Breaking the silence:

Teachers speak out

about classroom behavioural problems

Creating a positive learning environment in middle school classrooms – It can be done!

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Declaration

I hereby declare this work contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

This research gained Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Clearance, reference H12144.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying online via the University’s Open Access repository eSpace.

Anne-Marie Marias

12 November 2016
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Anne-Marie
Abstract

Too many teachers are struggling with students’ disengagement and behavioural problems in the classroom despite extensive research findings available to them on how to create a positive, harmonious learning environment: Why is this so?

The aim of this research was to understand the realities faced by frontline practitioners particularly in middle school in order (1) to identify the barriers that limit a teacher’s chances of success in creating a positive learning environment and (2) to search for the ‘right drivers’ and ultimately the actions, sometimes small, that as ‘tipping points’ can lead to significant improvements in the classroom.

A qualitative methodology, namely a constructivist form of grounded theory was selected for this exploratory research study in order to develop insights and create a theory for action. The goal was to capture teachers’ voice and to use my own reflections and voice in the research.

It was found that the silence about classroom behavioural problems needs to be addressed through a school culture of transparency, openness and collegial support, and the importance of classroom management needs to be recognised as a major teaching skill at the teacher, school and system level. A balanced leadership approach is recommended based (1) essentially on prevention but also (2) on positive, respectful intervention through logical consequences when preventative measures are insufficient to guarantee a lesson free from student misbehavior, and (3) on support provided to students with more challenging behaviours in order to assist them with the development of self discipline.

It is the contention of this thesis that creating positive classroom learning environments is certainly achievable, and this reasonably quickly.
Acronyms

ABA  Applied behaviour analysis
ACER  Australian Council for Educational Research
AITSL  Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
BaSS  Behaviour at School Study
BMSS  Behaviour Management Strategies Scale
CBM  Classroom behaviour management
CM  Classroom management
CBT  Cognitive behavioural theory
DMA  Developmental management approach
ICSEA  Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
LOTE  Languages other than English
MCEETYA  Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN  National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy
NSW  New South Wales
NT  Northern Territory
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PBL  Positive behaviour for learning
PBIS  Positive behaviour interventions and supports
PBS  Positive behaviour support
PD  Professional development
PISA  Program for International Student Assessment
QLD  Queensland
RTC  Responsible thinking classroom
RTP  Responsible thinking process
SWPBS  School-wide positive behaviour support
SA  South Australia
SLSS  Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce
TET  Teacher effectiveness training
TALIS  Teaching and Learning International Survey
UN  United Nations
USA  United States of America
WA  Western Australia
YOTS  Youth Off the Streets
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Chapter 1  The research and its context

Too many teachers struggle with student disengagement and behavioural problems in the classroom, with teaching and learning time lost as a result. In the last 10 years, academic results in Australia have been stagnating or declining compared to other Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, according to the 2009 and 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2010, 2013). The research literature on school improvement outlines many interrelated factors that explain this situation, but overwhelmingly it is teacher effectiveness in the classroom that is the most important variable for improving student achievement (Hattie, 2005, 2009; Masters, 2012). Marzano, Marzano, and Pickering (2003) identify three main roles the effective teacher has to perform in the classroom: first, designing appropriate curriculum according to students’ needs; second, selecting the most effective pedagogies; and third, using effective classroom management (CM) techniques in the classroom to create the positive environment crucial for teaching and learning. According to them, each of these roles is a necessary but not sufficient component of effective teaching: “take out one of the mix and you probably guarantee that students will have difficulty in learning” (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003 p. 4). Within a teacher’s repertoire of practices, CM is an essential skill — without it, a positive and productive classroom environment cannot be achieved:

If students are disorderly and disrespectful and no apparent rules and procedures guide behaviour, chaos becomes the norm. In these situations, both teachers and students suffer … But a well-managed classroom doesn’t just appear out of nowhere. It takes a good deal of effort to create — and the person who is most responsible for creating it is the teacher. (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 1)
Although the issue of discipline in schools has been widely researched and extensive documentation is available on useful CM strategies, based on many theories and models, there seems to be some difficulty in successfully implementing those strategies across the board; “we know what matters, but we don’t do it”, as Jensen (2012) has observed, “there is a disconnect between policy and what happens in the classroom (in Ferrari, 2012a, p. 3). The question, therefore, is, why? Of course, there are many examples of successful teachers, classrooms and schools where these effective strategies are used, but on the whole there are still too many behavioural problems in classrooms across the country, and those problems appear to be on the increase (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2004; OECD, 2013).

The main aims of this study are not to ascertain whether teachers are implementing evidence-based effective strategies, or to look for more strategies, but to identify, first, the barriers that limit a teacher’s chances of success in creating a positive classroom learning environment, and second to search for the ‘right drivers’ and ultimately the actions, sometimes small, that, as ‘tipping points’, can lead to significant improvements in the classroom, on Monday morning.

It is essential to note that there are strong links between student motivation, engagement, achievement and behaviour (De Jong, 2003; Hattie, 2003; Johnson & Sullivan 2014; Lewis, 2009; R. Marzano, Pickering & Heflebower, 2010; Savage & Savage, 2010). Progress in the area of CM, amongst other factors, is closely linked to progress in curriculum design and the selection of effective pedagogies. These factors are preventive as they discourage behavioural problems from developing in the classroom. They are the domain of the school improvement research that has
been on the agenda for the past 30 years, addressing the continuing challenge of improving the quality of education for all students.

It will still take time to address some of the complex, interrelated factors that give rise to behavioural problems in the classroom. However, although some of these are partly beyond teacher influence, major positive changes are possible in the classroom, through actions that are within the control of individual teachers; namely, managing the classroom effectively in order to create a positive safe learning environment. What makes this an imperative goal is that the education of students is at stake. As Hattie (2009) says, “while we collect evidence, teachers go on teaching” (p. 5). In that sense this project is timely, because it set out to research an area that is one of the key areas identified for school improvement—a culture that promotes learning (Masters, Aug 2012).

This introductory chapter presents an overview of the research territory first of all, including an acknowledgement of the severity of behavioural issues, with a focus on Australian middle school classrooms. A number of terms used in this project are clarified; CM goals are summarised; the extensive documentation available to teachers to address those issues is introduced along with the latest research findings on school improvement— that literature is reviewed in chapter 2. This overview leads to the second section of the chapter, which acknowledges a gap in the research, and presents the problem statement and the key research questions for this research project. The third section explains the significance of the research. Finally, the last section outlines the structure of the thesis.
1.1 The research territory

This section sets the context for the study, outlines the increasing problem of disruptive behaviour, defines some key terms and foregrounds the research with reference to previous studies.

1.1.1 Disruptive behaviour: An ongoing and growing problem

Many teachers have difficulties in the classroom caused by disruptive behaviours. “No topic terrifies beginning teachers, and some experienced teachers, more than classroom management” (Kirby, in Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007, p. x). From informal, anecdotal conversations with teachers to the formal acknowledgement of problems at the system level in Australia and overseas, the evidence indicating the existence of a pervasive problem with disruptive behaviour is overwhelming (Arbuckle & Little, 2004; Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007; Edwards & Watts, 2008; Evertson & Weinstein, 2011; Hart, 2010; Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; R. Marzano, Pickering & Heflebower, 2010; OECD, 2013, 2014; Williams, Winkelman & McDowell, 2012).

In a paper presented at a conference organised in 2002 by MCEETYA, New South Wales (NSW) Education Minister Watkins raised the issue of student behaviour in Australian schools as an ongoing and growing problem. As a result, MCEETYA acknowledged that the issue of student behaviour was of key national significance. A Student Behaviour Management Project was established, and a Report on best practice in addressing student behaviour issues in Australia was published (Skilbert & Connell, 2004). In analysing the attractions as well as the major problems and frustrations of a teaching career, the report found:
Common to most teachers in their early years are workload and classroom management challenges, often presented as severe … New teachers frequently expressed uncertainty over classroom management skills, particularly in relation to varied individual learning needs of students in the inclusive classroom. (Skilbert & Connell, 2004, in Wilkinson & Meiers, 2007, p. 12)

A survey of 1,380 teachers carried out by the Behaviour at School Study (BaSS) team (Sullivan, Johnson, Conway, Owens & Taddeo, 2012) on the nature and extent of unproductive student behaviour in South Australian (SA) schools categorised into low-level disruptive, disengaged, aggressive/anti-social, shows that in all three categories over one third of all teachers, regardless of their years of experience, stated that they did not manage students’ uncharacteristically erratic behaviour or verbal abuse of other students (BaSS Technical Report 1, 2012, p. 50).

While these problems are not limited to the Australian context, Australia does not rank well in the area of effective CM. The results of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) (OECD, 2009), which provides information about the working conditions of teachers and teaching and learning practices in schools, indicate that one in four teachers, in most TALIS countries, loses at least 30 per cent of their lesson time (some lose more than half) through classroom disruption and administrative tasks. In the section dealing with classroom discipline in Australia, the latest TALIS report (OECD, 2014) shows the percentage of sampled lower secondary teachers who agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:

1. There is much disruptive noise in this classroom: 25.3 per cent.
2. When the lesson begins, I have to wait quite a long time for students to quiet down: 26.8 per cent.
3. I lose quite a lot of time because of students interrupting the lesson: 31.5 per cent.
The OECD program—PISA—besides presenting the literacy, mathematics and science results of 15-year-old students, examines student motivation and engagement in learning. According to the 2012 report (OECD, 2013), Australia ranks 34th out of 65 countries (below the OECD average) in relation to questions asked of students about the frequency of students not listening; level of noise and disorder in their classroom, the time it takes for the teacher to start the lesson; and whether they are able to work without interruption.

Peter Wilson, a secondary school teacher from Hobart, forcefully illustrates this issue in an article published in *The Australian* (Wilson, 2012) ‘What’s wrong with our schooling?’ by stating, “the debate on school improvement … does not come down to funding or curriculum or more computers … it comes down to student behaviour. Period!” In his opinion, “the elephant in the classroom” is the gradual disempowerment of teachers in schools. In another article from *The Australian*, ‘The lost art of discipline’ (09 October, 2013) Donnelly, Director of the Education Standard Institute, states: “One of the main reasons so many teachers leave after three to four years in the profession is noisy and disruptive classrooms”. The media regularly reports more extreme forms of misbehaviour in schools, such as bullying, violence and aggression (Hart, 2010, pp. 353–371).

Johnson and Sullivan (2014) consider the behaviour of students at school to be a problem of post-industrial society. They found it was a recurring theme in the research literature on behavioural problems; “classroom management is considered by teachers as their greatest concern”, (p. 2). Already in 1999, for my master’s research *Re-thinking learning, re-inventing teaching education in the 21st century* (Marias, 1999), I analysed the way schools had been operating in the past and how teachers would like to see systemic changes introduced in education, “realising that
the institutions we call schools are rapidly becoming artifacts of the past rather than springboards for the future” (Middleton & Hill, 1996, quoted in Marias, 1999, p. 6).

To conclude, according to Kalantzis and Cope (2012), we are facing a crisis of irrelevance in schools, and behavioural problems are one of the three key indicators of that crisis, along with a lack of public confidence in education and employer complaints about new graduates.

1.1.2 Definitions

For the purpose of this research, a number of terms are defined in the following section.

1.1.2.1 Student disengagement

Students opting out of learning opportunities at school, known as students “disengaged, disaffected, disadvantaged, disenfranchised, marginalised, at risk” (Humphry, 2013, p. 6) is of great concern in Australia and overseas. It is often associated with poor attendance and/or very disruptive behaviours in the classroom and violence.

Classes are swollen and are increasingly filled with youngsters from more diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Teachers are hard put to deal with the problem of these teenagers at the most delicate period of their lives. (UNESCO Report, Muller and Murtagh, 2003, in Humphry, 2013, p. 6)

Motivation, achievement and behaviour are closely linked. “Orderly schools and, in particularly orderly classrooms, are associated with high student engagement and achievement” (Johnson & Sullivan, 2014, p. 1).
1.1.2.2 Misbehaviour, disruptive behaviour, unproductive behaviour

The term ‘misbehaviour’ can be misleading. The nature of misbehaviour can be very different from one context to another, from one school to another, from one country to another. Lewis, Romi, Qui & Katz (2005), in a comparative study between Australia, China and Israel, found that the Chinese report as much misbehaviour in their classes as Australians do, but its nature is completely different; less extreme. Charles (1989) defines misbehaviour as a “behaviour that is considered inappropriate for the setting or situation in which it occurs” (p. 2). I use this definition throughout this project.

‘Disruptive behaviour’ is defined as any inappropriate behaviour in the classroom that prevents effective teaching and learning. Disruptive behaviour can be viewed on a continuum from low-level distraction to complete chaos, insolence, defiance and/or violence. Teachers need to be able to manage low-key inappropriate behaviours as well as those that are more challenging. It must be noted that most behaviours of concern to teachers are rather trivial (such as talking out of turn, annoying other students, idleness or avoidance of work, and verbal abuse) but their repetition makes them frustrating, time-wasting and ultimately stressful (Sullivan et al., 2014). Lewis (2009) also establishes four categories of disruptive behaviour, from mild to severe. In Category A, generally students respond appropriately to the teaching content and do the work requested by the teacher. In Category B, students are occasionally distracted or distract others. Category C students more persistently display inappropriate behaviours that, at times, warrant isolation from the group. In Category D, disruptive behaviour happens repeatedly despite the teacher’s best effort. Of course some students will show behaviour patterns that reflect more than
one category. Lewis (2009) clearly identifies matching intervention strategies to elicit responsible behaviour from students according to each category.

‘Unproductive behaviour’ is a term used by the BaSS team (Sullivan et al., 2012) to emphasise the link between engagement in learning, achievement and behaviour.

1.1.2.3 Discipline, classroom management, classroom behaviour management

Terms referring to discipline and behaviour management are a source of controversy in educational circles. For some, ‘discipline’ and ‘behaviour management’ imply limiting and controlling student autonomy—the authoritarian power relationship of the past where the teacher was ‘the boss’ and students ‘obeyed’ without questioning, and were punished if they ‘disobeyed’. The trend towards political correctness in language usage has led to the avoidance of words that may have negative connotations, and as a result the terms ‘discipline’ and ‘behaviour management’ have tended to disappear in schools, and have been replaced by terms such as ‘student welfare’ and ‘student well-being’. However, this is not so much the case outside schools. Looking at the titles of researcher publications in the last 10 years, those terms continue to be used; for example: You know the fair rule. Strategies for positive and effective behaviour management and discipline in schools (B. Rogers 2011c). I discuss this point in detail in Chapter 5.

In this study, I have deliberately chosen to use the terms ‘classroom management’ ‘classroom behaviour management’ (CBM) and ‘discipline’ as I believe that the avoidance of appropriate descriptors can have a blurring effect that limits action. For example, I want to make it clear that the teacher has both a leadership role in the classroom and a practical management role. According to
Covey (2004), management and leadership are two different concepts. Leadership deals with the goals to be accomplished, while management has a practical focus: how to best accomplish those goals. Glasser (1988) defines this type of management as ‘lead management’, where the teacher is a leader rather than a ‘boss’ in the classroom.

Those responsible for choosing approaches to classroom management … have to understand the sort of values and beliefs likely to be transmitted to pupils who experience or witness these different styles of management. Such values are not haphazard but are consistent with the assumptions underlying the different approaches. (Lewis, 2009, pp. 12–13)

Therefore, in this study, CM, CBM and discipline are considered positively—they are not associated with punishment; they refer to the development of self-discipline, and encompass the actions a teacher takes to assist students in developing self-control and responsibility. This definition is consistent with the ethical dimension of education.

The effective teacher seeks to address [the] diversity of both teacher and student needs by establishing and maintaining a learning environment that is needs based, positive and inclusive. In this sense, classroom and behaviour management becomes a proactive strategy, rather than a reactive disaster! (Arthur-Kelly et al, 2007, p. 33)

CM and CBM are sometimes confused. Brady and Scully (2005) emphasise the difference, viewing CM as a broader set of strategies that subsume CBM:

The effective management of [a] classroom involves much more than the management of the students’ behaviour. The teacher as manager is charged with the responsibility of managing the curriculum, the learning environment both physical and psychological, time and its allocation as well as managing the students, their engagement in learning activity and their behaviour. (Brady & Scully, 2005, p. 104)

Virgona (2012) considers that managing student behaviour does not work in isolation from other teacher skills and “is only useful if it leads to the creation of a
classroom environment where learning occurs. Students can be well behaved but cognitively disengaged” (p.99).

CM represents ways of establishing and maintaining effective and safe learning environments where the teacher provides guidance for both academic and behavioural progress and uses strategies that prevent problems occurring in the first instance. B. Rogers (2011c) refers to prevention as ‘preventative discipline’ (p. 4). CBM, on the other hand, deals more specifically with the management of student behaviour and a teacher intervention when misbehaviour takes place: ‘corrective discipline’. It involves also supporting students in changing their behaviour: ‘supportive discipline’ (B. Rogers, 2011c). Corrective discipline used at the right time also has an important preventive role. In this study, CM is used as a generic term to encompass the three areas of prevention, intervention and support to students.

‘Prevention’ refers to the role of CM in providing a positive learning environment, thereby preventing problems from occurring. The emphasis is on fostering student engagement with learning. This can be achieved through careful curriculum planning, effective pedagogies that can still take time to further develop as previously mentioned, while the creation of positive relationships between teachers and students, the teacher taking a leadership role in the classroom, as well as the more mundane but necessary strategies such as the establishment of rules and consequences, routines, and attention to room attractiveness, can be achieved rapidly.

‘Intervention’ refers to the CBM actions a teacher takes to manage the inappropriate behaviour of individual students or groups in order to restore a positive
environment for learning and to teach individual students self-discipline. Prevention and intervention are described in detail in the literature review (Chapter 2).

‘Support’ refers to the various strategies provided to students to assist them in progressing towards more appropriate behaviours. They also play a preventive role, and, as such, complete the cycle of a balanced approach to CM. ‘Supportive discipline’ is particularly important for students with major behavioural problems, specifically those students diagnosed with behavioural disorders. For example, individual behaviour plans/agreements need to be put in place associated with counselling, and the systematic teaching of social skills.

In summary, CM and CBM have two main goals. The first is educational: the development of student self-discipline and character in order to become responsible members of society. The second is managerial: the creation of a safe, organised and positive environment conducive to learning (Lewis, 2004). In this research I use the following broader goals stated by B. Rogers (2011c), as they encompass the values that are the basis of any discipline plan—respect of the rights of others:

The aims of all management and discipline are to enable the student(s) to own their behaviour, and be accountable for their behaviour, to respect mutual rights and to do so within the context of workable relationships with other students and their teachers. The core rights are: the right to feel safe; the right to learn (without undue distraction or disruption) and the right to respect and fair treatment … The teacher will consciously discipline within these aims in order that the primary business of the classroom (teaching and learning) can take place. (B. Rogers, 2011c, p. 4)

The middle years of schooling

This research study examines teachers’ experience of classroom behaviour in the middle years of schooling in Australia where behavioural problems are perceived as the most serious. A 2014 survey organised by the NSW Department of Education in government schools indicated that student engagement in school and a sense of
belonging is higher in the primary years of schooling (around 80 per cent in Years 4–6), declining in the middle years of schooling (Years 7–10) before rising slightly towards the final years of schooling (Years 11 and 12) (NSW Government, Oct 2014, p. 24). As a long term educator in middle school and senior school, it is an area of expertise directly linked to my experience. It is to be noted that in Australia, year level groupings differ in the various states and territories and the different school sectors (government and independent). They have also varied a number of times over the past 40 years of my teaching experience, with primary school including up to Years 5, 6 or 7; middle school up to Years 9 or 10; and senior school or college up to Year 12.

1.1.3 Extensive documentation on strategies

A considerable amount of literature is available on behavioural problems in the classroom and how to best address them. From meta-analyses, books, numerous articles in academic journals, theses, national and international reports, to media releases aimed at disseminating the latest research findings, the amount of information is striking. This documentation can be regrouped into three major categories: Sets of effective practices that are usually evidence-based (e.g.: forming and establishing classroom rules); models that follow a particular philosophy or theory (e.g. Applied behavior analysis from Alberto & Troutman, 2013; Positive behavior leadership model, Rogers 2011c) many of which have not been tested formally and text books (Edwards & Watts, 2008). The literature review, Chapter 2, presents an analysis of this documentation.

There are areas of contention based on different psychological and educational theories, despite the fact that historically, behaviourist psychology was replaced by
an emphasis on cognitive psychology. Those controversies are mainly around themes such as the different teaching styles on a continuum from authoritarian to permissive, and the different degrees of use of behaviourist theories and strategies in schools; for example, the different emphases on prevention versus intervention, using punishment versus consequences and extrinsic versus intrinsic rewards.

The following statement from Hattie (2009) encapsulates the dimensions of the problem that there is so much documentation available to teachers with limited use of those strategies evident in the classroom.

There is so much known about what makes a difference in the classroom. A glance at the journals on the shelves of most libraries and on web pages would indicate that the state of the knowledge is healthy. There are thousands of studies promulgating claims that this method works or that innovation works. We have a rich educational research base, but rarely it is used by teachers, and rarely does it lead to policy changes that affect the nature of teaching. (Hattie, 2009, p. 2)

1.1.4 School improvement research

The school effectiveness research helps us to understand the characteristics of good schools and good classroom environments, but it does not tell us how to create them. This is the domain of school improvement. Creating a positive classroom environment in schools is linked to the general issue of school improvement, an ongoing debate for many years and a continuing key agenda item in educational circles. In August 2012 this theme was selected for an Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) research conference in Sydney: School Improvement: What does the research tell us about effective strategies? Presenters unanimously emphasised that teacher effectiveness in the classroom is the key to school improvement. Professor Geoff Masters acknowledged that continual improvement requires an aligned effort by all stakeholders, but that “the most effective strategy
available to governments, schools and school systems for improving student achievement is to improve the quality of day-to-day teaching and learning. At a fundamental level this means changing what teachers do” (Masters, 2012, p. 3); this is directly related to my area of research. In a teacher’s repertoire of practice, the ability to manage classrooms effectively is no doubt one skill amongst many, but the question is: How much importance should be given to it in relation to other teaching skills? In a general quest for school improvement John Hattie, who attempted to establish the major influences on student achievement expresses the view that in schools “all interventions are likely to work: the question thus should be what is the magnitude of any intervention? Any intervention higher than the average effect … is worth implementing” (Hattie, 2013, p. 24).

Within the school improvement research literature, CM is considered to be important by some scholars (Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; B. Rogers, 2011c; Sullivan et al., 2012). “It is a crucial skill for both beginning and experienced teachers” state Wilkinson & Meiers (2007, p. 3). It is regarded as one of the three main skills necessary for effective teaching, together with the selection of the ‘right’ curriculum and the ‘right’ teaching methods (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). However other scholars do not emphasise CM as a key necessary teaching skill. For example, for Masters (2012) to create a culture that promotes learning both at the system/school levels and at the classroom level is one of eight interrelated domains that impact on school improvement initiatives.

As a result of the continuous research work on school improvement, progress has been made since I did my own research in the late 1990s, on changing high schools from a 19th century model and bringing them to the 21st century. A new science of learning (Masters, 2013) is now emerging with collaboration across
disciplines, and work such as the research carried out by Kalantzis and Cope (2012) *New learning. Elements of a science of education*, are promising developments for the education of the future. My present research is an attempt to understand why so little progress has been made in the classroom with CM despite the extensive documentation available on successful techniques.

In his research on school improvement, Jensen (2012) emphasises the need to “target the things that matter”, and, going one step further, explains that, “doing what matters is easy. *Only* doing what matters is difficult” (Jensen, 2012c, p.118). His study on turnaround schools (Jensen, 2013a; Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014), has used a concept from the business sector, and looked at reforming the environment and the practices in low-performing, often dysfunctional schools. Based on the international research (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010; OECD, 2009, 2014), Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) undertook case studies on four ‘troubled schools’ in Australia to show how those schools managed a remarkable turnaround in their performance by using five common steps. They mention an orderly school environment as a precondition before other improvement efforts can take place, and state that “a safer school environment can have a large and instant effect on individual students, even if it takes longer to see improvements in student performance across the entire school” (p.7). My research focuses on one aspect of school improvement - the teacher’s ability to manage classes, but as already acknowledged in this section, the creation of a positive learning classroom environment is linked to all other areas of school improvement. For that reason, Jensen’s theory on school improvement has been chosen as the guiding framework for this study.
1.2 Problem statement

Although the research documenting how to create a positive learning classroom environment is extensive, many teachers continue to struggle with behavioural issues in their classroom. Why?

What does this research have to offer that has not already been established? Considering the amount of documentation on CM, the focus is not on *what to do?* but *why it is not done?* The aim of this research is therefore to listen to the voice of the teachers—to understand the realities of frontline practitioners, including myself as the researcher—in order to identify the barriers that limit the implementation of known effective CM strategies and how to minimise the impact of those barriers. I do this by targeting *only* what matters in the improvement journey, identifying first the ‘key drivers’, and then the actions, the ‘tipping points’ that can minimise the impact of those barriers and lead to immediate significant improvements in the classroom. This leads to the following research questions:

- What are the barriers preventing or limiting the implementation of effective classroom management strategies in middle school, hence hindering teachers’ success in creating a positive learning environment in their classrooms?
- ‘By targeting what matters and only what matters’, what are the key changes—the ‘right drivers’, the small actions that as ‘tipping points’ can overcome those barriers and lead to significant and immediate improvements?
1.3 Methodology

A qualitative approach was seen to be the best for this exploratory research study, particularly a constructivist Grounded Theory, suggested by Charmaz (2006). The aim was to develop insights, discover variables not to control them, and to create a theory for action. It was based on the interview of a twenty teachers/leaders as a primary source presented in chapter 4, with the ongoing return to the literature and the use of my own experience as a data source in the discussion of the findings, in chapter 5. Being a reflexive researcher, and using myself in the research through stories was a choice I made; the reasons for that choice are extensively explained in chapter 3.

1.4 The significance of this study

There are clear consequences of ineffective teaching practices, including their impact on learning outcomes; equity issues in relation to gender, ethnicity, location and socio-economic status; and teacher wellbeing, as well as ethical considerations.

1.4.1 Impact on teaching and learning: Learning outcomes

Despite the extensive documentation on CM strategies, a number of teachers continue to struggle with managing groups and individuals (Arbuckle & Little, 2004; Beaman, 2006; De Jong, 2003; Konza, 1999; Lewis, 2009; Marshall, 2001; MCEETYA, 2004; Rogers, 2011c; Wilkinson & Meiers, 2007). As a result, valuable teaching and learning time is lost, with serious consequences for students’ moral and academic progress.
Without effective CM, a productive classroom atmosphere is difficult to achieve, and disruptive behaviours impact on the learning process by taking time away from teaching. Johnson and Sullivan (2014, p. 1), in presenting an overview of the research on student behaviours in SA, reported amongst others the recurrence of the following themes: to maintain orderly learning environments is important because they are linked with high student engagement and achievement; ineffective CM has negative effects on student engagement, leading to student resistance and misbehaviour; and CM is viewed by teachers “as their greatest concern”. An Australian longitudinal study strongly establishes the link between classroom behaviour and academic performance (Angus et al., 2009). Amongst all the variables that impact on student achievement, the teacher is the major in-school influence (Dinham, 2012, p. 34). According to Jensen (2010c), a student with an excellent teacher (as defined by the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2014) can achieve in six months what would take a full year with a less effective teacher, and of course the effect is cumulative over several years.

For teachers, management skills are fundamental; “a teacher who is grossly inadequate in CM skills is probably not going to achieve much” (Brophy & Everson, 1976, in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 5). It is now recognised by many researchers that effective behaviour management skills are a necessary condition for creating a positive learning environment (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007; Edwards & Watts, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; Wilkinson & Meiers, 2007).

Hattie (2009), in his search for what has the greatest influence on student learning, analysed ‘effect sizes’ with an effect size of 1.0 being huge and an effect
size of 0.40 being the average, “the typical effect, the hinge point … a level where the effects of innovation enhance achievement in such a way that we can notice real world differences” (p. 17). In his table of effect sizes, ‘class environment’ has an effect size of 0.56, well above the average effect size of 0.40.

According to Thomson, De Bartoli & Buckley (2013), the 2012 PISA results reveal that, despite still performing above the international average, the mathematical and reading literacy achievement of Australian 15-year-olds has declined over the past decade. In mathematics, the decline was significant between PISA 2003 and PISA 2012. Results stagnated in science. The PISA 2012 national report links Australia’s falling results in mathematics and reading literacy to a decline in the proportion of high-performing students and an increase in the proportion of low-performing students. Of course many other factors can be linked to students’ results in tests, but a positive and safe classroom climate is a crucial one.

1.4.2 Equity issues

Very significant gaps in achievement remain between Australian students by gender, ethnicity, location and wealth. The gap between students in the highest and lowest socio-economic quartile for PISA 2009 was equivalent to almost three full years of schooling (OECD, 2010). The low achievement of Australian Indigenous students also continues to be of concern. ACER chief executive, Professor Geoff Masters, expresses the view that “these achievement gaps place an unacceptable proportion of 15-year-old students at serious risk of not achieving literacy levels [sufficient] for them to effectively participate in the workforce” (ACER, 2010). Having effective teachers in the classroom is vital to the life chances of every
student, particularly those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds who
often need it the most:

The more we educate people the more they become ‘global’ citizens. The poor
and uneducated are anchored to time and place and are subject to manipulation
and exploitation—political, religious, financial. But the rich and the educated
are independent and free. (Ohmaae, 1991, in Beare, 1995, p. 17)

A skill crisis is indeed bad enough but a value crisis would be devastating.
(Mulford, 1994, p. 38)

The 2012 PISA study suggests that one of the best ways to improve the
achievement of disadvantaged students, particularly those from low socio-economic
groups, is to ensure that schools promote a positive and disciplined classroom
environment. As Dinham states:

Life is not fair, but good teaching and good schools are the best means we
have of overcoming disadvantage and opening the doors of opportunity for
young people. (Dinham, 2012, p. 34)

1.4.3 Teacher wellbeing: Stress and retention

Many teachers continue to experience stress and disillusionment. In a thesis on
behavioural interactions between teachers and students, Beaman (2006), with
reference to NSW secondary classrooms, establishes a strong correlation between
teacher perception of troublesome classroom behaviour and levels of stress.
Disruptive student behaviour has a negative impact on a teacher’s sense of efficacy
and wellbeing (Barker et al., 2009), and many young teachers are leaving the
profession within a few years of graduating (Alexander-Rami & Bockrath, 2011).
According to Johnson and Sullivan (2014), teachers report that classroom
management is one of the greatest concerns in their teaching and it often leads to
burnout, job dissatisfaction and leaving the profession at an early stage.
Many Australian teachers leave the profession at an early stage of their career. According to a report from the Queensland (QLD) College of Teachers (2013, p. 3), about the attrition of recent QLD graduates, the estimate is that 8–50 per cent of novice teachers leave the profession within five years. Savage and Savage (2010) state that for some teachers the profession is not as noble as anticipated, “the classroom is a battlefield where it seems there is constant conflict”, and they choose “to leave the battle of teaching” (p. 3). Slee (2012), in her recent publication *Hang in there ’til Easter: Managing classroom behaviour by building resilient teachers*, outlines the problems facing novice teachers and emphasises the role that resiliency plays in teacher retention.

Recent research reveals the new phenomenon of competent, experienced teachers also leaving the profession. This may seem surprising, as we would expect those who leave teaching to be those who did not manage in the classroom, a type of attrition that might be desirable, but according to a recent study by Adoniou (2013), this is not the only case: “Too often those who leave are those who have high expectations of themselves and of their learners. They came into teaching with a strong desire to make a difference in students’ lives” (p. 3). Adoniou quotes one of the teachers interviewed, who said: “Don’t let me forget the teacher I wanted to be” (p. 3). Quality teachers are leaving because they become disillusioned, they feel their opinion is not being valued, they do not get the support they need and they feel that they cannot change the system. “Too often, good teachers leave because they care too much to stay” (Adoniou, 2013, p. 3).
1.4.4 *Ethical consequences*

Effective CM not only provides sufficient order to allow teaching/learning processes to take place, it also teaches values. Teachers and schools play a significant role in developing values, particularly in a society moving away from religions that traditionally attempted to set moral standards.

Schooling should have major impacts not only on the enhancement of knowing and understanding but also on the enhancement of character: intellectual character, moral character, civic character and performance character. (Shield, 2011, in Hattie, 2012, p. 4)

The teacher needs to gain respect from students and to be a role model. In a number of instances, the teacher could be the only role model children have. Teachers do not teach values during lessons on ethics, but indirectly, through integrating them in daily school life and by modelling appropriate behaviours. According to Lewis (2009), teaching values or citizenship as a separate program “focusing on transmission of knowledge alone have limited effect. The values that are to be promoted have to be incorporated into the day-to-day experience of pupils” (p. 11). It is important to understand that every interaction between teacher and student is a learning experience for students, whether they are directly involved or simply witnesses. If a teacher ignores a significant misbehaviour, the message to students is that the behaviour is acceptable. The way a teacher shows self-control, understanding and leadership during a behavioural crisis in the classroom influences the values development of all members of the classroom. The most common values acknowledged by the 2005 Australian Government are care and compassion; doing your best; fair go; freedom; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; responsibility; and understanding, tolerance and inclusion (in Lewis, 2009, p. 12).
Students have to develop social skills and understand that their behaviour can infringe on the rights of other students and teachers:

Great teachers allow their lives to express their values. They are matchless guides as they give the gift of opening truths about themselves to their students. I often think of three or four teachers out of the many … who changed my life. What made them truly great? They were well informed. They could relate their knowledge to students. They created an active not passive climate for learning. More than that they were authentic human beings who taught their subjects and were open to teach about themselves. (Boyer, 1995, in Marias, 1999, p. 19)

The behaviour of students on campus is also an ongoing concern to teachers: bullying, violence and aggression. Internal data from the Northern Territory (NT) Department of Education and Children Services show that there have been 24 assaults of teachers in public schools in the last 12 months. The NT branch of the Australian Education Union has complained that these assaults are not reported to the police (Myles, 2012). Are we potentially creating generations of young people who, as yet, have not developed self-discipline, feel unwanted, disconnected, powerless and socially maladapted?

Education should be preparing tomorrow’s adults to meet ethical, as well as economical imperatives, preparing them not only for a life of work, but also for a life of worth … We must bolster students’ will to seek wisdom. We must enable them to think creatively about complex issues and to act responsibly. (Mulford, 1994, p. 38)

1.5 Thesis structure

The metaphor of a jigsaw puzzle suggested by Perry (2002, pp. 37-38), is useful to describe the structure of this thesis. In general terms, this chapter begins the research like a jumbled research problem, a jigsaw puzzle. Chapter 2 starts to put the pieces together, to try to reveal a picture of what is known on the topic of CM, illustrating that some pieces are missing and so the complete picture cannot be known. Chapter 3 explains how the search for the missing parts will be undertaken.
Chapter 4 describes the matching together of newly found pieces. Finally, Chapter 5 returns to the puzzle, linking those new pieces to what the picture looked like at the end of Chapter 2, and explaining and discussing how the new and the old pieces fit to make the whole, new, picture clearer. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the whole picture, concluding the thesis.

To describe the thesis structure more conventionally, Chapter 1 introduces the research territory by presenting disruptive student behaviours as an ongoing and growing problem in Australian middle school classrooms; definitions are stated; the goals of CM and the extensive literature on CM strategies are introduced; the gap in previous research is defined, and the problem statement and the research questions are outlined; the links between improvement in CM and the overall progress with the school improvement research are explained; and finally, the significance of this thesis is explained. Chapter 2 presents a review of the relevant literature linked to the problem statement and the research questions outlined in the first chapter. Chapter 3 explains the methodology that has informed the development of the thesis, namely grounded theory, and describes the process of data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings through a thematic analysis of the interviews with participants. Chapter 5 discusses those findings through further links with the extant literature and my personal experiences, and finally the theory is developed. Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, outlines the connections between the outcomes and the research questions, the limitations of the study and the directions for further research.

### 1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the background context of this thesis and presented definitions. It has outlined the problem statement and the research questions. After
noting the potential significance of this study, the structure of the thesis was outlined.

The following chapter reviews the relevant literature in order to provide a foundation for the development of a theory.
Chapter 2  Literature review

This chapter reviews the research literature in three main areas: effective CM and differing teaching styles; school improvement; and change processes and the difficulties associated with implementing new strategies.

2.1 Classroom management research

As discussed in Chapter 1, many consider disruptive student behaviour in Australian classrooms to be not only an ongoing, growing problem (see §1.1.1), but “a matter of national significance” (MCEETYA, 2004). Behavioural problems have continued in classrooms despite the volume of contemporary research available to teachers on how to address this issue (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007; De Jong, 2003; Edwards & Watts, 2008; Hart, 2010; Lewis, 2009; B. Rogers, 2011c; Sullivan et al., 2012; Williams, Winkelman & McDowell, 2012).

Although the characteristics of effective classroom managers are clear and even somewhat intuitively obvious, what might not be as clear and obvious is how you become an effective classroom manager. (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 10)

Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) ask the following question: “Are good classroom managers born or made?” (p. 10). According to them, the good news is that they can be made. Good techniques need to be used and training in the use of those techniques can change behaviours. They cite Walter Borg and Frank Ascione’s 1982 research, which found that teachers trained in the use of specific CM techniques had fewer disruptions and were more engaged with their students than those teachers who had not been similarly trained. The issue is therefore, which approach and strategies teachers should choose in terms of their effectiveness from the multiplicity of the different models available to them?
In order to discover relevant research on CM, I selected electronic databases, such as ERIC, Education Research Complete and Google Scholar, using key phrases such as ‘discipline in schools’, ‘behaviour management’ and ‘classroom management’. I limited searches of journal articles to the last 10 years and to middle school contexts. I only considered peer-reviewed articles to ensure the quality of the sources. Following a grounded theory approach, the journal articles were also used to supplement my own data analysis, based on participant interviews. Articles that focused on relevant subtopics facilitated various comparisons, verifications and explorations around specific themes.

2.1.1 General considerations about the research documentation available to teachers: Evidence-based or not?

As already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, section 1.1.3, the research literature on CM and CBM can be broadly regrouped into (1) sets of specific strategies used in the classroom that are most likely to be evidence-based, (2) models based on various psychological and educational philosophies and (3) text books that guide teachers amongst all that documentation. It is to be noted that research to measure the effectiveness of CM models as compared to research on specific practices has been rather limited (O’Neill & Stephenson, 2014). In their extensive analysis of the different discipline models available to teachers, in 2008 Edwards and Watts stated that “unfortunately most discipline models have not been researched extensively. Hardly any research is available that compares the effectiveness of different models” (p. 37).

O’Neill and Stephenson (2014), in their key research work published in the Australian Journal of Teacher Education, have analysed what constitutes evidence –
based documentation in the field of classroom management (CM) and classroom behavior management (CBM): *Evidence-based classroom and Behaviour Management Content in Australian Pre-Service Primary Teachers’ Coursework: Wherefore Art Thou?*

They define what can be considered as evidence-based and was can be referred as a model. They refer to Kerr and Nelson (2006) who have developed criteria by which CBM strategies can be viewed as having an evidence-base: “the use of a sound experimental or evaluation design; empirical validation of effects; clear implementation procedures; replication of outcomes across implementation sites; and evidence of sustainability” (p. 2). They define a model as “a set of practices that reflect a particular philosophy or theory about teachers and students’ roles in determining the level of freedom and control in the classroom” (p. 2).

As already stated, O’Neill and Stephenson recognise that the research on the effectiveness of models has been limited compared to the research on specific strategies. They acknowledge that this is probably due to the difficulty to conduct research in the classroom when the implementation of the full integrity of a model is problematic, of course this is not the case for stand alone strategies.

O’Neill and Stephenson’s method, a sound experimental design, was first to select a set of 55 CBM strategies reported in the literature Behaviour Management Strategies Scale (BMSS) and from that bank to identify the level of support for those strategies in seven sources: six books describing evidence based strategies and a well known reviewed article from Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesh, Myers and Sugai, 2008, *Evidence-based Practices in Classroom Management: Considerations for Research to Practice*. They found that of the 55 strategies examined, 18 had at least one source as an empirical study and at least three other sources that viewed the strategy
as effective. Therefore, they establish this bank of 18 practices as evidence-based practices “that appear to have a weight of research support and should be considered for inclusion in subjects covering CBM within initial teacher education courses” (p. 17). Their next step was to analyse a number of models, and text books for the inclusion of these practices. Based on their findings, references will be made in the following sections of this literature review on what can be viewed as evidence based or not.

2.1.2 Key educational theories and models

A number of child development theories have informed CM and CBM models and strategies in Australian schools. These are usually presented according to a three-tier categorisation. For example, as suggested by Edwards and Watts (2008), Tier 1 theories focus on control and management of students, beginning with the behaviour modification model of Skinner (1971) and more recent variations to this approach. These include assertive discipline (Canter & Canter, 2001), cognitive behavioural theory (CBT) (Kaplan & Carter, 1995), applied behaviour analysis (ABA) (Alberto & Troutman, 2013), positive behaviour support (PBS) (Carr, 1997) and positive behaviour for learning (PBL) (Mooney, Dobia, Yeung, Barker, Power & Watson, 2008). Tier 2 theories relate to the leadership exercised by the teacher, with models such as democratic and goal-centered theory (Dreikurs, 1968;), choice theory (Glasser, 1988), the developmental management approach (DMA) (Lewis, 2009), and positive behaviour leadership (B. Rogers, 2011c). Tier 3 presents non-directive theories (C. Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) with models such as teacher effectiveness training (TET) (Gordon, 1974), the responsible thinking process (RTP)
(Ford, 2004) and the pain model of Patrick Connor (in Edwards & Watts, 2008, pp. 264-286)

This three-tier distinction helps to illuminate the choices available when different models are implemented in the classroom, depending on how much emphasis is put on teacher power and control versus student autonomy in the classroom (Canter & Canter, 2001; Charles, 1989; Dreikurs, 1968; Glasser, 1988; Gordon, 1974; Lewin, 1948; Lewis, 2009). These teaching styles can be placed on a continuum with authoritarian and non-directive intervention styles at both extremes, and with the balanced democratic leadership style in between.

How much power is exercised by teachers relates to the extent to which preventive, corrective and/or supportive strategies are used in the classroom (see §1.1.2.3). Authoritarian teaching styles focus mainly on corrective strategies, non-directive intervention styles either lead to complete student freedom or promote supportive strategies, while hybrid leadership models draw on all three approaches. Lewis (2009) considers that the theory of power developed by French and Raven (1959) was a valuable form of scaffolding for examining those teaching styles. He explains that five kinds of power can be used by teachers in the classroom, whether knowingly or unknowingly: (1) Coercive power, when students avoid punishment. (2) Reward power, when students want to gain something. (3) Legitimate power, which is considered to be inherent in the teaching position. (4) Referent (relationship) power, which students give to those teachers they respect, trust, value and like. (5) Expert power, where students respect the knowledge of the teacher and believe they will gain from cooperating with them.
2.1.2.1 Management theories: behaviourist approaches

This section provides details about the Tier 1 theories, focussing on control and management of students.

The behaviour modification model of BF Skinner

In the first part of the 20th century, Wolfgang Kholer and the Gestalt theorists criticised the dominant behaviourist branch of psychology on the grounds that it overlooked the dynamic nature of instinct, and focused only on conditioning and passive learning through response to rewards and punishment. They visualised a more active pattern (a gestalt), where individuals learn insights through their own attempts and failures. Nonetheless, Skinner’s (1971) behaviour modification model, based on the work of psychologist Ivan Pavlov, assumed that children’s behavioural development was linked to external stimuli in the environment, and therefore behaviours could be modified by manipulating rewards and punishments through positive or negative reinforcements. From the radical behaviourism advocated by Skinner in the 1970s, other more moderate forms of behaviourism followed. These involved students reflecting on, negotiating and managing their own behaviour.

The assertive discipline of Lee and Marlene Canter

According to O’ Neill and Stephenson (2014), this model “has been the focus of some research, but the evidence has been either “misleading, reported selectively, or together absent” (Maag, 2012, p. 2095, cited in O’Neill & Stephenson, 2014, p. 3).

At an early stage in the development of their assertive discipline model, Canter and Canter (1976) advocated that students must be made to follow rules, although they were not to be involved in the discussion of those rules. They were to be punished when they behaved badly, and their good behaviour would be encouraged
through positive reinforcement. Their focus on corrective discipline through punishment was criticised by other researchers, on the grounds that punishment promotes student resistance and rebellion, even aggression, and instead of eliminating undesirable behaviour, it is likely to promote the very behaviour it is designed to prevent (Gordon, 1974; Kohn, 1993). Subsequently, Canter and Canter (2001) softened their approach to the point where they envisaged a teacher who was assertive, but who also understood students’ needs, and was therefore also approachable and supportive. They advocated a discipline plan to ensure rule-based order in the classroom, one which rewards appropriate behaviours but leads to negative consequences for any non-compliance. Clear boundaries and rules were to be set in collaboration with students, and then taught, with the consequences clearly agreed upon and presented as a choice that students make when not following rules. It is important to note that Canter and Canter use the word consequences meaning ‘negative consequences’ as a euphemism for punishments, such as withdrawal of privileges, detention, time-out, being sent to the principal’s office, suspension and/or expulsion. These are punitive in nature, and have nothing to do with the concept of ‘logical consequences’ first introduced by Dreikurs (1968). Different interpretations of the word consequences lead to confusion in the research literature, as further explained in Section 2.1.3.1.

**The cognitive behavioural theory of Joseph Kaplan and Jane Carter**

Besides the use of punishment, Kaplan and Carter (1995) also focus on the involvement of students in reflecting, managing and negotiating their own behaviour in order to improve towards self-discipline. With the help of the teacher, students are “to talk sense to themselves” (Kaplan & Carter, 1995, in Konza, Granger & Bradshaw, 2001, p. 89); they discuss their past behaviours, identify goals for more
appropriate ones, develop a plan, then implement and monitor it. Lyons, Ford and Slee (2014) consider CBT to be strongly influenced by both behaviourist and psycho-educational theories and explain that “CBT is mostly used for students with more challenging behaviours, particularly those exhibiting low self-esteem, disruptive behaviours and underachievement” (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014, p. 26).

**The Applied Behaviour Analysis of Paul Alberto and Anne Troutman**

It is to be noted that according to O’ Neill and Stephenson (2014) Alberto and Troutman’s Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) is the only model considered to have a strong evidence–base (p. 3). ABA advances the notion that student behaviours are linked to conditions in the environment and their consequences, so that reinforcement-based strategies can be used to achieve positive behaviour outcomes (Alberto & Troutman, 2013). Children are taught new behaviours and skills using structured techniques that are systematically implemented. Therefore, it is essential to observe, define and measure behaviours in order to diagnose problems and also to monitor the progress of interventions. A record, often referred to as A B C (antecedent /behaviour /consequences), is needed in order to plan intervention. Special attention is also given to prevention in order to build a positive environment; teachers need to develop a relationship with students, built on positive experiences, in order to be effective in that program and to work with parents in monitoring progress. It is a time-consuming approach that requires training and skills, and is used in special education programs to support students with behavioural disorders. According to Lyons, Ford and Slee (2014), ABA is strongly influenced by behaviourist theory and the work on Positive Behaviour Support, which is yet another more recent model based on behaviourist approaches, as described below.
Positive Behaviour Support and School-Wide Positive Behaviour support

According to O’Neill and Stephenson (2014), Positive Behavior Support (PBS) (Carr, 1997) which is linked to ABA has also a strong evidence base (p.3). PBS is not so much about changing students as it is about altering teachers’ attitudes in order to promote positive changes in student behaviour. Originally developed in the United States of America (USA) under the name Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to specifically deal with children with special needs, it is also known as School-wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS). The focus is on teachers supporting students in changing their behaviour by taking the necessary steps.

We believe that good teachers possess all the tools necessary within their instructional repertoire to change behaviour in a positive and efficient manner. We also realize however that there are students whose behaviours will challenge the limits of our repertoires. Our task is to find the right combination of elements that teachers control—including interactions, routines, and physical environment. (Scott, Anderson & Alter, 2012, p. vi)

SWPBS is a widely endorsed and implemented evidence-based program in Australian schools. Although not nationally endorsed (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014), a number of state departments of education have developed some of their own policies and support systems to promote a whole-school approach to behaviour management in schools based on SWPBS.

For example, the model was implemented in NSW as Positive behavior for learning (PBL) (Mooney, Dobia, Yeung, Barker, Power & Watson, 2008) to further emphasise the importance of academic learning. It is a school-wide incentive program aiming at promoting good behaviour and thereby minimising negative behaviour. The aim of this approach is to select, teach and reinforce target behaviours by encouraging and rewarding them rather than waiting for inappropriate
behaviours to occur before responding. It is based on behaviourist theories, with a focus on prevention, intervention and supportive discipline, through various reinforcements and incentive programs across the whole school. Student progress is systematically tracked and school data are used as evidence of success or otherwise. The basic contention of PBL is that general prevention for all students needs to be supplemented with more specialised interventions and support for about 20 per cent of students, with intensive individual interventions for about five per cent (Mooney et al., 2008).

In Western Australia (WA) a ‘good standing’ policy approach has been implemented (Government of WA Department of Education, 2008). It started formally through a major WA funded project 2001 Behaviour Management and discipline. Schools were expected to develop comprehensive behaviour management plans. PBS was recommended to provide an operational framework for achieving positive behavioural outcomes. A ‘good standing’ policy is part of this program. For example, a school rewards exemplary behaviour, attendance and work ethics, and has a set of responses for positive and negative behaviours. Students can be ‘in’ or ‘out’ of good standing. The status of each student is recorded on a central computer system. Steps are taken to support students to move from ‘bad’ to ‘good standing’.

A critical evaluation of this program Troubling behaviour management: Listening to student voice, was undertaken in WA by PhD student Janean Robinson (2011). Robinson is very critical of this type of behaviour management in schools’ policies on the grounds of lack of consultation with teachers, parents and students. She challenges the deficit thinking that underpins them. “Anchorage High rewards exemplary behaviour, attendance and work ethics [and] shows a hierarchical set of responses for positive or negative behaviours … particular behaviours are rewarded
and punishment is distributed accordingly” (Robinson, 2011, p. 42). She expresses reservations about the ‘good standing’ approach and the labelling of students, branding them as good or bad, and placing them in and out of good standing status within a school. She suggests an alternative approach, based on trust, respect and care, particularly for those very challenging students who react strongly against punitive actions. In the NT, a SWPBS program has been implemented in a number of primary and secondary schools. Pilot schools have been trained in SWPBS since 2010 (Northern Territory Department of Education & Training, 2012). It is interesting to note that these programs represent a recent move back towards behaviourist approaches in an attempt to deal with the increasing number of behavioural problems in schools (Sullivan et al., 2014).

