Teacher’s Perspectives on Student-Teacher Relations and Classroom Management: Strategies for Intertwining Positive Relations and Effective Management in the Classroom

By

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Abstract

This research study focuses on teacher perspectives and experiences on building positive relations with their students as a strategy for classroom management. The study was guided by the following research question: How do a sample of intermediate and high school teachers foster relationship building with their students and use/implement this as a classroom management strategy? To inform this research study, an extensive review of the literature was conducted on the conceptualization of classroom management and current strategies for relationship-building and management of a classroom. Data was collected from three face-to-face semi-structured interviews with intermediate/high school teachers currently teaching in the Toronto/Greater Toronto Area. Four themes were identified from the interview data: (1) Participant’s notions of ‘positive’ classroom management consisted of having students be involved and engaged in the classroom, which was manifested through a positive classroom environment, (2) Participants emphasized the importance of connecting with students both within and outside the classroom, noting its significance in effectively managing a classroom, (3) The teachers recognizing that student empathy towards their teachers and peers is an outcome of strong relationship building, drawing on the idea of teacher ‘disappointment’ in student behaviour and how it can be used to effectively manage the classroom, and (4) The participant’s realized limitations and challenges of using the relationship building approach towards classroom management. This study concludes with a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature, the implications of the findings on the educational community, strategies for teachers in relationship-building and classroom management, and recommendations for future research.

Key Words: classroom management, student-teacher relationship, relationship-building, strategies
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

Classroom management and strategies to maintain a positive classroom environment have been a topic of interest for many beginning teachers. However, despite extensive research on developing strategies for classroom management, it appears to persistently be a challenge for many new and experienced school teachers (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Britt, 1997; Ganser, 1999; Jacques, 2000; Ladd, 2000; McCormack, 2001; Pigge & Marso, 1997; White, 1995; Jones, 2006). One popular strategy for maintaining good classroom management is the development of positive student-teacher relationships. Research has found that teachers who develop respect, care, and positive relationships with students tend to also have good classroom management (Beaty-O’Ferrall et al. 2010, Marzano & Marzano, 2003, Baker, 1999). In this vein, the impact of a teacher’s classroom management and student-teacher relationships especially during the adolescent years can be profound, as it is a time when students are “experiencing an especially vulnerable life transition during which positive intervention efforts can yield tremendous results” (Barr & Parrett, 2001, Skiba et al., 1997; cited from Kennedy 2011, p. 32).

In addition, classroom management is especially important as it is a central aspect to a teacher’s practice, and can have implications on student learning, engagement, and academic success, in addition to reduced teacher stress and burnout (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; van Tartwijk, 2009; Brackett et al., 2011). Research has also shown the importance of fostering inclusive classroom environments as a strategy for classroom management; many of which involve developing positive relations with students to manage behavior (Soodak, 2003; Soodak & Rose McCarthy, 2006). Despite the vast amount of research on the area of classroom management and fostering positive student-teacher relations however,
much of this research has not focused on how teachers may use the strategies provided by the
research in their own classrooms; that is, how teachers may actually work to build or develop
positive relations with their students as a classroom management strategy.

This research study will examine the perspectives of teachers currently teaching
intermediate and senior grades in Ontario schools on the importance of student-teacher
relationships in managing a classroom and maintaining a positive classroom environment. How
these teachers develop positive relationships with students and how they may use this as a strategy
for classroom management will also be examined. While there are a variety of aspects which
contribute to having good or poor classroom management, this paper will focus on teachers’
perceptions of the effects of their efforts to foster strong student-teacher relationships on classroom
management.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

As noted, classroom management is an especially important area of research for both new
and experienced teachers, and is a critical component in teaching. Extensive research on student-
teacher relationships and classroom management has shown that positive and supportive relations
can contribute to a well-managed classroom environment (Pianta, 2006; Evertson and Weinstein,
2006; Thijs, Koomen, & Leij, 2008; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006). Despite this, there are teachers
who continue to struggle with classroom management and/or fail to develop supportive
relationships with their students. In this sense, it is important to conduct research on the
connections between the two and to see how teachers incorporate relationship building strategies
in fostering a positive classroom environment. It is also important for teachers to realize the
connection between supportive teacher-student relations and classroom management, and how
their perspectives on the two can influence their students’ in-class learning experiences. Thus, the
purpose of this study is to examine various teachers’ perspectives on the effectiveness and importance of student-teacher relationships in the management of adolescent students in the classroom. This study will also identify possible strategies for building positive relationships with students for effective classroom management based on responses from intermediate and high school teachers in Ontario. For beginning teachers especially, this research study will help to uncover some effective strategies currently used by Ontario teachers for classroom management, thus giving greater insight into this area.

Through this study, I hope to learn more about the different factors which affect classroom management, while becoming familiar with a range of instructional approaches and strategies towards this end. This study may also help those who have difficulty with developing positive relations or with managing the classroom, to reflect on their own experiences with their students in terms of the extent to which they may incorporate student-teacher relations to help support effective classroom management.

