseb hafna mid-drabi din ma tahdimx qieghda...all right, importanti tfahharhom it-tfal eċċ imma mhux biss ghax xi kultant dawn l-affarijiet mhux qed jahdmu mat-tfal.

During our course they used to tell us about positive reinforcement, but I believe that many times this is not working...all right, it is important to praise the children etc. but it’s not enough because at times these things are not working with children.

Three teachers mentioned that most of the talks they have during their working experience are also loaded with theory and one of them implied that at times they feel that these talks are not always related to their needs.

Ms. Agius (subject teacher)

Jagħmlulna t-talks u ghalxejn imma ghax ma niehdu xejn, flok jghidulna kif irridu nahdmu ma’ dawn it-tfal jghiduna koċċ teoriji u paroli fil-vojt.

The talks we are given are in vain, we do not benefit from them, instead of telling us how to deal with these children, they tell us a number of theories and futile words.

Three of the interviewees showed their concern that during teaching practice the focus is on the subject methodology and no time is allotted to tackle disciplinary problems and classroom management issues. This repeats itself in everyday life in the classroom where the teachers have to strive to finish the syllabus without having any time left to the pedagogy behind it.
Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Jekk ma ghandikx pedagogy....ma tistax
ittiha l-methodology...bil-kontra forsi
tahdem xi ftit...jekk ghandek ftit
methodology imma ghandek hafna
pedagogy tmexxi.

If you do not have pedagogy, you cannot
apply methodology…it might work the
other way round…if you have some
methodology and a lot of pedagogy you can
manage.

More practice based teacher education.

Three interviewees declared that student teachers should be prepared for the
presence of students with challenging behaviour in class and be aware of the behavioural
problems they may encounter. One of the teachers spoke about increasing the teaching
practice period by eliminating the observation usually done in the first year and instead the
teachers-to-be immediately take charge of a class so that they would know what teaching
entails. The Headmaster declared his strong belief that the Education Directorate should
provide non-compulsory training for teachers, which should be easily accessible for those
who would like to attend.

Headmaster

Inti trid waqt li t-teacher ikun ghaddej minn
problemi ikun jista’ mbaghad jifhem iżjed
it-teorija lejn xiex twassal, u anke meta
jistaqsi, anke meta jiddiskuti, tkun hierża
mill-esperjenza tal-hajja fl-iskola.
It-training ma jkunx bilfors ghalixx meta t-
training ikun bilfors, wieħed imur jaghmlu u

One has to consider that when the teacher
would be going through a problem he would
be more able to grasp the theory’s objective,
and even when he asks, and when he
discusses, it would be a reflection of his
experience in the school’s environment
The training should not be compulsory
Five interviewees said that teacher training should be aimed at discussing practical ways of dealing with students with challenging behaviour in a mixed ability class, communication skills, group dynamics and classroom management. Training should also be aimed at dealing with students with specific conditions, including ADHD, ADD, autism, dyslexia, which may lead to misbehaviour. This training should be running throughout the teaching course as well as during the teaching life through in-service courses, school developmental plans and target groups.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

Jekk fl-iskola inti m’għandikx classroom management tat-tfal bic-challenging behaviour speċjalment, qed tipprova tibni dar meta m’għandikx pedamenti. If at school you do not have classroom management of children with challenging behaviour especially, you are trying to build a house when you do not have any foundations.

Three of the interviewees said that training should be delivered by a number of experienced secondary school teachers, capable of maintaining class control and willing to help other teachers.

Mr. Calleja (Assistant Head)

Jien nirrakomanda li jkun hemm teacher mentor, teacher tal-esperjenza li ma jkollux mentor, an experienced teacher who does...
One of the guidance teachers suggested that teachers should be placed in small groups to help each other as well as teachers-to-be, who come to school for their teaching practice, when challenging behavioural problems crop up. As Pianta et al. (2002) argued, teachers need to have “….opportunities to express and understand their negative experiences and to be trained in skills that can alter these representations and the interactions associated with them” (p. 94).

**Rigid sense of individuality and autonomy in class.**

**Lack of openness to change.**

When teachers were asked if they are willing to discuss their ways of dealing with students with challenging behaviour with other teachers, it is interesting to note that even those teachers who do not have a good relationship with these students are keen to tell other teachers about their ways of dealing with them; thus believing that they have found an effective way. In fact, five out of the six teachers are willing to share their methods and ideas. However, all the teachers agreed that other teachers are reluctant and resistant to listen to new ideas because everyone tends to stick to their own method.

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

Nemmen li kull teacher ghandha l-metodu taghha u forsi s-sistema tieghi ma toghġobx lil haddiehor, forsi ghal haddiehor jiena I’m I believe that every teacher has her own method and maybe my system is not approved by others, maybe for others I am
too lenient, I’m not that strict, but that is my system, if they do not like it, it’s their problem…I know that in other teachers’ eyes I’m not a successful teacher in my relationship with children.

Mr. Caruana (subject teacher)

I think it is difficult for teachers older than me to take ideas from me…they say who is he to tell me.

One of the guidance teachers, Mr. Attard, argued that probably teachers are resistant to change because they believe that students have to change.

Mr. Attard (guidance teacher)

many times, unfortunately, the hypothesis is that it’s not me who has to change but the children, they should not behave in this way, this is not acceptable…teachers are not to blame, on the other hand because I am preoccupied with managing to finish what I have planned, if I have one or two with challenging behaviour, sorry they have to change, and the SMT have to deal with him.
Cooper (2006) stated that teachers in a school who might be experiencing similar challenges “…draw enormous strength from sharing ideas and supporting one another in the development of understandings and interventions relating to constructive educational engagement” (p.85).