Although a whole-school approach to deal with behavioural problems is a move in the right direction (Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; Rogers, B., 2006, 2011c; Slee, 2012), the PBS and PBL approaches appear to be unbalanced, with an overuse of rewards and, to a lesser extent, punishment. The 2012 BaSS, an Australian Research Council funded project: Punish them or engage them? that set out to identify and address productive and unproductive student behaviours in SA schools, is critical of those behaviourist approaches, particularly the use of punitive strategies. Their research shows that “both primary and middle secondary teachers considered engaging the student in discussions about their behavior the most effective strategy…most teachers across both contexts considered that punitive behavior management strategies were ineffective” (Sullivan et al., 2012, p. 69).

2.1.2.2 Leadership theories

A shift away from the proponents of Skinner’s behaviourist theory and the use of punishment inflicting pain took place in the 1970s with the emergence of
Dreikurs’ goal-centred theory (1968), which has been categorised as a leadership theory (Edwards & Watts, 2008).

Leadership theories assume that children develop best through the interaction of both inner and external influences, hence the role of the teacher is to be a leader in the classroom and to use appropriate strategies to assist students in having greater responsibility for their actions. To avoid confusion, it is worth noting that leadership theories, such as Dreikurs’ goal-centered model (1968) and Glasser’s choice theory (1988), are also categorised in the literature as ‘psycho-educational’.

Dreikurs (1968) and Glasser (1988) both contend that human beings have needs, and that their behaviours attempt to fulfill those needs. Therefore, in the classroom, teachers should seek to understand the causes and goals of students’ behaviours (Lewis, 2009).

**The goal centred theory of Rudolf Dreikurs**

Dreikurs’ (1968) theory is based on Alfred Adler’s studies in psychology; in particular, on his proposition that human beings are essentially social and have an inner tendency to want to belong and be accepted. Dreikurs applies this theory to the classroom setting and emphasises the need for teachers to understand how inappropriate behaviours are linked to mistaken goals (e.g., power seeking, attention seeking, revenge, displays of inadequacy) and how, through counselling, teachers can develop student awareness of those mistaken goals and support them in changing their behaviour by choosing more appropriate ones that can still meet their needs.

Dreikurs (1968) differentiates between different management and teaching styles: autocratic, permissive and democratic, based on the research of Kurt Lewin (1948). Autocratic teachers impose their will on students and force them to obey
rules. Students tend to react against this approach. Permissive teachers allow students to behave as they wish, without guidelines or rules, and do not follow up unacceptable behaviours by pointing out their consequences. Both teaching styles are viewed by Dreikurs as ineffective. He strongly favours a democratic style, where teachers provide assertive leadership through firm, but caring, guidance. Table 2.1 presents the differences between an autocratic/authoritarian style and democratic leadership style.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Autocratic and democratic leadership styles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autocratic</strong></td>
<td><strong>Democratic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boss</td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharp voice</td>
<td>Friendly voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Command</td>
<td>Invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power</td>
<td>Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure</td>
<td>Stimulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demands cooperation</td>
<td>Wins co-operation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I tell you what you should do”</td>
<td>“I tell you what I would like you to do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposes ideas</td>
<td>Encourages ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominates</td>
<td>Guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticises</td>
<td>Encourages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finds faults</td>
<td>Acknowledges achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punishes</td>
<td>Helps (uses logical consequences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I tell you”</td>
<td>Discusses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I decide, you obey”</td>
<td>“I suggest and help you to decide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has sole responsibility for the group</td>
<td>Shares responsibility of team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Robertson, 2002, in B. Rogers, 2002, p. 21

According to Dreikurs (1968), the following conditions promote a democratic classroom environment: order, limits, firmness and kindness, assertiveness and leadership from the teacher, student involvement in establishing rules and logical
consequences with a clear understanding of rights and responsibilities in the
democratic classroom. The term ‘logical consequence’ began being used by Dreikurs
in opposition to ‘consequences’, since the latter can be interpreted as punishment, as
already mentioned.

**Choice theory, reality therapy and lead management: Glasser**

According to O’ Neill and Stephenson (2014), from an analysis done by Emmer
and Aussiker (1990), the effectiveness of Glasser’s model has had mixed results (p. 3).

Central to choice theory (Glasser, 1988) is the concept that the “only person’s
behavior I can control is my own”. Our behaviour is always purposeful and attempts
to satisfy five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun—
therefore the role of teachers is to assist students in choosing behaviours that will
satisfy their needs within a democratic context, where they do not infringe on others’
needs. For example, Glasser emphasises that classroom organisation can influence
the way power-seeking children can satisfy their need for power if given special
responsibilities within the classroom. Glasser also distinguishes between ‘boss’ and
‘lead’ teachers, to emphasise the democratic principles of power sharing.

**Ramon Lewis’s developmental management approach**

Lewis’s (2009) work mainly focuses on first, understanding the causes, and
second, understanding and categorising the goals of students behaviours.

**The causes of student behaviours**

According to Lewis (2009) causes are often presented in the literature on a
continuum. At one end is the belief that the misbehaviour is associated with some
form of deficiency in the student—a deficit model, in which teachers have no or limited control. At the other end, student misbehaviour is presumed to be due to the school system (e.g., curriculum, school climate) or caused by the teacher, implying the possibility of being able to change those variables. For Lewis, the extreme positions on this continuum seem to be the views of theorists; most experienced teachers understand that a pupil’s inappropriate behaviour is the result of a combination of both factors. Sullivan et al. (2012), drawing on their BaSS survey, argue that many factors are in fact within the teacher’s control, and to a greater extent than teachers are willing to acknowledge. They establish that low-level, disruptive and disengaged student behaviours happen frequently, and although teachers find them difficult to manage, they accept very little responsibility for such behaviour. Their key findings are summarised as follows:

Teachers were more likely to attribute unproductive student behaviours to individual student factors or out-of-school factors. Teachers were less likely to attribute unproductive behaviours to school factors. Most teachers commonly reported student unproductive behaviour as being outside the teacher’s control. Only approximately one third of teachers saw that inappropriate curriculum and ineffective school student management policies accounted for unproductive student behaviour to some or great extent. (Sullivan et al., 2012, p. 63)

The research literature usually groups the various causal factors according to the home, society, the student, the school and the teacher (Edwards & Watts, 2008). In regards to home factors scenarios and analyses are presented in the literature with respect to the lack of parental support for teachers and schools in today’s world. It has even reached the point where parents challenge the professionalism of teachers and leaders: Lewis (2009) comments that, more and more, parents and students are questioning teachers’ decisions. For example, he states that in the case of a student being sent out of class by a teacher to report to the principal, it is not unusual for a parent to ring the principal’s office before his or her child even arrives at that office.
According to a recent *Principal Health and Wellbeing Survey* (Riley, 2014) carried out in Australia over a four-year period, with about 26 per cent of all principals being surveyed, about one in four Australian school leaders have been threatened with violence by parents (p. 134). They experience a far higher prevalence of offensive behaviour at work than the general population, with threats of violence being five times higher (p. 14). In addition, parents are often over protective—Such parents are labeled as ‘helicopter parents’, who check all their children’s moves, or ‘lawnmower parents’ who attempt to remove any obstacles their children may encounter in life on the challenging paths ahead (Garst & Gagnon, 2015). These two terms became popular enough to become a dictionary entry (Cambridge Advanced Learners’ Dictionary and Thesaurus). Parents can also be over permissive. For example, they may consider their children as ‘little-kings’ (Olivier, 2002, *Enfants – rois, plus jamais ça!; ‘Children—kings, never that again!’*) and fail to train their children to develop social skills and self-discipline at an early age. From anecdotal reports of primary school teachers, the number of five-year-old children who start school without having been toilet trained is now alarmingly high. Like teachers who have had to shift from authoritarian approaches in dealing with children’s behaviours, some parents have found it difficult to achieve a balance. They don’t know how to set limits and slowly allow themselves to be disempowered and may lose their parental authority. They believe, for example, that you do not say ‘no’ to young children, and instead should provide them with endless choices (Slee, 2012). As a result, those children enter school with limited social skills, making the task of the teacher much more difficult.

Some dysfunctional families may also have a major negative influence, limiting a student’s chances of success at school. The negative effects of family dysfunction
may include deprivation of attention and love, excessive control, abuses of various types, and damage to self-concept (Edwards & Watts, 2008, p. 7).

Unproductive student classroom behaviour can also be linked to socio-educational disadvantage (Sullivan et al. 2012, p. 32). It was analysed with reference to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). It was found that teachers in schools with the highest ICSEA category reported significantly lower episodes of low-level, disruptive, disengaged anti-social behaviours than teachers from schools in all other ICSEA categories. However, deliberately disrupting the flow of a lesson and being late to class were the most frequent types of behaviours managed across all ICSEA categories.

Edwards and Watts (2008) refer to six areas of societal influence: technology, peer pressure, racial and class conflicts, unemployment and poverty, substance abuse, and gang activity. Factors linked to the student that are repeatedly mentioned in the literature are IQ and disabilities, past schooling or performance, the need to be liked and appreciated, the lack of social skills, and a lack of motivation (Edwards & Watts, 2008).

Some aspects of school organisation can also have a negative influence on student behaviours, such as a too coercive or permissive school culture, ineffective school leadership and/or a lack of whole-school approaches and policies that include support systems in place for both students and teachers (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007; Glasser, 1998; Lewis, 2009; Rogers, B., 2011c, Sullivan et al., 2012).

A large body of literature also emphasises the role of the teacher in contributing to students’ inappropriate behaviours (Edwards & Watts, 2008; Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; Sullivan et al., 2012). For example, Lewis
(2009, p. 23) comments on the importance of teacher behaviour, both positive and negative, and discusses theories that explain teacher ‘misbehaviour’ in the classroom. Aggression towards misbehaving students, and some disciplinary techniques such as punishment, are viewed as unproductive as they tend to escalate problems. Despite this, quite a few teachers appear to continue to use such techniques:

… 62% of secondary students … indicate that their teachers at least sometimes yell in anger at students who misbehave. In addition, 42% … report that their teachers at least sometimes use sarcasm, and 30% … use putdowns … and finally 45% … are seen to at least sometimes keep the class in because some students misbehave. These figures are substantial and a cause of concern. (Lewis, 2006, p. 1199, in Lewis, 2009, p. 19)

Not only it is important for teachers to understand the causes, but it is also necessary to understand the goals of students’ behaviours.

**Understanding and categorising the goals of student behaviours**

Much has also been written about the essential need to understand the goals of student behaviours as it warrants different approaches from teachers. Balson (1992) follows the principles outlined by Dreikurs (1968) to guide teachers in selecting different prevention and intervention strategies according to students’ needs and goals. More recently, Lewis (2009) outlines how strategies need to vary according to the different types of inappropriate behaviours taking place in the classroom and the hidden goals of student behaviours. This understanding enables teachers to use different techniques suitable for different groups (e.g., from students who rarely misbehave to very challenging students, such as those seeking power, and students with special needs). Lewis has had extensive experience in developing programs and testing them to assist teachers in helping students to behave more responsibly. In 2006, he conducted initial research on the impact of teacher strategies as perceived
by students. Those considered by students to be the most effective were the use of recognition and rewards for responsible behaviour and involvement in discussions to negotiate a positive outcome. If ‘calmly administered’ (terminology to be noted), punishments were viewed as promoting responsibility on the part of students who misbehave only occasionally.

Lewis (2009) categorises four types of student behaviours and labels them quite neutrally as A, B, C and D. These differentiations are important as they underline the various management techniques suggested to teachers through his DMA. In Category A, students generally respond positively to the demands of the curriculum, work reasonably well and cooperate with the teacher. With such students, teachers need to draw on their legitimate and referent power (see §2.1.1). They respond to ‘hints’, such as “the teacher pausing, moving closer, inspecting the child’s work or saying that there is a problem” (Lewis, 2009, p. 17). In Category B, students are less interested in the work, or may lack confidence in their ability to do it, so they are occasionally distracted and can distract others. Their behaviour usually improves with appropriate use of recognition and rewards when they behave responsibly. When this approach does not work, punishment should be used, mainly in the form of consequences when they act unresponsively. It is crucial that students know in advance the type of consequences the teacher will use to minimise feelings of unfairness and resentment. In Category C, students are challenging enough to be isolated at times. The teacher needs to have a chat with them, or several chats, to assist students to modify their behaviour. They usually progress to Categories B and A. In Category D, misbehaviour is repeated and can become chronic. Students have mistaken goals, as identified by Dreikurs (1968)—attention seeking, power seeking, revenge seeking or becoming withdrawn. No progress is made despite the different
techniques used by the teacher, and traditional models of discipline are not effective with extreme cases. In Categories C and D teachers need to rely on their referent power, using a ‘pile of goodwill’ in an attempt to develop relationships by “treating pupils almost as equals” (Lewis, 2009, p. 86)” and spending positive time with those students. The problem is that, in reality and despite their best intentions, teachers tend to use their coercive power more often as they find it difficult to like such students.

Lewis (2009) emphasises that of course categorising behaviour is not a fixed way to characterise students. Some students may show behaviour patterns across categories, or behave differently according to different contexts, including the time of the day, but this four-part categorisation is a useful framework to help teachers choose appropriate strategies depending on the type of behaviour exhibited. Lewis expands on a long list of positive interventions, such as fight your first impulse, try to understand that the pupil is hurting inside, encourage at every opportunity, separate the deed from the doer, express a liking for the student while still applying consequences for inappropriate behaviour, show awareness of some skills the student is good at, ask the student to help you, show some interest in the student’s own interests, modify the curriculum and assessment, help to change mistaken goals by ensuring that the student is aware of them, and collect enough data to be clear on those mistaken goals (Lewis, 2009, pp. 96–106). Finally, Lewis powerfully summarises those teacher reactions that do not work:

Essentially, a teacher who reacts to an attention seeker with irritation and annoyance, to a power seeker with anger or exasperation, to a revenge seeker with fear or hurt or to a withdrawing student with despair or helplessness is just giving the junkie a fix. (Lewis, 2009, p. 97)
The implementation of Lewis’s DMA (2009) was tested with four secondary schools over three years to measure the impact of the teachers’ strategies on student perceptions. “Overall the data indicates that in practice, the strategies recommended within the DMA are seen by those using them as very helpful” (Lewis, 2009, p. 136). More specifically, to summarise Lewis’s findings (pp. 118–135): the techniques seen by students as most effective in generating cooperative behaviours are: (1) The use of recognition and rewards (for Categories B, C and D) and the participation of students in discussion with negotiation for positive outcomes. (2) Hinting is perceived by students as moderately successful, but essentially successful with the most responsible students (Category A). (3) Punishment is reported to be of limited usefulness.

Lewis (2009) concludes that “aggressive disciplinary strategies such as yelling in anger, group punishment and sarcasm may be avoided by using techniques related to the needs of pupils” (p. 137). He states, however, that it is difficult to remove teachers’ aggression from the classroom. A number of teachers need support in order to use more effective CM strategies.

**The positive behaviour leadership model of Bill Rogers**

According to O’Neill and Stephenson (2014), Bill Rogers’ model is “the most frequently included model in Australian pre-service primary teacher education programs… It contains nine supported practices, with Assertive Discipline (Canter & Canter, 1992) containing nine” (p. 8).

B. Rogers (2011a, 2011b, 2011c) considers that any discipline policy should be based on students’ rights and responsibilities. His philosophical approach is based on the theories of Dreikurs (1968).
While student rights, a democratic curriculum, cooperative learning, participation and equity, inclusion, access and success are worthy goals of education, those goals need to be supported by a clear teaching and learning structure within a framework of rights and responsibilities. Respectful discipline is a significant aspect of the overall structure. Not autocratic discipline, not the martinet-style that many of us knew in our schooling but democratic leadership. (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. xvi)

In this balanced, middle-ground teaching style the teacher is a leader in a classroom and expects compliance rather than demanding compliance. Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) use the term ‘authoritative’ to describe this approach, while B. Rogers (2011c) prefers ‘decisive’.

The strength of B. Rogers’ work is to focus on practical teacher skills in order to provide classroom behaviour solutions, which he refers to as ‘preferred practices’. A key message is that teachers need to know how to manage their own behaviour, as well as student behaviour: That is, to monitor what they do, and what they say in the heat of an action. This is essential, as the class, the audience, is watching! This focus on practical skills is particularly evident in the longest chapter of his book You know the fair rule (2011c). Teachers can plan beforehand for their lesson what they will teach and how they will teach—the resources and the strategies they will use—but, according to B. Rogers, it is surprising that although they know that there will be some elements of disruption, many teachers start a class without planning answers to essential questions: What should I do if…? How can I manage Y’s behaviour? When should I ignore disruption, when should I intervene? What is my Plan B or X, in case of problems? Teachers need to have a plan they can rely on when they have to intervene: “Often the “last thing [they] plan is what [they] will likely say to minimise (not eliminate) unnecessary arguments” (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. 51). They need to have a range and number of internalised strategies that can be used when inappropriate behaviour is encountered.
Therefore, B. Rogers gives particular importance to the language of CM and presents numerous concrete examples of the language to be used in the classroom. For example, a teacher should not say ‘please’ to students but rather ‘thanks’, using positive language implying compliance. Rather than stating, ‘stop talking’, the teacher is encouraged to say, ‘listening, thanks’. Teachers should have a repertoire of phrases or actions that have been practised and internalised, so they are more positive and considered responses (e.g., ‘your mobile phone, in your bag or on my desk, thanks’). The emphasis is on planning what to do and what to say, if … since “the fundamental premise is that positive behaviour leadership and discipline is rarely fortuitous, or accidental” (2011c, p. xi).

The practices recommended by B. Rogers are presented in many different ways but his drawings, scenarios, and short video clips filmed in the classroom particularly provide a visual and effective means of transmitting information. He also focuses on a range of preventive strategies that maximise student on-task behaviours, such as proximity, setting clear expectations, “with-it-ness” (Kounin, 1970), planning transitions and routines.

In summary, B. Rogers’ (2011c) very balanced Positive Behavioural Leadership model can be summarised according to the following protocols of discipline:

Discipline is based on common rights, rules and responsibilities; unnecessary confrontation/embarrassment must be avoided (whenever possible); a least-to-most intervention approach is to be used; teachers need to follow up and follow through, and to give appropriate ‘choices’ within rights and rules; discipline must be carried out respectfully—even when assertive; positive corrective language should be used whenever possible; and so should related consequences; and teachers need to seek colleague and parent support (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. 19). The key message is that the
teacher needs to be assertive and a leader in the classroom by implementing preventive, corrective (intervention) and supportive strategies.

2.1.2.3 Non-directive theories

The humanists—the proponents of non-directive intervention theories, based on Abraham Maslow’s (2012) hierarchy of needs—assume that children develop in response to their own inner drives. Children develop best if they are self-directed and can achieve self-actualisation. Humanists believe that people are good in essence, and progress naturally towards emotional wellbeing. Students usually rebel when teachers want to control their behaviour. They can solve their own problems when teachers respect their needs and listen to them. Teachers have to show unconditional acceptance and establish loving and caring relationships (C. Rogers, & Freiberg, 1994). In this teaching style teachers hope for compliance, but do not insist on it—pleading with students rather than demanding certain required behaviours. An extreme version of this teaching style is that no rules are set, students have unlimited choices, and no consequences apply.

A new social consciousness developed in the 1970s and 1980s. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) formalised the way the western world dealt with children’s discipline in schools. Corporal punishment was abolished in Australian schools. As a result of this legal outcome, schools needed to re-evaluate discipline practices and the goals of their discipline policies. A tendency towards more ‘non-decisive’ expressions of management and discipline in homes as well as schools developed in the 1980s. This shift led to non-decisive approaches to discipline, in the belief that children would eventually develop appropriate behaviour from their inner capabilities without the need for different forms of reinforcement.
Taken to the extreme, it led to permissiveness. Such an approach was outlined in a widely publicised 1960 book *Summerhill*, where A. S. Neill (1992) describes an English boarding school without any rules and where discipline is inexistent — students don’t even have to attend classes. This was forcefully criticised at the time as ‘permissive absurdity’ by a psychologist, Dr. James Dobson in yet another best seller *Dare to discipline* (Dobson, 1970). Dobson said of this type of philosophy that “[It is] the antithesis of everything I have found worthwhile in the training of children” (p. 111).

The theorists in favour of a balanced democratic approach consider non-decisive intervention approaches as ineffective (Dreikurs, 1968; Glasser, 1998; Lewis, 2009; Rogers, B., 2011), on the grounds that when applied to the majority of students, indecisive teachers have unclear expectations, and allow themselves to be disempowered. Their non-assertive interactions inhibit leadership, can lead to permissiveness and laissez-faire attitudes, and as a result, classroom environments can become out of control where some students may form power groups within the classroom.

Without clear directions and confident and respectful leadership from teachers, some class members will find ways ‘to take over’. It is unfortunate, but children are not naturally democratic and ideologues who have forgotten what a robust Year 7 class is like, or more likely never taught in one don’t help by peddling slogans of ‘relevance in the curriculum,’ ‘democracy in learning’ and ‘student participation’ as [if] these were the answer. They are not, in themselves. (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. x)

**Variations of this model**

Gordon’s (1974) TET model promotes trust and relationships between the teacher and the students, and is aimed at improving teachers’ communication skills. Rewards and punishment are viewed as ineffective, even detrimental. Some teachers and parents use power to control children, which has negative effects such as rebellion, disobedience and retaliation, since “children who have been coerced, usually show very little self-control as soon as they are outside the influence of adult controllers” (Edwards & Watts, 2008, p. 185). According to O’Neill and Stephenson (2014), the effectiveness of this model has yet to be proven (p. 3).

Ford’s (2004) RTP’s model argues that in order to teach students to be responsible, it is important to avoid yelling and punishing and to engage them instead. Supportive strategies rather than intervention measures are essential in the RTP model, such as sharing quality time, and promoting caring and loving relationships. Teachers need to be patient and understanding with students who demonstrate challenging behaviours. Four school-wide strategies are used for implementation: the support provided to individual students by an engagement support team; the use of a responsible thinking classroom (RTC) where students can reflect on their behaviour and receive support to change that behaviour, the use of ‘chill-out’ passes, and the procedures for students to negotiate re-entry to classes following the period of time-out.

Connor’s pain model addresses the needs of high-risk, challenging students who are experiencing discouragement and the pain that causes the misbehaviour. “Students who misbehave continuously are like pre-school children, unready for school. They have not learnt the skills necessary to participate as a fully functioning member of the school community and therefore need to learn pro social skills.”
Traditional models of discipline are not effective with those high-risk students. This supports the findings of Lewis (2009), who suggests a healing and holistic social-welfare centre in the school as a place to support those students.

Some aspects of TET and RTP are used in democratic leadership models, for example through the use of time-out in an RTC. The use of time-out can be successful when carefully planned, as recommended by B. Rogers (2011c). It is not to be viewed as a punishment, but a time when students are isolated from the school community, since they were infringing on other students’ rights to learn and the teacher’s right to teach. It is a place where students should reflect on their inappropriate behaviour and decide to change in order to be readmitted into class. The time-out can range from a simple isolation desk in the classroom, to a space in a buddy class for a lesson or a room labelled as reflection room, for a full day or several days.

This introductory evaluation of approaches to CM based on the educational theories and models will be expanded in detail in Sections 2.1.3 and 2.1.4, which deal with the conflicting findings of the research about different models and strategies used in the classroom.

2.1.3 Further recent perspectives: A focus on prevention

This next section of the literature review highlights perspectives relating to student engagement, ecological systems theory, teacher resilience, teacher reflectivity, and school culture.
2.1.3.1 Focus on student engagement

The research shows that student engagement in learning is critical to positive behaviours in the classroom (Hattie, 2003, 2009; Johnson & Sullivan, 2014; Lewis, 2009; R. Marzano, Pickering & Heflebower, 2010; Savage & Savage, 2010; Sullivan et al., 2012). Hattie (2009) cites Steinberg, Brown and Dornbush (1997), who argue that school reforms will not be successful until we both face and resolve the engagement issue. They note that this is not simply an educational problem, but “a more general barometer of adolescent malaise”, with too many students in the classroom “physically present but psychologically absent” (in Hattie, 2009, p. 32).

Engagement was selected as a central theoretical framework by the BaSS team (Sullivan et al., 2012). They argue that, rather than behaviour management, engagement has a direct influence in preventing unproductive student behaviours. The title of their project encapsulates this key focus when referring to students: Punish them or engage them? Their initial findings (p. 9) are as follows: (1) The most reported concerns from teachers were disengaged behaviours and low-level disruptive behaviours. (2) Teachers were more likely to blame individual students or home and family factors rather than in-school factors, including themselves. (3) The behaviour management strategies used by teachers in the classroom were investigated for their perceived effectiveness. It was found that the most commonly used one was reasoning with the student; the least used were ‘in or out school suspension’; conferences involving student, parents, senior staff; and sending the student to the senior staff or the counsellor. In fact, 63 per cent of teachers stated that they never initiate such conferences and 33 per cent reported using ‘a step system’, involving an escalation of actions when the behaviour did not change.
A recent report from the NSW Government (2014), *What works best: Evidence-based practices to help improve NSW student performance*, also acknowledges that student engagement is directly related to academic achievement and future outcomes. It cites an American study of 78,106 students in 160 schools across eight states in 2009, which found that a one percentage point increase in student engagement was associated with a six-point increase in reading achievement and an eight-point increase in mathematics achievement scores (NSW Government, 2014, p. 23).

For Kounin (1970) prevention is essential to prevent behavioural problems. He recommends strategies such as keeping lessons flowing and interesting; making students accountable for their learning; monitoring them by having eyes in the back of your head, or practising what he refers to as ‘with-it-ness’ in the classroom. Lewis (2009) emphasises the need for the teacher to have ‘a pile of good will’, organising classroom meetings and setting up expectations for appropriate behaviour based classroom rights and responsibilities. However, the focus on prevention through student engagement does not preclude intervention through ‘corrective discipline’ (Rogers, B., 2011c).

Many new teachers want to know what they should do when faced with a problem, but they would be better served to prevent the problem in the first place. However, with the best prevention, problems will occur in the classroom because students (and teachers) are simply imperfect human beings who sometimes make poor choices. (Savage & Savage, 2010, p. 5)

### 2.1.3.2 Focus on an ecological perspective

This approach is based on the ecological systems theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1994). According to Bronfenbrenner, school, family and religion are part of a ‘mesosystem’ that influences children’s experiences and vice-versa. Another level of influence, an ‘exosystem’, is the community, culture and society but it is not as
powerful as the mesosystem. Behaviour changes within the interplay between the person and the environment. The notion of ecology emphasises the complex relationships of every element in a child’s life. Every child’s experiences are therefore unique. For example, high expectations for academic success and strong study practices at home will influence the way a student deals with academic work at school. This ecological perspective is used in the Lyford model (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014), and was also viewed as a key theory underpinning the CM model developed by Arthur-Kelly et al. (2007). Conway’s (2012) ecological model was also adopted by the BaSS team (Sullivan et al., 2012).

2.1.3.3 Focus on teacher resilience

Teacher resilience is another perspective studied in the research (Alexander-Rami & Bockrath, 2011; Barker et al., 2009; Beaman, 2006; Savage & Savage, 2010; Sullivan et al., 2012). This perspective is analysed in detail by Slee (2012) and is the focus of her book *Hang in there 'til Easter. Managing classroom behaviour by building resilient teachers.* In this textbook, written mainly for pre-service and graduate teachers, Slee emphasises the need for teachers to reflect on their own behaviour in the classroom and to build their inner resilience so they can face the challenges of teaching and enjoy their profession. Slee defines resilience as the “ability to spring forward from certain setbacks. Resilient teachers have developed protective factors in the form of personal strengths and skills to help them to meet classroom challenges and remain positive” (p. viii). She focuses on the need for planning before teaching begins, the importance of establishing relationships in the first week, clear communication skills, understanding the purpose of misbehaviour and its mistaken goals, and the need to develop social skills and social competencies through teaching those skills to students. Ongoing reflections on preventive
measures help novice teachers to build resilience and to develop adaptive expertise. Slee also views as very important the need for intervention. One entire chapter of her book is dedicated to corrective actions to use when preventive methods are not sufficient, particularly when challenging students have socio-emotional problems and use aggressive behaviour.

2.1.3.4 Teacher’s professional reflectivity and learning

The Lyford model of classroom management (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014) emphasises the need for cycles of reflectivity, where numerous theories are linked to practices and are reviewed on an ongoing fashion. In general terms, “reflexivity means referring back to self. In this professional context, it more specifically means refer back to action taken … reviews and reflections lead to informed and substantial changes in thinking and subsequently to changes in practices” (p. 7).

One of the key principles underpinning the Lyford model is knowledge acquisition theory (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1986, in Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014). This theory presents the concept that from the beginning of learning something new (in the case of the novice learner) through to becoming an expert, different stages of competence take place: novice, advanced beginner, competent performer, proficient performer and expert. The process of development is ongoing; new knowledge is applied and reviewed. An action research model of plan, act, observe, reflect, and further plan takes place in a cyclical fashion. As the learner progresses, knowledge becomes internalised and choices are more automatic, and based on experience. “Experts operate from a mature holistic well tried understanding, intuitively and without conscious deliberation” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, in Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014, p.3).
When a new challenge occurs, experts critically reflect on their intuition, knowing their choice of action may not always work out.

In a complex task such as teaching, with countless elements shifting and changing, there will be always new elements to consider, new ideas to take account of and new issues to deal with. In that sense we can at times feel like novices and at times like experts. (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2013, p. 2)

2.1.3.5 A school culture of support to teachers

The need for support to teachers has also been widely analysed in the literature as a means of empowering them to fulfil their professional responsibilities (Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; Rogers, B., 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2011c; Slee, 2012). B. Rogers stresses the importance of supporting teachers in the daily performance of their duties and providing support for their long-term professional development (PD). Regrettably, he concedes that teachers may go for years without having opportunities for feedback and constructive advice about their teaching based on direct classroom observation. B. Rogers (2011c) particularly focuses on mentoring, as well as ‘teaming’; namely, team teaching, peer-coaching, and peer support groups. The main goals are to raise teacher behaviour awareness, provide descriptive feedback, and support behaviour change through setting short-term goals to improve classroom practices. This type of support is to be viewed as part of overall PD, not as a way to identify teachers who are struggling with CBM.

Teachers may need support from leaders in their daily duties in managing the behaviour of challenging students when they are unsuccessful with the implementation of logical consequences (Rogers, 2011c). Sometimes mediation needs to take place in order to restore broken relationships with students. The restorative classroom discipline initiative is a positive move to address this problem. It has been introduced in Australia as a whole-school approach to support teacher
efforts in dealing with behavioural issues and to assist students in their progress towards self-discipline. The principles underlying these practices reflect some of the democratic leadership teaching styles recommended in schools. This approach, originating from the criminal justice system in the USA, has been used to counteract the overuse of punishment in schools and to provide a logical consequence to challenging behaviours and conflicts. Luanna Meyer, Professor of Education, and Ian Evans, Professor of Psychology, both from New Zealand, published a guide for teachers (Meyer & Evans, 2012) that clearly outlines the principles and strategies of restorative classroom discipline.

The main goal of restorative practices, as a school ethos, is to establish logical consequences, not punishment, so that offenders understand how their behaviour is damaging to others and come to realise that they are accountable for their actions. It holds that since offenders are accountable for their actions, they must face what they have done and those people they have harmed. This approach promotes conflict resolution, and problem solving, as well as restoring relationships between teachers and students, as students need to apologise for their actions. The emphasis is on mutual respect. Conferencing between offenders and victims takes place in the presence of someone trained in these practices (Wachtel, 2009). Restorative policies and practices reflect a whole-school approach to discipline, where expectations, rules and systems are transparent and fair.

Support can also be provided to teachers through actions such as sending a student to a time-out room organised / supervised at the school level: A cool-off period and reflection time for students can take place in that ‘time-out’ room, sometimes called a ‘responsible thinking classroom’ (Ford, 2003). This room is a place where students are supported in their understanding of what happened in the
classroom through discussion with counselling staff. It is not set up to be punitive, and has nothing to do with a detention centre, since it is aimed at restitution to the person(s) who have been affected by the behaviour and at learning better social skills on the part of the student.

2.1.4 **Contention about behaviourist approaches**

Student behaviour is viewed as a contested field of inquiry in which many interests have a stake … the challenge in school is to interpret, translate and enact the plethora of policies so that they complement rather than contradict each other. (Johnson & Sullivan, 2014, p. 5)

An area of controversy in the research literature on CM is around the issue of teaching styles on the continuum from an authoritarian style at one extreme, to an indecisive, non-directive intervention style leading to permissiveness at the other extreme, with numerous variations in between. Different models present milder forms of the radical models using strategies whose effectiveness is disputed in the research (see §2.1.2.1 & §2.1.2.3), essentially in regard to the use of punitive strategies.

2.1.4.1 **A contentious area: Punishment**

As a starting point, the following example illustrates the controversy. On the one hand, Anna Sullivan (2015) from the BaSS research team states that punitive approaches are “not effective at fixing the problem. In fact, they exacerbate it over time” (p. 2). She referred to a large body of research synthesised in Osher et al. (2010) and to her BaSS survey (Sullivan et al., 2012) of 1,380 teachers in SA, which found that most teachers in both primary and secondary schools considered punitive behaviour management techniques to be ineffective. On the other hand, Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) claim that “rejecting categorically disciplinary
techniques is simply not supported by the research” (p. 28), stating it is a myth that punitive actions do not work. They refer to the meta-analysis carried out by Stage and Quiroz (1997), including 99 studies, 200 experimental comparisons and more than 5,000 students, which indicated that disciplinary interventions led to a decrease in disruptive behaviour for almost 80 per cent of students. The interventions compared were reinforcement, punishment, no immediate consequences, and combined punishment and reinforcement. Stage and Quiroz (1997) state:

In summary, this meta-analysis study demonstrates that interventions reduce disruptive behavior work in public schools … we hope that these findings serve to separate the myth that disruptive classroom behavior cannot be effectively managed from the reality that interventions widely used in our schools do in fact reduce disruptive behaviour. (Stage and Quiroz, 1997, pp. 361–362, in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 29)

Building on the findings of Stage and Quiroz, Marzano, Marzanao and Pickering (2003) selected five categories of intervention: Teacher reaction, tangible recognition, direct cost-consequence for misbehaviour, group contingency, home contingency (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 29). The results showed that there should be a balance between negative consequences and positive consequences for those five categories of intervention, and it is important that boundaries be established and a record keeping system be used to keep track of individual student behaviour.

**From the behaviourist management style: use of punishment?**

A large body of research has strongly criticised the radical approach of Skinner (1971) on the grounds that it is excessively power-based, and emphasises obedience rather than promoting student responsibility and the development of self-discipline. There is no longer controversy about that extreme approach (Charles, 1989; Dreikurs, 1968; Glasser, 1988; Gordon, 1974; Kelly et al., 2007; Kohn, 1993;
Rogers, B., 2011c; Rogers, C., 1969). Teachers using this model of CM can even go to the extreme of being hostile and aggressive towards students (Lewis, 2009). Punishment is criticised as provoking resentment and resistance as it usually increases in strength when the misbehaviour persists (Lewis, 2009).

The contention arises because more recent models use an eclectic approach where only some elements of behaviourist theory, namely punishment, are still used. Because the negative aspects of punishment are moderated by some positive features such as involving students in reflecting on, negotiating and managing their own behaviour, this approach is favoured by some researchers; for example, Alberto and Troutman (2013), Kaplan and Carter (1995), Canter and Canter (2001) and the PBS and PBL models (see §2.1.2.1).

Some researchers report that punitive actions work in the classroom (Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003), while others dispute the effectiveness of models influenced by behaviourist theory, on the grounds that they are still too heavily based on rewards and punishment (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014; Sullivan et al., 2012). Again, this controversy is encapsulated by the title of Sullivan et al.’s research work carried out in SA: *Punish them or engage them?* (Sullivan et al., 2012). In their research most teachers considered punitive behaviour management strategies to be ineffective, and rather than using corrective strategies they viewed preventive strategies, such as engaging students in learning, as critical in fostering positive behaviour.

**Research done on assertive discipline (Canter & Canter)**

Six studies researching assertive discipline in the USA between 1980 and 1984, reported by McKormark (1989), and 10 additional studies reported by Desiderio and
Mulleniz (2002), indicate that “disruptions decreased, teacher attitudes to discipline improved and student teachers trained to use assertive discipline felt more prepared to handle discipline problems on field block practice” (in Edwards & Watts, 2008, p. 103). Palardy (1996) arrived at a more qualified conclusion: “[although] acknowledging that assertive discipline works, it works only in the short-term as it does not address the causes of the misbehaviour” (Parlady, 1996, in Edwards & Watts, 2008, p. 103).

**Research done on applied behaviour analysis**

Arthur-Kelly et al. (2007) claim that “ABA has a very large research base in which numerous applications and variations of its basic principles have been tested. There appears to be no doubt that ABA’s interventions can work to change behaviour” (p. 196). Even so, Lyons, Ford and Slee (2014) criticise this approach on the grounds that punishment was used as a mean of controlling behaviour: “Although short term behaviour change often results from using ABA strategies, there is far less evidence of generalization and sustained behavioural change without its continuous use” (p. 30).

It is also relevant to note that Lewis (2009) recommends punishment as necessary for only certain categories of student misbehaviours (Categories B and C) or as he labels it, ‘calmly administered punishment’ or ‘punishment used in the form of consequences’ (terminology which could cause confusion) where teachers’ aggressivity is removed and it is associated with other strategies such as recognition and rewards. Lewis emphasises that ABA is not effective, and is even counterproductive with Category D students, as it promotes revenge and may cause
them to feel that they should retaliate. However, for Lewis, appropriate expectations, boundaries and logical consequences are needed for challenging students.

**Positive behaviour support and positive behaviour for learning**

The models described in Section 2.1.1.1 are heavily focused on encouragement, rewards and supports provided to students to progress towards more appropriate behaviours, and to a minor extent, on punishment. Rewards are used to promote compliant behaviours and to a lesser extent various forms of punishment are used as a deterrent. The effectiveness of this approach has been tested. For example, in a paper presented at the Australian Association for Research Association Conference in 2009, PBL, as a whole-school system of support, is acknowledged as having a positive impact on the attitudes of staff and parents, but to a lesser extent on the behaviour of students (Barker, et al., 2009). On the other hand, PBS and the good standing policy approach have been criticised (see §2.1.1.1).

**So how to make sense of these contradictions?**

The following points need to be made here and will be further discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis: First, there is some confusion in how such terms as ‘punishment’ versus ‘consequences’, and ‘negative consequences’ versus ‘logical consequences’ are understood. When these terms are used in surveys, the confusion leads to inconclusive findings. Second, according to Lewis (2009), punitive strategies are only effective with certain categories of student, those in Categories B and C (see §2.1.2.2), and as he emphasised, only when ‘calmly administered’; so a blunt criticism across the board is misleading (Lewis, 2009). Third, Lyons and al (2014) argued that negative consequences, although effective, are only effective in the short term. There is no lasting effect on behavioural changes. Fourth, it is
interesting to note that in cases where students have been asked about their preferences regarding teacher behaviour, they typically express a desire for stronger teacher guidance and control, even authoritarian styles, rather than more permissive teacher approaches (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003).

**Confusion about punishment and consequences**

The difference between ‘consequences’ and ‘punishment’ is unclear in the research. According to Mendler (2012), punishment and consequences are often confused—‘punishment’ is intended to make someone feel bad, to hurt physically or morally; it is arbitrary, not logically or naturally linked to the behaviour.

‘Consequences’ refers to what will happen if rules are broken; they are logical in nature. They should be discussed with students before the event. If not, students may perceive them as punishment (Dreikurs, 1968). In the research literature, ‘consequences’ as a generic term refers at times to punishment and not to logical consequences, as extensively described by Dreikurs (1968) and B. Rogers (2002, 2006a, 2011c). B. Rogers (2011c) also notes that the notion of ‘consequences’ should not be confused with ‘punishment’ as they are logical in nature and he explains at length the difference between the two.

**Rogers’ analysis of logical consequences:**

B. Rogers (2011c) extensively analysed the effective use of logical consequences as a means to develop student self-discipline. They need to be related to the behaviour, to be reasonable, and to keep respect intact—what he calls the three R s: related, reasonable, respect. For example, giving lines to do in a detention room is punishment, while catching up on work that should have been done in class after school in a ‘catch up area’ (whatever term is used) is a consequence. Reflecting on
one’s inappropriate behaviour in a thinking area or buddy class, or being involved with a restorative justice program before going back to class, is a consequence, not a punishment. And most importantly, he says it is not the severity of the consequence that matters, but its certainty.

For B. Rogers the need to intervene, to use corrective discipline, is essential. Behaviours that infringe on others’ fundamental rights (students/teachers, other members of the school community) need to be addressed. Behavioural expectations have to be clear and need to be discussed with students. Boundaries have to be set and consequences established. This is usually done during the establishment phase of the class/school. Consequences should be viewed positively, as a learning process, a step towards the development of self-discipline. Students must be given a choice; for example, ‘You are not working in class, you need to catch up for homework or stay after school tomorrow’. He recommends calm and positive implementation of consequences, separating the deed from the doer and still showing a liking for the student. The message is: I care for you and, or as stated by Lewis, 2009, “there is nothing you can do, that will make me dislike you” (p. 101).

It is important to know when to use deferred consequences and when to act immediately. In class, most of the time, deferred consequences can be used. This avoids using class time to discuss the behaviour of one student, and anyway, it is wise to give a student some cool off/reflection time, allowing them to save face. For example, if a student refuses to hand over their mobile phone, or refuses to go to a buddy class, there is no need to escalate the issue with a power game. The teacher just needs to let the student know that there will be a chat at the end of the lesson. During the chat, the matter must be resolved (e.g., with apologies, a commitment not to offend again, and with consequences applied according to school policy).
However, if the disruptive behaviour of one or a group of students prevents the teacher from teaching and other students from learning, or if there is violence involved, the teacher must ask for help immediately.

In conclusion, “behavioural consequences are based on the fundamental notion of respect for others’ rights and taking ownership of and accountability of one’s own behaviour… Consequences ought to be seen as an outcome of choice” (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. 153). Logical consequences promote students’ accountability for their actions and help them to develop self-control.

The term ‘time-out’ is yet another example of confusing terminology: “time-out means different things for different people. As a practice it can be open to abuse… and like any management practice, it needs a clear-wide understanding of what we actually mean by the term time-out” (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. 163). For some, time-out represents a punishment, as does the term ‘detention’, and as such is criticised (Sullivan et al., 2012). For B. Rogers and others, it is not punitive. For example, as previously mentioned, Ford (2004) labels the time-out room as an RTC where restorative justice can take place, and Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) refer to it as a ‘think-time room’.

In this debate about the use or not of punishment, a balanced democratic leadership teaching style, as promoted by Dreikurs (1968), B. Rogers (2002 2006b, 2011b, 2011c) assumes that corrective actions are needed when students behave inappropriately, but in the form of logical consequences, rather than punishment or negative consequences (understood as a euphemism for punishment; see §2.1.2.1).
2.1.4.2  **Intrinsic rewards versus extrinsic rewards**

The issue of rewards has not been debated in the research literature as extensively as punishment has been. Recognition for good behaviour and positive reinforcement is generally seen as effective when teachers show that they like their students and provide encouragement by acknowledging their good behaviour. It plays a preventive role, as good behaviour is recognised and rewarded before inappropriate behaviours take place (Alberto & Troutman, 2003, 2013; Carr, 1997; Mooney et al., 2008). As part of the Developmental Management Approach (DMA), Lewis (2009) states that “teachers should feel comfortable in using techniques such as personal and group recognition” (p. 115). He analyses the role of rewards and positive reinforcement in the classroom and views it as critical that teachers acknowledge responsible behaviour, whether or not it is linked to achievement. He suggests praising and rewarding *effort*, not the person. However, he believes that rewards should be kept to a minimum with an emphasis on rewarding group responsibility more than personal responsibility. These views are consistent with the research of Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003). PBS (Carr, 1997) is also based on positive reinforcement to assist motivation, particularly with very challenging students. The general message is that we all respond to rewards and that small successes should be celebrated every session, day or week to give the student a reason to change.

Critics of these approaches state that rewards simply condition students to behave, functioning as a type of bribery that makes students rely too much on extrinsic motivation; by rewarding good behaviour, students come to rely too much on rewards, expect even more and more, and therefore develop less inner responsibility (Kohn, 1993, 1996; Savage, & Savage, 2010). They claim that
teachers use their reward power to control children rather than earning student respect and recommend that reward power should not be abused. Similarly, Good and Brophy (2003) provide clear, but nonetheless cautious, guidelines about the use of rewards and effective praise.

2.1.4.3 In summary

Extreme behaviourist approaches are viewed by the research as ineffective (Sullivan et al., 2014). However, there is a conundrum: some elements of behaviourist approaches, such as punishment, work in the short term. Exceptionally, they can be necessary at times with only a few categories of behaviours; for example, Lewis (2009) refers to ‘mild forms of punishment’, but they are not to be used with extreme challenging behaviours for Category D students, for whom, however, logical consequences are needed. The term ‘consequences’ has been interpreted in different ways: Some researchers criticising consequences understand them as negative consequences, hence punishment.

Effective CM is a combination of preventive, corrective and supportive strategies that are used in accordance with a balanced, democratic leadership approach. Intervention (corrective discipline) is needed in the form of logical consequences, not punishment. Overall, extrinsic rewards, when used cautiously, have been found to be effective; clear guidelines are needed though to assist teachers in using them wisely.

2.1.5 Guidelines for choosing a model: Key models

The following section outlines some guidelines suggested by the research on how to select a CM model, and presents a summary of some key models.
2.1.5.1 How to select and implement a model

Edwards and Watts (2008)’s text book, Classroom Discipline and Management provides teachers with an overview of a range of models they may encounter in professional practice. It presents a comparative analysis of eight models of CM used in Australian and New Zealand schools, regrouped according to the three main teaching styles adopted by teachers in the classroom: authoritarian, democratic or permissive. Each model is described in terms of assumptions, psychological theories, principles, prevention and correction. Their critical analysis of the advantages and limitations of each model is particularly useful for teachers planning their CM approach. Clear guidelines on how to better select a model, and aspects of different models are also presented, and synopses of the various models are offered. The purpose is to assist teachers to develop their own model according to their own personality, values and beliefs.

To be successful in the classroom, teachers need a well-planned, individual model of discipline. They must understand various psychological theories of discipline … they must use a model of discipline that is in harmony with their convictions … when teachers’ behaviour is incompatible with their beliefs, they not only experience personal conflict but confuse their students as well. (Edwards & Watts, 2008 p. 26)

In general, choosing a model is linked to judging which one is the most powerful. Edwards and Watts (2008) suggest that better theories have three benefits: Descriptions are clearer; explanations are more insightful; and predictions are more valid—they help to predict outcomes. They also consider three options for teachers wishing to choose their own model: (1) Selecting a model from a single theory/model with all procedures following the principles of the theory. (2) Selecting an ‘eclectic’ approach to use elements of a number of theories/models to create one model. Charles (2005) “claims that this recombination is necessary because one model may work well with one student whereas another model works better with
others” (in Edwards & Watts, 2008, p. 40). Diverse approaches are complementary rather than contradictory. (3) Choosing a shifting discipline program, where teachers change from one theory to another according to circumstances, classroom dynamics or individual student needs.

**Lewis’s developmental management approach**

Lewis’s (2009) DMA in the classroom favours eclectic and shifting approaches to discipline programs to deal with the four major categories of student behaviours (see §2.1.2.3). He explains how, in practice, teachers combine techniques from the three main educational philosophies and give them different emphases. “Even a behavioural program such as Assertive Discipline (Canter & Canter, 1996) incorporates counselling practices” (p. 114). Lewis’s (2009) guidelines are also useful to teachers facing many options. Flexibility allows for the personality and values of the teachers to be taken into account when making a choice.

**The Lyford model**

Gordon Lyons, Margot Ford and June Slee (2014) provide another example of an eclectic approach in the Lyford model, where a number of theories, frameworks, models and principles inform decisions on CM; namely, humanist theory, knowledge acquisition theory, ecological system theory, socio-cultural theory, psycho-educational theory and CBT. This model essentially brings together theory and practice. It presents strategies on how to implement the number of parts that interrelate in a model. These include: the inputs—knowledge of and understanding around CM and pedagogy; the filters—knowledge filters and interpretive filters; a CM plan, including ecological perspectives, socio-cultural perspectives, psycho-educational perspectives as core considerations; four positive practices, viewed as
preventive (relationships and communication/curriculum, assessment and pedagogy, classroom organisation/ professional reflexivity); and intervention practices; a plan-implement-review cycle and an ongoing cycle of reflexivity that is viewed as essential; finally the output, in terms of a successful satisfied teacher and students who belong, helping to promote safety, happiness, learning (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014, pp. 5–6). Not only does it represent a model of CM, but it is a practical guide on how to create one’s own model.

2.1.5.2 Models in the early 2000s

In the early 2000s, two key documents summarised the research on CM and suggested the best principles and practices for schools: An Australian research report (MCEETYA, 2004) and a meta-analysis from the USA (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). Those two documents represent evidence-based research. Many practices in schools are still based on their recommendations.

First, Best practices in addressing student behaviour issues in Australia (MCEETYA, 2004), a key document written by Terry de Jong (Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA), drew on a rigorous, Australia-wide student behaviour management research project. A review of the literature was undertaken to search for programs exhibiting best practices then a survey questionnaire, based on those findings, was designed and piloted in WA before being distributed around Australia to validate the findings from the literature review. “The assumption was made that where the literature made repeated reference to certain behaviour management strategies associated with successful outcomes, and the survey concurred consistently with this, these strategies could be considered good practices” (MCEETYA, 2004, p. 3).
The report presents the characteristics of best practices in dealing with behavioural problems in the classroom and the key principles that underpin those best practices. It is a guide to be used for the development of successful behaviour management programs at the classroom, school and system levels, grounded in evidence-based findings. For each characteristic of best practice, a list of practical actions that can be implemented in schools is presented. This document is a clear and powerful tool that can be used to promote reflection and guidance for improving the classroom climate of any school. It represents evidence-based findings that are used in this thesis to suggest effective CM and CBM. Table 2.2 presents a summary.