**The importance of a flexible personality.**

In this study, gender, amount of teaching experience or subject taught did not feature as key factors in the staff’s narratives about the teacher-student relationships; on the other hand, the teacher’s own personality did. Three of the nine interviewees, mentioned that teachers’ eagerness to build a relationship with their students does not only depend on the amount of training they have or on their teaching experience, but mostly on the teacher’s personality, such as being ready to learn and open to new ideas.

Ms. Borg (subject teacher)

...jistghu jittrejnjawk elf professor l-universita` imma mbaghad trid ti`gi minnek, ...you may be trained by a thousand professors at university but then it depends int trid issib it-triq kif inti ha tkampa ma` on you, you have to find the way to cope dawn l-istudenti. with these students.

The Headmaster stated that, as professionals, teachers should be flexible and motivated to attend training where they feel they need to improve.

Headmaster

Jekk ma tkunx flessibli ha tbati ghax inti If you are not going to be flexible, you are m`intix se tiffittja…il-flessibilita` hija going to suffer because you are not going to
McCready and Soloway (2010) argued that “It is teachers who become experts within their own inner domain that then embody the relational presence to meet and greet the ever-changing demands of … schools and classrooms” (p.122).

Common Themes from Students’ and Staff’s Interviews

The common themes emerging both from the students’ focus group as well as from the SMT and / or teachers’ interviews are compiled in Table 3 and discussed below.

Table 3

<table>
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<th>Common themes to both Students and School Staff</th>
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<td>Students behave according to the teacher’s attitude</td>
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<td>Sense of humour</td>
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</table>

**Students behave according to the teacher’s attitude.**

Some of the teachers said that in a very strict, confrontation environment students may rebel by misbehaving even more (cf. Cefai & Cooper, 2010). They also said that if students are respected and encouraged to participate in class they feel valued, and tend to behave in order to reciprocate this positive attitude towards their teacher (cf. APA, 2011; Martin & Dowson, 2009). They agreed that students change their attitude according to the relationship they have with the teacher, hence their main aim of building a caring relationship with these students as a primary step of teaching is imperative (cf. Felix, 2011). This line of thought is substantiated by the students themselves who admitted that they change their
behaviour according to the attitude of the particular teacher (cf. Cefai & Cooper, 2010; Mihalas et al., 2009). These students, identified as manifesting challenging behaviour, stated that if teachers respect them, they respect them back by behaving well in class.

**Ineffective coercive approach.**

The two guidance teachers, as well as the two teachers identified by the Headmaster as coping well with students with challenging behaviour, said that they are not in favour of a strict classroom environment and also mentioned that teachers who adopt such an approach initiated a confrontational attitude with these students (cf. Cefai & Cooper, 2010). Likewise, the students said that if the teacher is too strict the lesson becomes boring and a rebellious attitude may be instilled in the students against the teacher (Cefai & Cooper, 2010). This implies that a vicious circle may result such that in a strict classroom environment, students with challenging behaviour become frustrated which lead to a deterioration in behaviour.

**Sense of humour.**

Having a sense of humour was one of the common themes emerging from both students’ and staff’s findings. Some of the teachers spoke about the importance of having a sense of humour with their students in class (cf. Cooper, 2006), while the students also mentioned cautious use of humour as one of the positive characteristics of the teachers who have a positive relationship with them.

**Mutual respect.**

A common theme for both teachers and students was that teacher-student relationships should be based on mutual respect. Students claimed that teachers should be respectful towards their students (cf. Whitney et al., 2005). Likewise, some of the staff said
that if teachers respect their students, the latter would in turn be respectful towards them. One of the teachers argued that though she does not agree with the misbehaving attitude, she still respects the student manifesting this behaviour (cf. Cooper, 2006).

**Student participation.**

School staff argued that promoting the active participation of students with challenging behaviour in the classroom is a good strategy to respond to challenging behaviour; this was also mentioned by the students during the focus group discussion (cf. Bartolo et al., 2007; Whitney et al., 2005).

**Listening to students.**

Both teachers and students agreed that the best way that teachers and /or SMT should deal with students with challenging behaviour is by speaking to them alone, and trying to find the reason behind their misbehaviour (cf. Whitney et al., 2005). In doing so, through formal and informal communication, the teachers would be building a trustworthy relationship with these students (cf. Bartolo et al., 2007; Rudasill et al., 2006).

**Final Comment.**

The common themes which were brought forth both by students and / or school staff in this study, might serve to illuminate teachers in their way of dealing with students with challenging behaviour. Keeping in mind that students behave according to the teacher’s attitude, teachers should avoid a coercive approach in class. Teachers who respect their students tend to be respected back. Teachers, who deliver their lessons with a sense of humour, encourage student participation and are open to listen to their students’ needs, are likely to have a positive relationship with students exhibiting challenging behaviour.
Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the findings compiled together with a number of recommendations of how to build positive caring relationships with students as elicited from the results of this project. The limitations of this study, as well as possible suggestions for further research conclude the chapter.

Summary of Findings

In this section, the main themes emerging from this study in the light of the research question are compiled together. The eight students constituting the focus group said that they change their behaviour according to the teachers’ attitude. They felt that some of the teachers treat them differently because they are labelled as misbehaving students. Although all students believed that discipline is important in class, they were not in favour of a very strict classroom management. The students stated that teachers should adopt a sense of humour where both teachers and students joke during the lessons, as long as this does not interfere with the delivery of the lesson. The students argued that when a student misbehaves, the teacher should speak to him to find the reason behind his behaviour. They mentioned that teachers should deal with misbehaving students themselves, rather than reporting them to the SMT. However, the students said that if a member of the SMT receives a complaint about a misbehaving student, the SMT member should listen both to the student and the teacher concerned. The majority of the students believed that parents should only be informed if necessary. Once the teacher or SMT member speaks to the misbehaving student, if the behaviour persists, all students agreed that the student should be punished accordingly; however, punishments may escalate to quite harsh measures which may end up ruining their behaviour conduct. The students stated that punishments should have academic benefits whilst admitting that exclusions are not beneficial since the excluded student enjoys spending
time away from school. They concluded that an ideal classroom environment is one where lessons are delivered in a relaxed comfortable ambience, in which teachers are patient, helpful, treat students well and encourage student participation.

All the teachers and SMT interviewed expressed their concern regarding the problem of challenging behaviour in their school. Most interviewees attributed the cause of challenging behaviour to the students themselves or to their family background; as well as to the students’ difficulty to engage with a rigid school system. There is a clear distinction between the interviewees such that the majority, including the headmaster, one of the Assistant Heads, the two guidance teachers and the two teachers identified by the headmaster as coping well with students with challenging behaviour were in favour of a positive teacher-student relationship. However, the two teachers identified by the headmaster as not getting on well with students with challenging behaviour and the Assistant Head in charge of discipline were not. The findings of the majority of the interviewees will hereby be presented. Teachers establish a positive relationship with their students in class by showing that they care for them and wish them to do well, while keeping discipline and clear boundaries. The importance of being honest, respectful and adopting a humoristic stance was identified. Teachers should maintain realistic expectations and engage students with challenging behaviour in the lesson so that they feel valued and in turn behave well. By adopting a flexible classroom management, teachers should adapt rules and disciplinary measures according to the students’ individual needs, while at the same time being fair to all the students. If students manifesting challenging behaviour are confronted, the misbehaviour may escalate; if on the other hand these students are understood and praised when they behaved well, misbehaviour may decrease. In a caring teacher-student relationship, teachers should get to know their students individually, through formal and informal communication, and hence find the reason behind misbehaviour. Teachers should show understanding
towards their students, offer support when required or refer students if the need arises; although this may be time consuming it is quite effective. Most of the time teachers having a positive relationship with students manage to correct misbehaviour just by using non-verbal behaviour, rather than by punishments. Teachers who primarily build a positive relationship with students with challenging behaviour express their satisfaction that students do not really misbehave with them, show academic improvements and respect them both in and out of class. The majority of the interviewees lack adequate teacher education with respect to handling students with challenging behaviour. They attributed the gaps in teacher education to inexperienced lecturers, theory loaded material and a focus on subject methodology rather than pedagogy and classroom management. They suggested more practice based teacher education across the teaching course and classroom practice in which teachers learn different skills in how to deal with students manifesting challenging behaviour. These courses would ideally be delivered by secondary school teachers having effective class control. The majority of teachers stated that they are ready to share their ideas of dealing with students with challenging behaviour with other teachers but complain that teachers have their own method and are reluctant to change. Dealing effectively with students with challenging behaviour also depends mostly on teachers’ personality especially on teachers’ flexibility and openness to learn new ideas.

Both students and staff agreed that the teacher’s attitude strongly influences students’ behaviour and that a positive teacher-student relationship enhances mutual respect. Teachers should adopt a humoristic stance during lessons rather than creating a very strict atmosphere since this may induce a rebellious attitude in the students. Students and school staff both stated the importance that teachers should listen to students with challenging behaviour and find the reason behind misbehaviour as well as promote student participation in the classroom.
Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the researcher compiled a number of recommendations which can be followed in order to enhance a positive teacher-student relationship in secondary schools. During teacher education courses, as well as courses for Heads of School, teachers need to be made aware of the importance of building caring relationships with their students and how such relationships have been found to improve the behaviour and academic engagement of students with challenging behaviour. It also needs to be underlined that teachers who do not seek to build such relationships and base their teaching and classroom management on punishment, control and coercion, end up with more behavioural problems and disengagement. They need to be made aware of the importance of maintaining flexibility throughout their teaching years so that, irrelevant of the years of teaching experience, they would strive to be willing to learn and be open to other teachers’ new ideas.

Teachers may be provided with opportunities to form learning and mentoring groups to discuss their difficulties as well as sharing the ideas and strategies they themselves find effective in dealing with students with challenging behaviour. Both these groups as well as teacher education courses can be led by secondary school teachers who cope effectively with these students through positive relationship building.

The school staff may also be exposed to effective skills needed to build a positive relationship with students with challenging behaviour as stated by the participants in this research. The school personnel are advised on the potential risks of treating students negatively simply because they are labelled as manifesting challenging behaviour. Instead of confronting these students, they are encouraged to praise these students’ effort and motivation thus showing them that they are trusted. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a flexible classroom management, where rather than going to class with a fixed set of rules,
they adapt management measures according to the students’ individual needs, while being fair to all the students. Also by being aware of each student’s capabilities, teachers are advised to maintain realistic expectations accordingly and engage students with challenging behaviour in the lesson. It would also be useful for school personnel to help students manifesting challenging behaviour by getting to know them individually through formal and informal communication. By active listening to students, teachers and /or SMT may find the reason behind misbehaviour, students are shown that they are understood and then offered support or referred as needed. If students misbehave during the lesson, the teacher needs to try to attract their attention first; punishments are best avoided but if the particular student has been spoken to and misbehaviour persists, punishments having academic benefits should be used. Reporting students to third parties and excluding students have not been found to be effective ways of managing behaviour problems. While maintaining control and establishing clear boundaries, teachers are recommended to adopt a caring, flexible, and humoristic stance within limit. A positive relationship is enhanced in a relaxed and comfortable environment, where students are shown that they are cared for through honesty and respect, and are allowed to express themselves safely.