**Table 2.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core principles identified</th>
<th>Best practices recommended</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student needs must be understood from an eco-system perspective</td>
<td>A comprehensive behaviour management policy at the system, community, school and classroom levels focused on prevention and early intervention encouraging behaviour change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices must promote health and wellbeing to create a safe, supportive and caring environment</td>
<td>A health promoting culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusiveness is a must, catering for the needs of all students</td>
<td>A relevant, engaging, challenging curriculum: Quality curriculum and teaching will maximise student engagement and minimise behavioural issues and alienation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs and practices should focus on the whole student’s personal, social and academic needs</td>
<td>Effective pedagogies linked to effective theories of learning based on constructivist approaches to teaching rather than on direct transmission of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behaviour is linked to the quality of the learning experience</td>
<td>A democratic, empowering and positive classroom management approach. The emphasis is on negotiation, choices and positive reinforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relationships between teacher</td>
<td>Established internal and external support systems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and student are crucial

Support to students is essential through school-based support structures or external support such as family, education department, community and interagency partnerships. An alternative, non-traditional flexible learning environment, such as individualised education programs, school-based partial withdrawal or community based programs.

Second, Marzano, Marzano and Pickering’s (2003) meta-analysis includes a brief history of CM research studies from Kounin (1970) to Emmer, Everston, and Worhsham (2003). Within a USA context, this meta-analysis approach was used to pool the findings from more than 100 separate reports and to construct generalisations.

At first the ‘critical role’ of CM was emphasised. According to Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003), the research tells us that the teacher is “probably the single most important factor affecting student achievement, at least the single most important factor that we can do something about” (p. 1). Still acknowledging the complexities involved, and viewing the interrelation of many factors that contribute to good teaching practices, they consider that the teacher has three main roles: designing classroom curriculum, choosing the most effective teaching strategies, and not least, managing the classroom. Without effective CM it is difficult for the teacher to teach and for students to work productively. The remaining chapters of the book address seven general components of effective CM. Each component has clear guidelines for implementation under the heading ‘Action Steps’. The components are:

1. Rules and procedures (pp. 13–26)

The most obvious aspect of CM is to plan and implement rules and procedures. They are not imposed by the teacher, but negotiated. According to
Curwin and Mendler (1988) they should be viewed like ‘a contract’ between teacher and students (in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 17). They can differ from one teacher to another or one class to another class, but they generally fall into the following categories: general expectations of behaviour, beginning and end of a lesson, transitions, material and equipment, group work, and teacher-led activities.

2. Disciplinary interventions (pp. 27–40)

Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) present an interesting finding on one of the key areas of controversy in the research literature (described previously in §2.1.4): the role of punishment. They state that, although some researchers claim that the use of disciplinary techniques and the over-reliance on punishment are ineffective, “the categorical rejection of disciplinary techniques is simply not supported by the research. Quite the contrary” (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 28).

3. Teacher-student relationships (pp. 41–63)

Positive relationships are viewed as essential for the success of rules and procedures, and disciplinary interventions. Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) show that establishing an appropriate ‘level of dominance’ in the classroom is necessary, making it clear that the teacher is in control of the class and is a leader (requiring assertive behaviour from the teacher, establishing clear learning goals, guiding students); the teacher communicates appropriate levels of cooperation (flexibility with learning goals, personal interest in students); and is aware of the special needs of individual students (passive, aggressive, attention seeking, perfectionist). This relationship has nothing to do with students viewing the teacher as a friend, but is characterised by the teacher
demonstrating appropriate levels of leadership, “treating pupils almost as equals” (Lewis, 2009, p. 86) and showing ‘good will’ love and care for their students. This is particularly critical for discouraged, disengaged students who feel excluded from the school system. Nicoll Humphry (2013) in her doctoral research on Youth Off the Streets (YOTS) alternative educational provision for ‘at risk’ teenagers, views “the establishment of a practice of freedom that incorporates relations and practices of care [as] essential in the YOTS ability to build reconciliation” for those students with education (p. 302).

4. Mental sets (pp. 65–75)

This is also viewed as an essential part of effective CM. It is similar to the concept of ‘mindfulness’ in psychology promoted by Ellen Langer (1989). It refers to a high level of situational awareness, what Kounin (1970) labelled as ‘with-it-ness’, and also control over one’s thoughts and emotions—in other words emotional objectivity. A teacher needs to act in any situation in a ‘clinical’ manner even though he or she might be experiencing strong emotions. An emotional reaction of a teacher during a behavioural crisis could escalate problems. B. Rogers (2011c) continued to emphasise this point by insisting on the need to communicate with students without being too negatively emotional, and has extensively developed the use of appropriate language in the classroom.

5. Student responsibility for classroom management (pp. 76–91)

Students need to be involved with the teacher when CM is planned. The following strategies can be used: classroom meetings, written statements of beliefs, written self-analysis. Students can self-monitor their own progress, as well as being involved in reflecting, and understanding their own behaviour through discussions with the teacher.
6. Getting off to a good start (pp. 92–102)

The beginning of the year is critical in establishing CM procedures.

7. Management at the school level (pp. 103–115)

CM initiatives need to be supported at the whole-school level. Rules and procedures have to be established with consequences spelled out regarding specific types of misbehaviour. Additionally, a school system should be put in place for early detection of students with high potential for extreme behaviours. A school-wide management program needs to be adopted (e.g., a ‘think-time’ approach—often labelled ‘time-out’ in the research’ (Nelson & Carr, 1999, in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 114).

To conclude, these two documents (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; MCEETYA, 2004) continue to have a major impact in Australian educational circles, as evidenced by the number of references made to them in more recent literature on CM.

2.1.5.3 In summary: More recent key models

The models developed more recently in Australia all use an eclectic approach; some select different degrees of behaviourist theory as well as elements of non-directive intervention theories. They all promote preventive strategies (prevention) and corrective strategies (intervention) and recommend supportive strategies. The following key models dominate the scene currently: The integrated model of CM (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007) focuses on an integration model and ecological approach. Lewis (2009), Understanding pupil behaviour examines the causes, and goals of inappropriate behaviours and emphasises the need for strategy differentiation. June Slee’s (2012), Hang in there ’til Easter. Managing classroom behaviour by building
resilient teachers focuses on developing teacher resilience. The BaSS team (Sullivan et al., 2012) in *Punish them or engage them*? emphasises preventive strategies and promote student engagement. The Lyford model developed by Gordon Lyons, Margot Ford and June Slee (2014) *Classroom management. Creating positive learning environments* focuses on how to translate theory into practice. And last but not least, the positive behaviour leadership model developed by Bill Rogers (2011c) in *You know the fair rule*, which as already mentioned is the most frequently included model in Australian Pre-service Primary Teacher Education programs. It focuses on the rights and responsibilities of all members of the classroom and on teachers’ practical skills in the classroom. Finally, although it is not a model of CM, Edwards and Watts’ (2008) *Classroom discipline and management* is a useful book that assists teachers in understanding the many different options and developing an approach that fits with their values, beliefs and personality. It represents a valuable framework that analyses, compares and evaluates the many different CM models.

2.1.6 A summary of the major recommendations from the research

In order to create positive learning classroom environments, the following recommendations can be abstracted from the research literature. For organisational purposes they are grouped under the headings of general principles and strategies, and around the three main themes of prevention, intervention and support. They will be further discussed and expanded in Chapter 5.

2.1.6.1 General principles

CM and CBM management are positive processes, essentially “a means to an end in supporting the student to behave appropriately, and not simply an end in itself, punishment” (MCEETYA, 2004 p. 15). The teacher must plan. This is an
essential first step: “Many teachers plan well for curriculum but tend not to plan rigorously for behaviour management issues and necessary discipline, even though they know the common distractions and disruptions they are likely to face” (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. xvii). The teacher needs to be aware of the different models available—the research suggests the choice of an eclectic, balanced approach where elements of various theories are used to create one model according to their own personality and values, and the school ethos, or a shifting approach according to different groups or individual student needs (Edwards and Watts, 2008). Extreme theories and models are viewed as ineffective. Professional reflectivity is crucial: Teachers need to follow an ongoing cycle of plan, implement, and review (Lyon, Ford & Slee, 2014). If a strategy does not work, it has to be changed. It is through understanding the causes and goals of inappropriate behaviours that teachers can differentiate strategies (Lewis, 2009).

A whole-school approach is necessary to support each teacher’s initiatives and student progress towards self-discipline (De Jong, 2004). Teachers need to be able to get assistance at the system level after having trialed every possible avenue to achieve their leadership goal, they need to recognise when it is appropriate to do so, and procedures for chronic misbehaviour must be put in place at the school level as an educative process to support students (De Jong, 2004).

To conclude, preventive strategies are essential but also both intervention and supportive strategies are necessary and differ according to different classroom dynamics and individual student needs (Rogers, B. 2011c).
2.1.6.2 Evidence-based classroom and behaviour Management strategies

Following a systematic literature search, two key documents dominate the educational scene, one from the USA the other one from Australia. They identified evidence based classroom management practices:


According to them, there are five empirically supported, essential aspects of CM: “(a) maximize structure; (b) post, teach, review, monitor, and reinforce expectations; (c) actively engage students in observable ways; (d) use a continuum of strategies for responding to appropriate behaviors; and (d) use a continuum of strategies to respond to inappropriate behaviors” (pp. 353-357).

O’Neill and Stephenson (2014) identify 18 effective CBM practices that, in their view appear to draw on research and should therefore be featured in any CBM related material presented to students by initial teacher education course: Token economy; forming and establishing class rules; praise encouragement, positive feedback; individual behaviour contracts; altering classroom environment; student self-monitoring systems; all class incentives; time-out from positive reinforcement; teacher physical proximity, mobility; routine; tactical ignoring; clear expectations; reprimands; response cost/ mild punishment; diagnosing underlying function; individual behaviour plans, pre-corrections, cues, prompts; social skills instructions.

It is to be noted that in this listing, the issue of logical consequences is not mentioned.
**Strategies: Prevention**

Prevention is the most important aspect of CM. It is a complete move away from the old models of behaviour management, which focused on misbehaviour alone and ways to deal with it through intervention. A main focus is on student engagement: School policies and school culture, effective pedagogies and relevant challenging quality curriculum choices and assessment are essential parts of the equation.

The effective management of misbehaviours through action taken by the teacher in the classroom plays also a preventive role. Establishing an organised classroom by planning for CM is essential during the establishment phase of a class (De Jong, 2004) by setting boundaries, rules and logical consequences that are discussed with students, so that they ‘know the fair rule’, in the democratic classroom (Rogers, B., 2011c) with routines being quickly established. Teachers need to reflect on their own behaviour in the classroom as it can affect student behavior (Lewis, 2009). Establishing positive teacher-student and student-student relationships is crucial, and effective communication skills are important (Rogers, B. 2011c). High expectations for both academic progress and behaviour are necessary. Identifying early challenging behaviours prevents the spreading of issues. Taking an ecosystem perspective means meeting student needs and developing self-efficacy empowers teachers (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Rewards and incentives are effective, but must be used cautiously.

**Strategies: Intervention and support to individual students**

Intervention and support are as necessary as prevention, and as previously explained they play a preventive role. It refers to the steps a teacher takes to manage the inappropriate behaviour of individual students or groups in order to restore a
positive environment for learning and to teach student self-discipline. No matter how engaging the curriculum content is or how well designed it is presented to a class, this will not always guarantee a lesson free from disruption.

It is a myth to believe that … effective teachers can prevent all discipline problems by keeping students interested through the use of exciting classroom materials and activities. The potential for problems exists beyond academics. Students experience difficulties at home which spill over into the classroom; students experience problems with peers during class breaks and in the classroom which often involve the teacher, and students experience mood changes which can generate problems, to name just a few. (Long & Fry, 1985, in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 4)

Intervention is based on using logical consequences instead of punitive actions (Dreikurs, 1968; Rogers, B., 2011c). Action requires differentiation according to the seriousness of the disruption, the causes and the starting points (Lewis, 2009). Students must be given ‘directed’ choices so that they are responsible for their actions. Knowing the positive language of CM is crucial. The teacher needs to follow up and follow through, and re-establish relationships when logical consequences have applied (Rogers, B., 2011c). In any situation, teachers need to take a more ‘clinical’ and neutral approach and, whenever possible maintain emotional, professional objectivity.

Students also need to be supported in their progress towards self-discipline through effective behavioural teaching styles, and in the case of very challenging behaviours through individual behaviour plans, family support, regular counselling and the systematic teaching of more appropriate social skills through group or individual practices.

A behaviour plan is built on the belief and expectations that children can be helped towards better problem solving, understanding of the effects of their behaviour, exploration of alternatives, making of realistic commitments about behaviours. The teacher’s task is to teach desired behaviours (within an individual plan) and enable, encourage and support students to take responsibility for their behaviour and learning. (Rogers, B., 2011c, p. 174).
At the school level, alternatives, such as individualised education programs, school-based partial withdrawal may be necessary and beyond the school, department, community and interagency partnerships may apply through non-traditional flexible learning environment (De Jong, 2004).

2.1.7 Conclusion

This critical analysis of the CM research was organised into the following sections: the key psychological and educational philosophies underpinning the different models; the numerous perspectives linked to various models; the contentious issue of teaching styles and the confusion about terms that are not clearly defined in the research such as ‘consequences’ and ‘time-out’; the most influential models that, since the early 2000s, have dominated practices in schools; and, finally, a summary of current CM principles and strategies repeatedly recommended as effective and as part of a democratic and balanced leadership style.

Despite controversies around teaching styles, it is clear that stand-alone extreme styles are viewed in the research literature as ineffective. However, some elements of those extreme styles can be borrowed with effective results. For example, drawing on behaviourist theories, positive reinforcement is effective, but punishment should be avoided and be replaced by logical consequences; and time-out must be understood not as punishment but as a time to cool off, reflect and learn new behaviours in a ‘responsible thinking classroom’, following Ford’s responsible thinking theory (2003).

To conclude, the following quotation is particularly relevant. It is the final statement of a document Managing student behaviour in the classroom, prepared by
a team from ACER (Wilkinson & Meiers, 2007) and recommended by the NT Teachers Registration Board.

There is no ‘one-size-fits-all solution’ to remove problems related to CBM … an approach that works most of the time, for most teachers, will improve the learning climate of any school. Whatever the plan or approach, the emphasis throughout the research literature is on building positive relationships with students and adopting authoritative as opposed to authoritarian teaching styles. (Wilkinson & Meiers, 2007, p. 13)

2.2 The school improvement research

The implementation of effective CM strategies must be considered within the context of the general quest for school improvement since a relevant and engaging curriculum, as well as effective pedagogies, a positive school culture are essential factors to engage students in the classroom and prevent behavioural problems. An effective teacher needs to design a relevant curriculum, select the most effective pedagogies and be an effective classroom manager (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). The very interesting finding from the research is that progress in CBM can take place reasonably fast—results can be seen easily: A classroom environment can range across a continuum from harmonious and positive in promoting learning, to chaotic and negative. Robert Marzano, Jana Marzano and Debra Pickering (2003) state that becoming a skilled classroom manager can happen relatively quickly. Their assertion is based on evidence from the quantitative research of Walter Borg and Frank Ascione (1982) and Emmer, Sandford, Clements and Martin (1982). They found that teachers’ skills in CBM could be improved in a significant way by two half-day workshops and the provision of a manual. However, the search for school improvement in curriculum, pedagogies and other system wide factors takes time. It has been the focus of ongoing debate for many years, and is still a key agenda item in educational circles (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012; Masters, 2012). In the same way
that the research documentation on CM is extensive, the amount of documentation available on the issue of school improvement relating to student achievement is striking. For example, John Hattie (2009) in Visible learning includes a bibliography of 75 pages with an average of 22 references per page.

In August 2012, the following theme was selected for an ACER research conference in Sydney—*School improvement: What does the research tell us about effective strategies?* Presenters unanimously emphasised the teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom as the key to school improvement. Masters’ conference paper (2012) acknowledged that “continual improvement requires an aligned effort by all stakeholders”, but that “the most effective strategy is to improve the quality of the day-to-day teaching and learning, at a fundamental level meaning changing what teachers do” (p. 3).

### 2.2.1 Historical perspective: Changes introduced and results

The last 30 years have seen much research carried out on school improvement. During the 1990s, key educators such as Michael Fullan, Andy Hargreaves and the late Hedley Beare, to name a few, challenged assumptions about learning, teaching and schooling. In my Master of Education study (1999), I reviewed this academic research, and attempted to move away from the 19th century model of schooling to “re-discover teaching in a post industrial age, to transform schools and systems into ‘communities of inquiry and continuous learning’ in which all students are valued, empowered and become competent and achieve personal mastery and ultimately wisdom” (Marias, 1999, p. 5). The main purpose of this research was to address the sense of confusion, anxiety and powerlessness I had witnessed as an educator.
amongst youths, parents and teachers. It appeared that many schools had lost their clarity of purpose.

Since then, many changes have been implemented, particularly with the use of ICT as a new tool for teaching and learning. Extra expenditure has been channeled into education in that area, and also in the attempt to reduce class sizes. According to Jensen (2012), 44 per cent extra funding was invested into education in Australia between 2000 and 2009 (Jensen, 2012c, p. 116). So what have been the results? Australian spending on education compares with other developed countries, however, improvements in learning outcomes for the majority of students do not match the new approaches introduced: “Most spending increases in the last decades have not improved student learning” (Jensen, 2012c, p. 116). This correlates with the findings of other researchers. The research literature is rich in recommendations as to what teachers and schools should do, but the results are disappointing. Carpenter (2000, in Hattie, 2009, p. 2), for example, counted 361 ‘good ideas’ published in the previous 10 years of Phi Delta Kappan. He concluded that these good ideas have produced very little gain. As Hattie (2009) has argued, “We have in education a long history of innovations but it rarely touches but a chosen few” (p. 254). As early as 1991, Fullan and Hargreaves commented that education reform has failed time and time again and that, more specifically in the area of behaviour management, disciplinary problems seem to be on the increase (MCEETYA, 2004; OECD 2012, 2014).
2.2.2 Recent key initiatives from the school improvement research

A number of key reports and books published in the last five years have made valuable contributions to the research on how to improve student engagement in learning and achievement outcomes.

2.2.2.1 International perspectives

Key documents dominate the scene: the analyses of the results from PISA 2009, 2012 (OECD, 2010, 2013); TALIS 2009 and 2013 (OECD 2009, 2014), with a third international perspective provided by the McKinsey report, How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010). The PISA and TALIS results provide excellent databases for comparative analyses between countries. Using PISA and TALIS data, the OECD has produced extensive reports, with valuable recommendations that can assist countries in improving their educational policies. Volume 4 of the PISA 2009 results: What makes a school successful? (OECD, 2010) focuses on the learning environment, and considers factors such as teacher and student behaviours, teacher-student relationships and the disciplinary climate. The findings indicate that students perform better in orderly environments where expectations are high, classrooms are well disciplined and student teacher relations are positive. PISA 2012: How Australia measures up, (Thompson et al., 2013) presents findings relevant to Australian schools. The results indicate that schools must focus on strategies to improve what happens in every classroom every day of the school week. Masters (2013), further explains that macro solutions are weak drivers of improved achievement:

We must engage learners in schools by promoting ‘micro changes’… such as connecting with student interests and motivations; understanding where students are in their learning, identifying and addressing specific learning needs, diagnosing what learners know and can do; and setting personal goals
for further learning, jointly monitoring learning progress, and recognising and celebrating the progress that individual learners make. (Masters, 2013, p. 2)

TALIS (OECD, 2009) focuses on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in lower secondary schools. This comprehensive report, *Creating effective teaching and learning environments, first results from TALIS*, was compiled and led by Michael Davidson who, with Ben Jensen, coordinated the analysis for the report: Chapter 7, written by Ben Jensen, focuses on two key factors in developing effective learning environments—classroom disciplinary climate and teacher’s self-efficacy. “Classroom disciplinary climate not only affects student outcomes and attainment but is a prominent policy issue in a number of countries…and can be a challenging dimension of teachers’ work” (OECD, 2009, p. 222). Bandura (1977) explains that how people feel and believe in their capacities affects the way they behave:

Not only can perceived self-efficacy have directive influence on choice of activities and settings, but, through expectations of eventual success, it can affect coping efforts once they are initiated. Efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. The stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more active the efforts. (Bandura, 1977, p. 194)

The 2013 TALIS survey (OECD, 2014) dispels a number of myths that exist about teachers today. It is not so much class size that has a negative effect on teachers, but the types of students, such as those with behavioural problems, that has the strongest link with job satisfaction and feelings of self-efficacy. Most teachers are still working in isolation: 51 per cent report very rarely or never engaging in team teaching, 46 per cent report never receiving feedback on their teaching, with 51 per cent never receiving feedback from management. Just over a third state that the feedback they receive leads to a moderate or large positive change in the possibility
of career advancement. Less than a third of teachers believe that a consistently underperforming teacher should be dismissed.

The McKinsey Report (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010) examines 20 systems around the world, all with improving levels of performance at different starting points. It shows how significant gains in achievement have taken place as measured by national and international assessments. It presents systems according to starting points and progression, and shows clusters of interventions that move systems from poor to fair, to good, to great and to excellence. It attempts to identify which elements are universal and which are system specific. Six interventions happen equally at each stage in all systems: improving teacher skills and the management skills of principals; assessing students; improving data systems; facilitating improvements through policies; reviewing standards and curriculum; and introducing new remuneration and reward systems for teachers and principals. In the foreword of that report, Michael Fullan, Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto, who has been involved with school improvement for decades, praises this report as:

Remarkable… making a unique contribution to this critical global agenda…it portrays the inner workings of successful pathways of reform given different beginning points…it has captured action in real time. It will by its clarity and compelling insights, catapult the field of whole system reform forward in dramatic ways. (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010, p. 6)

2.2.2.2 The role of the Australian Council for Educational Research

The recent conferences organised by ACER set the scene for the main current issues of research in Australia: School improvement: what does the research tell us about effective strategies (ACER Conference, 2012); How the brain learns: What lessons are there for teaching? (ACER Conference, 2013); Quality and equity: What does the research tell us? (ACER Conference, 2014); Learning assessments:
Designing the future (ACER Conference, 2015). Attending three of these recent conferences assisted me in keeping abreast with the latest research developments. The topics were relevant to my area of inquiry, despite noticing with regret that CM was not a stand-alone agenda topic.

A key document from ACER is The Teaching and learning school improvement framework (Masters, 2010). This framework was developed in collaboration with the QLD Department of Education and Training as an assessment tool for measuring school performance, and also as a tool to promote reflection, discussion and change. It is based on eight key interrelated domains that impact on school improvement. For each domain, a school’s practices are rated on a four-point scale (low/medium/high/outstanding) and clear descriptors are provided. Strategies are different according to different starting points. This is a very promising scheme. It is encouraging to know that the framework is presently implemented in the NT Department of Education and Children Services, with additions in two extra areas. However, CM is not emphasised in this framework; it represents only one subsection of Domain 3: A culture that promotes learning, out of the eight interrelated domains for school improvement outlined in the document. This section simply reads:

Strategies to promote appropriate behaviour are clearly articulated and the school has documented policies and procedures—including clearly articulated responses and consequences for inappropriate student behaviour—and provides sufficient support for teachers to implement these policies. (Masters, 2010, p. 5)

2.2.2.3 The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

A step forward towards common expectations across Australia has now been taken by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), which has been working closely with all state and territory departments of education to develop an Australia-wide approach to teacher performance and development. It is
driven by the knowledge that the greatest in-school influence on student achievement is the quality of teaching (Hattie, 2014).

The doors literally close on classrooms and the teachers just get on with their teaching at a high level but largely in isolation. Despite this tendency we know what highly effective teaching practice looks like across a range of school settings. That high impact practice is described in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. (Hattie, 2014, p. 3)

As a result, some key documents have been published: The Australian professional standards for principals (AITSL, 2011); The Australian professional standards for teachers (AITSL, 2014) and The Australian teacher performance and development framework (AITSL, 2012). The latter is a comprehensive set of recommendations that can be used in assisting schools in the development of their own policies. These recommendations set out the principles of effective teaching. The documents are also useful tools for teachers and leaders to reflect on their performance and to generate discussion aimed at professional progress. However, following my analysis of those documents, it is again to be noted that limited importance is given to the issues of CM and CBM amongst the necessary teaching skills.

### 2.2.2.4 John Hattie's contributions

In the last decade, Professor John Hattie, Melbourne University, has attempted to determine the major influences on student learning and achievement (2003, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014). Amongst all the variables that affect student learning—students, teachers, schools, peers, principal, and home—the teacher is the most powerful source of variance apart from the student. While what students contribute to achievement outcomes account for about 50 per cent of the variables, the teacher represents 30 per cent of the variance (Hattie, 2003, p. 2). As already mentioned it is
with the right curriculum, pedagogies and the quality of the teacher-student relationships that teachers can engage students in learning. Teachers and leaders need to focus on their impact on student learning. As Hattie puts it, it is important to ‘know thy impact’. The challenge is to measure individual student progress.

2.2.2.5 Ben Jensen’s key concepts

The school improvement research of Jensen (2010, 2012, 2013, 2014) informs the guiding framework for this research study. First, Jensen’s argument proceeds from the realisation that “we know what matters but we don’t do it” (Jensen, 2012, in Ferrari, 2012a) to the conviction that we should be “targeting the things that matter” (Jensen 2012c), even though “doing what matters is easy, only doing what matters is very difficult” (Jensen, 2012, p. 118). Then, he advocates a five-step model for school improvement (2013a) that outlines the strategies needed to turn around dysfunctional, low-performing schools. In my research study, I am looking at ways of addressing behavioural problems in the classroom in order to create a positive learning environment where effective CM is facilitated by other areas of school improvement.

Targeting what matters: we need to learn from the best systems in the world

Jensen uses results from PISA and the best of the reforms from Hong Kong, Shanghai, Korea and Singapore as a basis for proposing guidelines for Australian schools on how to improve learning and teaching. His report for the Grattan Institute, Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia (Jensen et al., 2012), presents substantial information on the selection and implementation of programs that underpin success. Chapter 5 looks at how to connect policy to
classroom learning and presents key steps in successful implementation. Chapter 6 shows how Hong Kong selected the right policy levers and implemented them. The focus is on ‘targeting the things that matter’. Jensen explains how he visited many schools from Finland to Australia and found that many of the practices in the best schools were very similar.

‘We know what matters but we don’t do it’

In Shanghai, I found something truly different. It was not that the facilities were flash…many classrooms were overcrowded with 40 students or so in a class. No lavish learning spaces or state-of-the-art computers, but there was something far more important. These schools are doing what we all know matters... I don’t believe that we should become exactly like Shanghai. But we can learn so much. Not just because their students learn more. But because they are excelling in the things we keep trying to achieve. We all know what works to improve learning. We talk about it a lot. They do it. (Jensen, in Ferrari, 2012a)

Jensen emphatically says, with respect to the quest for school improvement, “we know what matters but we don’t do it”. This statement refers particularly to the findings of the TALIS (OECD, 2009) survey, which showed that for many education systems a gap had opened up between nominal policy objectives and actual classroom results: “There is a disconnection between policy and what happens in the classroom” (Jensen, in Ferrari, 2012). In an early report (Jensen, 2010a), it is stated that the concept of selecting ‘what matters’ is a key ingredient in school improvement. This report emphasises the need for accurate performance measurement and value-added measures to improve accountability. Another report (Jensen, 2010c) refers also to TALIS as a source of data for analysis with a focus on teacher evaluation and development.

John Hattie, as early as 2003, was singling out what matters by analysing the major sources of variance in student achievement and focusing on enhancing those variables that make a difference (p. 1). Hattie (2009), in the first sentence of his
introduction in *Visible Learning*, considers it to be a challenge that “in the field of education, one of the most enduring messages is that everything seems to work” (p. 1). He also observes that:

One of the fascinating discoveries throughout my research for this book is discovering that many of the most debated issues are the ones with the least effects. It is a powerful question to ask why such issues as class size, tracking, retention (that is holding a student back a grade), school choice, summer schools, school uniforms command such heated discussion and strong claims. (Hattie, 2009, p. 33)

Hattie views those debated issues as the politics of distraction. Finally, Jensen claims that:

Trying to do too much thus often results in very little being done at all. Choosing not to do something is often politically difficult but successful implementation requires prioritising fewer programs and cutting those with less impact on student learning. The process is vital. In short, doing what matters is easy. *Only* doing what *really* matters is hard. (Jensen et al., 2012, p. 19)

These views are also in line with the approaches of other researchers, such as Peter Senge (1992), Malcolm Gladwell (2000), Chris Sarra (2010), and one of the gurus in the school improvement research over the last 30 years, Michael Fullan (1993, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2012). Senge (1992) explains that there is a need to understand the low and high leverage strategies available to deal with a problem. What is necessary is to look at changes that can lead to significant improvements. In Chapter 1, he presents the concept of a lever, or leverage points in a system, where small actions can make the biggest difference. However, he points out that the areas of high leverage are often the least obvious.

In his bestseller *The tipping point*, Gladwell (2000) presents an interesting analysis of the way ideas or social behaviours change rapidly once they cross a threshold, a ‘tipping point’, and begin to spread like an epidemic. He identifies changes that can lead to significant improvement and believes that often the best
results come from small, well-focused actions rather than large-scale effort. In the end, tipping points are a reaffirmation of the potential for change and the power of intelligent action. “Look at the world around you. It may seem like an unmovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push — in just the right place — it can be tipped (Gladwell, 2000, p. 259).

Chris Sarra (2010), in Effective Indigenous policy reforms talks in a similar vein about ‘closing the right gaps’. And Michael Fullan (2011) demonstrates the importance of choosing ‘the right drivers’ to lead the change agenda. He defines a right driver as “a policy force that does achieve the desired results” in opposition to a wrong driver that is “deliberate policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired results” (p. 1). For example, for him, the right drivers are capacity building, teamwork, effective pedagogy, big expectations and systemic reforms, in opposition to accountability mechanisms such as too much testing, teacher/school financial rewards, individual initiatives, technology and piecemeal approaches.

2.2.2.6 Jensen’s five steps for turnaround schools

Jensen recommends five focus areas to improve schools, based on world best practices, drawing on PISA (OECD, 2010, 2013), TALIS (OECD, 2009, 2013), the McKinsey report (Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010) and his own research on turnaround schools (2013), where he studied how to turn around the most dysfunctional schools into models for other troubled schools. Following a case study of four successful schools in Australia, he co-wrote Turning around schools: It can be done (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014). Jensen acknowledges that the steps for turning around low-performing schools are broadly the same for general school improvement, however, for the lowest achieving schools, the general approach to
school improvement is insufficient, as the worst schools “require comprehensive overhauls that target numerous aspects of failure” (Jensen, 2013a, p. 3). “The difference lies in the magnitude of the change required, placing a greater emphasis on the behavioural and cultural change process” (Jensen, 2013a, p.7).

The five-step school improvement model (Jensen, 2013a) links these critical factors: Strong leadership that raises expectations; effective teaching with teachers learning from each other; development and measurement of effective learning; development of a positive school culture and engagement of parents and the community.

**Strong leadership that raises expectations**

Strong leaders need to drive cultural changes in their school through specific strategies that define first effective learning and practices. They have to set priorities in allocating resources where they matter and engage the staff in the change process. High expectations are essential.

**Effective teaching with an emphasis on professional collaboration**

This component requires a greater emphasis on foundations skills and more structured classes with delivery of content in small units easily subject to evaluation of outcomes. Teachers’ individual capacities need to be turned into collective efficacy.

**Measurement and development of effective learning behaviours and outcomes**

Data analysis is essential to improvement. It is necessary to know where the problems are in order to address them.
**Positive school culture**

“Turnaround schools often enforce a positive discipline culture which is unequivocal on what behavior is acceptable” (Jensen 2013a, p.13) and so there is a need for some focus on discipline and the enforcement of new social norms for effective learning and teaching. Positive teacher-student relationships and emotional supports to students are essential, such as mentoring, peer support programmes and community service.

**Engagement of community and parents**

Schools need to work with parents and communities to drive student attainment, by communicating with them on a regular basis, inviting parents to the school, organizing classroom visits and promoting successful partnerships with businesses and universities.

### 2.2.3 A summary of key findings from the school improvement research

I have regrouped the findings presented in the reports, books and initiatives, including Jensen’s five-step model, according to the following major themes outlined in the following sections.

#### 2.2.3.1 Systems can improve

Providing educators select what matters and identify the essence of key principles and the effective strategies necessary to implement those principles, systems can improve. A system can make significant gains from any starting point and this can be achieved in six years or less; in education, improving systems comes down to improving learning in the classroom. High expectations and belief in
improvement from one level to the next are crucial. The strategies may be different, and will depend on different starting points, but there are some that are universal, irrespective of context (Masters, 2014).

Jensen (2012a) examines the key objectives of high performing education systems in South Korea, Shanghai, Singapore and Hong Kong, explains how these systems have implemented strategies that work. In a media release from the Grattan Institute, he states that:

The rise of these four systems is not culturally determined by Confucianism, rote-learning, excessive focus on exams or Tiger Mothers, instead these systems focus on the things that are known to matter in the classroom, a relentless, practical focus on effective learning and the creation of a strong culture of teacher education, collaboration, mentoring, feedback and sustained professional development. (Jensen, 2012a)

2.2.3.2 The teacher is the key for school improvement

For Hattie (2003), it is necessary to improve day-to-day teaching in the classroom to improve learning, since teachers account for about 30 per cent of the variance of school achievement, thus initial pre-service teacher education and ongoing PD are essential. It is important to review teacher education programs in universities and to build capacity in schools through different styles of PD involving collaborative approaches, learning from each other in a culture of openness and trust, and valuing teachers as researchers involved in reflexive practice.

Interventions at the structural, home, policy, or school level is like searching for your wallet which you lost in the bushes under the lamppost because that is where there is light. The answer lies elsewhere—it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom doors, and performs the teaching act—the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling. (Hattie, 2003, p. 2)

As also stated by Jensen (2010b, p. 1), “teach teachers so that students can learn”. The focus is on teacher professional development, both pre-service and
ongoing professional learning. Leadership, however, is also crucial in developing a collaborative school culture and support systems for teachers. Fullan (2002) pointed out that the principal needs to be an instructional leader. What is also required is developing better teacher appraisal and teacher career structures (Jensen, 2010). According to TALIS (2009), teacher evaluation in Australia is largely viewed as an administrative exercise, and is not really linked to PD.

According to B. Rogers (2011c), “many teachers, finding discipline difficult, complain that their college or university did not adequately prepare them for what they had to face. They may well be right. Many teachers plan well for curriculum but tend not to plan as rigorously for behavior management issues and necessary discipline” (p. xvii). Dinham (2006) emphasises the need to address the issue of pre-service teacher education, which has been an ongoing concern for decades. In Australia, on average for the past 30 years, one state or national inquiry has been conducted every year in that area with “each inquiry reaching much the same conclusions and making much the same recommendations, yet little change” (Dinham, 2006, in Dinham, 2012, p. 35). In 2008, Melbourne University introduced a Master of Teaching (M Teach) and implemented the concept of clinical practice. This program is characterised by the integration of theory and practice through more in-school placement, paid release time for school mentors, the use of clinical specialists from the university and emphasis on evidence-based school practice. There is now an understanding that teachers need to ‘diagnose’ each individual student’s learning, to be clinical, evidence-based interventionist practitioners, and ‘prescribe’ appropriate curriculum for differentiated learning, in the manner of health professionals. This recent approach is very promising. Dinham (2012) mentions a survey of new primary and secondary teachers across Australia, organised by the
Australian Education Union in 2009, which showed that 40 to 45 per cent were well or very well prepared for teaching (on a five-point scale). Dinham notes that these figures are similar to earlier surveys of teachers in NSW, England, the USA and New Zealand. When the same questions were asked of the first M Teach graduates, in a survey organised by ACER in late 2010, 90 per cent reported being well or very well prepared when they began teaching (Dinham, 2012, p. 36).

2.2.3.3 Interconnectivity of all aspects in school systems

The school improvement research also emphasises the interconnectivity of all parts of the system and the need to address a number of domains one by one. Improvement does not happen in isolation, as many areas of intervention for improving student achievement are interrelated and need to be addressed. CM cannot be viewed in isolation; for example, improvements at the classroom level in that area are linked to improvements at the system level in other areas. “If you put a high quality recruit into a dysfunctional school environment, the system (in the most negative sense of the word) wins every time!” (Asia Society 2011, in Bruniges, 2012). This is why accomplished teachers often leave dysfunctional schools. Jensen (2013) emphasises that turning around dysfunctional schools requires simultaneously implementing the five critical steps rather than changing one or two characteristics which usually applies to the more general school improvement agenda.

2.2.3.4 Measure learning outcomes

Using national and international data and evidence-based teaching “is the crux of school improvement … the hallmark of professional decision making” (Bruniges, 2012, p. 10). PISA results provide us with comparative data on 15-year-olds’ performance across all OCED countries, including Australia. Jensen (2013), in his
five critical steps for turning around schools, presents ‘measurement and development of effective learning behaviours and outcomes’ as step number three (pp. 12–13).

However, in Australia, standardised data such as the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test results have provoked controversy in some educational circles. Testing is a contentious issue and the resulting data can be devalued on the grounds that tests do not measure all of the educational gains of students and can restrict the curriculum. Greg Thompson (2013) from Murdoch University, for example, conducted a survey of WA and SA teachers to analyse teacher perception of the impact of testing on students learning, relationships with parents, and pedagogy. His conclusions were that for the majority of teachers, the effects were largely negative: “the desire to be ranked highly, impacted for many teachers on the curriculum choice in the school/classroom, on the style of pedagogy teachers felt they had to adopt, and the subsequent learning opportunities and experiences of young people… [it worked] against, the supposed benefits of accountability and transparency in improving equity and outcomes within the Australian education system.” (p. 82). The controversy has been widely publicised through the media and in The Conversation under headings for example such as ‘NAPLAN puts focus more on passing tests than teaching’ (Danks, 2012) and ‘NAPLAN results don’t tell the whole story’ (Rice, 2014).

2.2.3.5 Organise intervention frameworks from different starting points

Some frameworks can be used as audit tools by schools to evaluate their own performance, and also for improving professional learning. However, any focus on intervention frameworks requires strategy differentiation. The McKinsey report
(Mourshed, Chijioke & Barber, 2010), as previously described in section 2.2.2.1, presents systems according to starting points and progressions.

2.2.3.6 Create a positive school and classroom climate

According to Hattie (2009), the most powerful effects of the school on student achievement “relate to features within the school, such as the climate of the classroom, peer influences and the lack of disruptive students in the classroom” (p. 33). Many researchers (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; Lewis, 2009; Rogers, B., 2011) show that “in a teacher’s repertoire of practice, behaviour management is no doubt one skill amongst many other skills, but it “is a crucial skill for both beginning and experienced teachers” (Wilkinson & Meiers, 2007, p. 3).

Jensen (2013), in his five steps for turning around schools, presents a positive school culture as step number four (p. 13). He points out that a focus on positive discipline, which is very clear on what behaviour is acceptable, can change the culture of the school. However, he does not emphasise the crucial need for effective management of the classroom. As already mentioned, creating a positive classroom learning environment is not prioritised in a number of other research-based studies; for example, it is only part of one of the eight interrelated domains that affect school improvement initiatives in Masters’ (2010) improvement framework and it is not emphasised in the AITSL (2011, 2014) documents on professional standards. However, the climate of the classroom is certainly salient for Hattie (2009).

2.2.3.7 Develop collaborative cultures

The term ‘culture’ encompasses the beliefs, values and norms that characterise an organisation. School cultures traditionally tend to be isolated, and this is negative for the health of an organisation (Hattie, 2012). Much has been written in the last 30
years about the need for a school culture that promotes learning through collaborative professional practices, in-school ongoing professional learning through classroom observations and feedback, team teaching, mentoring and discussion groups (Bruniges, 2012; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Hattie, 2012; Hord, 1997; Masters, 2012; Moursched, Chijioke & Barber, 2010; Mulford, 1994; Senge, 1992).

Learning from each other through collaborative culture seems to be viewed as the most effective form of PD (Lewis, 2009). Again, Jensen (2013) views professional collaboration as Step 3 for turnaround schools. In a recent book Creating the outstanding school, Lynch, Madden, Doe, Smith, Provost & Spiers (2015) propose a collaborative teacher learning model, where team teaching, coaching, mentoring and feedback are key elements of the model.

In the outstanding school, one of the foci is on professional learning where teachers work together to improve their teaching. To allow this to happen, it is necessary to create new learning spaces more flexible and ‘open’ for students and teachers.

Moving from a traditional ‘one teacher-one class-one classroom, grade level (for primary), subject based (for high school)’ structure to a cohort-learning centred approach situated in flexible learning spaces not only enabled staff… to deal with student diversity but also became the catalyst for the activation of the associated coaching, mentoring and feedback regime. (Lynch et al., p. 124)

2.2.3.8 Channelling resources into the things that matter is difficult

Finally, resources must be channeled to what matters most.

Education expenditure in Australia has increased substantially for more than a decade, but results have either stagnated or declined … this indicates that we are investing in the areas that don’t have the greatest impact on students learning … improvements will come when we concentrate resources on constantly improving student learning. It sounds simple but it requires investing resources in areas that have been shown to improve student learning and cutting resources in areas that do not. Doing what matters is easy. Only doing what matters is very difficult. (Jensen, 2012c, p. 118)
Policy makers thus need to ask themselves: Are all resources put into things that matter and only those that matter? Jensen asserts that for the last 10 to 20 years, money has been channeled into the wrong areas. In a recent article in *The Australian* (Jensen, 2013), he claims that “spending millions is the wrong fix for our failing schools: spending needs to be directed at only things that matter”. In the context of debate about school funding—how the money is being directed—this is essential, since for the last 10 to 20 years funding has been directed into reducing class size. “This has been a huge waste of money!”, he argues. Jensen cites with approval Holroyd High School in Western Sydney, which has rejected the move towards smaller class sizes and instead sets aside time for teachers to work collaboratively. The successes achieved at Holroyd could be replicated elsewhere (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014, pp. 16–18).

2.2.4 Latest research: Hope for the future

The latest research for school improvement provides us with hope for the future. The 2013 ACER conference *How the brain learns: What lessons are there for teaching?* has provided us with hope for progress in our quest for school improvement. A new ‘Science of Learning’ is emerging (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012).

2.2.4.1 A new science of learning

Research collaboration is taking place between different disciplines: education, psychology and neuroscience. It is still in its infancy, but promises interesting developments for the future of education. A better scientific understanding of how the brain learns will inform educational practice and assist teaching effectiveness.
The Learning Sciences and Brain Research Project was initiated in 1999 by Bruno Della Chiesa through the OECD, and a national Science of Learning Research Centre has now been created in Melbourne under the leadership of ACER with the collaboration of the QLD Brain Institute at the University of QLD and the Graduate School of Education at Melbourne University. The Science of Learning will involve a two-way interaction between educational practice and basic science. We often know what works, even a long time before understanding why it works states Masters (2013). For example, Hippocrates discovered that the powder from the bark of a willow tree could assist with headaches 2,300 years before the main component, aspirin, was isolated.

2.2.4.2 Towards new learning: Elements of a science of education

According to Kalantzis and Cope (2012), we are facing a crisis of ‘irrelevance’ and ‘credibility’ in many places, as schools have not been able to adjust to new forms of learning—that is, those that have been designed to meet the needs of learners living in dynamic, constantly changing social conditions:

We are on the cusp of a revolution in education that will change at the core the structures of its institutions, the practices of its professionals and the experiences of learners. Some of this is happening now … some of it may take decades to evolve, whatever direction the revolution takes; professional educators must position themselves as significant players, imagining alternative scenarios and designing and testing alternatives. (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, pp. 28–29)

Education has moved from what Kalantzis and Cope (2012) call ‘didactic education’, the 19th century model, to ‘authentic education’ in more recent times and now needs to be reconceptualised. They argue that now there is an urgent need for transformative education: a move to ‘New Learning’, one that requires a highly adaptive teaching profession. Some of this transformation is already happening, but for other aspects, it may take decades to evolve. Teachers have to face uncertainty
and anxiety in the meantime. They believe in the social and ethical dimension of teaching, but they have lost clarity of purpose, vision and direction (Marias, 1999). They are caught between different ideologies. They don’t know how to go about the change process. Already, 25 years ago, Deal (1990, in Mulford, 1994) pointed out that schools as social institutions for the future, set up to assist coming generations, appeared to have lost their moral fibre.

[They] are put in an impossible position. They stand at the crucial interface between past and future, charged both with the conservation of the culture and faith in its radical renewal. The rulebook keeps changing; some pages are missing, others are unreadable. (Deal, 1990, in Mulford, 1994, p. 150)

Kalantzis and Cope (2012) view behavioural problems in schools as one of the three key indicators of that crisis of irrelevance, together with the public’s lack of confidence in education (hence more parents enrolling their children in independent schools) and employer complaints about new graduates. Their research suggests many perspectives on how schools can prepare their students for social futures, but they add this caveat: “precisely what shape will the New Learning take? No single answer to this question is possible…our proposal for the New Learning is a series of open possibilities, educational agendas in the plural” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, p. 28).

Those comments about changes for the future bring to the fore some of the difficulties associated with change. These are explored in the following section.

2.3 The change process

The difficulties of implementing research findings in education, including issues related to CM, can also be viewed from the general perspective of understanding change processes. As Hattie (2009) states, “the key issue is less how to change but
why we do not” (p. 252). Policy work and implementation are “complex and messy, always contested and changing (unstable), always becoming” (Ball et al., 2012, in Johnson & Sullivan, 2014, p. 119).

The change agenda has been part of the research for many years. It is interesting to note that the recommendations of the past, such as schools becoming ‘learning organisations’ (Senge, 1992), or ‘communities of continuous inquiry and improvement’ (Hord, 1997), based on ongoing and interactive professionalism, are very similar to the current moves to encourage teachers as researchers and school-based on-going professional learning. The following section reviews some of the points that have been highlighted in the research on educational change; for example, changes never take place in a linear fashion; changes have an emotional impact; the difficulty of changing people’s mindsets should not be underestimated, nor should the problems associated with the dissemination of new information.

2.3.1 Changing processes: A non-linear approach

Johnson and Sullivan (2014) analysed the inadequacies of logico-deductive approaches to policy implementation. Referring to the research by Ball et al. (2012), they state that the predominant approach to implementation “is overly rationalistic and managerial and largely ignores the multitude perspectives of those involved in the process of policy enactment” (Johnson & Sullivan, 2014, p. 2).

Socio-cultural theories (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979; Conway, 2012) emphasise the value of numerous interactions within complex systems. Often these outcomes are unpredictable and unexpected and they emerge in rhyzomic fashion. There is no set of bullet-point prescriptions, as the road to success in carrying out a proposed change is not simple. It is in fact very confusing. As Tom Peters is known to having said
once, ironically, “if you are not confused, you are not paying attention” (Peters, 2014).

Changing an educational practice is not a linear process, as it involves ‘dancing’ with many different elements. Duignan (1997) uses the metaphor of the dance to describe the interrelationships of social systems. Teachers and leaders need to participate in the dance. Order and chaos are simultaneously present. Duignan, using another analogy, also compares these movements to the flocking of starlings. He points out that that the flock has a definite sense of direction, despite evidence of chaos amongst the starlings.

Change is too often approached through restructuring or fiddling with external indicators … during restructuring or downsizing the shape of the flock is often mandated from above but individual members are not consulted and/or do not understand (or perhaps do not agree) with the rules of the flocking. The creative spirit of the individual can be protected and even encouraged while still protecting the positive aspects of the flocking. (Duignan, 1997, p. 16)

2.3.2 The emotional impact of change

Many of us experience the emotional impact of change and, as a result, resist it: “Change results in loss and calls life’s meaning into question … we need instead to move ahead without losing our roots, to transform old forms and practices into new ones without jeopardising individual or collective meaning (Deal, 1990, in Mulford, 1994, p. 28). We need to maintain traditions while moving forward. It is what Tom Peters (1987, p. 395) calls “the core paradox … that all leaders at all levels must contend with [what] is fostering internal stability in order to encourage the pursuit of constant change”.”
2.3.3 **Changing mindsets**

Over the last 30 years or so, educators and other professionals have been concerned with the difficulties of changing people’s mindsets. They have looked at different areas of inquiry, studied the business sector, and focused on understanding the change process. Pivotal works on ‘the change process’ include Duignan (1997), Fullan (1993), Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), Hord (1997), and Senge (1992). In regard to education, the message is clear:

We have been fighting an ultimately fruitless uphill battle. The solution is not to climb the hill or getting more innovations or reforms into the educational system. We need a different formulation to get at the heart of the problem, a different hill, so to speak. We need in short, a new mindset about educational change. (Fullan, 1993, p. 3)

According to Hord (1997), the focus had been too much on organisational structures, on *what* to change rather than *how* to change. “What change is really about, rather than structures and strategies is people. Change is about each individual who will be involved in implementing new policies, programs and processes” (p. 92).

Any idiot with a high IQ can invent a great strategy. What’s really hard is fighting against the unwashed masses and pulling it off … change is about recruiting allies … you don’t bring changes in real big meetings … you bring it about one person at a time, face to face. (Peters, 2014, p. 4)

Different beliefs and attitudes can influence the way teachers understand behavioural problems in the classroom and address them. In dealing with the broader area of teaching and learning, Hattie (2012) talks about mindsets or mind frames. He claims that these are very powerful in framing the way teachers view their role.

Change also requires that a negative mindset be nipped in the bud by stopping even small negative behaviours before they spread. It follows the ‘broken window’ theory of Kelling and Wilson (1982), described in Gladwell (2000, p. 141). It is based on
the observation that if one broken window in a neighbourhood is left unrepaired, other windows will soon be broken too. This theory had a big impact on policies in addressing crime in New York City: Crime plummeted after the police stamped on minor offences such as spray-painting graffiti in the metro railway system.