Limitations

Any interpretation of the results of this study need to acknowledge several limiting factors, namely:

- The study was conducted in one school catering for students coming from a particular geographical area in Malta. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the degree to which the results are representative of other schools in different geographical areas in Malta.
The study was carried out in a boys’ secondary school, so findings are particularly relevant to such schools rather than to schools such as girls’ secondary schools, non-state schools and primary schools; great care therefore must be taken in making generalisations to such contexts.

A convenient sample of interviewees were chosen for the study, namely the Headmaster, two Assistant Heads, two guidance teachers, four subject teachers. So it is not possible to determine the degree to which results are representative of other school staff within the same school or in other schools.

The focus group consisted of eight students in Forms Three and Four, manifesting challenging behaviour. Since the sample was not randomly generated, it cannot be said to represent the students with challenging behaviour within the same school or in other schools. Care must be taken in generalising the results.

Data collection for this study took place at the end of the scholastic year; maybe if it took place at some other time during the year, different results would have been obtained.

The data collected by participants may not coincide with actual practices or conditions.

The researcher, being a practitioner in the same school in which the research was conducted, may present potential bias which may influence both data collection and analysis of findings. However, the researcher being aware of this position, continuously sought to investigate the research process as described in the methodology chapter.
Recommendations for Further Research

While acknowledging the limitations of this study, the researcher suggests directions for future research. A similar larger study incorporating different schools from different geographical areas, including girls’ secondary schools as well as primary schools can be conducted. A larger more representative sample of school staff can be interviewed and a number of focus groups with students manifesting challenging behaviour from all grades and forms can be conducted to obtain more representative data. Data collection can take place in three equal intervals that is in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the same scholastic year. The study may be divided into two types of data, qualitative and quantitative data. Through quantitative data, for instance, the frequency as well as the intensity of challenging behaviour may be determined. Through qualitative data, apart from the questions already asked in this research, the interviewees may be asked if students with challenging behaviour maintain or change their behaviour with different teachers and the reason behind their opinion, as well as elicit their belief regarding these students’ opinion towards them. Rather than just the data collected from the participants themselves, the researcher may observe actual lessons of different teachers with the same students. Through these observations, the researcher may obtain direct evidence to identify different types of relationships with students with challenging behaviour, how these are manifested and their effect on the delivery of the lesson as well as on the teacher and other students in class. The findings of such further research may corroborate the themes of this study and / or they may identify other issues not captured by this study.

Concluding Comment

This study may be useful in helping school administrators and classroom teachers as well as school staff specialised in SEBD to value the importance of building a positive
relationship with students manifesting challenging behaviour. Teachers may build trusting relationships with their students by maintaining an:

- open frame of mind and learning to listen to students’ interests, hopes and dreams….These strategies and skills are not mandated through school policies and are unlikely to be taught by relationship building ‘experts’. Rather, each teacher has to cultivate a set of practices that tap into her/his personal preferences, capacities and dispositions to build trusting relationships. (McCready & Soloway, 2010, p. 119)

The researcher believes that teaching is a learning experience in which the teacher keeps on learning through the building of each and every relationship with individual students. This will imply the development of more effective practice in classrooms and schools in general; as well as increase satisfaction in all sectors of education from administrators to teachers to each and every learner according to every learner’s personal needs.
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*Remedial and Special Education, 31*(1), 48-63.


Appendix A

Focus Group Questions

1. What in your opinion, is the role of the teacher:
   a. to teach the subject?
   b. to have a good relationship with the students?
   c. the two of them?

2. What do you mean by a good teacher-student relationship? How do you describe such a relationship? How would you prefer this relationship to be?

3. Do you behave the same with all the teachers or do you behave differently with different teachers? Why?

4. What are the qualities of those teachers with whom you get on well with?

5. What are the qualities of those teachers with whom you do not get on well with?

6. If you were a teacher, and you have a student in class who is misbehaving, what would you do?

7. Do you agree with punishments? If yes, what type of punishments? What is their effect? If you do not use punishments what would you use instead?

8. If you were the Head or Assistant Head of School, and one of the teachers reports that a particular student is misbehaving, what would you do?
Appendix B

Head of School and Assistant Heads’ Interview Questions

1. How many years have you been in this position?

2. How many students with challenging behaviour do you encounter in Form 3 and in Form 4? How serious is this problem at your school?

3. What sort of challenging behaviour do you usually encounter?

4. Why in your opinion, do these students behave in this way?

5. How do you usually deal with students with challenging behaviour:
   a. by trying to convince them to behave? How?
   b. by punishing them? How?

6. Have you ever:
   a. spoken to these students yourself?
   b. referred these students? To whom?
   c. what was the result?

7. What sort of support is provided at the school to help and understand these students?

8. Do you think that there is a link between:
   a. teachers and guidance teachers
   b. SMT and guidance teachers to help these students?

9. Do you think teachers are trained to deal with these problems?

10. How can teachers be helped in these situations:
   a. while studying to become teachers?
   b. during their teaching life?
Appendix C

Teachers’ Interview Questions

1. male ____ female ____

2. How many years have you been teaching? _______

3. subject taught ______________

4. number of classes you are teaching this year: Form 3 _____ Form 4 _____

5. Do you teach students with challenging behaviour?
   How many in Form 3 _____ and in Form 4 _____?

6. Why do you think these students behave in a challenging way?

7. What do you think is the best way to deal with these students?
   Do you think that these students should be:
   a. helped? If yes, in what ways?
   b. punished? If yes, in what ways? And how effective?

8. Do you use the same disciplinary measures for all the students in class?
   How flexible do you think teachers should be with students with challenging behaviour?

9. Do you manage to keep class control with these students in class? If yes, how?
   What have you found to work?

10. Whenever you used punishments with these students, what type of punishments, if any, do you usually use? Which punishment did you find the most effective?

11. As part of your way of dealing with these students, have you ever:
   a. spoken to these students alone (formal)?
   b. spoken to them during break (informal)?
   c. refer to SMT / guidance?
   d. refer to parents?
12. Do you think it is important to build a relationship with these students? If yes:
   a. How?
   b. What sort of relationship do you have with these students? (formal, friendly, supportive, understanding).

13. Were you ever trained to deal with these students?
    How can teachers be helped in such situations:
    a. while studying to become teachers?
    b. during their teaching life?

14. If you think that you have found a way of dealing with these students, do you discuss this with other teachers? If yes, what is their reaction?
I am reading for a Masters in Counselling (2008 – 2012) organised by the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. As part of my studies, I will be carrying out a professional research project. The purpose of this research is to formulate a guide to help prospective teachers and Assistant Heads to cope and respond effectively with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

The Head of School is asked to identify:

- eight - ten students in Form Three and Four whom teachers have already referred to the SMT for challenging behaviour (parental consent will be sought beforehand)
- two guidance teachers who work with these students
- two teachers who teach these students and find it difficult to get on well with them
- two teachers who teach these students but who are coping quite well with them

The Head of School, two Assistant Heads and six teachers are interviewed (semi-structured interviews). Each interview session will take about one hour. Eight – ten students (Forms Three / Four) meet once for a focus group session of one hour to discuss questions. All sessions which will be held at the school, will be recorded.

Information sheets and consent forms (attached at the back) are given to all those taking part in the study. Students will only be asked to participate following the approval of their parents and their own consent. In the consent forms, all participants are informed that
they may quit the study at any time. Real names will not be used in the study and confidentiality will be respected.

Once the research is completed, the staff interviewed will be given information about the results and conclusion of this research project. These results may help them to cope and respond effectively with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

For further information, contact me on ________________________ or ________________________

Yours sincerely,

_______________

Rowena Camilleri
**Information Sheet – Teachers**

I am reading for a Masters in Counselling (2008 – 2012) organised by the Faculty of Education, University of Malta. As part of my studies, I will be carrying out a professional research project. The purpose of this research is to formulate a guide to help prospective teachers and Assistant Heads to cope and respond effectively with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

The Head of School, two Assistant Heads and six teachers are interviewed (semi-structured interviews). Each interview session will take about one hour. All sessions which will be held at the school, will be recorded.

Information sheets and consent forms (attached at the back) are given to all those taking part in the study. In the consent forms, all participants are informed that they may quit the study at any time. Real names will not be used in the study and confidentiality will be respected.

Once the research is completed, the staff interviewed will be given information about the results and conclusion of this research project. These results may help them to cope and respond effectively with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

For further information, contact me on ______________ or _____________

Yours sincerely,

_________________

Rowena Camilleri
Ittra ta’ Informazzjoni – Ġenituri u Studenti


Bhala parti mill-istudju tiegħi ser inkun qed nagħmel riċerka biex nghin ghalliema u kapijiet tal-iskola kif ġhandhom jinxu ma’ studenti li ġhandhom problemi ta’ mġiba.


Jekk tixtieq iktar informazzjoni tista’ tikkuntattjani fuq ___________________ jew
___________________________

Dejjem tieghek,
_____________________

Rowena Camilleri
Appendix E

SMT: Consent for Participation

I ______________________________________________________________________ being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested for the study, the aim of which is to formulate a guide to help prospective teachers and SMT’s to cope and respond effectively with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Letter for future reference.

I understand that:

- I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
- I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
- While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
- While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, the school in which the study takes place will not be identified.

Participant’s signature .........................................................  Date..............................

Researcher’s signature .............................................................

Rowena Camilleri

Researcher’s contact details: ______________________ or ____________________

Supervisor’s signature ..............................................................................................

Dr. Carmel Cefai
Teachers: Consent for Participation

I ___________________________ being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested for the study, the aim of which is to formulate a guide to help prospective teachers and SMT’s to cope and respond effectively with students manifesting challenging behaviour.

- I have read the information provided.
- Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Letter for future reference.

I understand that:

- I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
- I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
- While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
- Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on my employment.

Participant’s signature .........................................................  Date..............................

Researcher’s signature ...............................................................

Rowena Camilleri

Researcher’s contact details: ______________________ or ____________________

Supervisor’s signature .............................................................

Dr. Carmel Cefai
Ġenituri: Ittra ta’ kunsens ghall- parteċipazzjoni fil-proġett

Jiena ........................................................................................................... li ghandi `l fuq minn

tmintax-il sena, qieghed hawn taht naghti l-kunsens tieghi biex it-tifel tieghi jiehu sehem,
hekk kif imfisser fl-ittra ta’ informazzjoni, fl-istudju li l-ghan tieghu hu li jghin ghalliema u
kapijiet ta’ skola kif ghandhom jimu ma’ studenti li ghandhom problemi ta’ mġiba.