Emily Lawson and Colin Price explain how companies can change the attitudes and behaviours of large numbers of employees (Lawson & Price, 2003). They outline the conditions for changing mindsets. Employees need a goal, a reason, support in the form of rewards and recognition, the skills necessary required to perform their duties effectively, and role models they respect.

2.3.4 Transferring skills/ maintaining changes

It is apparent that “the hardest part of educational change is not how to start it, but how to make it last and spread” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 94). There seem to be difficulties in bringing about permanent changes in the way individuals understand the world. Lewis (2009) claims that the post-guru syndrome explains the failure of many PD programs. It sets in between two weeks and six months after an expert has visited a school and demonstrated CM skills. Teachers start implementing the techniques, but soon these are inconsistently applied and finally they fail and those trying to implement them give up. Lewis further explains that this accords with the research on meta-cognition (McInerney & McInerney, 2002), which seems “to explain one of the major reasons for the gap between theory and practice” (Lewis, 2009, p. 7). Individuals develop frameworks for dealing with knowledge and these may not be congruent with the information provided by a guru. They may adopt new guidelines, but if they have not reflected sufficiently on the rationale behind them, the original pattern will reappear. Reflection and practice are needed in order for a
permanent shift to take place in an individual’s paradigm. Skills are difficult to transfer. According to Della Chiesa (2013), our behaviours are hardwired habits of our brain, so although we may logically understand the reasons for change, old neural pathways may direct us back to our habituated pathways. In order for change to take place, new neuron pathways have to be created and practised (Della Chiesa, 2013).

2.3.5 Problems with the dissemination of information

Hemsley-Brown and Sharp (2002) analyse how teachers compare with health practitioners in regard to the implementation of research findings to support practice. Their conclusions suggest that teachers and nurses are less likely to read or to use research compared to physicians and surgeons. A summary of factors affecting the use of research in medicine and education shows that the barriers are very similar, particularly lack of time, failure to understand the language or the statistics, and a culture that does not foster learning. Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan & Nazaret (2010) view the various shortcomings in the dissemination and transfer of research-based knowledge into medical practice as a matter of high priority in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the research documentation on CM, the recent findings on school improvement and some of the difficulties associated with change processes. First, the extensive, often contradictory research on effective CM and CBM was analysed and a main area of contention identified: Teaching styles can shift on a continuum from authoritarian at one extreme to non-directive or
permissive at the other extreme with many variations in between. Much research has been done about the use of behaviourist theories, namely the use of punishment and rewards. Results appear to be contradictory with some researchers stating that those interventions are effective while others claim the opposite. One reason for these contradictions is that in their analyses researchers did not sufficiently differentiate strategies according to the different types of behaviors demonstrated in the classroom. A strategy that is effective for one student may be completely ineffective for another (Lewis, 2009). It is unhelpful that different interpretations of words such as ‘consequences’ and ‘time-out’ appear in the research. It became clear that extreme behaviourist or non-directive approaches are best avoided as stand-alone models. A model of CM using eclectic and shifting approaches is recommended, and this can be regarded as a balanced, democratic, but still assertive leadership style. In line with this approach, punishment is replaced by an emphasis on the logical consequences of behaviour. These are discussed with students, and implemented consistently and fairly by the teacher, who aims to establish strong, positive relationships with students and help them to develop self-discipline.

Second, this chapter explained how the school improvement research of the last 30 years continues to looks for ways to change schools. The focus on recent research is promising, including the development of a new science of education and new educational designs for better social futures—the New Learning proposed by Kalantzis and Cope (2011). They explain that it is “not a destination, but a challenging journey” (p. 30), and that it is still going to take time to change so many parts of the systems for the better. According to them (p. 73), behavioural problems are to be viewed as “indicators of a crisis”. And finally, the difficulties associated
with change processes in organisations have also been outlined in this critical review of the research literature.

The preceding findings from the research literature will be drawn on extensively in the discussion chapter (Chapter 5) since the methodology used in my research is grounded theory, where the literature is used as a supplementary data source for comparing, supporting or contradicting findings from the field. Grounded theory is discussed further in the following chapter.
Chapter 3  Methodology

Chapter 2 reviewed the extensive documentation on how to create positive classroom learning environments and how to manage behavioural problems. It presented the different perspectives and strategies repeatedly suggested as effective. Finally, the chapter investigated two themes to provide the general backdrop to this research: the ongoing quest for school improvement, and the difficulties associated with changing mindsets and systems. The literature review set the conceptual background leading to the problem statement, the recognition of a gap in knowledge, and the two research questions guiding this project, as outlined below.

The problem statement

Despite the large body of documentation available on how to address behavioural problems in middle school classrooms, it seems that on a large scale problems persist. Why?

A gap in the knowledge

The issue is very complex. Many variables affect behaviours, thus there is a vast number of strategies available to teachers on how to deal effectively with behavioural problems. The aim of this research was not to look for more strategies, or to compile more checklists, but to understand the processes that are behind the scenes in order to identify the barriers preventing teachers from creating the positive environments so necessary for learning in the classroom. This led to the formulation of the following research questions.
The research questions:

1. What are the barriers preventing or limiting the implementation of effective classroom management strategies in middle school, hence teachers’ success in creating a positive learning environment in their classrooms?

2. ‘By targeting what matters and only what matters’, what are the key changes—the ‘right drivers’, the small actions that as ‘tipping points’ can overcome those barriers and lead to significant and immediate improvements?

The research questions were the starting point for determining which methods for collecting and analysing data would be the most appropriate for this research project. As well as detailing the research methods used, this chapter outlines and justifies the approaches selected: qualitative research and, in particular, grounded theory. A qualitative approach was deemed to be best suited to the design of this exploratory research project. It was based on a small sample of teachers and their perceptions of issues to do with classroom behaviour, for I wanted to capture the voices of the teachers. As Strauss and Corbin (1998) point out, “qualitative researchers are not trying to control variables, rather they are trying to discover them” (p. 281). Therefore, I selected a grounded theory research design since my main goal was to develop insights and create a theory leading to action. The cycles of data collection and data analysis associated with this approach suit the development of such a theory. The philosophical framework underpinning this approach to research could be regarded as a ‘moderate view’ of post-modernist theory and social constructivism, which I will present in this section. My guiding framework was based on the work of Jensen (2010, 2013) and Jensen and Sonnemann (2014), who focus on selecting ‘only what matters’ and propose a five step model for school improvement as outlined in Sections 2.2.2.5 and 2.2.2.6. Once
more it is to be noted that the issue of school improvement is at the heart of
preventing behavioural problems from developing in the classroom.

3.1 Ideological perspectives and philosophical framework

This study was guided by explicit paradigms that linked initial assumptions to
implications for practice. The philosophical framework informing my choice of
methods is graphically represented in Table 3.1, which has been adapted from Guba

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Implications for practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontological (what is the nature of reality?)</td>
<td>Reality is socially constructed. Multiple realities exist.</td>
<td>Researcher uses quotes and themes from participants and presents different perspectives, and divergent views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemological (what is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched?)</td>
<td>Researchers attempt to reduce the distance between themselves and the subject of the research.</td>
<td>Researcher collaborates, spends time in field with participants and becomes an insider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Axiological (what is the role of values?)</td>
<td>Researcher recognises that research is value laden and that biases are present.</td>
<td>Researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes their own interpretation in conjunction with interpretations of the participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1988) in Cresswell (1998, p. 75)

3.2 Modernism versus post-modernism

The post-modernist movement that emerged in the 1960s, and reached the social
sciences in the 1980s and 1990s, refers to a group of theories rather than a single
one. Despite their different perspectives, post-modernists all reject 19th century enlightenment and early 20th century focus on science, rationality and universal truths. For post-modernists, there is no absolute truth. According to Foucault (1971), knowledge is what a group of people decides to be the truth; meanings are constructed by humans, interpreting their world, which leads to the concept of constructivism. Guba and Lincoln (1989) summarise the primary characteristics of constructivism as follows:

‘Truth’ is a matter of consensus among constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality. ‘Facts’ have no meaning except within some value framework hence there cannot be an ‘objective’ assessment of any proposition … ‘Causes’ and effect do not really exist. ‘Phenomena’ can only be understood within the context in which they are studied … Neither problems, nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another … Data derived from constructivist inquiry have neither special status, nor legitimation; they represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus. (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, in Patton, 2002, p. 98)

Language used to describe reality is linked to the world-view of the group and the culture that constructed it. Therefore, language cannot fully represent reality. Constructivism, consistent with post-modernism, is relativistic. At the centre of Foucault’s (1971) theories is the notion that power is involved. The views dominant at a certain time or place serve the interests of those who have power in their culture. “By exercising control over the very categories of reality that are opened to consciousness, those in power are served … Language communicates the social construction of the dominant members of the group” (Patton, 2002, p. 101).

3.2.1 Criticism of post-modernist theories

Realism and relativism represent two polarized perspectives on a continuum between objective reality at one end and multiple realities at the other end. Both positions are problematic for qualitative research. (Andrews, 2012, p. 4)

According to Pauline Rosenau (1992), in her book Post-modernism and the social sciences, “post-modernism haunts social sciences … The challenges post-
modernism causes seem endless. It rejects epistemological assumptions, refutes methodological conventions, resists knowledge claims, obscures all versions of truth, and dismisses policy recommendations” (p. 1). Rosenau analyses the strengths and weaknesses of this movement in order for researchers “to take advantage of what it has to offer without becoming a casualty of its excesses” (p. 1).

Also, more recently, in his book: The trouble with theory. The educational cost of post-modernism, Gavin Kitching (2008) criticises not so much the ideas of post-modernism, but rather as a university professor he exposes the negative impact that this movement has had on his research students. He claims and demonstrates, through analysing the theses of many students, that “at the heart of post-modernism is a very poor, deeply confused and misbegotten philosophy. As a result, even the very best students who fall under its way produce radically incoherent ideas about language, meaning, truth and reality” (p. xi).

In summary, as Patton (2002) mentions, all movements tend to extremes: “enlightenment thinkers believe we can know everything and radical post-modernists believe we can know nothing” (Harvard socio-biologist E. O. Wilson, 1998, p. 21, in Patton, 2002, p. 100). Post-modernists have been criticised on the grounds that their theories prevent action. Cresswell (1998) considers that they want to change the ways of thinking rather than looking for action. Hammersley (1992, in Andrews 2012) questions the usefulness of relativistic findings, since the multiple accounts produced can all be legitimate and therefore a synonym for truth, or some politically, culturally constructed norms that become truth. According to Thomas (1993), post-modernists are just ‘arm chair radicals’ (in Cresswell, 1998, p. 79). Thomas Schwandt (1997) comments that constructivism, taken too literally, can sound radical, and even silly, and suggests a more balanced ontological view.
Although some versions of constructivism do appear to deny reality, many … qualitative inquirers have a common sense realist ontology, that is, they take seriously the existence of things, events, structures, people, meanings and so forth in the environment as independent in some ways from the experience with them. And they regard society, institutions, feelings, intelligence, poverty, disability, and so on as being just as real as the toes on their feet and the sun in the sky. (p. 134)

Andrews (2012) contends that there is confusion and misunderstanding about the paradigms that underpin social constructivism. He refers to Berger and Luckman’s (1991) view that social constructionism makes no ontological claims but only epistemological ones.

The idea that a disease can and does exist as an independent reality is compatible with the social constructionism view. The naming of a disease and indeed what constitutes disease is arguably a different matter and has the potential to be socially constructed. This is not the same as saying that it has no independent existence beyond language. (Andrews, 2012, p. 4)

There is an obvious difference between a disease that exists and coining a name for that disease. Hammersley (1992, in Andrews, 2012, p. 4) suggests that “the solution is to adopt neither position”, but to settle on a midway point that he terms ‘subtle realism’.

To conclude my reflections about post-modernism theories, I support Hammersley’s (1992 in Andrews 2012) views on constructionism, and while analysing the data from participant interviews, I adopted a moderate stance, a midway approach, one which values a common sense, realistic ontology, based on a cautious approach to post-modernism. Post-modernists challenge theories. However, in my search for solutions, I favoured a critical theory orientation that would lead to action. There are numerous variations of critical theory (Cresswell, 1998), but a common thread is the exploration of possible changes in social institutions through the transformations of social values. I investigated the social move from an authoritarian to an indecisive approach to CM, showing how powerful language is at
regulating institutions such as schools. The importance of the language used to conceptualise new cultural trends was evident. For example, I studied the use of the word ‘discipline’ in some educational circles and its replacement by words such as ‘welfare’ and more recently ‘wellbeing’. This change had a significant effect—blurring meanings, obscuring reality, and preventing action.

3.2.2 **Inductive/ deductive/ abductive analyses**

My analyses involved both inductive and deductive processes, given that “at the heart of theorising lies the interplay of making inductions (deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from data) and deductions (hypothesising about the relationships between concepts)” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). The phenomenon under investigation could not be isolated from other phenomena, as interactions were a part of it, as were the research methods. My goal was to discover patterns, categories and themes as I investigated the data. My approach was inductive at the beginning of the research, while I was developing a list of codes during the open coding phase (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I was immersed in the data, a process that is quite fittingly expressed in French as *je m’enracine* —I “root myself” (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Later, I used a deductive process in a cyclical fashion with further inductions.

I also used an abductive method, which can be defined as “working from consequences back to causes or antecedents. The observer records the occurrence of a particular event and then works back in time in an effort to reconstruct the event” (Denzin, 1978b, in Patton, 2002, p. 470). Patton states that the famous detective, Sherlock Holmes, relied on abduction more than deduction or induction to solve his
mysteries. My quest to answer the two research questions was, after all, a search to unveil a mystery.

3.2.3 Interpretative work: The role of the researcher

According to Cresswell (1998), “knowledge claims must be set in within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, gender and other group affiliations” (p. 79). Charmaz (2006, p. 79) views research analysis as an “interpretative portrayal of what is studied and not an exact picture of it.” There are categories with hierarchies, different control mechanisms and various meanings of language. Texts need to be deconstructed in order to “bring to the surface concealed hierarchies, as well as dominations, oppositions, inconsistencies and contradictions (p. 79).

I use deconstruction as a core analytical tool—this involves determining the subtext, bringing out key meanings and attempting to present different perspectives about reality. I look at the way language can distort understanding. Using a type of questioning that was based on a Foucauldian approach, as summarised by Pat Thomson (2011), I asked myself questions such as: Is the representation here a truth or a norm? How is it constructed? What type of evidence is used? What alternative meanings are not mentioned? What interests are being served? What actions are possible or impossible by this approach of thinking? There was a constant need to interpret the beliefs and behaviours of the participants, including mine as the researcher.

Scrutiny of the data offers both empirical certainty and intuitive reminders. Insights emerge also from the subconscious and from bodily memories never penned on paper. There are serendipitous connections to be made, if the writer is open to them. Writing and analysis comprise a movement between the tangible and intangible, between the cerebral and sensual between the visible
and invisible. Interpretations move from evidence to ideas and theory then back again. There can be no set formulae, only broad guidelines, sensitive to specific cases. (Judith Okeley, 1994, in Saldana, 2013, p. 32)

As a researcher, I am socially and culturally situated. It would be unrealistic and naïve to believe that a clean slate is feasible; in fact, that would go against my deep reasons for undertaking this research in the first place. All the choices I made were based on my life experiences—my personal interest in the subject, the selection of the research topic and methods, the questions I asked my participants, how I interpreted the data, and the stances I adopted in the critical evaluation of the literature or theories. Throughout my career, I have been immersed in my field of research, and as such have been able to observe, experiment and reflect on behavioural issues. First, as a French teacher, and then as head of the Languages Other than English (LOTE) faculty, I dealt with a subject area that was difficult to teach to middle school students. Rogers (2011c) also acknowledges the difficulties that LOTE teachers experience in their classes. Then, as a deputy principal in charge of student welfare for many years, I had a different perspective on behavioural issues. However, I could not fully begin any research in my area of expertise, teaching, without first filtering my pre-existing views. The following vignette succinctly positions myself, presenting my identity and intent.
Identity profile

I was raised in France, in a middle class family, viewing education as essential for academic and personal growth. My personality traits are those of a reader, a thinker, an artist, an adventurer and a doer. I was always conscious of the contribution one can, and should make to humanity, hence my passion for education.

Being educated in Paris, including at the Sorbonne University, I have always been immersed in a culture committed to “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity” promoting respect for individual rights and responsibilities as presented in the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. I also have a strong allegiance to secular education.

As an educator for more than 40 years, first in Paris, then in Australia, I have worn many different hats: from high school teacher, faculty head, assistant principal in charge of curriculum and student wellbeing, to relief teacher after I retired, and presently as an in-school mentor to neophyte teachers. Those experiences have given me many different lenses with which to look at issues in schools. I have always been front line in all these positions, a reflective practitioner throughout my career and always passionate about the ethical dimension of education.

3.2.4 Using self as a data source. Role of the writer’s voice

According to Matsuda and Tardy (2007), some researchers argue that the researcher’s voice is irrelevant in academic writing. Their own research found that, actually, the researcher’s voice plays an important role.

Moustakas (1990) describes the stages of heuristic inquiry and presents the idea of using ‘self’ as a major tool in the research. He views it as “a passionate and discerning personal involvement in problem solving, an effort to know the essence of some aspects of life through the internal pathways of the self” (Moustakas and Douglass, 1985, p. 39). Kim Etherington, in Becoming a Reflective Researcher, Using Our Selves in Research (2004), acknowledges the impact of her own history, experiences and views reflexivity as central to her work as a counsellor and a researcher. Using stories opens up new ways of thinking. It is through stories that we can co-construct meanings with our readers or listeners and we can deepen the
understanding of concepts by allowing a sense of affinity, a sort of resonance with the experiences of others.

Considering the ethical dimension of my research topic, where I had to both present a rigorous argument and convince the reader of its veracity, I took the stance that my voice as a researcher was in fact very relevant, particularly the use of stories and anecdotes about my own experiences. “When we use our own stories or those of others, for research, we give testimony to what we have witnessed and that testimony creates a voice” (Frank, 1995, in Etherington, 2004, p. 9).

3.3 Guiding framework

As outlined in chapter 2, progress with CM is linked amongst other variables to progress in curriculum design and the selection of effective teaching strategies. Success in those areas prevent largely behavioural problems to occur in the classroom. This is the domain of the school improvement research.

Therefore, I selected one systematic and abstractly formulated plan for school improvement (Jensen, 2012, 2013, 2014) as the main guiding framework informing this thesis. It is based on two complementary concepts “We know what matters but we don’t do it” (Jensen, 2012, in Ferrari, 2012a) and “Doing what matters is easy, only doing what really matters is hard” (Jensen, 2012a, p. 18). The focus is on school improvement and more specifically how to turn around low performing schools. A five-step model (2013) outlines the strategies needed such as a strong leadership that lifts expectations; effective teaching that draws strength from teachers who learn from each other; the measurement of student learning; the creation of a positive school culture; and school engagement with parents and the community. I developed those central theoretical premises in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.5.
3.4 Research design

Selecting a research design in the early stages of the research presented some difficulties as I had numerous competing goals in mind. I wanted to use my extensive teaching experience to investigate the problem I had chosen, using a heuristic form of inquiry. However, I was fully aware of the limitations of such an approach; insights based on experience and readings are important, but they can be misleading. I was aware of the need “to strive to be humble and not to hold a single presupposition, so as to be in a position to learn more” (Kierkegaard, 1965, in Moustakas, 1990, p. 43). I needed to find a balance between objectivity and subjectivity. I also wanted to describe in depth the experience of other teachers, clarifying their understandings of those experiences, and mainly representing their voice; basically, my plan was to use a phenomenological approach. However, my research problem also caused me to head off in other directions. My goal was not only to describe a phenomenon, but also to explain it, since it is my contention that “explanatory knowledge is more powerful than descriptive knowledge” (Punch, 2009, p. 22). In my attempt to investigate the research problem I had chosen, I wanted to understand, to generate new knowledge, and to construct new theories. To quote the title of a book published in the 1970s: To understand is to invent (Piaget, 1973).

In order to achieve my goal, I needed to use multiple data sources that would contribute to theory development—not only interviews, but also field observation conversations that I noted in my diaries—and I wanted to ensure that my analysis would be congruent with the data collected. I was, therefore, interested in engaging in cycles of data collection and data analysis, rather than collecting all of the data first before beginning the analysis. I wanted to continue using the literature as a
source of data during the analytical stage, and not only as a means of setting the conceptual framework at the beginning of the research. My intention was to compare those ongoing sources of data in order to promote new insights or to challenge emerging concepts. Finally, I was looking for a method that would give me clear guidelines when conducting rigorous data analysis. So, although initially I was tempted by phenomenology and heuristic research as possible ways to design this study, and indeed, there are elements of each that I have incorporated in this design, as I will explain later, I soon settled on grounded theory as my primary research method.

3.4.1 Grounded theory

Grounded theory has evolved since it was first described by Glaser and Strauss in 1967. It has been remodeled using a constructionist view, and multiple approaches are now available to researchers. Mills, Bonner and Francis (2006) explain the various perspectives of grounded theorists. They use the metaphor of ‘a methodological spiral’, starting with Glaser and Strauss and continuing today. The grounded theorists position themselves at various points in this spiral according to their different ontologies and epistemologies.

Glaser and Strauss (1967), as traditional grounded theorists, are positivists, believing there is a ‘real’ reality and promoting a purely inductive process of analysis at first. In their view, the researcher must enter the field of inquiry as a blank slate. Reviewing literature extensively before starting the study is not advisable as it may ‘contaminate’ the data. Strauss’ world view changed and in association with Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) promoted a constructivist stance. But it was only a start. They were proactive in using literature from the beginning of
the research, and continued to use it during the analysis as another source of data providing further information and comparison to contribute to the researcher’s development of themes and, ultimately, theories. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) continued to be criticised for their positivistic assumptions. More recently, Charmaz (2000, 2006) described her approach as constructivist grounded theory.

“Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather the discovered reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural and structural contexts (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). She emphasises the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and the participants, and the co-construction of meanings and shared reality.

I followed the approaches suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as well as the social constructivist ones advocated by Charmaz (2006). Charmaz (2000, 2006) uses the generic term constructivism for both constructivism (individuals construct reality through cognitive processes), and social constructionism, which has a social focus rather than an individual one:

One can believe that concepts are constructed rather than discovered yet maintain that they correspond to something real in the world. This is consistent with the … ‘subtle realism’ of Hammersley (1992), in that reality is socially defined, but this reality refers to the subjective experience of everyday life. (Andrews, 2012, p. 2)

The primary purpose of grounded theory is to generate a theory. This theory is grounded in the data. The researcher collects primary data through interviews. By analysing how people act and react to a phenomenon, the researcher codes basic units of information, then develops and interrelates categories and writes theoretical propositions. Categories are units of information, based on interview data, but they can also be based on documents and observations. They are organised according to their properties and dimensions following a process of conceptual ordering. The theory developed by the researcher emerges from the data, and evolves through the
study. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define a theory as a plausible relationship amongst concepts and groups of concepts. The development of an idea into a theory requires that the idea be explored from many different perspectives, and any propositions must be continuously verified against incoming data: grounded theory involves cycles of alternation between data collection and data analysis. From the research questions, the researcher collects the first data set (usually quite limited), analyses it, then, guided by the emerging findings, collects a new set of data including literature as a source. Further analysis is conducted and the cycles of collection and analysis continue until categories become saturated and the theory is developed in its most complex form. This is the process of theoretical sampling. “A theory does more than provide understanding ... it enables users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides for action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 25).

Data analysis, when conducted in the way just described, follows a systematic and standard format using different types of coding procedures:

It is both science and art. It is science in the sense of maintaining a certain degree of rigor and by grounding analysis in data. Creativity manifests itself in the ability of the researcher to aptly name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons and extract an innovative, integrated, realistic scheme for masses of un-organised raw data. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13)

3.4.2 Balancing objectivity and subjectivity

Strauss and Corbin (1998) prefer the term ‘sensitivity’ to subjectivity. They took a constructivist turn in the debate between positivists and post-modernists. They view objectivity as an attempt to present a problem in an impartial way, without assumptions or preconceived ideas, and view sensitivity as the creative ability to discover new insights based on one’s own experience. This is similar to a heuristic form of inquiry that “invites us to filter our participants’ experiences through our
own, not to supplant their experiences with our own” (Etherington, 2004, p. 125).

Data analysis and theory involve interpretation but interpretations are carried out through systematic, rigorous techniques of inquiry.

I assume that neither data nor theory are discovered. Rather we are part of the world we study and the data we collect, we construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people perspectives and research practices … It is an interpretative portrayal of the studied work not an exact picture of it (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 10–11).

3.4.3 Using the literature

Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasise that it is not necessary to review all the literature in the field beforehand. The literature review should only set the conceptual framework to begin the study, and should assist with the formulation of the research questions. The literature is used at a later stage as a data source, an ongoing tool both for primary and supplemental data, and for making comparisons while theoretical concepts emerge. From their recommendations (pp. 48–52) on the many ways to use literature to best complement the research, I used literature in the following ways: to compare the data from my participants to the concepts gained from the literature, either showing similarities or differences; to enhance my analysis of the data with variations that knowledge of the literature can provide; to use stories presented in the literature as a secondary source of data; and to further initiate questions during the analysis. At the final stage, after data collection and data analysis, I also used the literature to confirm findings or establish limitations in those findings. Finally, non-technical literature, such as policy documents and reports, were used as data to allow for further comparisons.

In conclusion, this research was based on a constructivist grounded theory approach, but was also inspired by some of the methods of heuristic inquiry.
Grounded theory enabled me to discover new understandings, to generate theory and to ground that theory in data. As Punch (2009, p. 134) observes, “it represents a coordinated, systematic but flexible overall research strategy … it brings a disciplined and organised approach to the analysis of qualitative data”. This being said, to quote Patton (2002) again, methods are not rules, “because qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique” (p. 433).

3.5 Methods

This section explains the process of data collection, analysis and verification, and the limitations of the research.

3.5.1 Data collection

The data were primarily gathered during interviews with a sample of 20 teachers, but I also used current literature findings and my own experience as data sources. In undertaking qualitative research with a small sample I was not seeking to establish research findings that were representative of a wider population; rather, I was searching for key conceptual correlations that would contribute to theory development.

The analysis followed an interpretive procedure, whereby the data were deconstructed and questioned, and the findings were compared to further incoming data and analysis. This technique of constant comparison challenges emerging theory, but also ultimately strengthens it. This chapter concludes by presenting the limitations of such an approach.

In keeping with a grounded theory perspective, and the aims of qualitative research more generally, I had no intention of choosing a representative sample of
the population of interest to interview (i.e., all teachers in Darwin schools). Rather, I selected a small sample of 20 educators, all with middle school experience, comprising three groups:

- **Group 1**: Experienced classroom teachers
- **Group 2**: Pre-service teachers / novice teachers
- **Group 3**: Educational leaders/policy and decision makers.

The sample was selected in accordance with the principle of theoretical sampling, as described earlier. I was looking for participants who “would maximise opportunities to discover variations amongst concepts and density categories” and who could contribute to the evolving theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 201). I sought out people who I believed were reflective practitioners and would be able to articulate well their views regarding CM and CBM.

Participants with different experiences, in different sites, including interstate ones, were able to provide me with different contextual information. The purpose was to saturate categories and constantly validate or negate the findings up to the completion of the study. I followed the sampling procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998), and these can be regarded as open, rational and variational, and discriminate, as outlined below.

First, open sampling entailed identifying five participants who could present their perceptions of CBM from their own classroom experiences, from what they knew of their colleagues’ experiences, and from the context of their school. The selection of interviewees was kept relatively open, as the purpose was to keep the collection process open to all possibilities. I followed the phenomenology approach at that stage in order to bracket my own preconceived ideas, and to suspend all
judgements about reality. The process was purely inductive. This approach allowed me to understand behavioural issues from the perspective of other teachers “by entering into their field of perception in order to see life as these individuals see it” (Bryun, 1966, in Cresswell, 1998, p. 275). Data analysis immediately followed data collection.

Second, during the open sampling phase, I looked for variations of concepts and relationships between concepts. I purposely sought more participants who could maximise similarities or differences amongst emerging concepts. Strauss and Corbin (1998) view this as a deductive process of rational and deductive sampling. I also started to use my experience and the literature as a means of generating new questions, and establishing comparisons by finding examples of similar or different phenomena.

Third, the choice of participants and the documents selected (such as the 2009 and 2014 OECD TALIS reports, the 2009 and 2012 PISA analyses, major surveys, for example from Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003) and the BaSS survey (Sullivan et al., 2012) further maximised the possibilities of comparative analysis through discriminate sampling. I returned to a few of the participants previously interviewed for further conversations, or approached new ones, for example leaders in schools.

I collected data from three sources: interviews, technical and non-technical literature, and my own experience. For the interviews, I first developed semi open-ended interviews, with the questions formulated to guide participants. I undertook a pilot interview with one participant, in order to test the suitability of the procedure. As more participants were interviewed, I developed three different groups of questions, following the suggestions of Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 77). I started
with open-ended questions then, as the interview developed, I asked more specific questions. I used the first bank of questions with five participants, I then prepared a second and third set of questions to provide further information about specific concepts directly linked to my research questions.

Most questions were common to all the interviews but they were viewed as triggers for conversation, and were not presented in a systematic order; other questions came naturally from direct interaction with the participants. Appendix 1 provides a sample of the type of questions asked.

Both technical and non-technical literature (as per the general guidelines previously described) provided a second source of data. I used reports of previous research studies (secondary data) to supplement the interviews, to enhance thinking about categories emerging from the data, and to compare findings.

The third source of data was my own experience.

The recognition is that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with oneself. One’s own self-discoveries, awareness and understandings are the initial steps of the process. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 16)

In fact, Glaser (1998) recommends that researchers interview themselves and analyse that interview like any other. By reflecting on my experiences, and taking notes from my diary, I was able to analyse my own subjective interpretation as I did with all other interviews, constantly comparing this data with other forms of data. I also wrote numerous field notes in my journal, where I presented scenarios, and commented on my own experiences while wearing many different hats throughout my career. “Like a camera with many lenses, first you view a broad sweep of the landscape subsequently you change your lenses several times to bring scenes closer
and closer into view” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 140). I viewed these scenarios and reflections as data, presented in the form of memos.

### 3.5.2 Ethics approval

This research was approved by the Charles Darwin University Human Ethics Committee on 22/11/2012: Reference number: H12144. Names and locations of participants remain confidential. Pseudonyms have been used in reporting the voice of the teachers in Chapter 4.

In terms of recording and storing the data, I recorded the interviews, and participants endorsed the transcripts. Paper copies, recordings and computer files were stored in such a way to prevent unauthorised access. Data will be retained on the university network and password protected. Printed copies of any work related to this project are kept in a lockable cabinet.

### 3.5.3 Data analysis

Grounded theory uses sets of coding procedures for analysis: open, axial and selective (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, pp. 101–199). Table 3.2 summarises the main characteristics of the coding procedure.

#### 3.5.4 Open, axial and selective coding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding type</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Open coding</td>
<td>The focus is on identifying concepts. Data are broken down into small parts: nodes. Those nodes are no more than labels until thoroughly analysed and compared. These nodes are regrouped into categories that have more abstract explanatory power. This is the first step of conceptualising. The researcher writes memos, in which thoughts, interpretations, questions and directions for further analysis are</td>
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Concepts are regrouped during the second stage of category selection. They are developed in terms of their properties and dimensions. Sub-categories can then start to be formed. Categories can be expressed using the words of participants.

Axial coding

This is the process of relating categories to their sub-categories. It consists of coding around the axis of a category—the main properties and dimensions of that category. The data that was fractured during open coding are reassembled to form more complete explanations.

Selective coding

This refers to the process of integrating major categories, interpreting them and forming a larger theoretical scheme: a theory.

At first I experienced difficulties developing codes and categories. As mentioned by Guba (1978, in Patton (2002, p. 465), coding is a difficult task due to problems of convergence and divergence in the data. Categories need to be judged against two criteria: internal homogeneity (how the data holds together in that category) and external heterogeneity (how clear the differences are between the categories). Guba (1978) advises that “the existence of a large number of un-assignable or overlapping data items is good evidence of some basic faults in the category system” (in Patton, 2002, p. 53). I used NVivo software for Mac (Version 10.1) in order to manage the coding and to assist me in the analysis and representation of the data.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) present a set of devices and techniques to facilitate analysis. I used all of their five main techniques, which are summarised below.

1. Use of comparisons: Asking theoretical questions about one case does not mean we are sticking to that case, rather, “we are opening up our minds to the range of possibilities which in turn might apply to and become evident when we sample other cases … we are constantly making comparisons against incoming cases” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 89).
2. Use of questioning stimulates thinking about concepts and guides further questions.

3. A deconstruction approach, based on the post-modernist perspective, analysis of words and phrases or sentences, enables the researcher to investigate possible meanings and to present the power elements of social constructions. To increase the rigorous process of comparisons Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest a “flip-flop technique” where “a concept is turned ‘inside out or upside down to obtain a different perspective on the event, object or action/interactions. In other words we look at opposites or extremes to bring out significant properties” (p. 94). The advantage of using this technique, I found, is that it helped me recognise the intrusion of my assumptions or a participant’s assumptions during the analysis.

4. Use of a ‘reflective journal’ during the research study: At the start of the research project I began keeping a journal to document my initial ideas and insights. The approach is to have an ongoing examination of what I know and how I know it, “to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment” (Hertz, 1997, in Patton, 2002, p. 65). This is consistent with Patton’s views that those initial ideas are the beginning of the analysis. As well, in accordance with the technique of heuristic inquiry, I included personal anecdotes, reflections about my experiences and notes about informal conversations with students, teachers and parents, and reflections about my readings.

The heuristic researcher is not only intimately and autobiographically related to the question but learns to love the question. It becomes a kind of song into which the researcher breathes life … the question itself is infused in the researcher’s being. It creates a thirst to discover, to clarify and to understand crucial dimensions of knowledge and experience. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 43)
5. Extensive use of memos: When I used the journal for reflections from conversations, reading or discussions, I summarised the content in the form of memos. According to Saldana (2013), the purpose of memos is to document and reflect on the coding, and these may take the form of journal entries or blog. As he sees it, “a memo serves as a ‘brain dump’ about the participants, phenomenon or processes under investigation by thinking” and in this way it assists with “writing and thus thinking even more about them” (p. 32).

3.5.5 Standards of quality and verification

Cresswell (1998) introduces the concepts of standards of quality and verification in qualitative research, rather than the more familiar terms, ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’. He explains his reasoning as follows: “I view verification as a process that occurs throughout the data collection, analysis and report writing of a study, and standards as criteria imposed by the researcher and others after a study is completed” (p. 194). He describes eight verification procedures often mentioned in the literature, and suggests that researchers engage in at least two of them for any given study. In my research I made use of the following three approaches: clarification of researcher bias, triangulation and peer-review debriefing.

1. Clarification of researcher bias: Bias is different from subjectivity. Subjectivity is an integral part of your way of thinking, conditioned by educational background, values, experience and skills, while bias is a deliberate attempt to conceal or highlight something (Kumar, 1999). I therefore prefer the term ‘clarification of researcher subjectivity’ to indicate the way I used my experience in the research. My personal positions were made clear at the beginning of the study. Encouragement to do so is offered by Strauss and Corbin
(1998, p. 5), who suggest that researchers “are unafraid to draw on their own experiences when analysing materials because they realise that these become the foundations for making comparisons and discovering properties and dimensions”.

2. Triangulation: The principle of triangulation is systematically employed in a grounded theory approach. It helps to determine how coherently and strongly the evidence supports the findings. Since validation is part of theory building, it is “built into each step of analysis and sampling … analysts constantly are comparing the products of their analyses against actual data, making modifications or additions … are constantly validating or negating their interpretations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 21). The literature reviewed by a researcher is also used for supplemental validation to help ensure the accuracy of the findings. Denzin (1978b, in Patton, 2002) uses the term ‘abduction’ to differentiate this type of analysis from purely inductive analysis or theory-driven analysis. New concepts are tested out and confirmed by the actual data.

3. Peer review debriefing is used as an external check. I endeavoured to use one or two colleagues to play devil’s advocate; to question, on a regular basis, the data collection analysis and findings.

Subjectivity can be also minimised by various procedures—the recording of all data; the use of process notes describing the researcher’s reaction during interviews; and the creation of a record of the steps followed throughout the research so that the study can be replicated. “By grounding theories in data and validating their statements of relationship between concepts during the research process, ‘researchers’ are confident about the conclusions they have reached” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 5). The process of theoretical saturation, where the researcher
gathers data until all categories are saturated, allows the theory to develop with rigour and precision.

According to Patton (2002), instead of gauging their statistical significance, qualitative results are judged for their substantive significance. The readers are the ones who judge the value of the significance. It should be clear how and to what extent the findings deepen and increase the understanding of the phenomenon in question, how they are supportive of other works in the field, and how much they can contribute to new knowledge.

John Hattie, in Visible learning (2009), explains that the purpose of his book was to present many correlates based on many meta-analyses that enhance student achievement. “It is to weave a story from the data that has some convincing power and some coherence although there is no claim to make this ‘beyond reasonable doubt’. Providing explanations is sometimes more difficult than identifying causal effects” (p. 4).

3.5.6 Audit trail

Although they are presented in a linear fashion, the actions taken in this research project fitted into ongoing cycles of data collection and data analysis, following approval of my research proposal. Grounded theorists stop and write whenever ideas occur to them. The process I used is illustrated in Table 3.3. Each of the actions was ongoing.
### Table 3.3 Data collection and analysis cycles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading/taking notes through journal entries/reflecting</td>
<td>Immersion in the big picture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary interviews (5)</td>
<td>Collection of the first level of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open coding, listing of nodes, using N Vivo software, creating code lists</td>
<td>First-level analysis of interviews, starting to form categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations while immersed in the field as in-school mentor, focus on classroom behaviour management, discussions with mentees, reflections</td>
<td>Writing memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing papers/newsletters to colleagues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Writing journal entries as memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten more interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More literature review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of initial coding after each interview</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Axial coding</td>
<td>Linking categories to sub-categories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five more interviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Starting selective coding</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second level of discussion with selected participants</td>
<td>Continuing until categories are saturated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical sampling</td>
<td>Emergence of insights/theory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.5.7 Limitations of the proposed research

The purpose of the data collection was to obtain insights into how teachers perceive CM, but like any self-reported data, the results were subjective, representing opinions and beliefs. The data set was based on a small sample, which could be seen as a limitation. However, regarding the issue of generalisation from one context to another, the following statement is pertinent:
If the question is: ‘is this one case representative of all cases’ then the answer is probably no, and further study will show why and how, but if one asks ‘is there something that one can learn from this case that will give us insights and understandings about the phenomenon’, then the answer is yes. (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 285)

The key point is that this research was aimed at generating new perspectives, insights and correlations, not at making generalisations that are then extrapolated from the small sample to a wider population of interest. My aim was to tell an explanatory story. Hattie (2009) forcefully questions the need for evidence through randomised control trials and evidence-based decision making: “Evidence-based this and that are the buzz words, but while we collect evidence, teachers go on teaching!” (p. 4). This quotation from Popper is also pertinent:

Bold ideas, unjustified anticipation and speculative thoughts are our only means for interpreting nature: our only organ, our only instruments for grasping her. And we must hazard them to win our prize. Those amongst us who are unwilling to expose their ideas to the hazards of refutation do not take part in the scientific game. (Popper, 1968, in Hattie, 2009, p. 4)

Another limitation could be that I put my experience too much at the forefront in the data-gathering and analysis process. As the researcher, it was my intention to bring myself into the study, but as a starting point, my role was that of an active learner, who presented the participants’ views rather than acted as an expert who presumed to judge them. Second, I wanted to use my extensive experience in the field by including it as field insights, observations and reflections.

Your private and personal written musings before, during and about the entire enterprise is a question-raising, puzzle-piecing, connection-making, strategy-building, problem-solving, answer-generating, rising-above-the-data heuristic. Robert E. Stake (1995) muses ‘Good research is not about good methods as much as it is about good thinking (p. 19). (Saldana, 2013, p. 32)

The focus of the study on the middle years of schooling could be perceived also as a limitation. The reasons for this choice was explained in the introduction of the
thesis, however it is to be noted that the findings of this research present essential principles that go beyond any specific context.

3.6 Conclusion

Strauss and Corbin (1998), and later Charmaz (2006), moved grounded theory in a post-modern direction, and I used their approach in this qualitative research project, together with elements of heuristic inquiry where my experience is also a source of data. I continued cycles of data collection and data analysis until the major categories I had created had been saturated. The results of the analysis are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 outlines the findings from the interviews with participants, and Chapter 5 discusses and expands on those findings in order to build the theory presented in this thesis.
Chapter 4  Findings

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology used in this research: the grounded theory approach of comparative analysis suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006). In line with this approach participants’ comments constituted the primary data for analysis, which was conducted with the aim of answering two research questions:

1. What are the barriers preventing or limiting the implementation of effective classroom management strategies in middle school, hence teachers’ success in creating positive learning environments in their classrooms?

2. ‘By targeting what matters and only what matters’, what are the key changes—the ‘right drivers, the small actions that as tipping points can overcome those barriers and lead to significant and immediate improvement?’

This chapter presents comments and stories from the participants on their perceptions of behavioural issues in their classrooms. This is followed by the data analysis, in which the following six barriers were identified:

1. a lack of support provided to teachers
2. the silence in schools regarding behavioural problems
3. an overload of documentation about possible strategies to deal with those behavioural issues
4. teachers’ mindsets—ranging from the belief that there is nothing teachers can do because inappropriate student behaviours are linked to factors entirely beyond their control with teachers not reflecting on the possibility that they could partly
be one of the causes of those behaviours, to the view that teachers are fully responsible for addressing misbehaviours

5. an underestimation of the importance of CM as a key teaching skill

6. a lack of passion for the profession

The end of each section on the barriers outlines the possible or desirable actions suggested by the participants to reduce the impact of each barrier. These findings are further discussed in Chapter 5 in relation to the research literature and my own perceptions of the issues, based on my lengthy teaching experience.

4.1 Classroom behavioural problems

The following few general comments and stories from participants create a story line related to the research topic. It is not the intention at this stage to interpret events, but rather to put the voice of the participants on the stage. Of the 20 teachers selected for interview in this research project, all participants—whether first-year graduates, experienced teachers or leaders—conceded that they experienced behavioural problems in the classroom. These problems included mild behaviours, such as chatting while the teacher is talking; calling out, gesturing and posturing; exhibiting more challenging behaviours such as refusing to put a mobile phone away, refusing to do any work, throwing work on the floor, swearing at teachers; and/or more extreme behaviours involving violence, such as threatening to stab a teacher who did not meet a particular student’s demands. The experienced teachers and leaders in the sample stated that, generally, they were successful in creating positive classroom environments, as they had developed effective strategies throughout their teaching career. However, while general CM had not been a
problem, the continuing challenge had been to manage individual student
behaviours. The following selection of participants’ statements reflects those views.

4.1.1 Experienced teachers’ perceptions

Experienced teachers generally reported that they now have little difficulty
handling confrontational or non-compliant behaviours. For example, Katherine, who
had been teaching for more than 20 years, confidently asserted: “I really haven’t got
behavioural problems in my classroom at all”. She reported being able to handle
“serious behavioural problems within a school” such as the time she had taken a job
that had become available because the previous incumbent… had “left the
classroom on a stretcher with a nervous breakdown”.

Just as confidently, Mary explained that “for me it [behaviour] is not a big
issue,” as from the start she knew how to be assertive, to establish high expectations
and boundaries with her students, and even arranged a contract with them:

My classroom, my rules, my house. We go through the rules and I get
everybody to sign a contract so when they don’t behave, I can always come
back to that and say, you signed to this, you signed this contract and therefore
you are committed to behave in my classroom. So that works. (Mary)

However, a few experienced interviewees reported a combination of positive
and negative experiences. For example, Denise reported, “sometimes I experience it
[behaviour management] as a success and sometimes I experience it as a failure.”
Such interviewees linked those bad experiences to specific circumstantial factors.
Elba, for example, explained, “one of those [bad experiences] was when I was
introducing a new subject. It was a subject that had not been taught before”. Amelia,
despite being an experienced teacher, viewed her recent CM experience as very
challenging, due in her opinion to factors outside her control:
I found it very challenging, especially in middle school because of the specificity of the subject I am teaching and also because of the challenges I faced with the lack of students’ motivation and the lack of whole school support. (Amelia)

Suzan, also an experienced teacher, reflecting on her recent work as a relief teacher, where she was required to take over a class in Semester 2 concluded, “behavioural problems [were] definitely … a challenge in that class and at times it can come down to the classroom make-up of the students in the class, the combination of those students”. She felt this had been going on all year and a change of groupings could have made a difference.

4.1.2 Early career teachers’ perceptions

The following comments present the views of both experienced teachers reflecting on their early experiences and those of neophyte teachers. It is relevant to note that the neophyte teachers interviewed for this research were working in a school where support systems were in place for graduate teachers through a mentoring system.

Claudia, an experienced teacher, reported having difficulties when she started teaching, particularly due the nature of the subject she taught, but she explained that those difficulties were also due to her lack of experience:

Probably like most people, I have experienced some difficulties in middle school, when I started teaching, particularly in maths classes … Also I was teaching the same students science and I had much less trouble. (Claudia)

Susan, also an experienced teacher, commented that at her first posting in a very low socio-economic area, she had to deal with very serious behavioural problems, and “was told on many occasions to f… off”.

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When interviewed about their work, neophyte teachers referred specifically to the problems they had encountered with particular groups of students with special needs, such as high achievers and/or Indigenous students or students with behavioural disorders. Overall, their experiences were positive, as exemplified by Frederick who clearly enjoys teaching and his relationships with young people. While he had high expectations, he still acknowledged some frustrations:

I experience it overall as a positive thing. A large part of what I enjoy about teaching is having a relationship with students, and that comes because they know that I have expectations of them and there is a joy to implement those. It fosters positive relationships. There are times when things require more work on my behalf and it becomes frustrating. (Frederick)

Frederick expressed his disappointment and frustration as ‘a bit of a blow’—since even though he had attempted to create a positive, engaging learning environment in his classes and had established some positive relationships, there were always ongoing challenges posed by individual students in his Indigenous classes:

Yes, at times, it can be a bit of a blow, particularly when you feel that you have a positive relationship with a student; there might be external factors that are influencing the student that day. (Frederick)

Igor, comparing his experiences as a neophyte teacher to those of young colleagues in other schools, felt that “overall the experiences have been challenging in a lot of different ways,” but that CBM “hasn’t been as difficult as some of my colleagues in other schools”; in his opinion this is due to “the cohort of students and type of students that I teach”. Through further informal conversations, he mentioned the positive contribution made by a mentor, which had “inspired me to grow into a skilful, knowledgeable and passionate teacher”.

Henry, another neophyte teacher, found that in his mainstream work, “classroom behaviours are usually OK … I can get on top of them pretty quickly and pretty
easily due to good systems in place that I know that I can fall back on.” However, he added, “with Indigenous classes, the support is not there and with CBM, I have a lot to work on”.

When asked if she was worried about student behaviours before taking her first class at the beginning of the year, Janine as a graduate teacher emphatically stated, “I think it was everything I was worried about”. Later in the year, Janine linked behavioural problems in one of her mainstream classes to different ability levels, even though it had been set up as an advanced class:

It’s a very big class, and so I find, I guess, they’re a close-knit group, so I find it difficult getting all their attention, because they’re always chatting and it’s hard too, because it’s an extension class. Quite a few students are not really up to the standard that they should be, and whereas others are way ahead, so it’s really hard trying to get them altogether as a group, when I’m on the board, but I somehow manage it [laughter], but I find that difficult. (Janine)

In another class, where Janine had five children with special needs, the presence of a teacher assistant had made a difference. As a consequence, she was pleased with her management of the class.

And then I’ve got another class where the students are good … I have a helper in there to help particular students, and so it can be a bit loud in that class sometimes, but I’m really—probably that’s the class I’m most proud of in terms of my behaviour management, because it’s a difficult class. I mean, it’s only 21 students, but there are five students who have special needs, and so it can be quite challenging in that sense. (Janine)

4.1.3 Leaders’ perceptions

Those in the sample who were identified as leaders presented views that were similar to those expressed by the experienced teachers. They all commented on their ability to create a positive learning environment in the classroom. They viewed the behavioural problems of individual students objectively and considered them to be
not really stressful, but just part of the expected challenges of the profession. This is summarised by Olga, who stated:

I think behavioural issues are part of everyday life in the classroom—it can depend on individual students, it can depend on the day, it can depend on the weather, it can depend on what has being going on at home …[or] in the boarding house the night before, or—over the weekend. So I think it’s—part of being a teacher. (Olga)

Tom, as a principal overseeing staff members, viewed behavioural problems in their classes as “a significant barrier to learning. It is a significant barrier that is unwelcome to teachers, to parents and to students”.

In summary, the purpose of this section was to introduce some of the perceptions of the participants, using short extracts from some of the statements they made. The next sections (§4.2–§4.8) identify and detail the barriers that limit the effectiveness of teachers in dealing with challenging behaviours in the classroom, as experienced by the participants. They also analyse the suggestions made by teachers with respect to actions that can help overcome those barriers.

4.2 Barrier 1: Lack of support

Overwhelmingly, participants in this study indicated that support is a first priority to assist them in their educational task—support from parents, colleagues and leaders—and they emphasised the need for support from whole-school approaches to CM. They perceived lack of support to be a barrier preventing them from implementing effective CM strategies in their classroom; on the other hand, it was viewed as a crucial positive element, when provided.

Comments from participants about perceived lack of support varied, according to their professional backgrounds and the school cultures they experienced. In response to the question, ‘Are you familiar with support systems in schools?’
Denise, an experienced teacher who was mainly doing relief work across a number of schools, emphatically replied: “It is a bit of a joke to tell you the truth. Most schools I have been working in, there is not much support system inside the school and not at all outside the school.” On the other hand, Janine, a neophyte teacher, indicated that she was satisfied with the support provided in her school, where a mentoring system was in place. In her view it had been effective in assisting her with CM. She explained the steps she takes when dealing with minor incidents by herself and the types of support she receives: “If they [students] push boundaries, I speak to them individually, and then if it’s something really bad, I let the house master know, or the team leader, and I also, if it’s really bad, I call the parents as well.”