- Jiena qrajt l-informazzjoni li nghatajt
- Dettalji dwar il-proċeduri u riskji marbutin ma’ dan il-proġett kienu spjegati lili
  b’mod sodisfaċenti
- Naf li ghandi nżomm kopja ta’ l-ittra ta’ informazzjoni ghal meta jkolli bżonnha fil-
  futur

Jiena nifhem li:
- it-tifel tieghi mhux bífors jibbenifika b’mod dirett mis-sehem tieghu fil-proġett
- jiena nista’ nwaqqaf it-tifel tieghi milli jiehu sehem fil-proġett, kif ukoll it-tifel
  tieghi jista’ jwaqqaf is-sehem tieghu fil-proġett meta nixtiequ ahna u ghandu wkoll
  id-dritt li ma jirrispondix ċerti mistoqsijiet
- l-informazzjoni miġbura minn dan il-proġett tista’ tkun ippubblikata, iżda t-tifel
  tieghi ma jkun identifikat bl-ebda mod u kull informazzjoni tibqa’ kunfidenzjali
- jekk it-tifel tieghi jipparteċipax jew le, inkella jekk inwaqqfu s-sehem tat-tifel f’dan
  l-istudju, ma jkollu l-ebda effett fuq il-progress tat-tifel tieghi fl-iskola

Firma tal-ġenituri: ................................................................. Data:..............................

Firma tar-riċerkatriċi: ........................................................................
Rowena Camilleri
Jekk tixtieq iktar infromazzjoni tista’ tikkuntattjani fuq ______________ jew ____________

Firma tas-Supervisor........................................................................
Dr. Carmel Cefai
Student: Ittra ta’ kunsens ghall- parteċipazzjoni fil-proġett

Jiena .......................................................................................... qed naċċetta li niehu sehem, hekk kif imfisser fl-ittra ta’ informazzjoni, f’dan l-istudju li l-ghan tieghu hu li jghin ghalliema u kapijiet ta’ skola kif ghandhom jimxu ma’ studenti li ghandhom problemi ta’ mgieba.

- Jiena qrajt l-informazzjoni li nghatajt
- Tkellimt mal-ġenituri tieghi u huma aċċettaw li jiena niehu sehem f’dan l-istudju
- Dettalji dwar x’ser jiġri fil-proġett u riskji marbutin ma’ dan il-proġett kienu spjegati lili b’mod sodisfaċenti
- Naf li ghandi nżomm kopja ta’ l-ittra ta’ informazzjoni ghal meta jkollli bżonnha fil-futur

Jiena nifhem li:
- jiena mhux bilfors nibbenifika b’mod dirett mis-sehem tieghi fil-proġett
- jiena nista’ nieqaf minn dan il-proġett meta rrid jien
- jiena ghandi dritt li ma nirrispondix ċerti mistoqsijiet
- ismi m’hux ser jidher fl-ebda rapport

Firma tal-istudent: .............................................................. Data:........................................

Firma tar-riċerkatriċi: ............................................................................
Rowena Camilleri

Jekk tixtieq iktar infomazzjoni tista’ tikkuntattjani fuq ___________ jew ___________

Firma tas-Supervisor........................................................................................
Dr. Carmel Cefai
Apendix F

Ms. Borg’s Transcript

R: stands for Researcher
T: Stands for Miss Borg

R: Female
R: How many years have you been teaching? 14 years
R: subject taught: English
R: number of classes you are teaching this year: Form 3 / Form 4: 2
R: Do you teach students with challenging behaviour?
How many in Form 3 / and in Form 4: 2 classes
T: As a class kienet kolla challenging issa kemm bhala behaviour, kemm bhala
attitudni biex jitghallmu, but it was very challenging.
R: Why do you think these students behave in a challenging way?
T: First of all naħseb l-background li ġejjin minnu, l-attitudni tagħhom lejn l-iskola,
mhumiex interessati li jitghallmu, xejn, allura the only thing they can do in class
hija li jitqażżu, mhumiex interessati li jitghallmu.
R: What do you think is the best way to deal with these students?
Do you think that these students should be
a. helped? If yes, in what ways?
b. punished? If yes, in what ways? And how effective?
T: Mela jien nahseb li t-tejn, they need to be helped ghax xi problemi għandhom all
right.
R: U inti bhalha teacher kif jirnexxelek tghinhom?
T: Hee nghinhom? Mhx fil-problemi personali taghhom, qatt ma dhalt fil-problemi
personali taghhom... nghinhom, nipprova nibdlihom l-attitudni taghhom lejja jew
lejn is-suġġett b’xi mod, tipprova tirbaħhom, all right. First of all I need to survive in class, allura dik hija prijorita’ u jien ghandi bżonn naghmel il-lezzjoni, jiġifieri b’xi mod trid tibdilhom l-attitudni tagħhom...mhux dejjem irnexxili, mhux qed nghidlek li dejjem irnexxili.

R: Billi tkellimhom jiġifieri...fil-klassi jew wahdu?
T: Jew quddiem il-klassi stess meta inti tikkoreġih bniedem jew tkellmu wahdu fil-kuritur int u hierġa mil-lesson jew xi haġa, kif tahseb li l-ahjar dak il-hin.

R: All right.
T: Punished ukoll, jekk dan li għamel huwa inaċċettabbli, he has to be punished. Per eżempju, jekk student refa’ jdejh fuq student ieħor he has to be punished.

R: Do you use the same disciplinary measures for all the students in class? How flexible do you think teachers should be with students with challenging behaviour?

T: You have to be flexible ghax dawn mhumiex studenti bħal ħaddieħor u jekk minghand haddieħor ghatisa tikkoreġiha minghandhom ma tistax, heq jien nifhimha.

R: All right.
T: Ghax inti taf x’inhuma, minghand Mark tistenna li dan ha jaqbad ma xi hadd, all right ha tikkoreġih imma mhux ha tagħmel plejtu fuqha, all right. You cannot use the same disciplinary measures le ma nimmaġinax, ma nemminx. Dawn li ghandhom challenging behaviour, mhux qed nghidlek thallihom jaghmlu li jridu, imma they need special disciplinary measures, nahseb jien. Per eżempju Steve, ukoll kellu challenging behaviour imma trid titghallem dan kif iddur mieghu speċi.