4.2.1 Support from parents

Teachers need the support of parents, but interviewees indicated that at times this support was not always forthcoming. As Queen explained, “the kids seem to be the reflection of the parents’ attitude … Teachers would say let us bring the parent in, we all know we need to discuss issues with parents because we need their support.” However, in her experience, “the ‘problem’ kids tend to have ‘problem’ parents”.

A number of experienced teachers also commented on the negative attitudes some parents had towards teachers. Lack of respect towards teachers was, for example, identified by Denise: “Most parents think that teachers are just bludgers and get 12-week holidays and that is just what they want to think about. So you don’t get a lot of support from that.” Queen also pointed out that parents who challenge teachers’ decisions can cause major issues. She complained that, often,
“the first thing parents do is to take side with their kids and this is the worst thing that can happen”. Katherine echoed this sentiment:

So, once you’ve got a student who usually has their mother on their side pointing the finger at anything that the school does in order to discipline or in any way stop the child from misbehaving, then you’ve got the beginning of what could be a very, very bad situation. (Katherine)

### 4.2.2 Support from leaders

Participants indicated that the degree of support from leaders varied greatly across different schools. Elba, an experienced teacher, felt supported in some schools: “In others they [the leaders] don’t really know what is going on in the classroom. There is no-one else in the classroom except you and the students.” According to her, the main problem is that, “students may describe a situation that is quite contradictory to what happened”. If matters are not investigated adequately, the teacher is often blamed. Denise also mentioned completely different leadership styles in schools, and viewed the need for principals to take a leadership role in terms of behavioural expectations and actions when problems occur, and to take responsibility for those actions:

I worked in a private school, I don’t feel that the headmaster did a very good job in supporting the school with these issues. I worked in a public school, we just had a new headmaster—the last one was not supportive at all, the new one I could feel this one was going to come on the radar … I think it is because the principal is not saying from the top down I want to see improvement in behaviour management and I will do whatever it takes and he does not follow through heads of faculties, through groups of teachers. (Denise)

Denise further explained that it was necessary sometimes to focus just on one aspect and have zero tolerance of any infractions—for example, using mobile phone in class—with the principal taking full responsibility for the issue:

It can be zero tolerance on using mobile phones in classrooms. [The principal could say] ‘You have my permission to take it to the front office and whatever happens you will have my support even if the phone is lost in the office and has to be replaced.’ You need to have someone who accepts responsibility for
dealing with problems … I feel we need to have a principal that will say this is what the school will do and this is what we won’t tolerate; if there is a problem I want to know about it and I want to deal with those children. (Denise)

These views were echoed by Queen who, after experiencing problems in a school with the total lack of support from the principal, stated “I have been in a school where the deputy was very strong…and I really enjoyed teaching there”.

A number of participants commented that it is essential that the lack of support from parents be counterbalanced by backup support from the leaders in schools. As Barbara expressed it:

Sometimes parents are challenging teachers’ decisions ... And also, because students have rights. It is a huge issue if you are working in a classroom and you are not given enough support from outside, for example from heads of faculty. (Barbara)

Or, as mentioned by Queen, “this [lack of support from parents] is an extra problem. Especially if the principal or the person in charge of discipline is inclined not to press the issue.”

A main point made by interviewees was the need for leaders to back teachers by following up with behavioural consequences at the school level:

Education has changed a lot since I went to school, if as a teacher you do not have the support of the parents...you need to have the support of that hierarchy that is going to follow through consequences. (Suzan)

At times, students need to be isolated from a class before behavioural issues can be resolved with the teacher. Claudia, who worked once in a school where a restorative justice system was in place, explains how that type of support from the school was crucial:

There was a student for example who threatened a teacher by lifting a chair. It caused that teacher terrible stress. But the matter was handled immediately, so the teacher got incredible support; the student was removed from the class to get involved in the RJ [restorative justice] program. Different from other schools where students say, ‘Oh, I am sorry Miss” and can come back into the class, this school did not allow that to happen. Students had to go through a
number of meetings then went to another class. It was taking time for the
student to be dealt with. (Claudia)

Elba, an experienced teacher, indicated two possible reasons for the lack of
support from leaders—wanting to be popular with students, and avoiding
confrontations with parents:

Sometimes senior colleagues may wish to maintain a certain level of
popularity with the students, they may be concerned about irritating parents
and not willing to raise the ire of the parents so they support the student
against the teacher. That is a really difficult situation. (Elba)

Denise, another experienced teacher doing relief work at the time, considered
that the immediate support of an authority figure respected and liked by students
could bring about a turning point with the management of a class. She gave an
example to illustrate one way it had worked in practice. In response to her request,
the head teacher came to her class in order to back her approach in dealing with
some inappropriate behaviours. This is the way she described the scenario.

A scenario: Receiving support from a leader

I remember one experience when someone did something really stupid
in the class. I growled at them all and I said that’s it, the head teacher is
coming. It was something funny, a very silly thing that they had done but
they were all very frightened by that, the whole class became very quiet
and they started working, they were really fearful of this man coming to
speak to them … they were more afraid of disappointing him because
they loved this man so much as the head of class … I wanted them only
to be aware that they had not behaved and they were going to
disappoint him, not that I wanted power. It actually changed how they
behaved, from that moment onwards, they actually behaved better for
me. (Denise)

Tom, an experienced principal, presented a leader’s views on the issue of
support by stating that teachers often complain about the lack of support from
leaders, conceding that, “in some cases they are quite right, they are to be provided
by some kind of support”. He acknowledged though, that “often they cannot
articulate what that support is”. There is also a conundrum; Tom commented that teachers have to understand that at times their own behaviour is responsible for student misbehaviour, in situations such as when they force students into a corner or fail to understand the underlying causes of the behaviour. This makes the supportive task of the leader very difficult. “It requires a lot of care from the part of school administrators to be dealing with this sort of thing”.

They [teachers] definitely recognise when they have felt unsupported and sometimes that can come about in that sort of situation when the teacher forces the student into a corner, and you can see as part of the school leadership that the teacher contributed to that, and if the teacher has not handled the situation the right way and you explain how to handle the situation in the future, their reaction will be, they took the side of the student, I was not supported. So they [teachers] may have had the best intentions: ‘I was trying to do the right thing, to engage them in learning,’ but because they did not understand the conditions the kids were under, they got a negative reaction from the kids and then you are faced with having to hand out a sort of punitive action to the kid as a result. This is the sort of thing that both you and I as assistant principals had to deal with. If the teacher had recognised this, we would not be in that situation in the first place. (Tom)

Another leader indicated that teachers who referred students to her had generally not put in the effort to establish appropriate working relationships with those students and therefore it was difficult for her to be supportive while critical of the teacher:

I’ve held various leadership positions and my observation is that often the children who were sent to me were from classes where teachers had not put in the effort to develop a relationship with those children and therefore it [the problem] came to me and I then developed a relationship with the students, but then I needed to be careful that I was not overstepping the mark in terms of maintaining my professional relationship with staff. (Nancy)

4.2.3 Support from colleagues

Suzan, an experienced teacher, commented on the “brilliant support” she received from colleagues in a school where the morale of the staff was very high, despite many behavioural issues. This informal support from colleagues, in
combination with the more formal support from leaders, discouraged her from leaving the profession:

The first school that I worked in was in a very low social economic background, there were many issues and I felt like leaving but now on reflection, I think these challenges made me the teacher that I am now. I nearly threw it in because I was told on many occasions to f... off and I believe that the only thing that kept me there (two years) was that the staff morale was brilliant, the colleagues’ support was brilliant ... the hierarchy was brilliant ... if I did not have that support and that backup and the morale that that college had, I would have left, well everyone would have left. It was a really good eye opener for me, and there was no judgement, it was a very open collegial environment. (Suzan)

Suzan further commented on the importance of the layout of the buildings in that school, which facilitated staff communication between the various subject departments.

Katherine, another experienced teacher, explained how support from her line manager, once they had developed rapport, made a huge difference to her work:

On my teaching practice I had a shocking time with behaviour management ... but in my first job, I got on very well with my immediate senior and could talk to her a lot if anything did happen and I knew I had her support and that made an enormous difference. (Katherine)

As already mentioned, the graduate teachers participating in this research commented on the effectiveness of having individual mentors to support and advise them, thereby boosting their confidence.

### 4.2.4 Lack of a whole-school approach

Participants emphasised that the lack of a whole-school approach to handling CM and CBM negatively affected their ability to deal with inappropriate student behaviours in their classrooms. Similarly, the lack of common expectations and intervention strategies amongst teachers was mentioned by participants as a barrier.

For example, Henry expressed “his frustrations” with the lack of consistency in
dealing with behavioural problems in his school and Claudia stated that a lack of consistency made it hard for everybody:

My least positive experiences have been in a school where there were no clear paths and every teacher was doing what they thought was best. So you found that in those schools there were different interpretations, different expectations so it made it hard for everybody. (Claudia)

Elba indicated that the leaders of a school need to promote a whole-school approach to CM and to establish structures to facilitate the processes with clear expectations and pathways for intervention:

I think this support comes in two ways. It comes with the leadership showed by the executives of a school, the way they understand the situation and the type of leadership that they show, the way they work alongside the teacher that is important. But the structures the school has in place are important too. These structures are what provide boundaries for the students and they also provide guidance for teachers and students; the guidance on what we expect of students. (Elba)

After teachers have used all possible strategies to deal with individual behavioural problems, they need to have them dealt with at another level to prevent the problems escalating or spreading to other students. As stated by Barbara, “a good flowchart of the steps on what to do, right from the teacher to the head of department” is necessary, otherwise “teachers have to deal with the issues themselves”. Structuring a response in this way promotes “a consistent approach through the whole school and not having different areas with different expectations”.

Barbara further emphasised the need for fairness:

It is not fair that a student can get away with some behaviour with one teacher and another teacher will have to address the issue. To me it shows that somewhere in the support system, something is wrong. (Barbara)

Procedures also need to be in place for teachers needing immediate help, in situations when the consequences of inaction can be dire; for example, when danger to the safety of other students or the teacher is involved, or when a student’s
disruptive behaviour completely prevents the teacher from teaching and the other students from learning. This was repeatedly presented as crucial by the participants:

If a student does get very upset, the most important thing is to minimise harm to themselves and other students. And so you take action accordingly, and hopefully there’s policies in place within the school which enable you to act quickly. (Gail)

In such [difficult] situations I had to remove the extremely disruptive student from the classroom. I had to send the student to the middle school or to have him/her sitting outside for time-out and try to bring the class back to a better condition. (Amelia)

To address the issue of disruptive students, Suzan viewed the use of a buddy system as a “brilliant idea”, for this allows a student to be sent to a colleague for a cooling off period until matters are resolved. The availability of a Plan B such as this was viewed by teachers as empowering:

I found that having a buddy system is a brilliant idea, just to know that there is Plan B … A buddy system can work internally without involving the leaders. At times you have not been able to contact the coordinator and putting students outside they are going to disrupt other classes … and it make it difficult not having anywhere for the student to go, so with that plan you can remove that child from the situation … It is really a great idea. (Suzan)

Nancy also commented on the benefits of time-out to allow students to cool off, however Igor brought the point that time–out can be misused when “the students have to be constantly removed from the classroom”.

Finally, and most importantly, as one of the informants pointed out, teachers need to work collaboratively, and with counselling support for their students, so that they in turn can assist students to learn more acceptable behaviours. “A school culture of support is necessary to help the more challenging students” (Igor). The importance of the supportive role played by welfare and wellbeing services in the case of students with special needs was mentioned by leaders in the sample:

Teachers need to understand the nature of their students, not only where their kids are at in their learning but also what their learning capabilities are, and not to impose something on kids if they are not at the stage to do it. It may be their
stage of development, it may be that time of the day, at that time of the day that kid does not function: a kid working in a bakery at night is not going to learn much during the day … You understand but it does not mean that you ignore the behaviour, it means that you work with the support of student services and welfare structures within the school to try to find out how do we address students’ learning. (Tom)

4.2.5 Action suggested by participants

Participants in this research indicated that when they know they have support, they feel empowered, and as they develop a stronger sense of self efficacy, they become better classroom managers. They emphasised the crucial role of leaders in providing support and in developing a culture of support within the school. Different forms of support are needed: the principal and senior managers of a school need to set clear, high expectations and directions for action in consultation with staff, to advise on preventive and intervention strategies, to listen to teachers’ concerns, and to take appropriate follow up actions when problems occur. Interviewees essentially emphasised the need for leaders to back them up when behavioural issues need to be handled outside class, at the school level, through a whole-school approach to CBM—the aim being to support teachers in order to support students in their progress towards self-discipline. This point is further developed in Section 4.5.

4.3 Barrier 2: A culture of silence

Participants discussed the issue of silence in schools—the willingness to gloss over or ignore behavioural problems in schools. Silence in this context is defined as “the hesitation to speak up about an issue that is of some importance to the individual but seems risky to speak about in their organisation or institutional context” (Milliken & Morrison, 2003, p. 1564).
4.3.1 Teacher silence

When asked, ‘Do you think teachers speak openly about behavioural problems in schools?’, participants did not agree. It was their view that, in general, teachers do not talk much about the behavioural problems in their classroom, and if they do, there is limited time to engage into conversations, and it is usually superficial—teachers mainly moan about it in the staffroom. As Denise put it: “No, in any school I worked at, it is something that teachers moan quietly about, in their department perhaps,” or according to Gail, “It’s generally done on—I would say on the fly, like how—how is it going?…. oh well! ….”

Robert expressed it this way: “Oh! They [teachers] don’t talk about behavioural problems, they accept certain things [misbehaviours].” This was echoed by Barbara and Elba:

The common answer you get these days when you ask, ‘How is it going?’ is, ‘It’s OK’. But you can see that they [teachers] don’t want to give any more information. If it was good, they would say good things about it. (Barbara)

I think there are some students that are seen as infamous in a school and teachers will talk about those students; however, issues of CBM are not discussed openly. (Elba)

Frederick, a neophyte teacher, indicated that behavioural issues were discussed openly with his faculty colleagues, but not really at the school level.

Yes, I think it is open with my immediate colleagues in the staffroom that I share with them … I think that there could be more conversation regarding that at a year level and also at a house pastoral level. (Frederick)

Note that in the school where I was working at the time, Frederick was part of a dynamic faculty: Collaboration and team work within that faculty would have been exemplary in any school.
Teachers themselves may initiate classroom meetings, as explained by Gail, but this is not done on a regular basis, mainly due to lack of time.

Open discussions? Yes, and no. There are several teachers that we have met on different occasions … for example for a class that we all teach and we’ve had difficulties, the teachers have come together to discuss certain strategies: what is working, what isn’t working. I found that very helpful. (Gail)

Suzan indicated that talking about behavioural problems is now even less frequent than it was before: “In my years of teaching I have seen it happening less and less.” Could it be linked to an increase in the number of cases, the severity of those cases, teacher responsibilities and challenges being on the increase and perhaps teachers feeling even more overwhelmed than before?

4.3.1.1 Why that silence?

There are many reasons why teachers may choose to be silent, but essentially participants indicated that silence is primarily the result of fearing potential negative outcomes or risks for themselves, but it was also linked to feelings of inadequacy and failure.

Fear of colleague reaction

The main reason for silence about classroom misbehaviour, according to participants in this research, was the fear of being viewed by colleagues as incompetent; for example, two experienced teachers, Mary and Barbara, confided that:

Teachers just let it [misbehaviour] happen in many other classrooms … a lot of teachers are putting up with it because they are afraid of saying anything; I think the problem is that a lot of teachers prefer not to confront that situation because maybe they’re feeling like, if I say anything they going to say I’m not a good teacher. (Mary)

It is a huge thing [to talk about behavioural problems] as other teachers may think, ‘Oh, she is having problems.’ It can be seen as a reflection on the teacher rather than the need for support … I think that they [colleagues] did not
have support and they had to deal with problems themselves and if they say that they need help it may be viewed negatively. Other people may say, he/she does not know how to manage the class. They don’t want this to be out there. (Barbara)

Professional standing within the group is important to teachers; behavioural problems in the classroom provide visual evidence of difficulties, and the blame can be directed immediately at the teacher. Remaining silent allows teachers to adopt a self-protective attitude, seemingly accepting the situation as unavoidable.

Speaking up about problems can also be significantly influenced by the way colleagues think and react, and the level of trust within the organisation. Teachers may fear saying something controversial. If they feel isolated, they tend not to be open and honest about their experiences for fear of rejection by their peers. This feeling was expressed by Claudia:

I remember for example, I had a lot of trouble in maths particularly with a certain cohort of students. I used to teach those kids science and maths. Another teacher was teaching integrated studies and then there was the PE teacher, I remember the teachers came to me and said, ‘Oh that is weird, we have no problems with them, they are good kids.’ That was so humiliating. I told them that I had no trouble with those students in science because they like it. But at the time, the story was that me, personally, had problems with kids! (Claudia)

**Leaders blaming teachers**

Many teachers commented on the negative consequences of reporting behavioural problems to their leaders who then, instead of supporting them, blamed them for the problems. For example, Elba, an experienced teacher, reported cases of students bullying her and was dismayed to find the leaders taking the side of the students:

Students would actually gang against you [the teacher] and complain about you, and when it becomes examined it is like [the students] don’t have a case to answer, but you do. (Elba)
Another experienced teacher, Denise, commented on the issues faced by novice teachers:

I think that they [novice teachers] did not have support, and they had to deal with problems themselves, and if they say that they needed help it may be viewed negatively … it may be viewed as a complaint but it is not a complaint, they are just asking for help. (Denise)

Teachers are clearly reluctant to seek help from leaders when that help is not forthcoming. Numerous comments by teachers indicated that they sent Reports of Concern forms to middle managers, asking for support, but when the leaders did not reply, they stopped doing so.

I feel like some people [middle managers] are very strong with that [support] and then others I need to chase them for feedback and follow-up. I think that there needs to be a situation where those people are forwarding their feedback back to you rather than you going and seeking it out, because as a classroom teacher … it’s time consuming to do that follow-up. (Janine)

Suzan also declared that discussions are often pointless if matters are not followed through with consequences for the misbehaving students. In response to the question, ‘Do you think that knowing that colleagues have similar problems help your self-assertiveness?’, Suzan replied:

Yes, and no, I guess if everybody has the same problem but nothing has been done it does not give you any more power, it is not the word, I don’t know … if it’s just a discussion and you are not taking it to the next level, or it has been taken to the next level and it has not been followed through, then the discussion means nothing … wherever you go, to the next colleague or a leader but nothing has been followed up. (Suzan)

**Feeling shame and self-blame for failure**

Teachers may develop a feeling of shame that further prevents searching for solutions with the help of colleagues. Elba disclosed that: “It might be a case of professional pride. Teachers prefer not to talk about it when they have minor issues with students’ behaviour.” Denise gave the example of her line-manager, who had difficulty controlling classes:
In a school I worked at, I watched my boss … kids don’t listen to him either … I guess it is not only me they are not listening to, if they don’t listen to my boss who I listen to and respect and has a lot of authority above me, I think he must feel as poor about it as much as I do. (Denise)

Given the fear of being labelled as not coping, even incompetent, Claudia emphasised the need to be assertive and self-confident, brave, willing to speak up, for example at a general staff meeting:

Even I remember when there was a staff meeting, people were bringing up issues, which is an incredible thing to do as you have to pretend that you are coping. It is a very brave act. (Claudia)

This would be particularly difficult for novice teachers who may not have yet developed sufficient resilience.

**Lack of time, lack of opportunities**

Teachers sampled in this research complained about the lack of time available to discuss behavioural issues with colleagues although, as already stated by Gail, it is very useful:

There are several teachers with whom we have met on different occasion… the teachers have come together to discuss certain strategies. What is working, what isn’t working? I found that very helpful. In terms of having that frequently, not so much ’cos we tend to get really busy. (Gail)

Suzan stated that in her years of teaching, discussions with colleagues are happening less and less, “perhaps it is because the workload is becoming more and more, there is no time for those discussions, and when it does occur it is a brief five minutes …” Suzan further explained that when matters were not addressed immediately, teachers just let them go:

I suppose I have six on, and I have yard duty and I have a meeting after school … and I guess when matters are not resolved within a few days, then there is another issue that erupts, you get busy again, staff get busy: ‘Oh! it was last week, just let it go.’ (Suzan)
4.3.2  *Silence at the system level: Leader silence*

According to the participants, behavioural issues are avoided in schools as a topic of discussion. Janine and Claudia were emphatic about this: “No, CM is not discussed openly in any school I worked at” (Claudia); “No. I mean, not really” (Janine). Such issues are not discussed at general meetings, limited professional development on the subject is provided, and school policies and strategic plans may not reflect the degree of severity of the problems encountered.

Participants mainly commented that leaders are not being sufficiently proactive in addressing behavioural problems in their school. According to Denise,

> Unless the principal of a school or the government admit that there is a problem, there is not much that can be done about it. You can put your hand up and say there is a problem. It has to come from a system based reform…it has to come from the top (Denise).

4.3.2.1  *General staff meetings*

At general staff meetings, either CBM is not placed as an agenda item or, as already mentioned by Claudia, teachers are not brave enough to bring up the subject for discussion:

> When people were brave enough to bring these matters at staff meetings, people would be looking at each other. Some would be negative and the matter was nearly brushed aside. E.g., the leader would say: ‘So we know you have an issue with that particular class, I will talk to you at the end of the meeting.’ So they became treated as special cases … to say something, that shows that you are not coping. (Claudia)

> The majority [of teachers] know that the class—the classes may have some students that may need extra help … it is discussed more at an individual level rather than at a whole-school approach to behaviour, how to deal with behaviour. (Gail)

4.3.2.2  *Professional development*

Professional Development (PD) about CM and CBM does not seem to be viewed as a priority. To the question, ‘What about PD at the school level? Is there
much dealing with discipline and CM?’ some respondents, such as Denise,
commented: “I have never gone to a whole-school PD in all schools I have worked at
where we would spend time on CM. I had to pay for my PD, outside the school.” Or
as Janine explained, when there is a PD week:

… there isn’t really anything on behaviour management. So, no, in that sense,
there’s not really; it’s a kind of—the teacher needs to set in place what their
behaviour policy [is] in their classroom, and if things get out of hand, that’s
when the other people need to be involved, when the leaders need to be
involved. (Janine)

4.3.2.3 Why leader silence?

Limited data was provided on the reasons for leader silence; interviewees such
as Queen, an experienced teacher, just stated that some leaders do not wish to hear
about problems. She described a scenario where a student repeatedly interrupted her
English lesson by yelling “boring … boring” across the room. After several requests
to stop the disruption, she asked the student to step outside.

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<tr>
<th><strong>Scenario: The boring … boring student incident</strong></th>
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<td>The principal happened to pass by my room while I was teaching and asked me… why was this student standing out there. Well with the door open, everyone in the classroom was listening. I explained what happened: this student does not like the subject and he does not have the civic consciousness to think that the other students are interested, and I gave him a choice, I told him if you do not like this lesson, maybe you should stay outside and give the others a chance to learn … The principal did not like my explanations. He said, ‘Well, that student should not be outside, take him in.’ I asked what should I do then? Do you want one person to disturb the class or do you want the rest of the class to follow the lesson? He said: ‘I don’t care, shut the door and the windows. I don’t want to know anything about this.’</td>
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My question: So the student came back to class, and did he continue disrupting?

Answer: No, I don’t think so, I think he realised that there was a problem. He kept quiet and it was very interesting that in subsequent lessons, he was doodling, but was not interrupting the lesson. (Queen)
4.3.3 Consequences of a culture of silence as perceived by teachers

This silence about behavioural issues leads to a lack of awareness or acknowledgment of problems, hence a lack of action. Such acknowledgement needs to come from the leaders in a school, as Denise correctly asserts.

Unless the principal of a school or the government admits that there is a problem, there is not much that can be done about it. You can put your hands up and say there is a problem. But it has to come from a system-based reform … I believe if a school wants students to be working well as a group and not being distracted, it has to happen from the top. (Denise)

With lack of action, problems can quickly spread. Behavioural problems need to be addressed early, when they are still manageable, and before they develop into an emergency.

Mary stated that teachers seem to put up with the problems, “A lot of people just put up with that hoping that one day will get better but … it’s just going to get worse.” By not intervening when they occur, those problems can spread, and through a spiraling effect, situations can become out of control, as mentioned by Denise:

Sometimes you can be lucky enough and you get a group of students that are really good and everything works fine and then every now and then you get one student or two students that are like interfering with your working and they are distracting your other students … and then this is the precious moment when you deal with it straightaway, cut that attitude, or if you let them take over your classroom, then it will be a nightmare for the rest of the year. (Denise)

Those comments from Denise, although dealing with the teacher lack of action at the classroom level, are applicable to the management of a whole school. This matter is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.3.4 Action suggested by participants

The role of leaders is essential for breaking the culture of silence by setting conditions that create an environment where teachers feel safe to share problems,
speak up, and as members of teams work towards solutions within a consistent, whole-school approach to CM: thereby ensuring a school culture of transparency, collegiality, support and ongoing learning.

I think that there could be more conversation regarding that at a year level and also at a house pastoral level, to make sure that everyone is on the same page so that everyone has enough understanding about what is happening for that student. I would like to see more of the experienced teachers discussing what works for them, not necessarily this is what you should do but what works for them, perhaps more regularly, that could be really useful for all teachers, including other experienced teachers. (Frederick)

Informants acknowledged that teachers themselves need to initiate discussions with colleagues, and to speak up at meetings. For example, Suzan refers to a time when she openly discussed behavioural problems in the staff room with a colleague as I happened to pass by:

This is what happened the other day, in the main staffroom when X and I were talking about some student’s misbehaviour, you came through and you had the opportunity to voice your opinion. It helped people talk further. (Suzan)

4.4 Barrier 3: Too much documentation

The literature review (Chapter 2) presented a review of the extensive research on how to effectively address behavioural issues in the classroom (see §2.3). Despite the availability of a great deal of relevant and helpful information, some teachers are uncertain about what to do, or think they know but are unsuccessful at what they are doing, and as a result behavioural problems continue to be a challenge in middle school classrooms. This is at the heart of the research problem statement. Therefore, the following questions come to mind: Are teachers aware of the extensive research findings? If so, how did they learn about it? Why is there so much documentation of this issue? Is there too much? How can a teacher choose between the numerous models and strategies suggested? Do teachers know what strategies to use and if they do, how do they implement them?
4.4.1 **Teacher awareness of available options**

To the question, ‘Do you feel that you were fully aware of the extensive documentation on ways to deal with CM?’, most participants explained that they had limited or ad hoc knowledge coming from different sources. For example, Elba stated: “No, the answer to that is no, I am not aware of it [extensive documentation on professional learning]. I am aware of some.” Claudia commented, “Not really, not coming from a research base… I was not exposed to different research, to different strategies.” Claudia further explained that, with the exception of one school, she was told, “This is what we are doing here. There is not ‘we do this because’ … but rather ‘we do this; we know what the kids are like. That is what they need.” Denise brought up the issue of accessibility, stating that she was “aware that it is out there,” but she claimed, “I never see it in schools, I never see it sitting on a coffee table, I don’t see it in faculties spending four or five hours dealing with different techniques, I never heard of it spoken about at staff meetings”. Frederick recognised the gaps in his knowledge: “I certainly read some. I cannot say that I am aware of the extent of the research that has been done.” According to Denise, “on the internet … there is a lot of documentation, but I don’t often see it in schools”.

Finding the time to go through the extensive research findings available is a problem: “There is a wide body of research that is available to teachers. I would be prepared to read those but I might not get the time to do it,” Elba stated. Denise recommended that some release time should be structured within the timetable for teachers to engage in collaborative professional learning:

I think that teachers are probably overworked; they need to have regular times where they might spend perhaps two hours a week when they can look at documents as a group, that means they need release time to do that; it is during school time, it is not after school, on weekends, during the school holidays, it is part of their curriculum. For example, Lesson 6 on a Thursday, they call
relief teachers and the senior calls down and they do some learning. And they
come back next week and say this worked or this did not work. (Denise)

4.4.2 Issue of professional learning

Participants commented on the various ways they learnt about CM and CBM—
from pre-service learning, formal PD in schools, ongoing learning through trial and
error, reflection, and collaborative learning.

4.4.2.1 Pre-service professional learning

Suzan described her learning experience at university as very positive, but
commented that it was unusual, as per the transcript of our conversation.

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<th>An experience of university professional learning</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Believe it or not I actually learnt much from Uni. I had one lecturer and he was amazing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- And he was focusing on CM not only on pedagogies?</td>
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<td>- Yes, he was, and it was not a set time we spent with him. He was someone who believed strongly in CM. He always used to say to us, ‘Never smile before Easter,’ and throughout the course of my four-year degree, he was always emphasising that we should make sure that we had a good rapport with students when the time is right and the first thing you do in the classroom is … to establish your leadership. And I think I don’t know what happens through the degrees at the moment, but there are a few graduate teachers I have seen through sitting in their classroom as the registered teacher, they come trying to be students’ friends from day one; it is not going to work. So I am old school like that.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- So you learnt through Uni.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- A lecturer</td>
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<td>- Because you were lucky to have a lecturer who was interested in that area.</td>
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<td>- Once again it was not something that was part of the course, it was something he chose to deliver. So I don’t know, but probably they don’t do enough on CM at university … So this in itself would be an initial step. It is not going to help those that are already in the profession. Surely it [CM] should be a big part of a Bachelor of Education. (Suzan)</td>
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Frederick, like many other graduate teachers, indicated that he learnt the theory through his degree course, but felt that he did not have enough practical classroom experience before starting to teach.

Because I did a four-year education degree, I am aware of some of the behaviour processes and I am personally a believer in positive reinforcement. [I] would have liked to have more practical experiences in school prior to becoming a teacher. The longest stretch that I had was four weeks, while in some courses students have 10-week blocks. I think it is very valuable having a block that is extensive. (Frederick)

4.4.2.2 Formal professional development in schools

Participants commented on the limited number of in-school PD opportunities about CM. For example, Denise stated: “[I] had to pay $300 to go to a behaviour management day outside the school, done by a man who gave me a lot of things I used”. She found the experience to be useful, as it was very practical:

Even a week later I used some of his little techniques in a Year 7 maths class, only boys, and the maths teacher was just amazed that students did all their maths and worked for me, because the assistant had told her that … the teacher had said in the notes that if you survive the day, you will be lucky … I was using some of the strategies Dr Bill Rogers gave me, just little things and the kids enjoyed them. (Denise)

Frederick found his experience of PD very useful too as it “[gave] me strategies that I can use and can be named and this is not only about behaviour management”. However, he prefers PD sessions that both deal with theory and practical applications, rather than theories alone.

If in a PD, I am spoken to about the theories that are behind the practices, it is not nearly as meaningful as like in PDs where they say this is the theory and this is the way you can deal with that issue, this is the strategy and this is an example of how you would use this strategy. (Frederick)

4.4.2.3 Ongoing learning

Ongoing learning includes learning from experience, practising new skills, the school learning culture and learning through transfer of skills from experienced colleagues.
Learning from experience. Being a reflexive teacher and a learner

Most teachers indicated that they tend to prefer learning from experience, through trial and error, such as Gail who:

learned from [my] mistakes by evaluating why or reflecting on why certain students or the class were behaving in a certain way, why would they do that? … Was it linked to my practice, something I wasn’t doing correctly and what could I change to make [the work] more accessible for the students? (Gail)

Mary explained that making mistakes is part of the learning:

When you make a mistake you explain to the students what your mistake was and then you keep moving with a new way, but at the same time a lot of teachers, they’re trying this and a bit of that and a bit of that. I think is better for you to just establish what way you want to teach, how you going to teach it. (Mary)

This approach was echoed by Suzan and Larry:

Oh! Experience. So you make mistakes, and it does not matter, you do things differently next time … [learning], from doing. Which is brilliant, brilliant learning. (Suzan)

I’ll try many things out of a selection of possibilities, I guess, and just see what works. (Larry)

Most teachers emphasised the value of reflecting on their practices. Olga, for example, explained the value of keeping a reflective diary:

When I started working in the [Indigenous] communities, I wrote every day. And it wasn’t so much like a diary. It was just how I was feeling at the end of the day. And then that would often lead into what could I have done differently … personal reflection … just a little red notebook that you can just scribble down. Nobody is going to read it, but writing, and, particularly, writing by hand … I think it helps you to process things, because it’s like having the conversation with somebody else. And maybe that’s another thing you do. If you have somebody that you can talk to, you can—because it—just the process of articulating something can bring other things to mind. (Olga)

When a strategy did not work with a specific student, Denise explained how she always reflected on the situation, then searched for other techniques by talking to colleagues or engaging in further reading:

You may not have a breakthrough with that child, but if you are always looking for this breakthrough and try to do better, you are improving anyway
… oh that did not work, what can I try instead, who can I talk to, what can I read, what can we do to make that student have a better education? (Denise)

**School learning culture; collegiality**

Suzan recognised the need to learn from other teachers in a climate of openness.

As a parent myself, you think I have done something wrong or I could have done that better, and just by speaking to another mother who has been through similar problems, they say ‘Oh I have done this or that,’ so you see a different perspective. So that comes down to the type of relationships you have with your colleagues. (Suzan)

Observing other teachers’ classes was perceived to be as an excellent opportunity to learn about strategies, but also as a way of realising that other teachers can make mistakes too. Frederick, a neophyte teacher, stated that:

At that stage in my career, I think it [observing other teachers’ classes] is invaluable. The more it can be done, the more chances we have to learn a broader range of strategies to be able to implement them in class. I don’t think it is learning about content but observing other teachers’ classes is about learning how to operate in the classroom. (Frederick)

I think observing other teachers is good, because you get ideas. Not only that, but you can see sometimes, in a sense, how important everything is that you do … I think it’s also about reassuring young teachers that it’s okay not to get it right all the time. (Olga)

Having a mentor was also presented by graduate teachers as an invaluable support. In Janine’s and Nancy’s words:

[Without a mentor] I think that would be very difficult. I don’t know how I would be able to cope with that sort of thing, especially being a new teacher, being new to the school, not knowing the kids as well as everyone else. I think that would be really tough. I’m not sure what I would do in that case if I had no-one to speak to, or if there was no mentoring program. I think it would be very tough. I think most people might quit [laughter]. (Janine)

I would like to see young teachers, beginner teachers working with a mentor, planning with the mentor, planning behaviour management strategies with the mentor, and then potentially team teaching. (Nancy)

**Issue of transfer of skills**

Experienced teachers have internalised knowledge about CM. When we look at colleagues who manage their classes well, it is hard to define why. Sometimes expert
teachers cannot put into words what they do. They use a combination of approaches they have synthesised and internalised throughout their career. Success and practices become embedded. Teachers are no longer aware of their techniques and it is difficult for them to transfer their knowledge. Olga explained it this way:

I’m finding it a little hard to talk about it [CM strategies], because I’m realising that a lot of what I do in the class [when students misbehave] is now intuitive. (Olga)

However, in her mentoring role Katherine explained that she found that some of her mentees after being shown what to do are actually even more successful than she is: “I get brand new student teachers who’ve never been in front of a class. I show them what to do. They come back. They do it better, they do it better, there is no doubt about it.”

4.4.3 The abundance of relevant information

Nancy, an experienced leader, recalling her own experience as she waded through a surfeit of information, acknowledged how teachers can feel “overwhelmed with a glut of strategies,” confused by too many different models and options:

I remember as a young teacher attending a Bill Rogers’ workshop, probably 20 years ago, and thinking, oh, thank goodness, because I didn’t think I’d ever stay in education if I didn’t have these strategies that this man has taught me. Now, over the last 20 years, I have seen those same strategies in so many different forms, so many different mutations, because different people have picked up on them and tweaked them a little bit, and then they become the guru for a little while, and then somebody else—some man—there’s someone from overseas, and in world of the internet now, we’re sort of obliged to continue professional reading all the time, and pick up on yet another strategy. (Nancy)

A number of participants explained that teachers or their leaders sometimes just do not know what to do, as illustrated by Gail and Janine’s comments:

And I’ve often heard it from the housemasters that there is nothing they can do. I go—so I’ve spoken to them on—and asked them what can I do? What
can we do to help this child and the answers have been there is nothing, I can’t do anything, I don’t know what to do. (Gail)

There was one meeting where one of the leaders for Indigenous education in the school did a sort of presentation, but it was the sort of things that I already knew, so it wasn’t really useful … but it would be nice if we just had some more strategies in place, particularly for the Indigenous students, but they’re really—no-one who seems to know, what to do, I guess. (Janine)

Nancy suggested that there was a need to bring to a close the quest for answers on what to do, in order to just select a model that fit one’s intuition and personality and to trial it; if it is successful, she said, just continue to use it:

I do think sometimes we have to stop and say I’m going to take stock, I’m going to trial these, or these are the ones that come naturally to me, or these are the ones I’ve had some success in, and become an expert at that. (Nancy)

4.4.3.1 Why so much documentation?

The dynamics of interactions between a teacher and many students in the setting of a classroom are complex and lead to a large number of possible strategies being used by teachers according to the many different needs of students and the teacher’s own needs and personality. All this reflects the unique ecology of particular classrooms. Participants such as Janine let on that “there is no recipe” for dealing with behavioural problems, hence the availability of so many possible options. Suzan concurred:

It’s like anything, there is a long list [of actions that could help], and I am not saying that all of them are right. There are many factors and not all of them are viable. We can always come back to class sizes but as we all know that is an expensive way around and regardless that you have 15 children or 25 children, you will generally end up with one that pushes the boundaries. (Suzan)

4.4.3.2 How to choose?

Mary emphasised the need for an approach in tune with a teacher’s personality.

I think everybody has to use their own way of teaching because that goes with your personality and who you are. A lot of people are trying to copy other people or other ways of teaching that it’s not appropriate for their personalities and when they make a mistake instead of go back and fix it they just go on and
on and on with the same mistake because they feel like there’s no return.
(Mary)

4.4.3.3 Being aware of available strategies

Participants outlined a smorgasbord of preferred strategies, and emphasised that it was useful to be able to access a bank of possible strategies immediately to give them a sense of self-efficacy, and enable them to adjust their techniques according to circumstances. As an example, to the question, ‘Do you find that as an experienced teacher that you have a number of key strategies in mind?’ Barbara answered:

I do, I think that sometimes it depends on the situation, the circumstances, but I go on with what I can use and I adjust to that. It does give me confidence because I have that list of things I can say or do. If it does not work then it does not work. I just have to do whatever I can about it. (Barbara)

Tom, as an experienced leader, said he was aware that “there are situations where people feel quite at loss about what to do,” but he relied on “good practices, pedagogies and effective CM strategies that can minimise the incidence of disruptions and maximise the opportunities for student learning”. Mary emphasised the importance of high expectations, with consistency of rules and consequences across the school and the need for students to be involved in decision making. Frederick, a neophyte teacher, suggested a tool kit, a bag of tricks with specific named techniques he can use when needed: “Using strategies and having a name for them so that you can put them into your tool kit and say I am going to reach for that in my bag of tricks and use it.” Like most participants he emphasised the importance of consequences when action needs to take place and relied on positive reinforcement strategies such as using a ‘dojo’ reward system involving the whole class. It is a computerised point system that recognises appropriate behaviours. Frederick believes that middle school students are not yet ready to understand the value of intrinsic rewards: “Perhaps intrinsic motivations are not in yet, [students]
need the support from teachers giving them extrinsic rewards when they do behave or make good choices.”

Denise, an experienced teacher, thinking about a relief lesson she had to take, explained how small actions could have a major positive impact in the classroom. She was amazed at her success in using a few strategies to manage a challenging class. Her assertiveness, through actions, such as settling down the class outside the room, smiling, checking individual student’s behaviour plans and monitoring the noise level in the class, had a major impact on the general tone of the class. The permanent mathematics teacher had told her in her briefing notes prior to taking the lesson: “If you survive the day, you will be lucky.”

Following her attendance at a PD workshop, Denise had implemented some of the practical strategies suggested by the presenter as illustrated in following scenario.

**The impact of small actions**

A week later [after a workshop] I used some of his little techniques in a Year 7 maths class, only boys, and the maths teacher was just amazed that students did all their maths and worked for me [the teacher assistant had told her].

[At the beginning of the class], I went to the door and I would not let them in until they were in line, I smiled at them, talking to them but we did not move to the room until things were in order ... I knew that there were two kids in the class that had behaviour management sheets. The first thing I did was to call their name and asked them to hand over their behaviour management sheets, which they did not really want to give me, but they did and I started explaining the requirements about noise levels, so I did a graph on the board and explained what was acceptable and what moved into unacceptable levels. That was through a double lesson in maths. So every 10 minutes I did a mark on the board. I said if you can get six marks on the board below the prescribed level of noise we will stop work 10 minutes early and we will play thumb up. I made a real show of each time the 10 minutes were up, I would go to students with the white board marker in my hand and come back to the board so that they had some warning, so I could see the class room noise level drop: shush ... shush. (Denise)
4.4.3.4 Knowing what to do yet finding it difficult to act

Janine, a neophyte teacher, explained that, despite knowing what to do, she found it difficult to implement various strategies, due to lack of experience: “I know what to do but … because the circumstances are always challenging and my experience is limited, when it comes to that situation the connections don’t necessarily get made in my mind straight away about what to do.” She further commented that because there are too many actions to be taken at once, she finds it difficult to act.

So, even though I’ve got it well—the ideas well established going into the classroom, when I get into that situation, if there’s an issue as well as several others going on at the same time, which is the norm in the indigenous classes that I teach, then even though I know the pathway to be able to manage the major issue, sometimes I can’t get onto it as quickly as I would like to or I’ll miss a step or something then I think that comes down to experience with the issues. (Janine)

4.4.3.5 Practising new skills

The need to practise skills step by step to internalise the knowledge of new strategies and to develop automaticity was brought up by Nancy: “Like driving a car … you don’t have to think about the mechanics anymore, you can just do it.”

4.4.4 Action suggested by participants

Participants stated that they would have liked to see more time spent on practical CM skills at university as a part of their degree course. They indicated that they mainly learnt on the job, through trial and error as well as ongoing reflection. They acknowledged the value of PD, but regretted that very few of those opportunities dealt with CBM. They indicated how small actions could completely change the tone of a classroom. Neophyte teachers found that observing other teachers’ classes and having a mentor was very useful in developing their
professional skills. Overall, teachers considered that having enough time scheduled through their timetable to facilitate learning from colleagues in a school culture of openness, collegiality and ongoing learning was critical for their ongoing PD.

4.5 Barrier 4: Teacher mindset

From the interviews with the participants, three mindsets were identified as barriers to progress in developing positive classroom environments: (1) Some teachers explained “there is nothing that I can do about that class, that group or that individual student,” and blamed the situation on factors they perceived as being outside their area of control. (2) Often teachers do not understand that they may be the potential cause of behavioural problems in their classroom. (3) Teachers also may feel fully responsible.

4.5.1 Mindset 1: Disruptive behaviours are beyond teacher control

A number of participants linked inappropriate student behaviours in the classroom to factors they believe they cannot control, such as factors linked to the student, the home, the school, the system in general, and/or society at large. As a result, some teachers felt disempowered, thinking that nothing can be done to address those factors, and leaders commented that some of their staff had given up on trying to find solutions. However, a number of the most experienced teachers and all leaders indicated that creating a positive learning environment was achievable in the classroom, despite the challenges presented by a few students in a class. They viewed those challenges as part of the job.
4.5.1.1 Factors linked to the student

Most commonly, teachers linked the lack of student motivation and engagement in learning to inappropriate student behaviours that could be out of their control, as expressed by Elba: “If students are very distractive in the classroom, they are just being disruptive and are not interested at all in their education. That can be outside the teacher’s control.”

Amelia explained student lack of motivation with reference to the subject she was teaching:

I found it very challenging especially in middle school because of the specificity of the subject I am teaching ..., and also because of the challenges I faced with the lack of students’ motivation. (Amelia)

Similarly, Robert, an experienced leader, described the difficulties of a colleague who had to teach drama to disinterested Year 9 students. The teacher had 25 years’ experience, teaching senior students, but due to a review of the structure of the school, she had to teach in middle school: “It became quite a nightmare for that teacher … she found it absolutely exhausting and [with] very little support from the school … she went on stress leave and ultimately resigned.”

Robert also commented about his own difficulties with a Year 10 science class, describing the students as ‘a bit of a rabble’, with a large number “having very little interest in school, did not see it as relevant”. He felt that “it was impossible for those students to sit down and work in groups or anything in regards to an exercise or any task involving some serious cognitive work,” concluding, “unless in the … teaching you occupied them with some sort of physical activity you would end up with some kind of behavioural issues”.

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Elba referred to power-seeking behaviours on the part of students and admitted to being bullied by them at times: “Sometimes students will gang up against teachers for reasons of their own and these may be outside of the teacher’s control too.”

Participants found it difficult to meet the needs of all students in the inclusive classroom: in particular, students with learning difficulties, those with a long experience of academic failure, or those with extreme behavioural disorders. For example, Barbara explained how at the early stage of her career, she had difficulty knowing what strategies to use because “of the inequalities [of needs] and not knowing enough about them … for example children with different types of learning disabilities, like autistic children … I did not know how to deal with them, how to integrate them in the mainstream classroom, it was in itself a huge learning area for me.”

4.5.1.2 Factors linked to the home

Participants emphasised the factors linked to the home, such as parents’ attitude towards education and teachers, ineffective parenting skills, or students belonging to dysfunctional families.

4.5.1.3 Parent attitudes and skills

Katherine, an experienced teacher, presented a number of scenarios and comments on how parenting skills and parent attitudes towards teachers and education can have a negative impact on student behaviour in schools. “It takes one student who really doesn’t care to ruin a class… a student with no boundaries at all, and those lack of boundaries usually come from home.” Katherine further explained how she usually establishes relationships with students, “but sometimes you’ve got no chance and in my experience, most of the classes where I’ve had nothing but
problems, you know … those times where you’re just keeping a lid on misbehaviour.” For example, she had to write a whole assessment task “so that students in a science class can do it without getting out of their seats because of a single student … because the mother of that child [believed] he would never do anything wrong”. Although Katherine could not change the mother’s attitude, she had sufficient understanding of the situation to realise that she could still control the issue in the classroom by reorganising the style of assessment task. Katherine also made the point that she prefers to deal with students from poor socio-economic backgrounds, whose life may be tough at home, as she finds it easier to establish productive working relationships with them, rather than with spoiled children from middle-class families.

The school was a very low socio-economic school and kids weren’t spoilt by their parents … Generally, they were lucky to have shoes on their feet … so, if you rang the parents or sent the home office staff around to the parents, the kids were in trouble … I’ve always said give me healthy neglect … over being spoilt, any day. With a student who has basically had to do it a little bit tough because maybe it’s tough at home, you can form a relationship—they can see that you are helping, they can see that you’re not the enemy, but if you get a spoiled child who ultimately is never going to be happy, because there’s no such thing as happiness in that world, and it doesn’t really matter what you do or say. (Katherine)

Nancy commented on kids who were brought up without behavioural boundaries at home: “Some of [our] students don’t have that tough person in their life, because they are allowed to get away with anything … and therefore I believe it is incumbent upon us to ensure that the boundaries are consistent … still being flexible.”

4.5.1.4 Dysfunctional families

Tom commented on the impact that dysfunctional families can have on our students, and on the need for the teacher to address matters accordingly.
We must also accept the fact that there are children who turn up to school who have had horrific times with the families. They have not had much sleep, they have not been fed, there may have been abuse. As a teacher you are not aware of this and when they come to class the last thing they want is to engage in any form of learning activity. They are there for respite for what is happening outside the school so the whole approach is totally different and to try to force them to be engaged at that time will probably be the wrong move. (Tom)

4.5.1.5 Factors linked to the school

Some aspects of a school’s organisation can have a negative influence on student behaviours in cases where the culture of the school is too coercive or too permissive, the leadership of the school is ineffective, whole-school approaches and policies are lacking and/or support systems are non-existent (See §2.3).

Claudia explained that in a school that is too coercive with “a very ‘name and shame’ type of approach” and a focus on punishment, she adopted her own strategies, mainly using positive reinforcement:

It disagreed with my personal philosophy. I used to do a lot of positive CBM, positive reinforcement, and unless there was nothing too dangerous, I tried to overall ignore negative behaviour. (Claudia)

The issue of support has already been mentioned in Section 4.3 as one of the major barriers for the implementation of effective CBM strategies: support from leaders and support through clear whole-school approaches to CBM, as stated by Elba:

If the leadership above the teacher, the line managers don’t support the teacher, that is outside the teacher’s control … If the school is not strong on the expectations and the consequences, then that does not support the teacher either and that might be also outside the teacher’s control. (Elba)

4.5.2 Mindset 2: Teachers lack of self-awareness

Leaders who had to ‘discipline’ students referred to them by teachers reported that teachers who do not see themselves as being at least partly responsible for inappropriate behaviours impede effective CM. Experienced teachers acknowledged
that at times they could have been partly the cause of student misbehaviours by either selecting ineffective curriculum and/or pedagogies, not realising the importance of developing positive relationships with their students, misunderstanding the causes and the goals of student behaviours, or using an ineffective teaching style by being too authoritarian or too indecisive/permissive. They emphasised the need for assertiveness, leadership in the classroom, with-it-ness and the professional objectivity to deal with behavioural challenges.

A neophyte teacher, Igor, acknowledged the role that teachers can play in creating behavioural problems since they are unable to engage students in learning. I think the blame should be far less on the students as the teacher and how teachers approach the classroom because in my experience, I haven’t met a student yet that doesn’t want to learn and often behavioural issues are the result of that student not being able to learn because of what is presented to them in the classroom. (Igor)

4.5.2.1 Selecting ineffective curriculum and/or pedagogies

Tom, as a leader, gave an example of how teachers who select effective pedagogies can make a huge difference to student motivation, for example by facilitating access to knowledge rather than being a transmitter of knowledge.

One of the striking things that I have seen operating in the classroom is where teachers depart from a broadcast paradigm where the teacher transmits knowledge and the student is a receptacle of knowledge, the teacher directs all the activities and so on. When you move from that type of teaching towards more independence from students and learning from each other … if students are divided into groups and are given a task to complete, they appoint their own leaders, choose their own ways of doing and they have an objective and they have to meet that goal and compare their results with other groups. When I have seen that in operation, the kids are engaged. (Tom)

Frederick explained how teachers who use non-engaging pedagogical approaches are “boring”, which has a negative impact on student behaviour.

I often have students who tell me that a particular class they have to go to is so boring ‘I hate going there, I don’t care about the subject, it is so boring we just
do this, or we do that all the time.’ There are repetitive programs without any zest. (Frederick)

4.5.2.2 Not realising the importance of positive interactions

Olga explained how a teacher has to be very careful with language, “particularly once the student is wound up, you need to very careful about what you say and how you say it, in case it makes things worse”.

Tom, as an experienced leader, described how teachers can push students in a corner and exacerbate behavioural problems.

Because as you know as a vice principal when you are dealing with the end results of that when a student has been swearing at a teacher, the teacher pushed the student into a corner and the teachers may not even be aware that they were doing that. Teachers believe that they had the best intentions, and will justify their actions and will continue with that afterwards. (Tom)

Tom further explained how, even before a teacher plans how the teaching will be done, it is imperative to establish the right teaching-learning relationships:

A dialogue between the teacher and the students … shows … students that the teacher is more than just imparting knowledge, but is actually caring about the kids. I think that when kids perceive that a teacher has lost interest in them, they lose interest in anything that is going on in the class. And those teachers who are fed up with kids are the ones who are facing the problems. (Tom)

Olga reiterated the fundamental need to know the students: “To narrow it down, I think knowing the students, or knowing something about the student, knowing their culture, understanding their culture is necessary.”

Nancy, another leader, echoed this point:

I’ve also had many years where I’ve held various leadership positions and my observation is that it’s often the children who were sent to me whose teachers have not put in the effort to develop a relationship with those children and therefore it comes to me and I then developed a relationship with them. (Nancy)

Nancy shared what she considered to be a classic example:

I was … deputy principal for part time, and then I was in a classroom for the other part of the week. The teacher with whom I shared the class had a
dreadful approach, I believe, to her behaviour management, and didn’t put in the effort to develop a rapport with some of our high maintenance students, and particularly boys. (Nancy)

4.5.2.3 Not understanding the causes of student behaviours

Igor insisted on understanding the causes of inappropriate student behaviours and assisting those students rather than judging them.

I feel that the real behaviour management … comes from that deeper level of understanding why a student is exhibiting a particular behaviour and putting in the necessary supports to help them overcome, and not judging the student. (Igor)

Tom gave another example which illustrated the need for teachers to know their students and to understand the causes of their behaviours. Although this scenario concerns a senior school student, the situation is relevant to a middle school context.

**Scenario: an unusual behaviour**

You have to know your students. I was just thinking, in the late 70s, at Y school, there was a student in Year 11, X was his name. He used to sit at the front of the class and he would not put pen to paper, he would not engage in discussions, he just sat there. When it came to a test he topped the class. He knew everything that was going on, he did not need to write things down. When he was in Year 12, the new teacher who was from the old school could not come to terms with that behaviour, could not accept it, they [the school] ended up throwing him out … The teacher had to understand that this student did not have to do like everybody … So that point of understanding is crucial, it is not only dealing with relationships and caring, it is also understanding the reasons behind odd behaviours. (Tom)

Gail, like most of the participants in this research, understood that inappropriate student behaviours could depend on a combination of factors:

It can depend on individual students. It can depend on the day. It can depend on the weather. It can depend on what has being going on at home. In the case here it can depend on what has happened in the boarding house the night before, or over the weekend. (Gail)
4.5.2.4 Using ineffective teaching styles

When asked about their teaching styles, participants generally indicated that they had moved away from authoritarian styles towards more balanced democratic teaching styles.

It is like being a leader in the workplace, you have to give an idea of where you are going, but you don’t tell people how they are going to do individual things. This applies in the classroom and if you go to the level of micro-managing too much, it may work but the students are losing something, they are losing the ability to develop their own independent learning and their ability to learn from each other. (Tom)

Many participants viewed authoritarian styles as counterproductive, as indicated in this comment from Larry: “I’ve found that overbearing external discipline just raises the issue. It creates a negative reaction in many students.”

However, the teachers interviewed were alert to the dangers of non-directive teaching styles. Nancy for example, referred to the risks associated with being too permissive and of being unwilling to take action when problems occurred, based on the belief that everything would be alright. However, she accepted that ignoring misbehaviour was necessary at times but, “if you ignore something, which can’t be ignored, that is passing the message to the rest of the class it’s okay, and it’s inviting a problem”.

Frederick viewed himself “not at either end of those extremes [authoritarian /permissive teaching styles]. I view myself as being very close to the middle, perhaps slightly towards the permissive side. For me the decisive element in behaviour management is the relationship, the rapport you have with students”

Denise summarised her leadership approach in a powerful way. She is assertive in the classroom: “When I walk to the class, I am not looking like a coward dog, I am walking with authority and I am smiling at them [the students].”
She further stated that, having been a relief teacher for most of her career, her style varied according to different contexts and groups of students, but she always saw herself as a leader in the classroom, with high expectations, and the willingness to use authoritarian techniques as a last port of call with very challenging students.

I could not put myself really in any of those three [referring to categories from authoritarian to too permissive]. It really depends on the group of children, the age group, how motivated they are. I am always a leader, I would say. I do not tolerate poor behaviour but I am not very much an authoritarian unless you have to be. In some classes you have to be. I try not to be, it is probably my last port of call as I find it usually closes down children when you act like that and I try very hard to find where we are. (Denise)

4.5.2.5 Teacher lack of ‘with-it-ness’ and emotional objectivity

It was pointed out by interviewees that a teacher’s lack of with-it-ness and emotional objectivity in the classroom could also negatively influence student behaviours. For instance, Barbara explained how she learnt to make a stand: “While I am talking to a group, every two seconds I am checking what the others are doing. I want students to know that I am actually looking.” She further explained that teachers must not view violation of classrooms rules, negative reactions to disciplinary interventions and challenges as personal attacks. They need to treat classroom problems in an objective, clinical way: especially given that the class is watching. In the following scenario, Barbara explained how she reacted in a non-emotional way after a student had been swearing at her.

Scenario: A swearing incident

You are explaining to students what to do but some kids refuse to do what you want. You remind them and a student swears at you. This shocks the whole class. So I am standing there, hoping that this student is not going to hurt anyone including myself. He opens the door and slams it. I then realise not to take the matter personally, because he was actually fed up with me telling him to work. I just realise that the class had just witnessed something amazing so I decided to refocus the class: ‘It is time to work again!’ I calm my voice down and I realise that he could have been even more aggressive …

It took me a moment to check myself as well, by not showing a reaction
On the other hand, Amelia explained how she felt extremely stressed at times:

It happens when a situation is extremely challenging for the teacher. I am not talking about small issues, it can be very stressful and when you are dealing with a couple or more students who have been extremely rude or disruptive, I think that sense of survival, of stress creates a situation with a tunnel vision which prevents you from keeping an eye on the whole classroom. I am saying it is not helping when you are experiencing such levels of stress. (Amelia)

Both Olga and Robert reiterated the need to deal with behavioural challenges more objectively.

But, I think, keeping calm, is important because once a teacher starts shouting, it just escalates the whole thing. (Olga)

I never saw any violence, direct violence, but I have seen equipment being smashed up, I have seen other students become violent kicking doors, but we were fully aware that those students had anger management issues and I approached this in a clinical way. (Robert)

In summary, experienced teachers and leaders emphasised the need for teachers to adjust their teaching styles to the different ecologies of the classroom. They were in favour of choosing a balanced approach, such as a reflexive leadership style, and of always being willing to evaluate their own approaches and behaviours. Olga’s comments summarised this approach.

If I have a day where I just think, ‘Oh that class was terrible!’ And I take the responsibility myself. I never blame the students because they’re here to learn, and they may be bringing all sorts of problems with them. And it might have just have been that I was absorbed with something else. I was too absorbed with the content. Or I wasn’t watching. Or I wasn’t very focused. And this is what I think. It’s like with your own children, when you bring up children, they’re a mirror of yourself. And I think this is the thing. Teaching is learning all the time. And this is why teachers who have been around students for a long time, they can tell you what might work and what might not work, simply because they’ve had that mirror held up to them for so long. Because it really is like that, because you reflect back what you’re doing, and what you’re not doing. (Olga)
4.5.3 **Mindset 3: Teachers feel fully responsible**

At the other extreme, teachers may blame themselves when they are unsuccessful in addressing some of the behavioural problems in the classroom, and may even feel powerless. Self-blame can be very stressful, as Robert and Henry revealed, leading to teachers feeling badly in need of a holiday at the end of term.

Robert commented on the reactions of an experienced teacher who had to teach in middle school after a school restructuring, and did not cope with a Year 9 class after teaching for many years successfully in the senior school. “She blamed herself, went on sick leave then resigned. She did not ask for support—she thought it was indicating a sign of weakness.”

Henry viewed his mental state as subject to some duress when dealing with Indigenous classes and “trying to get on top of the situation … and so, well put it this way I feel like I’m due for a break at the end of the term.”

As various informants acknowledged, teachers need to develop professional objectivity. They need to realise that they may have unrealistic expectations and must treat problems in a clinical fashion. The experiences of stress and burnout are common in service professions such as police work or nursing. Denise genuinely admitted that she tries not to hate herself after experiencing failure in dealing with CBM and suggested positive actions:

> Normally I have been able to get success out of those failures. It does not always come straight away, sometimes it may take the whole year in that class; sometimes it may be one or two moments with a child or it may not work at all and you may not have a break through with that child but if you are always looking for this breakthrough and try to do better, you are improving anyway. I try not to hate myself for the failures (Denise).

Experienced teachers are aware of this issue:
I don’t think I ever took their behaviour personally. I don’t think I ever accepted responsibility for their behaviour ... teachers sometimes underestimate what they have achieved. (Katherine)

Robert, as identified in the following text box, analysed how he had built up resilience over many years of a successful career.

**Building up resilience when faced with behavioural challenges**

I go back to my Year 10 science class: I had to drag in the Year 10 coordinator because I had three or four students that had no interest in school or anything else and they should have been put into a VET course and I think they were trying to do that, but I did not have much support and I did have one or two nightmare episodes. But it did not stress me as a person because of my age, and the second thing, I actually can reflect back upon everything I have done in education and I know that I am successful overall. I can allow that to fly over my head, also I empathise with other people and what I mean by that is because of my age and my experience, my different employments, I can put myself in the situation: What does a policeman do when he goes of shift when he had to deal with a car accident where two people have been killed—a child might have been killed and he has to address that and pass on the information to someone else or ... advise, ‘I am sorry but your son is not coming home tonight, he is dead!’ I empathise in those sorts of ways, but in my case, this is minor, I can step back. (Robert)

4.5.4 **Action suggested by participants**

A number of experienced teachers and leaders understood how their mindset could limit the creation of positive learning environments. They emphasised that teachers must experience a sense of powerlessness by believing either that there is nothing they can do to address problems, or that they are fully responsible for those problems; ongoing reflection on the success or otherwise of what teachers say or do in the classroom is paramount. There is an essential need for balance in establishing how much control teachers can exert on students who behave inappropriately.

Assertive leadership is necessary, as both too authoritarian or too permissive styles are ineffective for most students. Establishing positive relationships and being aware of student needs were viewed by informants as the keys to success. Leaders, in
particular, valued objectivity—the capacity to be clinical about the challenges of the profession and to view those challenges as part of the job.

4.6 Barrier 5: Insufficient planning

A number of participants in this study emphasised the importance of knowing how to manage classes and planning for CM, either to prevent problems from developing in the classroom or to intervene promptly and effectively when problems occur. They described a number of strategies as being successful.

I would like to see that behaviour management is part of a teacher’s daily life, and I would like to see a situation where teachers talk about management strategies they use successfully and those that did not work as well. (Elba)

Katherine explained that she was able to handle serious problems “with a lot of thoughts, planning and strategising”.

Denise, an experienced teacher, described the importance of planning for CM, particularly in her challenging role as a relief teacher: “It [CM] is the utmost importance to me. It starts as soon as you walk up into a class. Particularly for me as a relief teacher when I walk into a class, I don’t know the children, who the trouble makers are.” She explained that being assertive when entering the class and setting high expectations straight away are crucial:

I am walking with authority and I am smiling … I am saying, ‘Good morning and let us have two lines in an orderly fashion, my name is Mrs X … and you have to walk quietly and sit down.’ As soon as we open that door they start off having an understanding of what I am expecting of them. If you don’t have that there are problems. (Denise)

Denise said her prevention techniques were effective: “I think I do very well at preventing problems” as she has to “nip a lot of things in the bud before they became problems.” However, she is not so confident about her intervention skills: “Sometimes I do not do as well with dealing with inappropriate behaviours. If I think
of it later, I could have chosen a different strategy.” But most of the time she was confident that she was “in the ball park … there have been only a few occasions where things have spiralled out of control”.

4.6.1 Planning for prevention

Not all possible preventive measures were discussed, but a number were viewed as essential by participants to minimise potential behavioural problems.

4.6.1.1 The importance of building teacher-student relationships

Further to Section 4.5.2, which discussed the importance of teacher-student relationships, participants overwhelmingly emphasised the important preventive role of establishing positive caring relationships with students in the establishment phase of a class. Getting to know students at an individual level is a priority before even starting to teach content. Tom, as a leader, explained that it is essential as a first step to connect with students at an individual level:

What is comes down to, certainly in [the] high school environment, when a teacher is given a class it is really important that there is time spent getting to know those students and getting across to those students that you are interested in their wellbeing and if teachers don’t put that time in, they are reducing the opportunities for successful learning, and they are increasing the risk of disruption through behavioural problems. (Tom)

Tom commented further that he would have no hesitation in suggesting to new graduates that they leave the profession if he found they were not interested in working with young people.

And to take that to the extreme, you have been in this position as much as I have, when you have new people coming to the profession and you have them on probation, when you come to the realisation that these people are not interested in the kids, they do not care about them, you really need to tell them that they should be looking for another job. (Tom)
Showing students that you are a teacher but also a real person, who can relate to students’ interests and use humour, were seen as key ways to go about relationship building.

I think relationship is so important, to be able to have a laugh, to let down the guard a little bit and be a real person, to come to school in your silly footy jumper because that’s something that is another connection that you can have with the students. ‘Oh, Miss, you barrack for the wrong team.’ ‘Ah, ha, ha, they’re the best team,’ just to have a laugh, nothing to do with what I’m teaching them, but so much to do with deepening that relationship. (Nancy)

Relief teachers may experience difficulties with CM, as they do not know the students they are teaching, and as yet have not been able to establish productive working relationships.

This is why kids take the foot off the pedal when they have a relief teacher and they think it is holiday time and they play up. Often relief teachers will have difficulties … because that part which is important which is strengthening the rapport and building up the relationships, that part has not happened. (Tom)

### 4.6.1.2 Student input for a classroom behaviour management plan

Expectations, boundaries, rules, consequences and routines need to be clear to all students. Several of the informants regarded this is essential, particularly during the establishment phase of the class, and these expectations and routines need to be implemented and maintained. They have an educational as well as a management role in assisting students with the development of self-discipline and managing behaviours within the class.

### 4.6.1.3 Expectations, boundaries, rules, consequences

Mary explained that she was very assertive, trying “to be very tough and strong when the kids first arrive in my classroom because I want them to know the rules but I also like them to see the fun side”. She used positive reinforcement and believed in the value of a reward system, not by giving them material things like a lot of parents do, but by allowing students to have fun.
So for every good reaction or good attitude at the end of every week they will get a reward. So, games, bingo, something fun to do at the end of that lesson. A lot of people don’t believe in rewards but I do. I think a lot of—in this society today when kids are at home by themselves most of the time because the two parents are working these days, is they just do get rewards from the parents. So if you do your homework, you do good at school, you will get this. In my case I don’t give them material things. I give them fun and I think that’s important. (Mary)

Participants commonly indicated that they use positive reinforcement in their classes to reward students.

### 4.6.1.4 Plan to be discussed with students

Nancy, as a leader, summarised the view of a number of participants by explaining that consequences, like expectations, boundaries and rules, need to be discussed and negotiated with students at the outset with some allowance made for flexibility. She described a typical scenario involving such a discussion with a class.

**Discussing a classroom behaviour plan with a class**

And if you look at that as backward design, if you go into a class and say, okay, the goal today, or our learning intention today is to get to this point. What sort of things are we going to need to do together to get to this point? If someone is fooling around, how are we all going to get to this point? So what do we need to do? That sort of negotiation builds the students into the solution, and they know their peers better than we do. So they can say, ‘Oh, Miss, so and so is having a bit of a bad day today, so’—or that person might say, ‘I’m having a bit of a bad day today. I had a shocking sleep last night. I have a cracking headache.’ Okay, tell me how can I help you get to that point? ‘I would just like to read my book.’ Okay, that’s fine. I want you to read, you can brief somebody else later on, and then that will enable us all to get to this point … I believe it’s incumbent upon us to ensure that the boundaries are consistent. They’re a little bit rubbery because some children can’t work within very tight boundaries, whereas others need those, so you can still be flexible. (Nancy)

### 4.6.2 Planning for intervention: Behavioural consequences

Most participants regarded the use of behavioural consequences as essential. While implementing behavioural consequences when problems occur with one or a few students was categorised as ‘intervention,’ it was also seen to play an important
preventive role in ensuring that problems did not escalate and start to involve other students. This point is discussed further in Chapter 5.

Suzan viewed her approach as a bit old fashioned, implying that it is not what other teachers do, probably referring to the tendency to adopt more indecisive teaching styles.

I am a bit old fashioned and believe in consequences. If the consequences are far too … lenient and the rest of the students clearly see that. I am not saying using them as an example, but if a student is asked to report to a leader it goes around to the rest of the students’ group that there was a consequence. I think [setting the boundaries and having the consequences with one student] … other students quickly understand that was the behaviour and this is the consequence. (Suzan)

Nancy too, considered consequences important:

I do think as the responsible adult in the room, sometimes you need to do something drastic to break the cycle. For 25 minutes he had been interrupting, he’d been rude to the other students, he’d been rude to me. It was an inappropriate model to the other students. If I’d continued to let it go, I was saying to the other kids, it’s okay to be rude in this class. (Nancy)

Consequences are also used for intervention as a means of supporting students in changing their behaviour, as explained by Gail. In her view consequences are not a punishment, but she emphasised the need for them to be related to the offence:

In the school … there is no internal suspensions. There are no actual real consequences so a student that may miss classes or behaves really disgustingly in a class will get a 10-minute detention at the end of the day. It’s not comparable to the crime and I’m not advocating that students should be punished—they need to be rehabilitated. (Gail)

Suzan pointed out that a behaviour modification plan should be put in place “to help that child to change the behaviour. That child is all the time with the year coordinator … but it is not always consequence, consequences, there is a need to have a step in the right direction for that students to make the right choices.” Note that Suzan appears to confuse logical consequences with punishment. Similarly, Frederick finds it “a bit difficult to distinguish between consequences and
punishment. I am happy to use the word consequence. I do see it as a form of punishment, but the consequence does not have to be horrific.”

4.6.3 Types of intervention

A number of participants indicated that they tend to discuss inappropriate behaviours privately with students in the classroom, in a non-threatening way, by engaging them as problem solvers.

So I might have a quiet chat at the end of the class, or say when I see the person outside, ‘Gee, you weren’t happy in that lesson, were you? What’s—is there anything I can help with? What’s the trouble? Or do you need some help with it?’ In other words, not just the what of the behaviour, but the why.

(Larry)

In some cases, a cool-off period is necessary for both the student and the teacher, and the positive impact of such actions on the classroom climate is immediate.

And sometimes you do need to have physical distance between people. Today, I sent a young man out of class. Now I would never do that, and I was anxious about where he was going to be, because I needed to supervise him, but he was just being absolutely rude, contributing inappropriate comments … disrupting the class. And … the change within three seconds of him being out of the room, everybody else brought their tone down. You could see the shoulders drop … (Nancy)

Tactfully ignoring minor misbehaviours was advocated as a useful strategy for dealing with minor infractions of classroom discipline, but not in circumstances where the behaviour was dangerous, or where it persistently interrupted teaching and learning activities in class, or where the student was an attention seeker.

Unless there was nothing too dangerous, I tried to overall ignore negative behaviour. Of course if people had been dangerous in a science classroom, if they had been noisy and disrupting everybody else learning, you just cannot ignore it, you have to take action. (Claudia)

So I try to deal with an issue – it depends. Most of the time I try and deal with it individually and quietly, have a quiet word with the student in class, like, ‘That really wasn’t a pleasant way to behave. How about we get on with this?’
and try not to make the student the focus of attention. So—’cos if the student is somehow just looking for notice and notoriety, then I don’t want to feed into that. (Larry)

Some teachers are confused about the difference between punishment and consequences. Frederick, as already mentioned, divulged that for him the distinction between the two was hard to discern: “I find it a bit difficult to distinguish between consequences and punishment. I am happy to use the word consequences. I do see it as a form of punishment, but the consequences do not have to be horrific.”

Barbara explained that when a number of students misbehaved, it is difficult to talk to them individually at recess or lunch time, “so during that time, I will give them the school rules to write. I am trying to deal with the situation myself”.

Using different consequences is a way to deal with matters that do not require immediate action. Having Plan B or X, such as a buddy system in mind, was viewed as very useful by Suzan:

Just that I found that having a buddy system is a brilliant idea, just to know that there is Plan B. And I think Plan B is such a great idea, because at times you have not been able to contact the coordinator and putting students outside—they are going to disrupt other classes … and it make it difficult not having anywhere for the student to go, so with that plan you can remove that child from the situation … it is really a great idea. (Suzan)

Having a toolbox approach of strategies to call upon according to different situations was mentioned by a few participants as a good way to plan for action. It was also mentioned as a way of assisting teachers to develop a sense of self-efficacy.

I do have a number of strategies in my mind, I think that sometimes it depends on the situation, the circumstances, but I go on what I can use and I adjust to that It does give me confidence because I have that list of things I can say or do. If it does not work, then it does not work. I just have to do whatever I can about it. (Barbara)

[You need] to become expert at a toolbox of strategies. If you can become expert at that and you know that you’ll be able to draw on that expertise in any situation, with slight modification, then you don’t have to think about it so much. (Nancy)
Denise further emphasised the need to target one behaviour at a time. A teacher’s success with this will set the tone for the class. As already mentioned, she gave the example of the use of mobile phones in the classroom, which was presented as a key problem by most participants: “Sometimes you have to start with one aspect, it can be zero tolerance on using mobile phones in classrooms”.

These strategies are part of a whole-school approach to CM.

### 4.6.4 Action suggested by participants

Planning the management of a class and/or individual students is crucial, both for preventing behavioural problems from taking place and by taking action with individual students for avoiding the spread of behavioural issues to the class. Intervention, therefore, has a preventive role. It also assists individual students to learn more acceptable behaviours and progress towards self-discipline. High expectations, boundaries, rules and the use of behavioural consequences, not punishment, is the way to go, including the involvement of the students as problem solvers. Specific strategies have been well researched and will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

### 4.7 Barrier 6: Lack of passion—the ethical dimension

For an experienced leader like Tom, being passionate about being a teacher is essential. His statement in the text box below represents many of the participants’ views on the ethical dimension of education. The passion for being a teacher would minimise greatly the impact of the barriers previously described and enable teachers “to go a lot further” … as they will always be looking for solutions to support their students in both their academic and behavioural progress.
The ethical dimension of education

The teachers who look forward to coming to school, who enjoy interactions with young students, and I dealt mainly with adolescents as you know, those teachers who are enthusiastic who are committed, who have empathy with their students, who care about their students, their students’ learning, their students’ welfare—their physical welfare, their emotional welfare, their intellectual welfare on an individual basis, those teachers are going to go a lot further …

There is a Latin phrase that we used many years ago: locus parentis. We used to interpret that as you will manage the student behaviour the same way as the parents would manage it. For me it is the central thing about being a teacher; when the students are in your care, you are adopting the role of an ideal parent, not their parent necessarily, but the role of an ideal parent, so therefore what you have to manifest is almost the ultimate love and care for your students and they have to know that you take that very seriously, that is all business of locus parentis and that you are there as their parent during the time they are in your care.

(Tom)

4.8 The drastic consequences of the barriers

When teachers are unsuccessful in overcoming the impact of the barriers that limit their effectiveness, as discussed in the previous sections, they may just put up with the problems and lower their expectations. Either they ignore the chaos in the classroom, or in order to cope with the issues, they may develop survival strategies that are professionally unacceptable.

Suzan explained that when she took over a new class in Term 4 while the teacher was on leave, she found many students’ behaviours quite challenging. After consulting with other teachers of that class, she found they had similar issues, “Oh yes, I have the same troubles with those ones”. She was surprised that no action had been taken: “We were in Term 4, so teachers just had put up with having troubles.” She further noticed that the following year, class groupings had been changed, leading her to conclude: “That could be a major improvement.”
Robert presented the case of Student X. Parents and teachers, including the principal, had given up on him; it appeared that no action had taken place to motivate that student, and as a result X was barely literate after several years in the same school.

Robert and Tom, both experienced leaders, stated that they met a number of teachers who, in order to survive in the classroom, allowed disruptive students to sit at the back of the room.

Teachers could either take the five kids that have no interest and spending all the time trying to get them interested and ignore the other 20, or what I see is the way you survive; what they do is that they ignore the five that are a pain … who are not prepared to cooperate, and allow them to exist in the back corner of the classroom and they focus on the 15 to 18 students who are interested and capable. You grow them and you wait for those five at the back to suddenly kick in, take an interest or fall off the planet because they are not interested in taking action [for themselves]. I am not going to waste my time because I have the others who want to learn … Students are left to vegetate at the back. (Robert)

Robert further commented that allowing mobile phones in the classroom kept those bad kids at the back occupied. To my question, ‘Would you say that the policy of a school like Y allowing mobile phones is perhaps allowing this survival approach to take place?’ the answer was unequivocal:

Yes, [and students] use the iPads as game machines, we allow them … to play games and we focus on the students who want to learn … that is very much a

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**A student barely literate at the end of middle school**

Well I had one student. Let us go back to that Year 10 class. Let us do a case study. I call him student X. Student X had learning difficulties, he was not prepared to participate. Sometimes he would arrive late or something else, his marks would end up to be a D or an E, I would say. Now I can remember at parent-teacher night speaking to the principal, and that student arrived with his father, and I just said the same thing: ‘Your son is taking no interest, but when he is prepared to take action I work with him,’” and the principal said to me: ‘He has been doing that for the last three, four years, he is taking no action, the father knows it and that is how it is.’ And I never forgot that and this is why the student is barely literate. (Robert)
survival tactic and that is actually quite common. I have seen that in other classes. I have seen other classes totally like that, absolutely based on that where there are five or six students that are not interested to do the work so the teacher focuses on the other kids, the competent group. (Robert)

Denise commented that in some schools, kids playing video games are “clogging the internet!”

Reflections from an experienced leader

I have had teachers telling me that this is their response because they do not have the time, the energy or anything else to deal with those students. For me it is a huge cop-out. As a professional teacher it is your responsibility to find a way to engage those students and to get them involved somehow, it may not be done immediately, it may take a lot of extra work. I can remember myself going to visit families at home and discussing with them. I remember when I was at X School, I remember a girl in a low achiever Year 10 class, she was called [Erica] and there were all boys and [Erica]; she was always dressed in black and she claimed because her name started with an E, in her school report she would like to have an E for all her subjects. She was not interested, she refused to do anything. I went to visit her at home, parents showed me her room, the walls were painted black, it was just incredible but I refused to give her an E, I still tried to engage her and spoiled her report card with a D! (Tom)

4.9 Conclusion

Participants in this study considered that student behaviours in the classroom can be very challenging. Experienced teachers and leaders were generally successful in creating positive classroom environments, but they described the experiences of some of their colleagues as very stressful. The neophyte teachers confided that they experienced difficulties when trying to manage some classes or individuals, but they felt that the situation was under control as they belonged to a school where a support system was in place.

To reiterate the key findings, the following are the main barriers limiting teachers’ success in creating positive classroom learning environments: A lack of support for teachers; a culture of silence in schools about behavioural problems; an
abundance of available information while, at the same time, many teachers do not
know how to handle unacceptable behaviour in the classroom; teachers’ mindsets,
such as believing there is nothing that they can do since inappropriate behaviours are
linked to factors entirely beyond their control or not seeing themselves as a possible
cause of some of those behaviours or, at the other extreme, regarding themselves as
fully responsible; not viewing the CM as an essential teaching skill and therefore
failing to plan for it; and a lack of passion for the profession. As a result of those
barriers some teachers switch into survival mode and may give up on their
professional responsibilities by ignoring the ‘bad kids’ at the back playing on their
mobile phones or their iPads.

In the next chapter, these findings are explored more fully in a discussion that is
linked to the available research literature and my own experiences, so that their
contribution to relevant theory can be made explicit.
Chapter 5  Discussion

Chapter 4 presented the findings from teacher interviews. The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on those findings and to link them to the relevant literature, which was reviewed in Chapter 2. I found six barriers that limited the teachers’ ability to manage their classrooms. Participants made suggestions regarding possible actions to reduce the negative impact of those barriers. Barriers can be viewed as systemic, or both external and/or within teacher control. Conceptualising teachers’ difficulties at this level might assist with some theoretical speculations. These, in turn, might serve to demonstrate what contribution this research could potentially make to the research literature, as discussed in Section 5.3.

Prior to discussing the barriers, however, it is useful to present some teacher experiences of behavioural problems in the classroom. The experiences described by the sample of teachers overall reflect the experiences outlined in the research literature, with the exception of the few graduate teachers. In the sample, a number of experienced teachers, and all of the leaders, indicated that creating a positive learning environment is achievable. They stated that they had experienced problems with some classes at some stage of their career and continued facing difficulties with a few challenging students. An issue therefore, for both the teachers sampled in this research and those investigated in the research literature more generally, is how individual students can be supported so that they can progress towards self-discipline, while at the same time preventing unacceptable behaviours from spreading to other students and affecting the general tone of a classroom or a school. Rogers (2011c) makes it clear that a large number of students are prepared to cooperate with the teacher, particularly at the beginning of the year during the
establishment phase of the class, and the teacher must not lose that cooperation by allowing the uncooperative behaviours of a few to offset it.

A number of the early career teachers interviewed for this research project shared perceptions that were different from those usually mentioned in the literature. For example, they did not experience the high levels of stress usually reported in surveys of neophyte teachers (see §1.3.3). This difference is linked to the fact that the graduate teachers in my study were part of a school where a mentoring support system was in place. However, the following anecdote presents the views of a pre-service teacher after a very bad day during a practical placement in a school. This impromptu conversation illustrates the challenges of the profession.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My informal conversation with a pre-service teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friday afternoon, 4.00pm, I am at the university public car park, far away from the education building where I have a meeting. I am late. When I finally arrive I notice a young girl just parking in a private car park. Strange, I think, she doesn’t seem to have a permit. So I ask her:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do we need a permit to park here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- No, I don’t think so, she replies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thank her and start walking away. Unexpectedly she calls me back:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Did you have a good day? she asks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is odd! I feel she wants to talk, so despite being late I ask:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What about you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Awful, she replies. I am training as a teacher. Today at my school the students were so poorly behaved! I feel like giving up teaching all together …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- I understand, I reply; in fact I am working for you at present …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So I chatted with her, trying to give her hope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The recent BaSS survey (Sullivan et al., 2012) on the nature and extent of unproductive student behaviour in SA schools showed that over one third of all teachers, regardless of their years of experience, did not effectively manage students
with challenging behaviours. Teachers with less than five years of teaching experience reported the highest average incidence, while teachers with 15–19 years of experience had the lowest average, and principals and deputy heads of sub schools recorded the lowest mean for managing low level disruptive behaviours (BaSS Report 1, Sullivan et al., 2012, pp. 50–54). Those statistics also match the survey results from TALIS and PISA as described in Section 1.1.1.

The following text box presents reflections on my experience as a teacher and leader.

### Reflections on my teaching experience

As an experienced teacher and leader in Australian schools I never encountered long-term major problems in creating positive learning environments for my students. With some classes, the establishment phase might just have taken longer than for other classes. When dealing with an individual student’s challenging needs, I had at times limited success, but with care, persistence, high expectations, carefully monitored individual behaviour plans, and the many other skills described in this thesis, I managed always to gain their respect and supported them in making some progress towards self-discipline.

When I first started teaching (both in Paris and Australia) the system was very authoritarian—we were still caning students in Australian schools … and as such classroom problems were controlled—this did not mean that this autocratic system engaged all students in learning, but there was order in the classroom and therefore no disruption to the teaching and learning of the group.

While assistant principal, I had to deal with fights in the yard a number of times, and once had to face a threat of violence when in my office a 15-year-old female student grabbed a pair of sharp scissors from my desk and threatened to stab herself if I did not meet her demands. I managed to dismiss the threat and defuse the situation.

In more recent years as a part-time relief teacher after I retired, at times I experienced major problems when first meeting a challenging class. Those problems quickly disappeared when I had the same class for several lessons and/or my reputation within the school spread amongst the student body.

A typical scenario at school, after lunch, outside the classroom door—

Huge noise: Half the students have earphones and are listening to music on their iPad; loud arguments between two girls. ‘You are a f… bitch,’ yells one girl to another. A few boys are play-fighting. The Year 9 maths class is waiting for me! The regular teacher is away.
After cuing them for silence: ‘Earphone off, eyes and ears this way. Thanks …’ and reminding them, ‘You must have your text book with you,’ I calmly invite them to enter. There is still some pushing, swearing … but things have improved.

Good, I think, it will take me only 10 minutes to have them all working … I greet them individually and finally they are all in. I now walk in to see a group of students at the back of the classroom, socialising; some have feet up, others are texting on their mobile phone, many have hats on, no books are out of bags … In the meantime, there is a shuffle outside—two students late to class are drumming at the door …

Ok! It could take me more than 10 minutes! Never mind! I have Plan B ready …

It is the contention of this study that a positive classroom learning environment can be created, despite the behavioural challenges presented by some students, when the system supports teachers in carrying out their professional responsibilities and when teachers understand what the barriers are, and are proactive in minimising the impact of those barriers.

5.1 The barriers

Of the six barriers that seem to inhibit positive learning environments, identified by analysis of the interview data, the first one can be regarded as external or systemic: lack of support. A second group of barriers are both at the system level and the individual level: a culture of silence, and the lack of familiarity with the impressive research literature on effective management of behavioural problems; teachers’ mindsets and inappropriate teaching style, inadequate planning and strategising, and lack of commitment or an absence of passion for the profession.

5.1.1 Barrier 1: Lack of support

Overwhelmingly throughout the interviews, teachers indicated that lack of support was a major disempowering factor when faced with challenging behavioural
issues in the classroom. When they know they have support, teachers develop resilience and a stronger sense of self-efficacy. For example, the neophyte teachers in the interviews worked in a school where a mentoring system was in place. They acknowledged that, because of the support provided, they had faith in the system and as a result, things never got out of hand. This aligns with the findings of other researchers. To cite one example:

Teachers have the right to ask for and receive backup help from principals, from parents and other school personnel. Teachers who have such support will not be intimidated when students behave defiantly or hostilely. (Charles, 1989, p. 108)

Participants in my research considered that support was essential in enabling them to understand student needs and thus deal more effectively with behavioural consequences. Buttressed by that support, they were empowered to help challenging students in their progress towards self-discipline, which in turn contributed to preventing the spread of problems within the class. The nature of that support could vary, including colleagues, parents and the community shoring them up; a sense of being propped up by school leaders; support provided by teacher assistants in the classroom; and supportive counselling and welfare services. The latter point was mentioned mainly by the leaders in the sample.

These findings align with the research literature (see §2.1.3.5). In his work on discipline and CBM in schools, B. Rogers (2006, 2011c) focuses on the type, extent and importance of support in schools, and how positive support can assist teachers deal better with what he views as a stressful profession (see §2.1.3.4).
5.1.1.1 Types of support needed

Participants referred to a range of available supports, as mentioned above. These constitute a kind of foundation for teachers, whether formalised as whole-school approaches to CM, or arising informally in professional interactions with colleagues.

Support from parents

Participants viewed support from parents as essential but they regretted that it was not always forthcoming. Instead, parents often blamed teachers rather than working with them to assist their children’s educational and behavioural progress. The research literature (see §2.1.2.2; Lewis, 2009; B. Rogers, 2011) corroborates those findings. A number of parents, unwilling to acknowledge the inappropriate behaviour of their children at school, become over-protective, and seek to remove any hurdles or challenges for their children. This social phenomenon was described (see pp. 41-42), where ‘helicopter’ or ‘lawnmower parents’ were discussed, along with the children who are like little kings or queens in the household. Dealing with such parents requires sophisticated negotiation skills on the part of teachers or leaders. Even so, it is very difficult to change such a parent’s mindset.

My experience in dealing with unsupportive parents

As a deputy principal, I had to deal with a number of angry parents and needed to support teachers in my school. Conflict resolution skills were definitely an essential part of my leadership skills. I always found the presence of the teacher during such meetings crucial for a positive outcome, as I needed first-hand primary information from the teacher about what had happened in the classroom. Without the teacher being present, I would not have been in a position to challenge the student’s version of events, hence changing parents’ understanding. Absence of the teacher would have negatively impacted the outcome of the meeting and the student’s progress towards more responsible behaviour.
When teachers cannot rely on parents’ support, they need to take that into consideration when planning CBM, as they may need to rely even more on assistance from school leaders and colleagues.

**Support from leaders**

Backing from school leaders was also perceived as very important by participants; first, since whole-school approaches foster a positive school learning environment hence affecting the classroom environment; and second, because it ensures behavioural consequences beyond the classroom. Most interviewees use consequences when they need to address the inappropriate behaviour of individual students in their classroom and at times they need follow up action taken by the school when their own actions have been unsuccessful. However, teachers indicated they were often blamed for the problem behaviour of individual students when seeking help, and that leaders often took the side of students. These findings are consistent with the research literature (see §2.1.3.5).

Whole-school approaches, expressed through clear discipline policies need to be in place. These will set out aims and expectations, suggestions for preventing problems from occurring, recommendations for different types of support according to individual student needs, and behavioural consequences with pathways for referral systems when intervention is needed. Particular attention needs to be made to support teachers in assisting students with behavioural disorders. This is, for example, how the WA Department of Education explains the role of the principal in developing those goals:

The principal is responsible for the creation and maintenance of a safe and positive learning environment and the development of processes for the effective management of student behaviour. The principal must use approaches which are preventative in nature, promote pro-social behaviour, student
wellbeing and the development of self-discipline, focus on early intervention and outlines procedures for the management of ongoing serious misbehaviours. (Government of WA Department of Education, 2008)

As described in the *Australian professional standards for principals* (AITSL, 2011), the role of the principal is crucial in “creating and sustaining the conditions under which quality teaching and learning thrive,” and leadership being “distributed with teams working together to accomplish the vision and aims of the school”.

In Ben Jensen’s five-step model for turning around schools (Jensen, 2013, Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014) the most crucial factor is strong leadership that raises expectations, and this is critical to successfully turning around dysfunctional schools. Leaders are to drive cultural changes by starting to develop a clear strategy that defines new learning and teaching practices in their school. Indeed, whole-school policies do need to be developed in active collaboration with staff in ways that take into consideration the most recent evidenced-based research and adjust it to the local context. This is the way those policies need to be enacted—not by keeping them on the shelf as I have noticed in many schools. The research on the implementation of policies in an organisation emphasises the need for staff to be actively involved since “a new strategy will fall short of its potential if it fails to address the underlying mindsets and capabilities of the people who will execute it” (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p.1). B. Rogers (2011b) recommends the adoption of “preferred practices” within a whole-school approach to behaviour leadership that relates to “a school wide consciousness” on how to lead and manage student behaviour. These practices enhance the “sense of shared professional consistency across the school” (p. 4).

The more dysfunctional a school is, the more the need for direction to be provided, for example, from a new principal. The research on leadership shows that different starting points warrant different strategies (see §2.2.3.5). Jensen and
Sonnemann (2014) differentiate between the strategies necessary for general school improvement and the ones necessary to turn around dysfunctional schools where a complete overhaul of the school practices is needed. Making sure that policies are being implemented at all levels of the system is also essential.

5.1.1.2 Leader perceptions of difficulties in supporting staff

Experienced leaders also presented their perceptions of support, and explained how difficult it is for a leader to find out what is really happening in the classroom. Students are skilled at minimising their responsibilities when being interviewed by a person in authority, in an office—the leaders can see a completely different facet of the student’s personality, and there is no student audience to trigger attention or power-seeker behaviours. I have experienced situations where students even bully some of their classmates to back up their version of events, for of course they know that the leader may interview other students from the class. Also, without full information, leaders can be misled, and this may ultimately lead to blaming the teacher.

While leaders should know their staff’s capabilities well, that is not always the case with new staff or neophyte teachers. Even if a leader visits the classroom, students modify their usual behaviours as they know the leader is in a position of power. I became acquainted with this phenomenon when, after many years as assistant principal, I continued working in schools after retirement as a part-time relief teacher, still using the same kind of professional skills, but without any hierarchical authority in the eyes of the students. As a result, the behaviour of some students was very different, as exemplified in the following scenario.
The mathematics teacher was away and I was teaching a Year 9 class for the first time. Students did not know me and I did not know them. As usual I introduced myself and explained that I was from Paris etc., had kept a strong French accent despite many years in Australia, wanting to prevent any possible jokes about my accent! And I started the lesson. In the middle of a mathematical explanation, a student interrupted the flow of my speech by yelling: ‘Mrs. Marias, do you eat frog legs?’ Of course the class burst into laughter …

I was surprised, as after so many years as an educator in a leadership position, no student would have dared challenge me in that way. I could not ignore this kind of behaviour. Fortunately, from my lengthy experience, I did not feel embarrassed and used humour (with a touch of sarcasm—which I normally never use with students) to reverse the situation, stating: ‘Yes, I do, every breakfast, and I particularly love cane toads!’ Of course the class laughed again, but no longer at me … and I added, ‘By the way, if you are interested in this topic, young man (I did not know his name) come and see me at lunch time.’ They all understood my underlying message … Then, addressing the class, I continued: ‘Sorry class for this interruption, let us go back quickly to maths.’

Everybody worked well after this intermission, and the student didn’t come to see me at lunch time for further information, after all. When, many weeks later, I met him again in other classes, he was on his best behaviour—we had not forgotten the frog leg episode, I am sure, but we had maintained mutual respect.

As Tom, a high school principal explains (see § 4.2.3), leaders also find it difficult at times to back up a staff member, especially when they perceive that the actions of that teacher are partly responsible for an escalation of problems in the classroom.

My experience with those management issues tells me that, first, the leader must have the full version of the reality of the situation, not only from a student perspective as previously explained, but also from a detailed report, preferably in writing, from the teacher. Stating in general terms that a student was disruptive in class does not provide enough information for leaders to be able to understand and judge a situation. In difficult cases, it is better for all parties to be present at a
meeting, in particular if the parents are involved. The following scenario from my bank of experiences illustrates the need for very detailed documentation to be provided to leaders in order for them to judge situations and make informed decisions, the goal always being to assist students in progressing towards self-discipline.

**Extensive detailed information provided to a leader in a behavioural incident report**

I had taken a relief class for the last lesson of the day—Year 9 science. Following my usual approach, I settled the group outside the room and all students entered. When I came in, I noticed at the back of the class a female student and a group of boys, very noisy, giggling loudly. The girl was the centre of attention. She was holding a sort of balloon and it was obviously party-time! No books on desks as yet in that area. Perhaps someone’s birthday, I thought, but let us stop this nonsense tactfully … I, however, intuitively guessed that there was more to it.

I approached the scene to discover that the balloon creating so much laughter was actually an inflated condom! No doubt in my mind—the innocent few minutes of birthday enthusiasm were to be over … I asked the girl to give me the object; she complied telling me, ‘But it is a balloon, Miss.’ I had to defuse the matter promptly, without too much sarcasm nor too much prudery, as the class was watching. I stated that it was unacceptable behaviour, and refused to get engaged in an argument with the girl about whether or not it was a balloon. I asked the group to get science books out of their bags immediately and I stated, ‘By the way X, we need to have a chat after the lesson.’ The audience—the class—got the message: No, they were not going to have that type of entertainment this lesson, and everybody settled to work.

The after-class chat was brief. The student, whom I knew from other classes as a source of disruption, admitted her guilt and apologised. I told her it was fine to apologise but that I had to report the matter to the regular teacher and to the deputy principal, considering the nature of the incident. I knew of course it was not a one-off prank but that the girl was an ongoing problem in the school.

As I was about to write the report, I realised that I had lost the evidence. I thought I had placed it in my folder. I knew immediately that I had to find it and attach it to my report. So I went back to the class, where I found the evidence on the floor, including … the packaging.

It was obvious to me that a simple report would have been insufficient to prove the case, unless perhaps I was present at a meeting with the deputy principal, the student and the parents. All parties would have had vested interests for minimising the issue—the student, claiming that the teacher was confused, the parents embarrassed by their daughter’s behaviour, and the deputy having to compromise in a delicate situation. So quickly, I, the teacher, would have been blamed for
misunderstanding the situation: a good story for our Year 9 girl to tell her fellow students!

The following day my report with both the condom and the packaging stapled to it arrived on the deputy’s desk. No possible confusion! A meeting took place with the parents and a strong warning was delivered regarding possible suspension/expulsion in case of further such incidents. By preparing that detailed report, I felt I had met my professional responsibilities … towards that student by making her accountable for her actions, and I did not have to waste yet another hour by being present at the meeting after all!

If it is ascertained that the teacher is partly responsible for the problem, the leader needs to firmly but respectfully guide them in changing their mindset, and possibly organise support systems to further counsel the teacher. These situations are quite common in schools, and require sound leadership skills to address them fairly and effectively.

In the case of overprotective parents, leaders need to be particularly skilled in supporting a teacher’s actions. I have had extensive experience explaining to parents the need for firm, logical consequences for inappropriate behaviours, so that the student can learn to change the behaviour—done in a spirit of understanding and care for student ethical progress.

5.1.1.3 Support from colleagues

Moral support from colleagues is invaluable, as acknowledged by the participants. It is usually informal, around a cup of tea in the faculty room, where the teacher can unload some frustrations after a bad day. More formal support can be a problem at times—both offering support and asking for support. From my observation, teachers tend not to offer support, because it is like accusing colleagues of incompetence, and they do not ask for support for the same reason. A whole-school ecology of support and collegiality can assist, however, with structures being
in place. There are times when a collegial approach to support is absolutely needed, for example in re-establishing a challenging class. The line manager, an expert teacher, a master teacher or a mentor, can play that role (B. Rogers, 2002, 2006a, 2006b). The value of collegial school culture promoted by leaders has been extensively researched in the literature (see §2.2.3.7).

When whole-school support is lacking, from my experience, seeking colleagues’ support becomes even more essential. I have been in a school where relief teachers initiated a buddy system within their group: They could send disruptive students for a cool-off period, giving them the opportunity to follow up and follow through at a later stage. This self-help system, although not initiated by leaders, was endorsed by the management team. It was very effective and provided relief teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy that helped them to carry out their challenging responsibilities as substitute teachers more effectively. The system was not abused and referrals were in fact limited. This can be interpreted in two ways: either teachers were reluctant to use it, or, more in line with my thinking, the availability of Plan B increased teachers’ sense of efficacy, allowing them to go through more effective action steps in the classroom.

Although not mentioned by participants, teachers should also view themselves as change agents to bring about improvements in their school. As one of the authorities in this field reminds us, “every person is a change agent. Change is too important to leave to the experts. Personal mindset and mastery are the ultimate protection” (Fullan, 1993, p. 22). With the help of close colleagues, teachers should endeavour to bring about changes by tactfully addressing some of their school’s shortcomings.
5.1.1.4 Teacher awareness of support systems available

When planning both for prevention and intervention, teachers need to be clear about the type of support readily available within the entire approach to discipline in their school. In my role as a mentor, knowledge about such support is the first step I recommend that teachers consider before they plan any possible line of action. Particularly with intervention, there is a need for Plan B or Plan X to be available at the school level to ensure the success of their Plan A. If whole-school support is not available, teachers need to plan accordingly, for example, by having a buddy class where students can be sent to a colleague’s class for reflection on their behaviour. When immediate action is required, I recommend to neophyte teachers that they obtain the mobile phone numbers of key school personnel who will be able to provide support.

5.1.1.5 Action: the drivers

In summary, adequate support for teachers is clearly essential if they are to carry out their professional duties effectively. A positive school environment with well-managed school discipline supports the creation of a positive classroom environment. In situations where parent support is not forthcoming, it is even more important for the system to assist the teacher: A school culture of collegiality promoted by the principal is the best way to provide those support systems within a whole-school approach to CM and discipline, where it is crucial for leaders to back up teachers with the implementation of behavioural consequences beyond the classroom. Leaders need to be very skilled in judging behavioural incidents reported by teachers, since being in a position of authority distorts the way students behave and present their own version of events in their presence.
Teachers should have no hesitation in using support earlier rather than later to prevent an escalation of problems within the classroom and to assist individual students with behavioural changes, while not neglecting their professional responsibility to address problems themselves in the first instance. Before taking their first class, teachers need to establish what type of supports are available within their school in order to plan their CM strategies accordingly. In extreme cases where no support seems to be provided, teachers still need to find their own ways to deal with challenging situations, and challenging students, but must never feel completely disempowered, giving up on expectations. They should build alliances with their colleagues and become change agents to improve their school system.

5.1.2 Barrier 2: A culture of silence

Although not presented as the main barrier, a number of participants commented on the silence surrounding behavioural problems in schools. From my analysis, as developed in this section, it is the contention of this thesis that a culture of silence about behavioural problems is the key barrier to the creation of a positive classroom learning environment.

I found few instances of this issue in the education research literature; silence in organisations mainly refers to the business sector, but not to schools. Searches using key words such as ‘organisational silence’, ‘schools’, ‘teacher behaviours’, located only two articles, both in Turkey: by Yahya Altinkurt (2014), The relationship between school climate and teachers’ organisational silence behaviours, and Cemal Akuzum (2014), The effect of perceived organisational justice on teachers’ silence. Two main types of silence have been analysed in the business sector. First, the silence about unethical, illegal practices and about the competence or performance of
co-workers, and second, the silence about what is working or not working in an organisation, despite the evidence that speaking openly is necessary to promote better effectiveness. This last aspect of silence is what is mainly happening in schools with behavioural issues—teacher silence and leader silence.