R: Sewwa.
R: Do you manage to keep class control with these students in class? If yes, how?
   What have you found to work?

T: Issa hafna drabi trid toħloq deal magħhom dawn in-nies.

R: Sewwa.

T: Issa li inti tkellmu wahdu tghidlu isma’ jien għandi x’nagħmel, jiena I have the rest of the class ma’ min nahdem. Mhux se jagħmel il-lezzjoni kollha pinna, żgur li le, imma at least jipprova; ha jkun hemm hin fejn ha nwaqqfu, ha jkun hemm hin fejn jitqażżież jew nghidlu isma Paul mur sat-toilet jew xi ħaġa.

R: Tinduna li qisu jkollu bżonn hin barra.

T: Eżatt imma in a way trid tilhaq deal inkella dawn iktar ma ttihom, iktar ma tipprova tissikkahom iktar ha jaghmlušek ghax imbaghad ha ssir battalja personali mieghek u jghidu lil din ha nagħmlilha ħajjitha infern u jien ma rridx li jiġrili hekk.

R: Qisek what have you found to work, huwa dealing l-iktar...

T: Dealing

R: U timxi magħhom in an individual way.

T: Eżatt Mark mod, Paul mod iehor, Jeremy...dawn kollha differenti allura int trid timxi differenti magħhom. Per eżempju Mark ma kellix clash wahda f’sena u kien l-iktar student li kont qed nibża’ minnu x’hin qaluli li ha nghallmu...imma jien ma kellix clashes mieghu u dejjem thank you u sorry u please, u he was really really nice, mhux qed nghidek li kien perfett is-sena kollha imma qatt ma tani trouble...u anke fl-eżami, fil-literature ma ghamel xejn, kemm kiteb ismu, zero. Imma fl-English Language Mark got over 60 marks u hadmu b’serjeta’ kbira l-eżami...

R: Ara naqra...

T: ...hu jhobbu l-Ingliż...xorta mhux se jтик xoghol, xorta mhux ha joqghod attent dejjem, imma jhobbu.
Whenever you used punishments with these students, what type of punishments, if any, do you usually use? Which punishment did you find the most effective? Tuża punishments l-ewwel nett?

Ifhem mhux xi punishments kbar, l-iktar punishment huwa jekk jien ha nirraporta lil xi hadd ikbar jekk ġrat xi haġa gravi imma mhux ha ntih detention, mhux ha ntih fhimt?

All right.

Jekk xi haġa hija żgur ta’ barra minn hawn...

Qed tikser il-liġi fil-klassi, ha tmur tghid lill-Assistant Head.

Iva mhux ta’ kull nitfa imma meta kien hemm affarijiet li jiena nahseb li inaċċettabbli ehe I report it.

Ehe, u tghidlu li ha tirrappurtah.

Iva ġieli nghidlu f’wiċċu, isma’ jekk ha jiġi jghidlek xi haġa jien ha nkun li ghedtlu all right biex nurih li lili dejjaqni b’dik il-haġa.

It-tfal ġieli haduha kontrik meta ghamilt hekk per eżempju?

Le, ghax ikunu jafu li ghandi raġun...jafu li altru ghax veru gravi.

Jiġifieri jista’ jkun li ghax ma taghtihomx ghalxejn.

Ghalxejn, jafu. Min jaghti ghalxejn imbaghad tiġi tahdem kontra t-teacher.

As part of your way of dealing with these students, have you ever:

a. spoken to these students alone (formal)?

b. spoken to them during break (informal)?

In a formal way, inkellimhom wara l-lesson imma mhux b’mod formali, iktar informal. Isma illum dejjaqtni, illum taf li ... hekk

c. refer to SMT / guidance?

SMT diġa’ semmejtha
Have you ever referred students to the guidance per eżempju?

T:  Ghax kienu diġa’ qed jahdmu fuqu, Felix per eżempju.

R:  U refer to parents?

T:  Ma tantx.

R:  Do you think it is important to build a relationship with these students? If yes:
   a.  How?
   b.  What sort of relationship do you have with these students? (formal, friendly, supportive, understanding).

T:  Ifhem nipprova nibni relationship with these students. Issa x’tip ta’ relationship hija stramma fis-sens jafu li jien ma nkunx kuntenta bl-affarijiet li jaghmlu ghax nghidilhom, imma fl-istess hin trid taċċettahom u tirrispettahom kif inhuma lil dawn in-nies. Nipprova nibni relationship with these students u nkun ok magħhom, especially out of class. Eżempju jekk nara lil Paul barra fejn it-tuck shop, ikellimni qisu mhux hu u la ha joffendini. Per eżempju m’ilux konna supervision it-tuck shop waqt l-eżamijiet u Paul u l-gang kollha jiġifieri l-krema tal-iskola kienu qegħdin hemm u lili jkellmuni b’mod normali jiġifieri la qed jitkesshu, la qed ...jiġifieri normali qed ikellimni, xorta hemm ir-rispett li suppost, mhux qed inħosshom li qed jitkesshu jew hekk. Imbagħad tara d-differenza ghax imbagħad ġie ċertu persuna u nqala’ rebus shih. Jiġifieri jiena, issa jiena mhux xi wahda li jibżgħu minni t-tfal, lili kienu qed ikellmuni b’mod ordnat, imbagħad x’hin ġie dan il-persuna nqala rebus, joffenduh, igarawlu l-prinjol, jiġifieri ghalxiex dik l-attitudni ma ghamluhiex mieghi fhimt?