5.1.2.1 Teacher silence

Often teachers choose to be silent for fear of being viewed incompetent or being blamed (see §4.3.1). Consequently, they withhold inputs that could be valuable to their colleagues and therefore to the progress of their students. I have also had first-hand experience of those feelings, as per the following scenario.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My experience of being blamed</th>
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<tr>
<td>After many years as deputy principal, I retired and did some part-time relief work. I once took a very challenging class and was concerned with the general behaviour of the group and the behaviour of a number of individual students. When I attempted to discuss the matter with the regular teacher, the answer was blunt: ‘You can’t manage a class!’ The teacher had no idea of my background and her immediate reaction was probably self-protective: she viewed my comments as a criticism of her students, and hence of her own performance, and she was very defensive. I was momentarily shocked by her reaction; but fortunately I had developed resilience and a strong sense of self-efficacy, and I managed to turn around the discussion to be more positive. I engaged the teacher in a conversation on possible effective strategies. Her initial comment would have been devastating to the self-esteem of a teacher with limited experience, and of course not helpful for either the teacher, or the students.</td>
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From my experience, teachers are willing to talk informally about curriculum, less about pedagogies—although I tend to initiate discussions about teaching strategies in the staff room—but they are reluctant to discuss CM and behavioural issues at all. In formal settings curriculum and pedagogies are topics of academic staff meetings but rarely are the issues of CM and CBM on the agenda.
Through informal discussions, teachers indicated that they can also be silent, because they feel that their opinion is not valued, therefore speaking up will not lead to any changes and is viewed as a waste of time.

According to Hattie (2012), a survey conducted in New Zealand about what teachers talk about at morning tea, lunch and PD sessions, found that they talk about kids, curriculum, football, and assessment in high schools. They tend to view their work as private, between closed doors.

One minute a month, they talk about teaching. We almost have a psyche in our schools that says ‘Michael you teach different from me and I respect that’. Now what I am saying is don’t you dare touch me. And that is one of our problems in our system is that the whole teaching act, not only is private—we don’t even talk about it. (Hattie, 2012, p. 5)

Hattie (2009) refers to Little (2007), who explains how teaching takes place in isolation from other teachers, between closed doors, so teachers tend not to share their professional knowledge and rely more on stories from others’ ‘war stories’ during their professional conversations. Describing ‘a four walls mentality’, Hattie comments that “teachers are not yet at the point where they really can talk openly with their colleagues about the challenges that they are experiencing in the classroom” (Hattie, 2009, p. 9). When talking about students, (Hattie, 2012) also emphasises the need to move from the gossip about student behaviours to a professional discussion on student needs and possible techniques to support students in their learning.

As mentioned by the leaders interviewed, teachers who need the most help are the ones least looking for it. This is supported by the research: “significantly, the teachers most likely to be using counter-productive discipline techniques are those less likely to ask for help” (Lewis 1999, p. 10). Teachers often feel unsupported by their colleagues and the issue of behavioural problems is seen as threatening to their
status and their career. Informal discussion with colleagues indicated that the fear of being blamed by leaders is also associated with the fear of negative consequences for their own career when they admit having difficulties with some classes or individual students. Teachers under contract simply fear losing their job.

B. Rogers’ (2011c) research shows that even when other teachers want to assist, a perceived risk in asking for or giving support remains. Even in schools where PD is organised by the leadership of the school, participation from teachers may be limited, as highlighted in the following scenario.

**Scenario: Organising professional development on classroom behaviour management**

At the time I was deputy principal student welfare. I had noticed that year that a number of teachers new to my school were having difficulties with CM. In Term 2, I decided to organise a full PD day through a well-known expert on the topic. To my surprise, only a few teachers registered to attend and those teachers were in my opinion very effective with CM; the five or six teachers who needed some guidance did not volunteer to attend. I had to push the issue by requesting the attendance of at least one member from each faculty who had to report back to colleagues at a formal faculty meeting entirely focused on that topic, and of course faculty meetings’ minutes were to be made available.

Teachers need to speak up, share issues with colleagues and collaboratively search for solutions, or at least work towards progress. As described by B. Rogers (2011c):

> When we are feeling jaded, even defeated at times in the first few weeks of the year by a group … the least helpful thing to do is to try to go alone in the mistaken belief that others will think of us as failure, or worse incompetent if we ask for help by sharing our concerns or anxieties. (p. 271)

### 5.1.2.2 Leaders’ silence

Limited data was presented by participants on this issue. Interviewees pointed out that the acknowledgement of problems should come from the top, but the causes
of leaders’ silence were not made explicit. The literature research and my own reflections provide some insights.

In my experience, leaders can also be perpetrators of silence for a number of reasons, some being similar to those listed by teachers. This issue has been analysed in the business sector and viewed as a fairly common problem. Some aspects of that analysis are applicable to schools.

Individuals in organisations face a choice about whether to speak up or remain silent about concerns that they have at work. Individuals make this choice within the context of an organisational hierarchy in which bosses who do not wish to hear about problems can punish people for speaking up and within the context of a social system that has implicit norms about the desirability of speaking up. Not surprisingly it appears that the decision to remain silent about developing issues or problems is a fairly common one. (Milliken & Morrison, 2003, p. 1563)

There seems to be a reluctance to mention publicly that there are problems in a school as it could be perceived by the larger community as an inability of the leader(s) to run the school, and may affect the reputation of that school and its teachers. Also as mentioned by Hattie, schools do not like debates about their impact “because it is easier not to know” (Hattie, 2009, p. 153).

Of course, these issues need to be treated sensitively, but ignoring them is part of the problem. Milliken and Morrison (2003) also point out that, although in an organisation, leaders need to know what is working or not working so they can act and ensure that their organisation is effective, “for very human reasons, they may not embrace such information when offered … and this human tendency makes the communication of such information risky” (p. 1564). Rao & Sutton (2014) mention that silence is a sign of “fear of responsibility, especially the sense that it is safer to do nothing” (p. 4).
Sadly, I have even witnessed, in some schools where transparency is not apparent, a reluctance to take minutes of meetings or to make them openly available. Issues are not communicated to general staff on the grounds of confidentiality and even worse, unethical behaviours may take place, such as the removal or deletion of compromising files.

5.1.2.3 School silence

Although in schools some policies and strategic plans deal with behavioural issues, from my observation this is often not done in a clear, straightforward manner, and is not presented as a priority area. There is a deliberate avoidance of some terms, mainly due to a shift in society towards ‘political correctness’ in language. In the last 20 years, some words such as ‘discipline’, ‘behaviour’ or ‘classroom management’ have disappeared from the vocabulary in some educational circles, particularly in schools where the reputation of the school in the community is directly at stake. This phenomenon does not appear in the field of research (the stakes are different) where numerous recent publication titles from experts in the field still use such terms, for example: Teacher leadership and behaviour management (B. Rogers, 2002);

Classroom management -Creating positive learning environments (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007). Classroom discipline and management (Edwards & Watts, 2008);

Classroom management. Creating positive learning environments (Lyons, Ford, & Slee, 2014); Understanding pupil behaviour. Classroom management techniques for teachers (Lewis, 2009); Hang in there ’til Easter. Managing classroom behaviour by building resilient teachers (Slee, 2012). However, five of these six books complement the term ‘behaviour management’ in the title with a socially perceived, more positive variation such as ‘creating positive learning environments’. I must say
that I am using the same approach in this study. The following scenario illustrates these points.

**A scenario: We do not use the term discipline in our school!**

Several years ago, after many years of experience as a teacher and leader in a number of different schools around Australia, a colleague of mine was new to our school as a teacher. At the first general staff meeting of the year, she asked: ‘What type of discipline policies are operational in the school?’

‘Oh! Mrs X, we do not use that term in our school,’ was the abrupt answer by the deputy principal leading the meeting. No further comments were added and the matter was dismissed.

This teacher felt very disappointed by such a reply, and no doubt embarrassed.

School strategic plans and leadership positions in schools tend to refer to student welfare and wellbeing. The terms ‘discipline’ and ‘behaviour management’ are avoided. I have experienced the change in terminology throughout my career. Thirty years ago, as head of a LOTE faculty, I was in charge of professional support, curriculum and student welfare and discipline. Later, my position was titled Assistant Principal Student Welfare. Finally, my role was to be in charge of student wellbeing.

Without doubt, promoting student wellbeing is an essential goal in schools. The focus presented through the choice of the word ‘wellbeing’ is positive: it highlights the need to prevent behavioural problems taking place in the first instance and the care we show to our students. However, the necessary aspect of intervention or action when problems occur is also crucial, but it is not embedded in that choice of term.

The recent research literature, as presented in Chapter 2 emphasises both prevention and intervention as ways to deal effectively with behaviour management
(see §2.1.2, & §2.1.5). Although I understand the reasons behind this shift and the use of positive language, it is the contention of this thesis that it can have a blurring effect that prevents awareness and understanding of problems, and particularly prevents action. As a result, in terms of specific leadership responsibilities in schools, no-one seems any longer to be in charge of coordinating action to address discipline issues. Ironically, when a word is no longer part of the dictionary, it seems that the reality of it no longer exists. If there was a problem, well the problem is gone: there is no longer a word for it! This could explain why scholars researching school improvement and not specialised in CBM are not aware of the dimension of the behavioural problems encountered in schools, and why in official documents CM is not perceived as a priority area. I would like to see a more balanced and appropriate usage of terms in school policy documents, one that reflects the reality of life in schools and the behavioural problems encountered. For example, the policies and strategic plans could be renamed Student wellbeing and self-discipline, or a leader in that area named Vice Principal, Student Wellbeing and Behaviour Management.

This silence is also reflected system wide in Australian Government educational policies. It is disappointing to see the limited emphasis placed on CM and CBM amongst the numerous other skills needed for effective teaching. For example, in the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2014), Standard 4, ‘Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments’, is one of seven standards presented. In the area of CM, under Standard 4 (pp. 10–12), key principles are outlined for teachers at different levels of expertise. For proficient teachers, in the category ‘Support student participation’ (4.1), the standard descriptor is, “establish and implement inclusive and positive interactions to engage and support all students
in classroom activities”. In the section ‘Manage classroom activities’ (4.2), the descriptor reads: “Establish and maintain orderly and workable routines to create an environment where student time is spent on learning tasks”. However, at least the standard criteria ‘Managing challenging behaviours’ (4.3) is mentioned. The descriptor reads: “Manage challenging behaviour by establishing and negotiating clear expectations with students and address discipline issues promptly, fairly and respectfully”. So it is to be noted that some progress is being made in acknowledging that behavioural issues need to be addressed, and the word ‘discipline’ is used. In the previous *Professional standards for teachers* (NT Government, Teacher Registration Board of the NT, 2006), specific reference to behaviour was made only once out of the 36 criteria presented for effective teaching skills! This document had been the framework used in the NT until January 2013, when the Teacher Registration Board of the NT adopted the *Australian Professional Standards*.

In his five-step model for turning around schools, Jensen (2013) does not mention the critical need to speak up about behavioural problems, although in the section on positive school culture he emphasises the crucial importance of creating a positive school culture environment.

Since CM is not viewed as a priority area for action, the question is therefore: at the system level, are we targeting what really matters in our quest for school improvement?

**5.1.2.4 Consequences of a culture of silence**

Silence about behavioural problems in a school is a major barrier that prevents action and progress. It leads to yet another barrier: the lack of planning for CM and CBM at the school level and the classroom level, as explored in Section 5.2.2.
Awareness of problems, admitting problems, and assessing the degree of severity of those problems is as important as finding a solution. Einstein is quoted as having said: “If I had one hour to save the world, I would spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem and only five minutes finding the solution….Recognising a problem is the first step to solving it”. Silence leads to fear of responsibility and inaction.

“Silence is among the most reliable signs that people fear personal responsibility and that the learning and self-criticism needed for excellence is not happening (Rao & Sutton, 2014”, p. 4).

A culture of silence is also linked to the culture of isolation, characteristic of the teaching profession. There is not only silence about problems, sadly, there is also silence about successes. In an interview with Cassandra Davies, John Hattie states:

“Throughout Australia we have teachers who are performing at extraordinary levels which essentially means they are creating maximum learning impact with their students. All too often, such high impact teaching is almost invisible to the colleagues of those teachers (Davies, 2014. p.1).

Silence can also prevent written school policies from actually being enacted. Teachers no longer reminded of policies can become very confused about what to do when problems occur, and feel isolated whereas collaboration, a team approach, is essential if solutions to potentially very challenging problems are to be found (Bruniges, 2012; Hattie, 2012; Jensen, 2013a; Masters, 2014). The following reflections about a scenario from the medical field illustrates the point.

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**In the emergency ward of a large hospital**

A few weeks ago, I found myself as a patient for six hours in the emergency ward. I could observe, how the staff were dealing with challenging problems. The teamwork between nurses, doctors, leaders was just amazing. Structures for immediate effective communication were in place. I could not but think how great it would be in our schools,
if teachers were dealing with behavioural challenges in the same way.
Of course the context of emergency and life threatening outcomes of ineffective strategies is different, but still…

5.1.2.5 Action: The drivers

Although interview participants considered the lack of support as a key disempowering factor, as it directly affects them most, silence about behavioural problems exists in schools and was presented as yet another barrier. (see section 5.1.2.3). My experience supports strongly this perception. There has been extensive research about silence in organisations in the business sector, but not so in schools. I view the culture of silence in schools about behavioural problems as the key finding from this research. This needs to be addressed urgently.

Speaking up at all levels of the school hierarchy is necessary to develop the awareness of problems, so that action can take place, leading to progress. A culture of transparency, openness, collegiality and trust needs to be developed by leaders to facilitate breaking the culture of silence. Teachers have to feel safe to speak up and share professional expertise. The language used in school should reflect this approach. Avoiding terms such as ‘discipline’ or ‘classroom management’ and only referring to student ‘wellbeing’ in official documents, contributes greatly to the maintenance of the culture of silence.

At the governmental level, CM and CBM should be considered as a priority areas and emphasised in official documents, for example in the AITSL Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, since the research has well documented that CM is an essential skill that needs to be in a teacher’s repertoire of practice (Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; B. Rogers, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2012).
Individual teachers have a key role to play in that process. Just as they can play a role in contributing to the development of collegial support in schools, teachers can become change agents in breaking up the culture of silence. Mahatma Gandhi is known to have said: “Be the change, you wish to see in the world”. Breaking the silence is one of my goals through this research study.

**5.1.3 Barrier 3: Too much documentation**

Participants indicated that they knew there is no recipe to address behavioural problems in the classroom. However, they were not fully aware of the extensive documentation available to them due to the lack of time to search for materials, and they found it difficult to choose from the range of different models or strategies available to them. Pre-service learning provided limited practical skills, so they relied on ongoing learning through experience, using trial and error, and reflecting, and they believed that having mentors and learning from colleagues through classroom observations, collaborative planning in a school culture of collegiality and learning was how to go about improving their skills. They also indicated that they relied on their own bank of strategies, developed over the years, when they needed to take action.

The research literature supports those findings and further expands on the issues raised. The documentation on professional learning has been extensively researched (see §2.2)

Although the characteristics of an effective classroom are clear and even somewhat obvious what might not be as clear or obvious is how to become an effective classroom manager. (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 10)

Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) ask whether good classroom managers are born or made. They state that, fortunately, the research evidence is that they are
made (research by Borg & Ascione, 1982) and the good news is that it can happen relatively quickly.

### 5.1.3.1 Extensive documentation: Is there too much?

Educators face a conundrum—if there is insufficient documentation, it cannot cover the multiplicity of strategies teachers may need to use in the classroom, depending on unique contexts or individual student needs; but too much documentation can lead to confusion and prevent effective action. According to Michel Fullan, the most critical problems our school face is “not resistance to innovation, but the fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from an uncritical and uncoordinated acceptance of too many different innovations” (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1971, p. 17, in Hattie, 2009, p. 2).

**Why so much documentation?**

The extensive documentation is necessary due to the complexities of classroom behaviour. Different strategies are needed, depending on the different needs of all members of the classroom, both students and the teacher, and the unique ecology of each classroom (see §2.1.2.2). B. Rogers (2006) explains how within the ‘unusual’ context of the classroom, students and teachers bring their own agenda, feelings and needs, and “both teacher and students are ‘teaching’ each other through their daily relational behaviours” (p. 7). Different researchers therefore focus on the many different perspectives they emphasise (see §2.1.2). A blueprint for action would be inappropriate. There is no recipe. What works for some students does not work for others. This is why the research suggests that teachers need to have a broad range of strategies they can call upon when relevant (Masters, 2014). A tool-box approach to techniques is recommended.
Effective managers do not treat all students the same, particularly in situations involving behavioural problems. Whereas some students need encouragement, other students need a gentle reprimand, and still others might require a not-so-gentle reprimand. (Brophy, 1996, in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 48)

Using a bell curve analogy, Hattie (2014) states that the limitation of most policies is that they are created to solve problems in the bottom of the distribution and then they are applied to the top half of the distribution; it is little wonder they don’t work. He gives the example of leadership in struggling schools, where there is a need for quite direct leadership, and contrasts it with successful schools, where indirect leadership works best. One approach does not fit all situations. The school improvement research repeatedly mentions the need to organise action through frameworks for intervention according to different starting points (see §2.2.3.5; Masters, 2012; Mourshed, Chijioke, & Barber, 2010).

Making sense of all this documentation, which often presents contradictory options, is not easy at the school or individual teacher level. Although necessary, the amount of documentation may overload teachers who do not have extensive time to read, analyse, synthesise or compare the information available to them. Teachers may become confused, and as expressed through informal conversations, they would perhaps rather prefer to have a set of bullet-point prescriptions, as they often end up still not knowing what to do.

**Awareness of the documentation? Difficulty in choosing?**

A multiplicity of models, based on various psychological and educational theories, has been described in the literature review (see §2.1.1 & §2.1.2). Teachers are often uncertain of what models to adopt and what strategies to use. The literature
seems to be a controversial field, with competing models and ideologies. Meanwhile, state and territory education departments have developed their own guidelines.

Participants indicated that they were aware of some of the strategies presented in the research literature, but had limited time to keep up with the continuous flow of information on CM. They may make decisions by rule of thumb, on what comes easily to mind rather than what is evidence based. Bruniges (2012) cites Ken Rowe, who claims that “despite the existing and emerging research evidence for educational effectiveness … there is a disturbing level of ignorance among teachers at all levels of educational provision related to what works and why” (p. 11). Johnson and Sullivan (2014) view behaviour at school as “a problematic and contested field of inquiry in which many interest groups have a stake” (p. 2). They state that there are deep ideological differences about children’s status in society, the roles of families and schools in teaching values, and the numerous ways that are effective and legitimate when disciplining children and adolescents:

The intrusion of overtly ideological protagonists into the field of student behaviour has presented schools with a major conundrum—how to undertake the messy and complex work needed to make sense of, mediate, and enact behaviour policies from the plethora of options open to them. (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012, cited in Johnston & Sullivan, 2014, p. 2)

Johnson and Sullivan (2014) also present an analysis of the complex policy context linked to behaviour in schools. They state that first, schools in Australia are subject to different directives according to the different sectors they belong to, whether Government, Catholic and Independent. Second, Australian schools are required to implement policies promulgated by various states and territories and by national legislation. SA, for example, complies with SA’s Equal Opportunity Act 1984, the Commonwealth’s Disability Discrimination Act 1992; the 2005 National Safe Schools Framework and SA’s Child Protection Act 1993. The dissemination of
evidence-based information also presents difficulties. It has been studied as a major problem in the field of medicine (see §2.3.5), but not really in education.

5.1.3.2 The issue of evidence-based strategies

This issue has been discussed in the analytical review of the literature in Chapter 2. Models of CM and CBM even though they may not have been formally evaluated represent a whole body of guidance to classroom teachers.

Evidence-based teaching is defined as “the explicit and judicious use of the best evidence in making decisions about the education of individual students” (Gardner, 2009, quoted in Bruniges, 2012, p. 10), which is a little like the process of prescribing treatment in the medical field. Bruniges (2012) advances the premise that using data and evidence-based strategies are the hall marks of professional decision making. Her argument is about the whole issue of teaching and student learning, not just behaviour. When dealing with behaviour, data should reveal a student’s current pattern of behaviour. It can be compared to the medical process of diagnosis.

MCEETYA (2004) reviewed the literature relating to Australian programs which exhibit best practice in addressing student behaviour issues and identified the best characteristics of these programs. They conceded though that identifying best practice was difficult. This did not indicate a scarcity of programs but rather a lack of formally evaluated and well documented programs (see §2.1.3.2). According to Lewis (2009), “part of the teacher concern is uncertainty about what approaches are the most justifiable” (p. 110). Through the internet, teachers are regularly advised of new innovations and strategies claiming to achieve miracles in education, in the same way we are bombarded with weight-loss weight programs, or cures for health-related issues. One must be cautious of uncritically using off-the-shelf, how-to
recipes. Hattie (2009), after investigating “the nature of evidence that makes a difference to learning”, commented that “a major area in educational research should be why we continue to believe many claims about ‘what works best’ when there is no evidence for these claims” (Yates, 2008, cited in Hattie, p. 254). One has to be very clear on what does not work, as well as what does.

In schools, the executive team needs to take a leadership role in guiding staff even though they are still themselves sometimes uncertain about strategies. They will also learn while doing. As Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) once stated, “be more confident than the situation warrants. [Leaders] need to develop leadership in others. Be specific in the few things that matter and keep repeating them (in Fullan, 2008, p.14)”

5.1.3.3 Main areas of debate on classroom behaviour management

The issue of teaching styles was identified as a major area of controversy in the analysis of the research literature (see §2.1.2 & 2.1.4): How to choose between the three main different teaching styles linked to different psychological and educational theories and models, on a continuum from authoritarian to non-directive? Particularly, to what extent should behaviourist approaches be used when dealing with behavioural issues, as they are known to be only effective in the short term?

The current research recommends a balanced approach, a democratic leadership style, and the use of logical consequences rather than punishment (see §2.1.4). However, a number of teachers remain confused about the difference between punishment and consequences.
5.1.3.4 Recent swing back to behaviourist approaches

The PBL and PBIS whole-school approaches to behaviour management are an example of the recent trend back towards behaviourist approaches (see §2.1.1.1 &2.1.3.1). Johnson and Sullivan (2014) criticise that trend, arguing that it is linked to the pressure from governments to address behavioural problems in schools. “This pressure is mounting, in many countries as there is a sense of moral panic about students’ behaviour in schools. (Ball, Maguire & Brawn, 2012, quoted in Johnson & Sullivan, 2014, p. 1). The title of Johnson and Sullivan’s (2014) paper encapsulates the concepts presented: Against the tide: Enacting respectful student behavior policies in ‘get tough’ times. A return to behaviourist approaches is favoured as the strategies are easier to implement and the research shows that they work in the short term for the majority of students. In my opinion the swing back towards behaviourist theories must be treated with caution. Although they encompass a consistent whole-school approach for discipline in schools, which is needed, the research shows that these behaviourist approaches treat the symptoms rather than the underlying causes of inappropriate behaviours, and are also ineffective with very challenging behaviours (see §2.1.3).

5.1.3.5 So how to choose?

Participants indicated that they tend to have a bank of possible strategies that they can use according to different situations (see §4.4.2). Similarly, Ball et al. (2009) suggest:

Schools adopt a ‘smorgasbord approach’ to policy development where they draw selectively on a range of directives, policies, legal requirements, procedures and local practices - a profusion of ideas … these are then rendered into and enacted as particular programs and initiatives at the school level. (in Johnson & Sullivan, 2014, p. 5)
Schools need to develop their own guidelines and preferred practices collaboratively: ones that teachers can choose and place in their toolbox. There is a need to customise plans according to contexts, in accordance with an ‘if then …’ dynamic (B. Rogers, 2011c). The knowledge that Plan B exists, or even Plan X, reassures teachers and helps them develop self-efficacy.

The role of the teacher’s personality also warrants consideration when making these choices. This was mentioned by interviewees (see §4.5.1). Edwards and Watts (2008) emphasise the need for teachers to develop a discipline model linked to their own personality, after evaluating educational philosophies and child development theories. Lyons, Ford and Slee (2014) also suggest an eclectic approach, the Lyford model, where a number of frameworks, theories and principles inform decisions on CM (see §2.1.4.1). These choices, though, must be in tune with a school’s policies.

My own experience leads me to favour an eclectic approach when planning for CM, one with the flexibility to adapt, depending on the unique ecology of a class or a student. My preferred approach is the balanced democratic leadership style of Dreikurs (1968) and B. Rogers (2011). So, for teachers, learning what to do is a complex endeavour. Just as complex a task is implementing that knowledge.

5.1.3.6 Professional learning

Improving classroom environments involves improving teacher capability for quality decision making. Hattie (2009) emphasises the impact that professional learning has on teacher effectiveness, and hence student learning. He looks for an impact that is greater than average. “I have no time for the concept of what works because the answer is everything … If the professional learning does not have an impact greater than the average, we are doing the wrong thing” (Hattie, 2014, pp. 2–
3). What is important is for teachers and leaders to understand their impact with the teacher being the evaluator.

The overwhelming evidence shows that investing in teacher effectiveness has the greatest impact on student learning. Students with highly effective teachers can, in a single year, learn twice as much as students with poor teachers...

Reform that focuses on improving teacher effectiveness can lift our students to among the highest performing in the world. (Jensen, 2010)

While a student’s academic progress may take time to be assessed, the good news is that the impact of CM strategies used by a teacher are immediately visible—either there is a harmonious environment, or there is chaos in the classroom, albeit with many shades of grey in between. This is a very important, positive fact.

5.1.3.7 Different sources of learning and their relative effectiveness

Throughout the interviews participants commented on the various forms of learning, such as pre-service learning, learning from PD programs, learning from experience in the classroom and from colleagues. According to the participants, their pre-service learning was limited, as it focused too much on theory rather than practice. Also, they claimed they had limited opportunities for PD on CM and learned more through trial and error and their reflections on their own daily experiences. Overwhelmingly, they viewed learning from colleagues in a collegial school culture of learning as the most effective technique.

**My experience of professional learning**

As a teacher or leader, I relied heavily on reading, but always found that I had limited time to do so. I was often overwhelmed by the number of different perspectives and propositions, with some being completely contradictory, all claiming that they were evidence-based. I also relied on formal regular PD. I particularly liked PD workshops where many practical strategies were presented; I avoided those workshops of ‘discovery learning’ where participants are supposed to construct knowledge together. I viewed those sessions as a waste of time since most of us seemed to be just sharing our ignorance. However, it was mainly through ongoing reflexivity that I was able to choose my approaches, based largely on my own experimentation in finding out
what worked or did not work. As a classroom teacher, many years ago, I did not experience whole-school collaborative learning cultures, but more recently I fully endorse and have promoted this approach.

As a researcher on the topic, I became even more acquainted at the amount of documentation available to teachers on the issue of CM, and I also found it at times difficult to synthesise and/or discriminate between all the theories suggested. To go back to the puzzle analogy presented in the introduction of this thesis, putting the pieces together was a long-term endeavour, which was the aim of this four-year research project. Sadly, many full time teachers do not have the luxury of that kind of time.

**Pre-service learning**

“Given the importance of management and discipline, one expects that the management and discipline domains lead to increased attention in teacher preparation programs and in research. However, this is not the case” (Savage & Savage, 2010, pp. 3–4). B. Rogers (2011c) also forcefully states “we ill-serve trainee teachers if we do not teach behaviour management and discipline skills. While thorough preparation of curriculum is essential (B. Rogers, 2011, p. xvii). This area of pre-service learning in universities is presently an area of debate in the field of education and is being extensively researched. Melbourne University has been in the forefront of this research (see §2.2.3.2). According to very recent article in the *Weekend Australian* (October 3–4, 2015) Ben Jensen and Danielle Toon emphasise that:

Reform in teacher education is particularly necessary to raise school standards in economically deprived areas since underprepared young teachers … will not be hired by the best school in the leafy suburbs. They will likely end up in schools struggling to serve disadvantaged communities, teaching students who have the most complex needs. So our failures in teacher education reform entrench disadvantage. (p. 23)

**Professional development programs**

The limitations of short-term PD programs are also well documented in the research literature. Lewis (2009, p. 7) emphasises they often have a minimal effect
on learning, for they are affected by what he calls the post-guru syndrome, which usually affects teachers between two weeks and six months after a workshop has been organised with an expert on CM. Teachers implement the new strategies, but soon return to their old ways. According to Hattie (2014), “we love to have programs of professional learning that I suggest to you, about things that don’t change us” (p. 5).

**Learning from experience, through reflexivity: Ongoing learning**

Experiential learning refers to teachers knowing the latest research and translating it into their own practice through reflection and application in a step-by-step experience in the classroom. There is a need to look both inward and outward. Mulford (1994) suggests stepping back and looking again at any situation from a balcony. Educators are often immersed in the confusion, but need to stop. They need to reflect in order to understand and be in a better position to choose and act.

Increasing skill levels through ongoing learning has been promoted in the last 30 years. Success depends on brain power, ‘know how—skills’, what knowledge to have access to, how to access it and practise it. This has been referred as the age of learning—life-long learning.

**School culture of learning: Collegiality and mentoring**

As the research on school improvement has repeatedly mentioned, “master plans from the top do not work. No-one has the answer. Education is a collegial collaborative enterprise and no one person, group, organisation or government has the answer” (Mulford, 1994, p. 38). If no-one has the answer, does it mean that no plans or guidelines are possible? Someone, somehow has to start and involve others in the process. That someone can be in a leadership position, but teachers are leaders
too, and can be change agents—those teachers who have a sense of urgency and are passionate about teaching and have faith in the future. In that case the principal must be supportive.

A culture of trust is needed to facilitate collaborative planning, discussion and reflection. In Shanghai, neophyte teachers sit in their mentor classes three to four times a week, and have their own classes observed (Jensen et al., 2012b). There is a need for a school culture that fosters learning (see §2.2.3.7). Teachers need to be supported to expand their understanding of practices through a collaborative approach to professional learning. Not only from written documentation, or PD—teachers need “ready access to evidence in action, examples of other teachers doing things differently” (Bruniges, 2012, p. 12). Teachers need to observe others’ classes and engage in ongoing discussions with their colleagues; team work is essential to solve problems. This will take time and need to be scheduled, but as Hattie (2012) recommends, this time should be favoured over other initiatives such as reducing class sizes.

Yes, this takes time to work together, but may be less debate about other structural concerns (lower class size, different tracking methods, PD sessions not related to the debates) could make way for financing more teacher planning and review time together. (Hattie, 2012, p. 151)

The role of leaders is crucial in developing a culture of ongoing learning. ‘Learning leaders’ have more impact than transformational ones. “A key role of learning leaders is to construct the learning of the adults in the schools” (Hattie, 2012, p. 154). Hattie relates the concept of learning leaders to both student and adult learning. Additionally:

Leaders devote appropriate time and energy to support major change … they also role model the right behaviours to support change, commonly by demonstrating the difficult act of making personal behaviour changes. (Pustowsky, R., Scott, J., Tesvic, J., 2014, p. 2)
A whole-school approach to collegial learning requires time, and it is the responsibility of leaders to structure the time for this approach to take place. It is a matter of redirecting resources into what matters most. It is necessary too, for teachers to work together in planning and evaluating their impact on student learning through classroom observations and mentoring systems. Collaborative work is a must, but it needs to be structured within the timetable (Hattie, in an interview with Cassandra Davis, 2014, p. 2). Working smarter rather than harder is required.

According to Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) some successful ‘turnaround schools’, such as Holroyd High School in Western Sydney, have been able to reorganise their timetable by reducing the amount of face-to-face teaching and increasing class sizes (see §2.2.3.8).

5.1.3.8 Implementation: Problems with change and skills transfer

Developing skills is important, but “training that only emphasises new behaviour rarely translates into profoundly different performance… Despite the stated change goals, people on the ground tend to behave as they did before” (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p.1). Training must be associated with self-discovery and self-development where individuals are looking inward examining their own ways of operating: “Many people are not aware that the choices they make are extensions of the reality that operates in their heart and minds” (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 2). Also telling others what to do is still filtered by the person’s mindset receiving the guidance, and can be misunderstood. As already mentioned, confusion takes place at the level of words, such as consequence/punishment; discipline; behaviour management; time-out. I experienced this phenomenon many years ago, as described in the following scenario.
My experience in transferring skills

At the time, I was mentoring a teacher who had major problems with one classroom. During the observation of the class, a student came about 10 minutes late, entered the room and went to sit down without apologising to the teacher. The teacher ignored that behaviour.

In the debriefing session, I discussed that point with the teacher and suggested that the lateness could not be ignored and should have been addressed by, for example, welcoming the student and asking him to take a seat, and telling him that we will chat briefly after the lesson. I also provided reasons behind that approach. The teacher appeared to agree with me.

A few days later, yet again a student arrived late. This time the teacher interrupted the flow of the lesson and was very abrasive while asking the student why he was late. I pre-empted an angry reaction from the student and minimised the possible escalation of a conflict by diffusing the situation as tactfully as I could to save embarrassment to the teacher.

During the debriefing session I discussed yet again the matter of student lateness to class, but this time I emphasised the kind of body language and tone of voice that need to be adopted when interacting with students. I still think that he did not get it. Eventually that teacher had to leave the school … I was an inexperienced mentor at the time!

Erica Ariel Fox, in her book Winning from within (2013), calls this phenomenon “closing your performance gap. That gap is the disparity between what people know they should say and do to behave successfully and what they actually do in the moment” (Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 3). We need to reflect on our mindset and recognise the thoughts, emotions and feelings that drive us.

Knowing what to do, but not as yet having internalised the knowledge, is also a problem. There is a need to practise new skills (B. Rogers, 2011c). Bill Rogers, for example, promotes the importance of rehearsing communication skills in the classroom: what to say—what not to say (see §2.1.2.2). A recent area of research is in simulation training. In the same way air pilots practise their skills in simulators,
teachers could rehearse their communication skills with students in simulated environments.

5.1.3.9 Action: The drivers

In summary, the extensive documentation available on how to create positive learning environments is linked to the complexities of the issues to be addressed, hence the numerous different perspectives, sometimes contradictory, presented in the literature. This can be very confusing for teachers. This thesis argues that beyond the numerous options available to teachers, some key drivers that represent the essence of good practice can be identified.

It is necessary to “teach teachers so that students can learn”, states Jensen (2010b), in the title of a media article. According to the recent research, the best professional learning needs to take place on the job, where teachers learn from each other and from mentors, within a school culture of collaborative learning. Once more the role of the principal is critical in developing such a culture. Time must be structured within the timetable to allow for this type of culture to develop.

Professional decision making can be improved by ensuring that the evidence base for effective CM practices is easily available to teachers, and that it is understood. With such extensive documentation available on CM, teachers must not be overwhelmed. They need to be realistic, starting with value principles, hopefully in tune with a whole-school approach, and a small smorgasbord of strategies from their toolbox. From a starter kit, as graduate teachers, they can progressively expand the quantity and quality of the tools in that toolbox. The key driver is to start with a few well-focused, evidence-based strategies. Then educators need to embark on an ongoing journey of reflection and learning where they discover new understandings.
and new strategies, trial them, measure their impact and practise them. These principles, which relate to the management of the classroom, apply also to the management of the whole school. Ben Jensen’s five-step model for turning around schools recommends as Step 2, effective teaching with an emphasis on professional collaboration (Jensen, 2013).

As repeatedly mentioned in the literature, the teacher in the classroom is the key to creating a positive learning environment: how they think, what they know, what they do (Hattie, 2003). Arguably, “the teacher is probably the single most important factor affecting student achievement—at least the single most important factor that we can do much about” (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 1). The following section discusses the impact of teachers’ mindsets, their planning for CM, and their engagement and passion for the profession.

5.1.4 **Barrier 4: Teacher mindsets**

According to participants in this study, teachers’ beliefs and attitudes can be counterproductive, and represent a barrier for creating a positive classroom learning environment. Some teachers blame the student, the home environment, parent attitude, the school, the system or society. They do not view themselves as a possible cause of behavioural issues in the classroom or, at the other extreme, they may view themselves as fully responsible and experience a sense of professional failure. As a result, teachers may feel powerless, believing that nothing can be done. The consequences can be drastic, such as teachers switching into survival mode in the classroom by lowering their expectations and ignoring inappropriate behaviours that should not be ignored. Ultimately, they may leave the profession.
The interviewees in my research project tended not to unveil their own beliefs, but referred to colleagues’ feelings or, in the case of leaders, the perceptions of their staff. In informal conversations with colleagues throughout my career similar beliefs were expressed, but more directly in statements such as: “There is nothing that I/we can do about those disruptive behaviours”; “this is out of my/our control”; “students, parents, society are to blame”; “I will only teach those students who want to learn!”; “CM is not important”; students will eventually behave well and make the right choices”; “I do not need to intervene”; or “I am the boss in the classroom and students will be punished if they don’t do as they are told”.

The present challenge for teachers is the complexity of different student needs in the inclusive classroom (see §2.1.2). Students bring problems that are due to factors outside the school, so teachers need to recognise and understand those factors. Teachers also need to recognise factors that more closely relate to the school, the classroom environment or to themselves, as teachers. The last two statements in the previous paragraph reflect two completely opposite teaching styles, indecisive and authoritarian, that are both now widely recognised by the research as inappropriate approaches to CM, although they continue to be used in middle school classrooms (see §2.1.2. & §2.1.3). These findings are further expanded in the following discussion.

5.1.4.1 Mindset 1: Disruptive behaviours are beyond teacher control

In the context of this mindset, the term ‘control’ is positive for it refers to the influence that a teacher has on the factors causing disruptive student behaviours. From participants’ comments and my experience, it is evident that a disinterested student is a challenge for a teacher, but this attitude is alterable and is at least partly
within the teacher’s control. The teacher needs to understand the causes of student disengagement or misbehaviour and find ways to engage them in positive learning (see §2.1.2.2 & 2.1.3.1).

While the issue of students bullying a teacher has been described by one of the participants as very challenging, the matter should have been addressed at an early stage—so, again, it seems to be within the teacher’s control. However, if as stated by some of those interviewed, the leadership of the school does not support individual teachers, some situations can become very difficult indeed. No doubt individual teachers have limited control with respect to the leadership of their school and its culture. However, this thesis contends that in their classrooms, teachers must not allow self-disempowerment. They need to address issues such as lack of student motivation or disruption of the learning environment by engaging all students in learning (Sullivan et al., 2012). Doing so is part of their professional responsibility, as described by the *Australian professional standards for teachers* (AITSL, 2011).

**Factors linked to the student**

The research acknowledges the impact of factors such as IQ, learning disabilities, past schooling or performance, lack of social skills and lack of expectations, openness to experience, motivation and engagement in inappropriate student behaviours (Edwards & Watts, 2004; Hattie, 2009; Johnson & Sullivan, 2014; Lewis, 2009; B. Rogers, 2011; Savage & Savage, 2010).

Hattie (2009) claims that one of the tenets “of the ‘grammar of schooling’ that has changed little over the last century is that students are to be made responsible for their learning” (p. 5). Teachers with that mindset consider students to be responsible for their achievement or lack of it, which may lead to ‘deficit thinking’, an issue
particularly when dealing with minority students. Hattie (2009) mentions a study by Bishop, Berryman and Richardson showing that students, parents, principals and teachers have very different views on the factors that have the most influence on Maori student achievements. Teachers explain their lack of success in deficit terms for “they do not see themselves as the agents of influence, see very few solutions, and see very little that they can do to solve the problems” (p. 6). Researchers have criticised this deficit-thinking approach. For example, Hattie (in an interview with Cassandra Davis, 2014, p. 2) states that we do not have a magic wand to deal with socio-economic disadvantage, “students do not leave hunger or poverty at the school gate, but educators can ensure the principal leading the school and the teachers in the classroom are highly skilled and have maximum impact on those students”.

**Factors linked to the home and or socio-educational disadvantage**

These issues are well documented in the research (see §2.1.1.1) and have been discussed in the section on the lack of parental support (see §5.1.1.1). Socio-cultural factors in the classroom influence student behaviour in different ways and have impact on the social dynamics of the classroom. Conflicts may take place around gender, social status, race, nationality and language. The teacher needs to create a positive classroom environment where every student is valued, safe and belongs, and as such can learn effectively.

When dealing with socio-cultural theory, the MCEETYA Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) compiled by all Australian education ministers suggests the following points amongst others: There is a strong correlation between socio-economic background and educational outcomes, therefore “Goal one [is that]: Australian schooling promotes equity and
excellence” (p.7). Schools have an important role to play in developing good citizenship for a multicultural nation. Curricula have to be diversified and students need to value diversity within the classroom. “Goal two: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative and informed citizens” (p. 8).

**Factors linked to society**

Participants did not expand on this issue, but through conversations I often heard the view that nothing really can be done about behavioural problems nowadays, as social trends have removed the power from adults to do so through legislation promoting children’s rights and, for example, the disappearance of physical punishment. Many years ago, I had a discussion with a leader of my school. There were major problems in that school and I viewed it as dysfunctional. I suggested that as a team, we should do something about it. The answer from that leader was definite. I can still remember the words: “You are too idealistic! Society has changed and is more permissive, and there is nothing that we can do about those societal changes!”

**Factors linked to the school**

Participants commented on this issue (see §4.5.1.5). Schools can be either too coercive or too permissive, and the lack of a whole-school approach and leadership support can contribute to students’ behavioural problems. An authoritarian school culture, based on punishment, is particularly negative, as it gives the illusion of being effective in the short term, but has no lasting effect in the long term, and does not assist students in developing self-discipline. For very challenging students it is also counterproductive in the short term, as are ineffective, permissive school cultures (see §2.1.1). The research repeatedly emphasises the desirable move away
from punishment (Arthur-Kelly et al., 2007; Glasser, 1993; Johnson & Sullivan, 2012; B. Rogers, 2011c). Regarding the need for whole-school approaches and support, the participants’ statements provide further evidence of what has also been repeatedly mentioned in the literature (see §2.3.3).

However, despite the challenges related to school factors, teachers still have the power to act within their school context. Teachers should consider themselves to be change agents within their organisation, despite difficulties. My experience of being a major change agent in a school is expressed in the following scenario.

**Being a change agent: My refusal to cane female students**

I was vice principal at the time and in schools it was still the practice to cane students. Being educated and trained in France, where the cane had not been used in schools since the 19th century, I found it very difficult to comply with this approach as part of my professional responsibilities. I used the cane only a few times when directed by principals who could not cane female students and I administered it like a gentle stroke to which I was told once ‘It is supposed to hurt!’

After much reflection about complying or not with Australian law (The UN Convention on the Rights of Children was ratified in 1989 and the abolition of corporal punishment was made law in Australia in 1990 although it was actually banned in Victoria in the mid 1980s), I expressed to a principal my disagreement with that practice. His comments were very evasive but I thought that the matter was resolved.

One day, about a year later, the principal came to my office explaining that I had to cane a girl: The parents and the student were in his office. I cannot recall what the offence was, but the parents had requested that the girl be caned rather than suspended from school. And this was to happen within the next five minutes! I no longer had a cane in my office, but the principal had several, so the excuse I was about to use was quickly dismissed.

I made up my mind and in front of the audience I explained officially that I would cane the girl ‘symbolically’. She presented her hands and I just placed the cane gently on them while counselling her on future behaviours, and I left the room leaving the principal to explain to the parents this new form of punishment. I thought that it would be less embarrassing for him and for the sake of the school name than having to comment on his deputy refusing to follow instructions.

Of course he was furious with me, but this incident gave me the
Factors linked to the education system: The school improvement research

This research was not mentioned by the participants, but school improvement research has been on the agenda for the last 30 years (see §2.2). Educators are continuing their quest to transform education towards new forms of teaching and learning as described in Chapter 2 (see §2.2.4). Behavioural problems in schools are viewed, for example by Kalantzis and Cope (2012), as the symptoms of a crisis of credibility and indicators of the irrelevance of unreformed schooling. According to them, we need to explore new territories in education, to build vision and develop new practices: the education of the future is being created. But the question is how much time is still required to make a real difference? In the mean time teachers are in their classes every day of the week, teaching. The findings of this thesis lead inevitably to the conclusion that teachers need to take shared responsibility for addressing behavioural problems in the classroom and creating a positive learning environment for their students. They can, if both the barriers that limit progress are removed or minimised, and if the right drivers that will bring positive change to the teacher’s work on Monday morning can be identified.

5.1.4.2 Mindset 2: Teachers lack of self-awareness

Most participants in my research project raised the issue that some teachers do not view themselves as partly responsible for students’ misbehaviours. They
emphasised the need for those teachers to reflect on their own behaviour in the classroom. Leaders commented on the problems they face when they have to discuss behavioural issues with teachers holding such a mindset.

The research overwhelmingly emphasises the links between motivation, engagement and behaviour, and between CM and behaviour (Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; B. Rogers, 2011c). Teachers can cause student misbehaviours in the classroom when they fail to choose an engaging curriculum, select ineffective teaching strategies, establish negative relationships with their students, misunderstand the causes of student behaviour, and/or use inappropriate teaching styles and CM strategies. Sullivan et al. (2012, p. 9) view it very worrying that teachers tend not to question their own professional expertise; for example, they do not typically see the association between in-school factors, such as curriculum and pedagogy, and student behaviours.

**Teaching styles**

Participants in my research commented that, if they are too tough, they have to engage in constant power struggles with students. Relationships are the key to successful interactions with students; to their surprise, though, they also discovered that even if they really like the students and establish good relationships with them, students may still not respond in the desired ways. Nevertheless, they favoured a balanced approach, a positive leadership style.

Their perceptions are in line with the literature that has emphasised the significant impact that teaching styles have on the creation of a positive learning environment (see §2.1.2). Extreme authoritarian and indecisive styles are both viewed as ineffective, whereas the balanced, democratic leadership style is highly
recommended (see §2.1.6). Autocratic styles lead to students rebelling, and teachers can be caught in escalating conflicts (Dreikurs, 1968; Glasser, 1988 Lewis, 2009; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003; B. Rogers, 2011c). Indecisive teaching styles can lead to chaos and too much time wasted in the classroom. “Without clear direction and confident and respectful leadership from a teacher some class members will find ways to take over. It’s unfortunate but children are not naturally democratic and ideologues who have either forgotten what a robust Year 7 class is like, or never taught in one should remember that” (B. Rogers, 2011c, p. xvi). To summarise, this statement from Savage and Savage (2010 p. 4) presents the following extreme mindsets as myths: “Love and trust the students and the problems will disappear or show the students you are the boss and don’t smile until Xmas”.

It is also to be noted that the degree of leadership a teacher exercises in one class can vary from the style exercised in another class that has a different dynamic. Typically, the more a student or a group demonstrates self-discipline, the less directive the teacher has to be (Hattie, 2014).

**Authoritarian teaching style**

Although all teachers interviewed appeared to reject authoritarian teaching styles, the reality in schools is sometimes different. My own observations when I visited staff classes, as a leader, correlate with the comments from the leaders I interviewed and surveys from the research literature. For example, Lewis (2009) analysed the way teachers may contribute to behavioural problems in the classroom, explaining that “secondary teachers tend to frequently hint and punish, only occasionally recognise and discuss good behaviour with students, and hardly ever involve them in decision making” (Lewis, 2009, p. 16). He even refers to teacher aggression towards
misbehaving pupils. A trigger that could provoke disruption is when the teacher has not taken the time to understand who that student is, where they are coming from, and what the nature of the problems might be that drive the student to act inappropriately.

The controversy about the use of behaviourist approaches to CBM, such as rewards and punishment in schools, has been discussed in Section 2.1.3. It is interesting to note that, despite a move away from behaviourist approaches and the use of punishment to manage student behaviour, the word ‘detention’ continues to be commonly used in many schools, and teachers are often unclear about the difference between punishment and consequences (§2.1.4.1).

**Indecisive teaching styles**

The social shift from authoritarian to indecisive styles was part of a social trend towards freedom in the 1960s. It culminated into a major social unrest in France and the Parisian Revolution of 1968, initiated by the student movement whose key slogan on the university walls was: “Il est interdit d’interdire” — It is forbidden to forbid. However, participants commented that indecisive teaching styles are ineffective. Teachers must not let themselves become disempowered. Power in this context is not power over children, using the cane, or punishment, but “power for and with our students” (B. Rogers, 2011c, p. 2). Teachers need to give instructions and therefore have to be assertive and clear. They must use the language of instruction; for example, ‘your books away, thanks’ rather than supplicating, weaker requests such as, ‘please would you put your books away’. Choices should be limited, and directed towards reasonable options. Slee (2012) complains that
children are given far too many choices at home nowadays, which has led to an epidemic of narcissism (Twenge & Campbell, 2009).

> Children constantly get choices at home … but the world is not like that, so somewhere they must learn that we are not always given choices … Think about it. You have 30 students in your class all making decisions about what they want to do. This is a recipe for chaos. (Slee, 2012, p. 44)

B. Rogers (2006, 2011c) strongly criticises indecisive teaching styles. A survey carried out by Marzano, Marzano & Pickering (2003) showed that students prefer a management style that emphasises strong guidance and control in the classroom. The most effective approach is a balanced one where the teacher is a leader in the democratic classroom (see §2.1.2.2 & 2.1.2.3).

**Leadership teaching styles**

Within a democratic leadership style the use of behavioural consequences is crucial, as described at length in Section 2.1.3 of this thesis (Dreikurs, 1968; B. Rogers, 2011). I have repeatedly witnessed the effectiveness of using logical consequences to assist students in their progress towards self-discipline, and I support it without reservation. For example, I have witnessed how the use of well-planned and clearly understood time-out procedures at the school or classroom level can be very successful. As vice principal, I implemented a time-out policy in one school, very much in line with the Responsible Thinking Classroom of Ford (2003). The measure of success was that after ‘having a full house’ for a while, we ended up with an empty room most of the time and the staff commented on improved student behaviour. Parents were very supportive of that approach as it prevented the use of external suspension. Essentially, students were supported in choosing more appropriate behaviour; when re-admitted into class, individual behaviour plans helped them to monitor their own behaviour. This step-by-step approach allowed for
student progress and the avoidance of external suspension as a means of control. Suspension, as a temporary exclusion from schools, should be avoided as far as possible, although at times it is unavoidable. In the same way, expulsion as a ‘permanent’ act by the school may at times be necessary as an exceptional measure. It is important to recognise that ignoring the necessity of that exceptional, ultimate consequence could endanger the whole approach.

Democratic leaders see that developing positive relationships with all students is essential in all aspects of the classroom life. “The quality of [a] teacher’s relationship with students will act as a constant reminder of what it means to have a positive learning environment” (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014, p. 12).

*Lack of emotional objectivity:’ With-it-ness’*

Participants mentioned the need for ‘with-it-ness’, that is, noticing what is going on in the classroom (Kounin, 1970) and for a ‘clinical’ approach to behavioural challenges. This is supported by the research; for example, Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) acknowledge that it is difficult to maintain awareness of our own responses, as our immediate reaction to student defiance is to feel challenged and angry. Such a high emotional state needs to be controlled. They view ‘with-it-ness’ and emotional objectivity as one of the key factors important to effective CM, along with rules and procedures, disciplinary intervention, and teacher-student relationships. They found that ‘with-it-ness’ and emotional objectivity had the largest effect size compared to the other factors (p. 67). Similarly, B. Rogers(2011c) emphasises the need to focus on primary behaviours in the classroom and ignore secondary behaviours (such as sighing, eyes rolled to the ceiling, sulking, to name a
few), which could lead to an escalation of problems. Irritating secondary behaviours need to be ignored by teachers.

Finally, research shows that teachers need to move away from behaviour management that focuses only on students and concentrate instead on managing their own classroom behaviour (Lewis, 2009; B. Rogers, 2011; Slee, 2012). According to Slee (2012), most behaviour management books study student behaviours, but do not address the issue of particular teacher behaviours in the classroom that may contribute to problems.

5.1.4.3 Mindset 3: Teachers feel fully responsible

Another equally negative mindset is when a teacher feels fully and personally responsible for the behaviour of his or her students. As mentioned by B. Rogers (2002, p. 58), “No matter how exciting the curriculum, how engaging the teaching process, some students will present what could be called a psychologically logical response (in regard to their private logic) when put under pressure to conform”, and teachers need to understand this, so that they can be objective about the challenges and not take them personally. Teachers need to free themselves of feelings of inadequacy: “No conflict can be resolved as long as the teacher is afraid of being humiliated, taken advantage of and personally defeated” (B. Rogers, 2011c, p. 34). More students with diagnosed behavioural disorders are integrated in the inclusive classroom and present extra challenges to teachers who often are not trained in dealing with those challenges.

A brief story drawn from my experience illustrates this issue.
Observing a challenging class as a mentor and teaching the second part of a double lesson with limited success

It was the first time I was meeting the group, an Indigenous class. I had neither established relationships with those students, nor leadership with that group, and I have a strong French accent … which Indigenous students characterised by stating: ‘You speak funny!’, to which I reply: ‘I understand, it is different, but you are educated children, so you have 30 seconds to smile, after that I will take objection.’

We had planned with the teacher that for the first part of the double lesson I would observe the mentee leading the lesson and for the second part, I would take over the teaching of the class.

Fourteen students were present. Despite a number of students being late (a matter that the teacher addressed most adequately), the lesson was well-structured and interesting, started reasonably well with a routine exercise in order to settle the class with use of positive reinforcement. But soon, during a purposeful hands-on activity, a few students became disruptive, spreading problems to half the class. The following behaviours were taking place: students calling-out; swearing at each other in their language during task activities; wandering around and teasing others, clowning and attracting others’ attention; one student threw the work to be done on the floor. We both just managed to control the group, but so much teaching and learning time was wasted and the classroom atmosphere was far from harmonious! At some stage, four students left the class without permission, ran off, and were brought back to the room, 10 minutes later. They individually promised to behave before re-entering the room, but at a later stage started to be disruptive again.

I took over the leadership of the next lesson in a very unsettled climate. I had prepared a lesson that was always very successful in the past with Indigenous students. But it took me some time to get the students to listen. They finally connected to the story and at the end understood some of the moral values presented; however, limited learning took place during that lesson and we did not have time to complete all the work as planned. When the bell went, I kept behind some of the disruptive students and those who had been late. I spoke to them and they all assisted me in tidying up the room.

Reflections

For a few seconds, I felt embarrassed: it was upsetting for me as an experienced teacher, leader and mentor to have experienced such behavioural challenges in front of my mentee! But I am resilient, and I treat professional matters objectively. I pushed aside my negative feelings and viewed the experience as a positive one, showing my colleague that this shared experience should build his self-confidence, and that now we had to work together to find solutions.

Through a lengthy debriefing session, we were able to share our perspectives and develop strategies for that class. I had no hesitation in speaking up, informing the leaders of the school of the major challenges presented by that group, explaining that we needed support beyond the classroom. This resulted in extra support being provided to the teacher.
A positive result was achieved after all for the teacher, and especially for the students of that class.

B. Rogers (2011c) comments on similar experiences while team teaching as mentor, for at times he experienced significant challenging behaviours from students: arguing, defying, swearing and even being aggressive. He views this as positive since it gives the colleague “a sense of shared experience and even hope” and often the colleague would state with relief: “It’s not just me, is it?” (p. 11).

**Leader mindsets**

Leaders may experience similar mindsets to teachers when dealing with the management of the whole school, and this substantially limits their effectiveness as leaders. In schools that are too autocratic, students rebel, but permissiveness is a recipe for anarchy. A lack of action may lead to matters spiraling out of control. Visualise the lack of control when trying to work with a class of 25 students, and how it can multiply dangerously in a school of 1000 students! According to Malcolm Gladwell (2000), there is a threshold when things become out of control. I have witnessed such out-of-control situations in dysfunctional schools.

The ongoing research work of McKinsey and Company about leadership, presented through articles in Mc Kinsey Quarterly (Boaz & Fox, 2014; Peters, 2014; Rao & Sutton, 2014) confirms the importance of leaders reflecting on their mindsets if they want to lead at their best. The *Australian Professional Standards for Principals* (AITSL, 2011) emphasise that point in the section dealing with personal qualities and interpersonal skills, one of the three school leadership requirements it recommends.
Changing mindsets

Changing people’s mindsets is difficult, as confirmed by the research (see §2.3.3). First one needs to want to change. “Everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing themselves” (Tolstoy, cited in Boaz & Fox, 2014, p. 1). Training that emphasises new behaviours rarely translates into profoundly different performance, as a significant shift in mindset is not easy to achieve. Teachers need to know when to blame themselves and when not to, and this is the same for leaders—they need to reflect on their own behaviour and know when to blame or when to support their teachers.

Barsh and Lavoie (2014) analyse the difficulties of changing mindsets, particularly during periods of stress, when our brain may quickly return to old hard-wired patterns, unless we have deliberately rehearsed and practised new patterns:

To make change stick, unwind and rewire from inside. Start with self-awareness: seeing yourself as a viewer of your own movie. Once you see the pattern, you have a choice whether to change. Owning the choice creates enormous freedom. As you exercise that freedom to change your mindset and practice new behaviour, you role model the transformation—creating what does not exist today but should. (Barsh & Lavoie, April 2014, p. 6)

It is through reflection and action/practice that mindsets can change. How to become a reflexive teacher is the theme of a book by Brooksfield (1995), who explains what critical reflection is and why it is important. He describes how teachers can change their mindsets by evaluating their practices through lenses such as their experiences as teachers and learners, their students and colleagues’ perceptions, and the theoretical literature. Experiencing small successes is a motivational factor in itself: “It is the actual experience of being more effective that spurs them (teachers) to repeat, and build on the behaviour” (Fullan, 2012, quoted in
Hattie, 2012, p. 156). But first one has to start the process. In order to do so, facilitating factors need to be put in place, essentially the culture of the school:

This is particularly important when one does not have the intrinsic motivation to be a learner. The main facilitator is the culture of the school, the way others behave. Leaders can transform the mind sets and behaviours of their employees—no easy task, by changing the culture of the school. (Lawson & Price, 2003)

It is not an easy task, and it cannot be done by mandate. What is required is some guidance about existing knowledge and the modelling of new behaviours until “the culture of the school is the essence of sustained success (Hattie, 2012, p. 150). Elmore (2004, as cited in Hattie, 2012) reiterates the claim that leaders have the responsibility for changing the culture of their school, not by mandates, but by changing existing structures and processes, and modelling new approaches.

When no facilitating factors are brought into play through a school’s culture, teachers still need to act. They need to view themselves as change agents, who consider their school not so much as a problem but as a system where solutions can be discovered. Despite the statement that “if you put a high quality recruit into a dysfunctional school environment, ‘the system’ (in the most negative sense of the word) wins every time” (Asia Society, 2001, as cited in Bruniges, 2012, p. 13), I believe that action can still take place. Teachers may feel disempowered, but in their classroom with their students they still have a degree of autonomy that enables them to act. They have to find alliances with their colleagues. They have to be change agents within their school. They must never give up!

5.1.4.4 Action: the drivers

Teachers need to be aware of their negative mindsets, where these exist and endeavour to change them. They have to understand that there are cases in which
their influence is limited. Even so, they have professional responsibility to act, using strategies that will assist students to progress towards self-discipline and academic achievement. Teachers may blame themselves fully for the difficulties they encounter with challenging classes or disengaged behaviours, and the consequent lack of self-confidence and assertiveness, which feeds into further escalation of problems in the classroom. If so, they should adopt a clinical approach to the profession. Most importantly, teachers need to realise that they could be the cause of student misbehaviour, either because they do not know how to manage the class or individual students, or have not planned an approach to CM, or they are using an inappropriate teaching style. They need to reflect on what they are doing in the classroom and change some of their approaches. They need to adopt an assertive, democratic leadership teaching style.

5.1.5 **Barrier 5: Insufficient planning**

Amongst other barriers previously described—the lack of support, the culture of silence, the difficulty in choosing which approach to choose from the abundance of suggestions in the literature, and teachers’ mindsets, planning for CM does not always occur as it should.

Most experienced teachers in my sample, and in the research literature, indicated that they had a plan, and used a number of strategies in order to deal with CM, both for prevention and intervention purposes, according to different needs. They emphasised the importance of the establishment phase of a class. With a mentor to guide them, graduate teacher interviewees also stated that they had a plan. However, through my dealings with staff as a leader in schools for many years, I found that many teachers in fact did not plan sufficiently for CM. They may have worked hard
on their lesson plans and curriculum, but found themselves short of time for CM planning. They seem unable or reluctant to plan since contexts are always changing and strategies vary according to the ecology of the classroom. They tend to think that they will be able to manage on the spot. This point is extensively supported by the research literature: “Many teachers plan well for curriculum but tend not to plan as rigorously for behaviour management issues and necessary discipline even though they know what the common distractions and disruptions are that they are likely to face” (B. Rogers, 2011c, p. xvii).

Marzano, Marzano and Pickering (2003) identify the three main roles teachers have to perform in the classroom. Teaching requires thorough planning of the what of teaching (the curriculum), the how of teaching (pedagogies), as well as how the classroom will be organised to maximise students learning capabilities (CM). The roles are interrelated. Each is necessary but not sufficient for a successful classroom. “Take one out of the mix and you probably guarantee that students will have difficulty in learning” (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 4). Within a teacher’s repertoire of practices, CBM is an essential skill. Brophy and Everson (1976, in Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003, p. 5) advise that: “A teacher who is grossly inadequate in CM skills is probably not going to achieve much”. Hattie (2009) emphasises that classroom disruptions can have negative effects for all students, as well as on their own achievement outcomes, “thus, reducing disruptive behaviours needs to be a core competency of any successful teachers” (Hattie, 2009, p. 103). To use a metaphor by Christensen (2010, p. 49), not having a plan at the beginning of a school year, with a new class, is like being at sea and “departing without a rudder and getting lost in the very rough seas of life”.
5.1.5.1 How to plan? What to include?

Participants appear to rely on an eclectic approach as a way to effective CM, a strategy supported by the research (see §2.1.4). Teachers need to create their own system. At the classroom level, the Lyford model (Lyons, Ford & Slee, 2014, p. 6), is a good way to start. This model has been described in detail in Section 2.1.2.4. The plan needs to be linked to sound educational theories, based on evidence-based strategies, and in harmony with the whole-school approach to CM.

Since the focus of this study was not on strategies, limited data from the participants about this aspect were recorded. A number of teachers presented several ideas that are in line with the research literature, particularly using a toolbox of possible strategies that they can rely upon and modify according to different contexts (see §2.4.2). Small strategies are particularly important as tipping points that can change a whole class tone, as presented by one of the interviewees who introduced noise meters in her classroom (see §4.4.3).

5.1.5.2 Action: the drivers

Teachers need to view CM as an essential teaching skill and plan for it, in the same way they plan for curriculum and pedagogies. Due to the complexities involved and because there is no recipe, teachers tend to avoid spending the time required for that planning and prefer to act on the spot, relying on their intuition. This perhaps works for teachers who have internalised strategies through many years of experience, but it certainly does not work for neophyte teachers.

The plan needs to be linked to evidence-based research and a whole-school approach to CM that the teachers themselves have been actively involved in developing. Teachers also need to plan, with a clear understanding of their school
culture, the types of support systems available (or not) in their school and knowledge of the barriers that can limit their effectiveness as classroom managers, including their own mindset.

5.1.6 **Barrier 6: Lack of passion**

Comments from participants in leadership positions, and reflections on my experience in schools, indicate that teachers who do not have a deep interest and passion for teaching will find it difficult to meet the present challenges of the profession and to carry out their professional duties effectively.

During my time as a teacher in France, around the late 1960s, teachers were highly respected, in the same way that doctors or priests were. To enter the teaching profession, it was assumed that one must be passionate about the job, and to have a vocation. Participants, in my research, experienced teachers and leaders alike, mentioned the need to be enthusiastic, keeping in mind the purpose for selecting this profession in the first place—touching student life, helping students to learn and become better people. People who do not like children, who do not care for them as good parents do, should not belong to this profession.

As stated by Hattie (2012), “in *Visible learning*, I constantly came across the importance of passion…but it is a particular form of passion—a passion based on having a positive impact on all of the students in a class…working with colleagues, sharing successes and sharing mistakes is part of sharing the passion of teaching” (Hattie, 2012, p. viii). In the *Australian Professional Standards for Principals* (AITSL, 2011), the term ‘passion’ is not used. The standards are based on three leadership requirements, the first one being vision and values.
I would also like to point out that many schools and many teachers are successful. As stated by Deborah Meier, an amazing leader in a disadvantaged school in New York City, “the secret ingredient [for success as a teacher] is wanting it badly enough” (Meier, as cited in Marias, 1999, p. 39)—wanting it badly enough to create positive learning environments for our students, and motivate teachers to find solutions, even in the most difficult situations.

To conclude this discussion on barriers related to teachers, I refer to a superb quotation from Hattie (2012). “Christine McAulliffe, the astronaut, summed up this underlying passion of teaching perfectly. I have touched the future: I teach” (p. 150).

5.2 Consequences of the barriers

Systemic factors that are external to the teacher, such as the lack of school support and the culture of silence, or the surfeit of confusing information, may lead to teachers feeling disempowered. As a consequence, they may develop a negative mindset. Believing there is nothing they can do, they switch into survival mode, lowering their expectations and tolerating unacceptable behaviours. So, some teachers allow a chaotic environment or completely ignore students’ lack of cooperation. This has a snowballing effect as high expectations are one of the key elements for preventing unacceptable behaviour. The extreme case, quite common according to the leaders participating in my research, is to ignore ‘the bad kids at the back’. Teachers achieve some peace by tolerating a group of students at the back of the classroom who do no work at all, and simply use their mobile phones or iPads to entertain themselves. While this status quo allows an artificial harmony in the classroom, it is an alarming teaching-learning scenario, as this group of disengaged
students, year after year, may learn very little, leaving school without adequate literacy and numeracy levels.

I have also witnessed this phenomenon. Through informal conversations, teachers have often told me about their decision to ignore the challenging students, as there was nothing that they could do about them. They would teach only those who wanted to learn. Tom and Robert, both experienced leaders, confirmed that they had come across a number of teachers with that kind of mindset. Teachers who feel disempowered may switch into this dangerous survival mode in the classroom, what B. Rogers (2011c) calls a “degrading survivalism” (p. 271).

The research makes it clear that most students are actually willing to learn, but if the classroom is not well managed, a large number will join those at the back who elect to do no work at all. According to B. Rogers (2011c), 70–80 per cent of students in a class will normally co-operate with a teacher who exhibits confident and respectful leadership from day one, and effectively manages the challenging students in the class well. The involvement of those normally co-operative students will assist with the successful management and support provided to the 20–30 per cent of the more challenging students who can potentially become “catalysts for the others” (p. 249).

Those out-of-control situations can happen at the classroom level, but may spread to the point where the general tone of a school is drastically affected. At a school level it is usually a slow deterioration process, not immediately visible, but very dangerous. The metaphor of the boiling frog is well known in psychology. When organisations face problems that are unsettled or ignored, the issues can become chronic and may reach a non-manageable stage. I have witnessed such
degradation in schools, where ultimately a change of principal became necessary to re-establish a positive learning environment.

### 5.3 In summary

Based on the findings from interviews with participants, six barriers to the development of positive classroom learning environments were identified.

In the first part of this chapter the barriers limiting teachers’ success were discussed, with reference to the research literature and my own lengthy experience as a front-line practitioner in schools. This discussion led to the identification of possible drivers that can minimise the impact of those barriers. Those barriers and the associated drivers were presented at both the system level and the teacher level.

The barriers at the system level disempower teachers, and inhibit their ability to carry out their professional responsibilities, so removing them or minimising their impact would greatly facilitate the work of teachers. Three were identified: the lack of support to individual teachers, the culture of silence about behavioural problems in schools, and the extensive, somewhat bewildering documentation about CM and CBM. It is the contention of this study that first, despite many challenges at the system level, in their classroom, teachers have the power to act and can achieve success in creating harmonious learning environments. At the teacher level, the barriers identified were teacher mindsets, a lack of planning and a lack of passion. These are all constraints that can be readily addressed using the right tools and with the right understanding and values in place.

School improvement has been on the agenda for more than 30 years, and educators know how effective curriculum and pedagogies can prevent the development of behavioural problems in the classroom. According to Kalantzis &
Cope (2012), the future of education is in the making; ‘Creating the Outstanding School’ (Lynch et al., 2015) is happening in pilot schools, but the question remains—how much time is still required to make a real difference in the daily life of students in the classroom, while in the meantime teachers are in their classes every day of the week, teaching. It is therefore the second contention of this research that teachers have to act now in addressing behavioural problems in the classroom. After all, there are many successful classrooms and schools in Australia. Even turning around dysfunctional classrooms can be done, and done reasonably quickly. With a better understanding of the barriers that are limiting progress, and with a focus on the right drivers—what matters and only what matters—selecting specific actions as a start, those actions can become tipping points and teachers can bring positive changes to every classroom on Monday morning. This is the basis of the theory presented in the following section.

5.4 Putting it together: the theory

Effective actions are linked to the contexts in which they take place, and the interrelations of all the factors that are part of the dynamic environment that represent the classroom. Classrooms are eco-systems where the dynamics are always changing according to the different actors involved, the culture of the school, the physical elements; even the time of the day, as mentioned by one of the participants. So amongst the multitude of possible drivers that can create positive learning environments, the question remains: how to choose the right ones, the ones that have maximum impact.
5.4.1 Selecting what matters and only what matters

Jensen, in his work on school improvement, starts from the fundamental principle that to improve schools, it is necessary to select “what matters and only what matters” (see §2.2.2.5). Such an approach is also promoted by other scholars, namely Fullan (2011), Hattie (2012) and Masters (2014).

Hattie (2012) mentions the importance of the core attributes of successful schooling, what he calls the ‘Intel inside’, the brain in the computer. He looks at visible learning inside: “In many ways our schools have emphasised the software, (the programs in schools) and the hardware (buildings, resources) rather than the Intel inside (the core attributes) that make schools successful” (Hattie, 2012, p. 3). Michael Fullan (2012) not only recommends using the right drivers to change whole systems, but also the need to be clear about the wrong drivers, those that do not work. Along the same line, Masters (2014), in his ongoing quest for school improvement, argues that there are several practices that promote effective teaching and so are more likely linked to improved student outcomes than others. Masters views these as essential practices, regardless of who is being taught, what is being taught or the context of the teaching.

We know enough about teaching and learning to know that no single pre-packaged teaching solution works for all learners in all situations. But it does not follow that there are no general principles of effective teaching. A challenge is to continue to identify the essence of effective teaching when it occurs. (Masters, 2014, p. 5)

From the six barriers that limit the creation of positive classroom learning environments numerous key drivers emerged that are highly correlated to improvement in the classroom on what can be done to remove or minimise the impact of those barriers. Now I intend to propose the principles representing the
‘generic essence’ of effective CM, the Intel inside and the key strategies to achieve it. I will use the terms ‘essential principles’ and ‘anchoring strategies’ to label them, as this metaphor of an anchor suggests concepts such as safety and reliability, but also movement—changes of ground and different terrain, although the same anchor is being used. The essence of effective CM can be identified using Jensen’s (2010-2014) guiding framework about school improvement, as described in Chapter 2.

**Jensen’s five-step model for school improvement**

Jensen proposes five critical steps (Jensen, 2013a) on how to turn around low performing schools and, with Sonnemann, has confidently claimed that it can be done (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014). Jensen deals with the whole area of school improvement, and more specifically turning around schools, while the focus of my study is about one aspect of school improvement: the creation of a positive classroom environment. However, preventive CM practices are highly correlated with student engagement, and the general school improvement agenda.

My findings in fact contribute to Jensen’s (2013a) five-step approach to improve schools. My analysis suggests that two more components are needed to improve schools and to turn around low performing schools. These components are also necessary to turn around classrooms: (1) A strong leadership that develops a school culture of transparency and breaks the culture of silence about behavioural issues. (2) the creation of a positive classroom learning environment to enable teaching and learning to take place. Therefore, adding these elements yields an extended seven-step model for improving schools. The additional components have been asterisked.

1. *strong leadership that drives a school culture of transparency about behavioural issues*
2. positive classroom learning environments
3. strong leadership that raises expectations
4. effective teaching that incorporates professional collaboration
5. a positive school culture
6. measurement and development of effective learning behaviours and outcomes
7. engagement with community and parents with support from leaders.

Although the ideas are presented in a linear fashion, they follow a rhizomatous approach and represent a patchwork of influences, like in an impressionist painting where the combination of colours create the whole.

There is a need to work simultaneously on individual and institutional developments, ‘to dance’ with various forces, contradictions, possibilities … we need to merge the big picture, the search for purpose and meaning and Monday morning. (Marias, 1999, p. 47)

These essential principles and practices outlined below are based on the voices of teachers who participated in this research and the voice of those colleagues who shared their experiences with me throughout my career. They are linked to the critical analysis of the extensive research literature on effective evidence-based strategies including Jensen’s (2013) model for school improvement and represents the synthesis of this documentation through the lens of my lengthy experience as a teacher and leader.

The glue that binds the effective drivers together is the underlying attitude, philosophy and theory of action. The mindset that works for whole-school system reform is the one that inevitably generates individual and collective motivation and corresponding skills to transform the system. (Fullan, 2011, cited in Hattie, 2012, p. 151)

Many of the drivers, as individual pockets of knowledge—the pieces of the puzzle—are not new. They corroborate the findings from the research. So what is contributing to new knowledge is the linking of the pieces of the puzzle, the relative
importance of some pieces that creates a new picture representing the essence of
effective CM and of course some added new pieces such as speaking up about
behavioural issues— breaking the culture of silence in schools and viewing the
creation of positive classroom environments as a matter of high priority.

As in the discussion of the barriers to successful CM, there are system-wide as
well as classroom-level essential principles and anchoring strategies to meet
behavioural challenges. I will outline first the system-wide factors viewed as
facilitating factors, followed by the factors that are directly linked to the teachers,
their mindsets, the principles they follow and the strategies they use in their
classroom.

5.4.2 **System wide essential principles and anchoring strategies**

System-wide facilitating factors are essential to empower teachers in carrying
out their professional responsibilities more effectively, to make it easier for them to
deal with behavioural challenges in their classroom. They are linked to an extension
of Jensen’s (2013) five-step model to the seven-step model for school improvement
that I have proposed, as those steps prevent behavioural problems to occur in the first
instance. I now advance the following principles as representing the essence of
effective CM:

1. The school culture: a culture of transparency about behavioural issues; a culture
   of high expectations; a culture of collegial support and collaboration and a
culture of ongoing learning. The role of the principal is crucial in changing the
   school culture.
2. The awareness that a teacher’s ability to manage a classroom effectively is a key teaching skill. It is to be acknowledged at all levels: the system level, school level and teacher level and of course this will lead to action.

3. A clear whole-school policy on student discipline, wellbeing and behaviour management based essentially on a democratic positive leadership style with some elements from behaviourist or non-directive models: an eclectic approach to school discipline.

The following section expands on these essential principles and presents the associated key drivers, the anchoring strategies.

5.4.2.1 School culture
Cultural changes are needed to promote and support a positive classroom environment. Strong leaders need to drive those cultural changes, break patterns of failed practices and define new practices in their school and role model these new practices. The degree of changes will depend on starting points; as mentioned by Jensen (2013a), school turnaround is different from school improvement, it involves a more radical comprehensive overhaul than the general approach to school improvement “Rather than changing one or two characteristics of the school, successful turnarounds look at simultaneously improving the five areas” (p. 3)

In the same line of thinking, turning around dysfunctional classroom environments requires acting simultaneously on all areas of improvement.

A culture of transparency about behavioural issues
Teachers need to feel free to speak and share their concerns about behavioural challenges in their classes (see Barrier 2: Culture of silence). Awareness and
transparency promotes collaborative problem solving and action. The principal and the leadership team have the responsibility to emphasise the crucial importance of positive classroom environments and to acknowledge problems in that area when they exist in their school.

CM and CBM need to be discussed regularly, at staff induction sessions at the beginning of the year, and raised at meetings (placed as agenda items) and PD workshops. Careful use of language needs to be established as language encapsulates realities: for example, using terms such as ‘positive school discipline’, ‘classroom management’ and ‘classroom behaviour management’ in association with ‘student wellbeing’ and avoiding a term like ‘detention’ that refers to punitive actions. It is necessary to ensure that all staff understand the terms in a positive way. Changes need to be slowly undertaken in that area of language so a thoughtful, nuanced approach is advised.

**A culture that raises expectations (Jensen’s Step 1)**

Leaders are responsible for the development and effective implementation of wellbeing and behaviour management policies at all levels of the system. The school tone is essential to set the tone in the classrooms (Step 4 in Jensen’s model). Jensen views a focus on discipline as a pre-condition for other aspects of school improvement (Jensen & Sonnemann, 2014, p. 7). A positive school tone is characterised by both an orderly/ disciplined/caring environment and a school life rich in learning activities where successes are celebrated. In turn, it greatly influences the tone of individual classrooms and empowers teachers to create their own positive classroom environment.
Leaders have to ensure that teachers’ negative mindsets are explicitly and officially challenged, particularly deficit views and low expectations (see Barrier 4: Mindsets). They need to guide teachers on strategies and to build the capacity of their staff (see Barrier 3: Too much documentation). It is essential to define baseline, inappropriate behaviours that are unacceptable (e.g., repeated truancy, fights, gross disrespect to teachers, or more mundane expectations such as the use of mobile phones). This can be achieved by ensuring that a whole-school approach to behaviour management is in place. Leaders need to be highly visible within the school, and not just work from their desk, if they are to ensure that implementation is consistent and effective.

*A culture of professional support, collaboration and ongoing learning (Jensen’s Steps 5, 2, 3)*

Support to staff in carrying out their professional duties and support to students in progressing towards self-discipline are essential. Teachers need to engage parents and the community in this support; leaders have to follow up with logical consequences and support needs to be provided to the most challenging students, particularly those with behavioural disorders. Teachers need to work with colleagues and work in professional teams (see Barrier 1: Lack of support).

In a culture of collaboration, mindsets can be challenged in the least invasive way (see Barrier 4: Teacher mindsets); professional knowledge is shared through learning from each other and modelling is done by colleagues and leaders. Collaborative planning also enhances teachers’ ability to change and internalise new knowledge (see Barrier 5: Insufficient planning). Teachers learn from leaders, from mentors and from each other (see Barrier 3: Too much documentation). They learn about curriculum, pedagogies and CM. This can be achieved through strategies such
as allocating time within the timetable and human resources at the school level to ensure that collaborative learning and planning happen.

5.4.2.2 The importance of CM as an essential teaching skill

This can be achieved at the system and school level by officially acknowledging the importance of managing classes as one of the three teaching skills of effective teachers (Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). At the system level, official documents need to present it as a priority area (AITSL, State Education Departments). It needs also to be emphasised in schools through clear discipline policies that are enacted at all levels. Principals has to direct resources in that area in order to build teachers’ capacities. The silence has to be broken.

5.4.2.3 A democratic positive leadership approach to school discipline

Leaders need to guide teachers in making sense of all the documentation on CM and promoting evidence-based strategies. Even if they themselves are uncertain at times about some approaches, they need to start selecting the things that matter and keep emphasising them to staff. A whole-school approach to discipline with high expectations and effective discipline strategies enacted at all levels of the system is needed.

On the continuum from an authoritarian style based on behaviourist approaches at one extreme, to an indecisive style that leads to too much permissiveness at the other, a balanced democratic leadership management style needs to be adopted as both extremes on their own are ineffective. But it does not mean that the approach needs to remain in the middle ground of that continuum. Essentially, following an eclectic approach, where a few aspects of different models are used, the balance can swing from one direction to the other. The research made it clear that the more
students need guidance, the more strategies are needed from the controlling side of
the continuum. The general focus is on prevention, but one cannot dismiss the
crucial need for intervention when inappropriate behaviours take place. Intervention
plays an important preventive role, both by preventing problems spreading and by
supporting students in their progress towards self-discipline. For intervention, logical
consequences need to be used, not punishment, in a spirit of love and concern for
students, their learning, their wellbeing and their progress. To take this approach is
really fulfilling a teacher’s professional duty of care. A crucial foundation for
effective work at the classroom level is a whole-school behaviour management
policy based on a democratic leadership management style.

A whole-school policy will not only set the general tone of the school but will in
turn affect the teaching-learning ethos of each classroom. It will be consistent across
the school, and clearly reinforced in an ongoing fashion. It will be reviewed
regularly in collaboration with staff, for example through committee work. It will be
implemented consistently by all staff members. It will guide and support teacher
initiatives in their classroom (see Barriers 5, 2, 3, 4) and provide support to students
in their behavioural progress towards self-discipline. The plan must be based upon
the most recent evidence-based research, and adapted to the unique context of the
school. This policy should include the following characteristics: clear goals and high
expectations based on shared values; specific recommendations for both prevention
and intervention, and clear procedures for implementation; and clear pathways for
student referral (intervention) with a focus on logical consequences instead of
punishment. Particularly for challenging behaviours, the role of consequences is
essential. The research shows that withdrawal facilities such as ‘time-out’ in a buddy
class or in a ‘reflection room’ combined with the use of restorative practices are very effective, providing procedures are clearly understood and consistently implemented.

Finally, it is of great value to teach students appropriate behaviours through individualised behaviour plans, practice and counselling, thereby assisting them in their progress towards self-discipline. This is a high priority for the increasing number of students with behavioural disorders. The avoidance of external suspension is a must, and is achievable, providing structures are in place to promote student progress towards self-discipline. Gauging the effectiveness of this approach through measuring the number of referrals, withdrawals in the reflective classroom and of course the number of external suspensions, leads to ongoing review of strategies.

5.4.3 Classroom level: essential principles and anchoring strategies

The following principles encapsulate the essence of effective CM at the teacher level. Teachers need to:

1. Believe that creating a positive learning environment in middle school classrooms can be done.
2. View CM as an essential teaching skill and plan for it.
3. Select an effective teaching style and strategies, namely a balanced democratic leadership style, in tune with the whole school approach.
4. Speak up when problems occur, collaborate and seek early support.
5. Be reflective.
6. Be clinical and developing resilience.
7. Be an active participant in cultural changes or be a change agent.

This section expands on these principles and suggests strategies.
5.4.3.1 Belief in creating a positive learning environment

The good news is that a positive learning environment can be achieved in the short term; teachers must avoid procrastination. They need to act now. Progress can be made even with the most challenging students, providing that teachers want it badly enough. Turning around dysfunctional classrooms is achievable.

5.4.3.2 Classroom management is an essential teaching skill

Planning thoroughly for CM in the same way teachers plan for curriculum and pedagogies is essential, the goal being to engage students in learning. Being an effective classroom manager is one of the three key teaching skills, together with selecting the right curriculum and the right pedagogies. Teachers must understand that effective CM has an immediate effect on the general tone of the classroom, unlike the slower impact of getting the curriculum and pedagogies right. With the most challenging behaviours of a few students, success takes time, but at least progress should be noticeable in the short term.

5.4.3.3 Selecting the right teaching style and strategies

Effective teachers will use evidence-based teaching styles and strategies, and will select an eclectic approach similar to the one described for the school system: a balanced leadership teaching style that is neither too authoritarian nor too permissive with variations according to individual groups or students needs. The aim is for the teacher to function as an assertive and understanding leader in the classroom. It is essential for teacher to know all the students, their personalities and their needs, and to establish relationships—students first follow people they respect, rather than the rules.
Planning for prevention and using a toolbox approach for necessary intervention according to different student needs are recommended. It is important for teachers to understand the crucial importance of the establishment phase of a class; knowing the “if-then dynamic” (B. Rogers, 2011c, p. 152) and starting with the selection of a few practical skills, practising them and expanding on their number for their tool-kit.

5.4.3.4 Speaking up and seeking early support

Teachers need to share their classroom problems with colleagues in order to look collaboratively for solutions. They need to seek support earlier rather than later—support from parents and the community, leaders. They have to know the types of support systems available to them at the onset so they can adjust their planning accordingly and/or seek support promptly when needed.

5.4.3.5 Being a reflective teacher

Teachers need to engage in ongoing reflection and learning, asking themselves what to do, what to say, and what do I have to change?

5.4.3.6 Being ‘clinical’ and developing resilience

Teachers need to be objective about the challenges of the profession, for these are part of the job! Effective teachers seek to remain calm and professional at all times in the classroom, although calmness does not negate the need to be decisive and assertive where appropriate and necessary. Therefore, building resilience is critical.

5.4.3.7 Being an active participant and or a change agent

Finally, teachers have to participate in the cultural and behavioural changes in their school, or become a change agent themselves in collaboration with their colleagues.
5.4.4 *The key actions, the tipping points*

The previous section presented a selection of effective drivers, consisting of essential principles and anchoring strategies in order to create effective classroom learning environments. All these actions or triggers, even the small ones, when used adequately, can have maximum impact in any classroom context and become tipping points. These tipping points for the system and for teachers are represented in the following figures.

![Tipping Points Diagram](image-url)
5.5 Conclusion

Based on participants’ interviews, this research identified six barriers preventing the creation of positive classroom learning environments. Although there are also many successful classrooms and schools, too many teachers feel disempowered leading them to just survive, day after day, in chaotic classrooms and ‘hanging in’ there until the next holidays, or ignoring the educational needs of a number of students in the classroom, ‘the bad kids at the back’. For each barrier corresponding actions were postulated. Drawing on CM research and my teaching experience, those findings were discussed and key drivers were established to build towards a theory. This theory at both the system and classroom level included the essence of effective CM and CBM and the key strategies needed to achieve a harmonious, positive classroom. As a last step of the theory, key actions were selected as tipping points to bring about changes.
It is important to note that applying the principles of the general school improvement agenda, for example the five-step model of Jensen (2013a) to address the system-wide factors that influence a positive classroom improvement has a spiraling effect: no longer does it represent a deductive application of principles using an abstract model, but rather it is a cyclic venture that works from the ground up with the aim of replacing the culture of silence and accepting one which is more transparent and proactive. In the same way that school improvement impacts on classroom improvement, a positive classroom environment impacts on the school culture. Jensen’s five-step model to school improvement was therefore expanded to a seven-step model with reference to strong leadership that drives a culture of transparency about behavioural problems and to the importance of classrooms being well managed. At the system level, strong leadership is critical: Leaders need to value transparency and more honest disclosure, so that teachers feel they can speak up about behavioural problems in schools, and thereby challenge the culture of silence—this point is the key finding from this research study. Leaders need to raises expectations by challenging teachers’ negative mindsets, guiding them towards effective approaches and strategies in a culture of collegial support and collaborative professional learning. The support to teachers who deal with unacceptable behaviours in their classes needs to be carried out by spelling out to students the logical consequences of their behaviour. A balanced, democratic leadership approach should be selected as a preferred teaching style within a school with elements being borrowed from different models following an eclectic approach. At the teacher level, there is value in promoting the view that achieving a positive classroom climate is actually not as difficult as it appears: It can be done, providing teachers change their mindset, are clinical about the challenges of the profession, make use of
evidence-based effective techniques, reflect on their practices, accept that they could be responsible for some of the problems and are involved in ongoing learning, and not least, are passionate about teaching. Teachers need to avoid procrastination and act immediately. While education researchers might be able to keep sifting through the evidence, looking for better ways, teachers are in their classrooms, teaching. Just as doctors might continue hoping for a cure while in the meantime needing to manage the symptoms, teachers need to be able to take appropriate action now, as much as they might want to see themselves “imagining alternative scenarios and designing and testing alternatives” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, pp. 28–29).

So, ‘is this yet another recipe?’, you may ask. The answer is no, as I have been searching for the essence of CM. To conclude I like to refer to Deborah Meier’s (1995) comments who after describing her successes in ‘turning around’ a small school in Harlem, was asked the question: Can this system be reproduced? Her answer was a definite yes:

We have proven that these kinds of schools work over and over again with different directors, with different staff and without extra funds … the secret ingredient is wanting it badly enough. If what we have done is to have wider applicability, we need to look upon our story as an example, not a model and the making it easier—not harder—for others to do similar things in their own way. We need to insist that there cannot be just one right, perfectly crafted, expertly designed solution. Good schools like good societies and good families celebrate and cherish diversity … After accepting some guiding principles and a firm direction, we must say ‘hurrah’, not ‘alas’ to the fact that there is no single way towards a better future. (Meier, 1995, p. 39)
Chapter 6  Conclusion

School remains the most important institution that shapes the future of our children, our future. The responsibility of educators is therefore huge. Teaching is a moral craft. “Scratch a good teacher and you will find a moral purpose” as Fullan, (1993, p. 10) reminds us. A number of teachers and schools have successfully created positive learning environments; however, in too many schools and classrooms, the work of teachers and the learning of the majority of students is disrupted by the inappropriate behaviours of a few. It is also true that academic results have stagnated or dropped considerably in Australia in the last 10 years. Too many young people reach adulthood without having developed the kinds of skills and the self-discipline necessary to be active members of society and to enjoy fulfilling lives. Significant gaps in achievement continue to exist between Australian students by gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity and location (Masters, 2010; OECD, 2010, 2013).

The research literature on school improvement shows that it is a teacher’s effectiveness in the classroom that is the most important variable in improving student achievement outcomes. In a teacher’s repertoire of practices, CM is an essential skill: Without effective management, a productive classroom atmosphere cannot be achieved, and teaching and learning time is lost. Although extensive documentation about numerous discipline models and effective evidence-based CM strategies is available, too many teachers may be unaware of them, are confused or are unsuccessful in implementing them, and so they continue to struggle with behavioural issues in their classroom. Why?
This thesis has attempted to answer two research questions: (1) What are the barriers preventing or limiting the implementation of effective classroom management strategies in middle school, hence teachers’ success in creating a positive learning environment in their classrooms? (2) By ‘targeting what matters and only what matters’, what are the key changes—the ‘right drivers’, the small actions that as ‘tipping points’ can overcome those barriers and lead to significant and immediate improvements?

6.1 Connecting the outcomes to the research questions

This thesis identified six barriers that limit teachers’ ability to create positive classroom learning environments: a lack of support provided to teachers; the culture of silence prevailing in schools about behavioural problems; the large number of documented strategies, often contradictory, which have been proposed as ways to deal with behavioural issues; teachers’ negative mindsets; a lack of planning for CM, since it is not considered as a priority area amongst the many skills required for effective teaching; and a lack of passion for the profession.

In response to the second research question, amongst many key drivers I identified a few anchoring principles that represent the essence of effective CM, irrelevant of specific contexts. The drivers were presented under two categories: facilitating factors at the system level, and factors linked to teachers’ actions in the classroom. (1) Facilitating factors can empower teachers to meet their professional responsibilities and involve changing staff behaviours and many aspects of the school culture. In order to do so, principals need to create a culture of openness, transparency where problems are acknowledged (including behavioural issues when they exist in their school), and a culture of collegiality, support and ongoing
learning. Planning for discipline is to be viewed as important as planning for curriculum and pedagogies, and requires a whole-school approach to behaviour management which is supported by a balanced democratic leadership style. Leaders need to take action and to follow up with behavioural consequences, when teachers have been unsuccessful with challenging student behaviours. They also need to ensure that support systems are provided to students. Factors directly linked to teachers can also make a huge difference in the classroom. These include understanding individual student needs and the goals of their misbehaviour, using an assertive leadership teaching style, acknowledging the importance of CM and planning for it, taking action when problems occur by using behavioural consequences rather than punishment, and assisting student behavioural changes through supportive intervention. These anchoring principles represent what really matters. Then, when small actions—the anchoring strategies—are selected, these can become tipping points and have maximum impact in changing classroom environments for the better.

Of course, there is a difference between just improving classroom environments and turning around dysfunctional classrooms: The starting points are not the same. In the same vein, Jensen (2013a) and Jensen and Sonnemann (2014) explain the difference between just improving schools and ‘turning around’ dysfunctional schools: It requires working on numerous areas of failure at the same time through a complete overhaul of approaches and strategies, although the guiding principles remain the same.

The available research on behavioural issues in schools has been used to frame my empirical findings based on teacher interviews. It also served as a counterpoint to reflections and scenarios about my own experiences. Explicit contributions to new
knowledge have been made by placing a major emphasis on new links, establishing connections that have not been made before—specifically:

1. The silence about behavioural problems in the classroom needs to be broken through a school culture of transparency, openness and collegial support. This is the key finding and the title of my research.

2. The importance of CM as a major teaching skill needs to be recognised at the classroom and school level through appropriate action plans. At the system level it should be acknowledged as a priority area through official documents such as the AITSL national standards for teachers and for principals. It is also recommended that Jensen’s (2013) five step model for school improvement be extended to a seven step model by adding two more components (1) Strong leadership that breaks the silence about classroom behavioural problems (2) Viewing CM as an essential teaching skill: ‘Targeting what really matters’.

3. It is crucial for leaders to support teachers by developing a school discipline policy which is clear, well publicised and enacted at all levels. This policy should include the many preventative approaches suggested in this study and acknowledge the essential need for intervention through logical consequences when behavioural problems occur, followed up by support for individual students in order to help them attain self-discipline. Specific procedures should be in place such as in school time-out procedures and/or external suspension.

4. Teachers need to be aware of the effectiveness or shortcomings of their different teaching styles. For example, there is a need to take a stance with respect to the controversial directions for action by rejecting approaches that are too authoritarian or permissive, and selecting instead a balanced democratic leadership style, using logical consequences when intervention is required. The
difference between punishment and logical consequences must be made clear to all teachers.

5. Creating a positive classroom climate can be done providing teachers use the right drivers and select the key actions that can serve as tipping points. And this can happen quickly since the impact of teacher action is visible immediately.

6. Finally, and most importantly, teachers need to act now without waiting for the major shifts aimed at improving the education of the future (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012) and that are likely to revolutionise education in a major way eventually.

### 6.2 The journey

“To understand is to invent” (Piaget, 1973)

This research has been a journey of understanding, discovery and hope, using a constructivist grounded theory methodology as my guide. I first started by presenting the voices of teachers, often silenced by the culture of the school and the system more generally. Developing a better understanding of the issues involved was the first aim of my study, and finding directions for action and change, as a change agent, was my second aim.

This study advocates eclectic, shifting approaches based on adapting different CM models (§2.1.3). As Hattie (2012) says in relation to his own work, this research project is “more an explanatory story not a what works recipe” (p. 3); or, as Deborah Meier (1995, p. 39) states, “our story is an example, not a model … there cannot be just one perfectly crafted, expertly designed solution”. There is no single recipe. What my research findings propose though are directions for action, ‘the right drivers’, and the good news is that teachers in their classrooms can experience effectiveness very quickly and understand their impact, to paraphrase Hattie’s well-
known catch phrase. Finally, following my chosen guiding framework, I boiled down my findings until I located those drivers that matter most, those anchoring principles and strategies that represent the essence of successful CM. Those could constitute a starting point for any neophyte teacher developing their personal discipline model or any experienced teacher wanting to reflect on their own practice.

6.3 Limitations

The empirical data were obtained from a small sample, and I acknowledge this limitation, but I was not seeking to come up with research findings that were representative of a wider population, as this has been done extensively by researchers elsewhere—rather, I was searching for key conceptual correlations that would contribute to theory development that would speak to issues in middle school classrooms. Hattie (2009), referring to his book Visible learning, states rightfully:

> Throughout this book many correlates will be presented ... to enhance student achievement. A major aim is to weave a story from the data that has some convincing power and some coherence, although there is no claim to make this beyond reasonable doubt. Providing explanations is sometimes more difficult than identifying causes and effect. (Hattie, 2009, p. 4)

I was influenced by this view, and in my search for answers, I took a moderate stance, a midway approach, based on the common sense, realistic ontology outlined in §3.2. An inability to speak with certainty can lead to not speaking at all, and I wanted to be able to speak up and act in the reality of the classroom ‘on Monday morning’. As Hattie (2009) mentions with respect to our endless quest for evidence: “As we collect evidence, teachers go on teaching!” (Hattie, 2009, p. 5).

The topic I chose to investigate is no doubt very complex, and complex systems often do not have predictable outcomes, so one needs to be humble with respect to one’s empirical findings. As Fullan (2008) advises we need to value “confidence but
not certitude in the face of complexity” and to “get comfortable with being uncomfortable” (p.14). Or, as Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) comment: “Wisdom is using your knowledge while doubting what you know but looking for what works, most of the time” (in Fullan, 2008, p. 14).

To conclude, I refer to Franklin D. Roosevelt, who is reputed to have said: “One thing is sure. We have to do something. We have to do the best we know how, at the moment … If it does not turn out to be right, we can modify it as we go along.”

6.4 Further research

Throughout my 40 years of teaching, I have witnessed excellent teachers who lived by sound principles and successfully used some of the strategies presented in this research. As a leader, I have guided teachers and mentored graduate teachers, seeing the same positive results. However, I would now like to see these practices systematically implemented in schools. Not only that, it will be important to measure their effectiveness, and to scrutinise turnaround classrooms in the same way that Jensen investigated four Australian turnaround schools through case studies.

In conclusion, it is hoped that these findings will help solve a problem in the immediate future. For myself, as an educator, I am hoping that, having understood better, “having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My views will have become different; I will have begun seeing and thinking differently. I will have crossed the gap, which lies between problem and discovery” (Polany, 1962, cited in Moustakas, 1990, p. 56). For others—teachers, leaders, decision makers and interested scholars, the findings should provide powerful information for further reflection and action. Referring to her book Becoming a Reflective

If this book resonates with your experience, affects you emotionally and intellectually, if it raises new questions in your mind and/or moves you to write or take any other action, if it challenges assumptions and sustains interest, then in my terms I will have succeeded. This depends as much on you as a reader as on myself as author. (Etherington, 2004, p. 22)

And finally as Foucault (1994) once stated: “I do not write a book so that it will be the final word, I write a book so that other books are possible, not necessarily written by me” (pp. 157–74).

While the future we actually inherit is being shaped by many things beyond the control of any individual, or group or institution, it is also to a greater or lesser extent being shaped by human enterprise or the lack of it … Vision, hope, energy and wisdom will have to win out over resignation, frustration despair and divisiveness. (Gilbert, 1991, cited in Mulford, 1994, p. 41)
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample questions

First set of questions

- How do you experience classroom behaviour management in your own classrooms?
- What are your feelings and thoughts about your experiences? Can you describe different scenarios? What aspects of your experience stand out?
- Do you have a plan, some clear strategies in mind about what to do in order to prevent disruption, or to act when inappropriate behaviour takes place and when your initial strategies do not work?
- List the strategies you use, principles you follow that in your opinion were successful (both for prevention and intervention). Try to prioritise.
- List the more significant factors that in your opinion prevent effective classroom behaviour management.
- Are you aware of the extensive documentation available on classroom behaviour management? Did you use research to devise your own approach? Do you follow specific theoretical models of classroom behaviour management?
- What type of professional development do you receive about classroom behaviour management?
- Do you feel supported by your colleagues, your leaders?
- How do you perceive the general school disciplinary climate of your school? Can you further explore this point? (What are the reasons? Do you have suggestions?)
Optional interview questions: Second set

- How do you experience classroom behaviour management (CBM) in your own classrooms? What are your feelings and thoughts? You may wish to describe a positive and/or a negative scenario.
- How do you feel when children fail to cooperate and display challenging behaviours?
- Do you know what to do? Or do you feel that there is little that you can do?
- Do you feel disempowered? What are the factors that are beyond your control?
- In your opinion, what is your teaching style (On a continuum from authoritarian to permissive)?

Knowledge of strategies

- Are you aware of the extensive research documentation available on effective CBM? How did you learn about those strategies?
- What type of PD did you find the most useful?
- What about University pre-service training?
- Is the topic of CBM discussed openly in your school? How? If not, in your opinion, why not?

Implementation

- When reading about strategies or advised on what to do, do you find the implementation easy or difficult? How do you go about it?
- Do you have a plan to deal with CBM, that is very clear strategies in mind about what to do? (a) To prevent problems (b) To act when inappropriate behaviour is taking place. What do you do if your strategies do not work?
• In terms of behavioural expectations what are the ‘non negotiable’ for you?
• What are the barriers that prevent you to implement some of those strategies?
• Could you identify the most important ones?

Support
• Are you aware of the support systems in your school, outside the school?
• Do you talk to your colleagues about behavioural problems in your classes?
• Do you feel supported by your colleagues, your school leaders?
• What are the key actions that could make a huge difference in your classroom? Please attempt to prioritise and select only what matters in your opinion.

Third set of questions (mainly with experienced teachers)

• How do you view classroom behavioural problems from your experience, other teachers’ experiences?
• There is so much documentation on what to do available to educators—how to prevent problems, how to intervene when there are problems—in your opinion why are they so many teachers still struggling?
• What are the barriers preventing the implementation of known effective strategies?
• Reflecting on your own experiences, what were the key actions that made a difference? Which strategies were not effective? Which ones were the most effective? Please try to prioritise.
• Do you think that your experience is transferrable?
Appendix 2: Transcript of interviews

See attached CD Rom.