R:  Ghalxiex tahseb?

T:  Ma naʃx...forsi ghax irnexxili niġbor ir-rispett taghhom, b’xi mod.

R:  Bil-mod tieghek.
T: Bil-mod tieghi, mhux qed nghidlek li jitwerwru minni ghax ma jitwerwrux, nixtieq, imma nixtieq li in a way ġieli jitwerwru naqra minni imma mhijiex, it’s not in me...it’s not in me le....modi ohra nużə.

R: Eżatt...u l-fatt li tiibni relazzjoni magħhom thossha li tghinek fil-klassi?

T: Ehe tghin, tghin...ghax imbagħad jirrispettawk anke jekk ma jkunux iridu jagħmlu lesson naraha jien personali...jghidu isma...per eżempju ġieli nismaghhom, eżempju Mark mieghi ma kienx jipprova ibaqbaqni imma ma ċerta nies xorta anke din is-sena kien jipprova jbaqbaqhom u smajtu jien b’widnejja jghajjarhom. Meta lili qatt ma ghajjarini dan.

R: Were you ever trained to deal with these students?

T: No.

R: How can teachers be helped in such situations:

a. while studying to become teachers?

b. during their teaching life?

Kieku kellna say biex nghinu teachers li ghadhom qed jitghallmu biex isiru teachers, fil-kors tat-teaching kif nistghu nghinuhom biex ikunu trained how to deal with these students?

T: Ma nafx kif tista’ tkun trained ghax trid tkun fiha l-haġa.

R: All right.

T: Inti l-Universita`, kif ha tiği ttrejnjata biex tiddilja ma’ tfal bhal dawn jekk qatt ma ltqajt magħhom...trid tieħu l-kulhadd b’mod individwali, ma tmurx with a set of rules.

R: Ok.

T: Trid turihom li r-realta’ tal-klassi hija li ha jkollok minn dawn l-istudenti u mid-dehra ha jkollna aktar as from next year, jiġifieri b’xi mod trid tittrejnja imma fl-
ahhar mill-ahhar nemmen li trid tiġi minnek, inti trid issib, jiġifieri jistgħu
jittrejnjawk elf professur l-universita` imma mbaghad trid tiġi minnek, int trid issib
it-triq kif ha tkampa ma` dawn l-istudenti.

R: Anke during our teaching life?
T: Eżatt, dik importanti.
R: Per eżempju?
T: Fil meetings li jkollna ghaliex ma ghandniex niddiljaw ma` dawn it-topics? milli
ġieli jkollna topics li huma mhux relatati mal-bżonnijiet tagħna...
R: If you think that you have found a way of dealing with these students, do you
discuss this with other teachers? If yes, what is their reaction?
T: Le ma niddiskutix. Nemmen li kull teacher ghandha l-metodu tagħha u forsi s-
sistema tieghi ma toghġobx lil haddiehor, forsi ghal haddiehor jiena I`m too leniant,
i`m not that strict, imma dik is-sistema tieghi, jekk ma toghġobhomx affari
taghhom...naf li jiena f`ghajnejn teachers ohra I`m not a successful teacher fir-
relazzjoni tieghi mat-tfal....allura ma nitkellimx ma` teachers ohra, kulhadd ghandu
s-sistema tieghu...anke meta t-tfal jghiduli ghax inti hekk imma ghax dik,
nghidilhom ma rridx nisma, ma rridx nisma, daqshekk. Per eżempju xi ħaġa li
niggustahom, mhux qed nghid il-4CD ta`, anke l-4CD qaluhiei, il-4AB, li kieku
jistgħu jaghmlu petition biex nerġa` nghallimhom jien is-sena d-diehla, jaghmluha;
u ghedtilhom probbabli mhux jien nghallimkom, mela min, jibdew ghax issa jien
lilek drajtek, mieghek mort all right, mhux akkont ta` marki, akkont ta` kemm kien
komdu matul il-lezzjoni.
R: Forsi ghax mieghek ihossu li jistgħu ikunu huma.
T: Jafu li xorta qed jitghallmu imma mhux f’atmosfera ta’ (ugly face) fhimt?.....mhux qed nghid they are enjoying it għax neqridhom ukoll, jghiduli “Marija Santa” ġieli “kemm teqred”, xorta jghiduli affarijiet...

R: Imma jistgħu jghiduhielek.

T: Ehe.

R: Dik hi d-differenza.

T: Mhux qed nghid li jkunu qed itiru bil-ferħ mieghi ghax ma jkunux imma they are at ease.

R: Hemm xi haġa li trid iżżid?

T: Jien għalija l-aktar każun ta’ misbehaviour hija l-fatt li ghandek student li ma jridx jitghallem...ghax ma jarax importanza, il-persuna li dahlet tghallmek ghalik, m’intix interessat tismagħha...

R: Imma int fil-bidu semmejti li l-iktar problema hija din li semmejt issa pero` it-tfal xorta qed iġġibhom mieghek, anke dawk li ....

T: Mhux qed nghidlek li jahdmu...

R: Le imma ghalingas jirrispettaw lilek u lil haddiehor.

T: At least, eżatt. Ippruvajt u nhossni fallejt fil-4CD, hafna pruvajt u qatt ma kelli klassi bhalhom li xorta ma mexxilix nbiddlihom l-attitудni taghhom totalment lejn is-suğgett, imma at least irnexxili naghmel lesson u xi haġa tajthom żgur. U anke jiġifieri ma stennejtx li ha jkun hemm ammont daqshekk li jghaddu mil-language, mill-language qed nghid, literature forget it.

T: All right hemm xi haġa li trid iżżid?

R: Le.

T: Thank you.