1.2 Research Questions

This research study aims to explore teacher perspectives on the importance of student-teacher relationships for classroom management. In doing so, I hope to highlight some methods of classroom management that will be insightful and helpful for both beginning and experienced teachers. The main research question for this study is: How do a sample of intermediate and high school teachers foster relationship building with their students and use/implement this as a classroom management strategy?

In answering my main research question, I will also look into the following sub-questions:

- What do teachers believe constitutes a positive relationship and classroom environment?
• How do teacher characteristics (i.e. teacher self-efficacy) and perceptions on the link between building relations and classroom management affect their teaching/management practices?
• What experiences and factors do teachers draw on to develop positive relations with their students?
• What outcomes do they observe from students from using positive relations with students as a classroom management strategy?
• What are the challenges that teachers face when trying to use relationship building as a classroom management strategy?

Through these points, this study aims to help inform our understanding of the relationship between student-teacher relations and classroom management, and to look into possible strategies that Ontario school teachers may use for the effective management of adolescent students in the classroom.

1.3 Background of the Researcher

As a student teacher transitioning to a teacher, one of the things that I had been most worried about was classroom management and maintaining a stable, yet safe classroom environment. More specifically, I had imagined the classroom environment to be intimidating; especially in middle and high schools where the children likely had much more energy to expend and were also at an age where they were more likely to act as they pleased, often ignoring the words of adults or teachers. In my own experience, I have seen many classrooms going out of control, with the teacher being unable to maintain order in the class. I have also seen and experienced instances where teachers were yelling at their students for misbehaving, and using harsh tactics to get the students to co-operate (singling out, unsupportive comments, lack of respect to the student(s), sending them out to the hall regularly). In my years as an elementary and high school student, I had also seen the effects of these sorts of teacher behaviours, which often left students disliking and making negative connections to teachers who were considered ‘mean’ and
yelled at the students. It seemed to me, and the other students at the time, that these teachers absolutely hated their students, and did not take the time to get to know us as students so that we could learn in school.

Not only had I experienced these types of classroom environments, I had also observed it in some intermediate and high-school level classrooms, specifically at some of my placement schools. During the placements, I had witnessed the very things I had experienced in my school experiences: the teacher seemed to have no respect to their students (they would put down students or did not want to help them), and would yell at them if they asked a question or did not understand the material. Much like my old teachers, they appeared to dislike their students, and did not develop a supportive and encouraging relationship with them. As a result, the classes led by these teachers were often in disarray, with students being disruptive and misbehaving during class. In these classes, I had noticed that there was a lack of respect throughout the class. That is, the teacher seemed to lack respect for their students, and the students seemed to lack respect for their teacher.

During these instances, I had always wondered: was there not a better way for teachers to handle these situations? Would the classroom situation have been better if the teacher had taken the opportunity to get to know us and been supportive of us as we learned? In both instances, I had believed that bridging the gap between the student and teacher, and having both sides come together to form a consensus, was a method that could help with classroom management.

In light of my experiences, I had become interested in how teachers perceive the importance of student-teacher relationships and its effects on classroom management and student behavior. My experiences in the intermediate grades and in high school, as well as my observations of middle-school classes have led me to become concerned for my own classrooms, and a curiosity as to why these situations would arise in the first place. These experiences have also motivated me
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to find out the impact (if any) that student-teacher relationships might have on the classroom environment, and whether this notion of strong relations in the classroom is feasible for teachers to incorporate as a strategy for classroom management.

1.4 Overview

This research study will look into the relationship between student-teacher relations and classroom management in Ontario classrooms. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature, whereby I give an overview of the current literature relating to strategies for classroom management, as well as literature relating to the effects of student-teacher relationships, especially in the classroom. This literature review will work to tie together classroom relations and classroom management, which underlie the focus of this study. Chapter 3 will include the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 identifies the participants in the study and describes the data as it addresses the research question. Finally, chapter 5 will include limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and further reading and study. References and a list of appendixes will then follow at the end.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

There has been considerable research on a multitude of areas regarding student-teacher relationships and classroom management. Evertson and Weinstein’s (2006) ‘Handbook of Classroom Management’ describe and compile a series of research articles relating to the research and practice of classroom management issues (many of which relate back to student-teacher relations). The research on classroom management and student-teacher relations have also been extensive in their own respects, with much of the literature focusing on how student-teacher relationships are important to both student and teacher outcomes (e.g. student success, motivation, and engagement) on one hand, and the implications of classroom management on teachers and students (e.g. on their wellbeing) on the other.

In this chapter, I will provide some groundwork for my main research question: How do a sample of intermediate and high school teachers foster relationship building with their students and use/implement this as a classroom management strategy? To extend on my research question, I will review the literature on the areas of classroom management and student-teacher relationships, in addition to examining research pertaining to how teacher beliefs and characteristics may influence teacher-student relations and/or classroom management. I will start by reviewing themes relating to classroom management, including the conceptualization of classroom management, the importance and implications of classroom management for teachers, and the various strategies and actions taken by teachers in managing classrooms, mainly with a focus on the connection between these strategies and student-teacher relations. Next, I will review literature on the significance of student-teacher relations, emphasizing its importance to teaching, the classroom environment, and to the affected parties. Then, I will examine the research relating to teacher perspectives on the
areas previously mentioned, including a focus on how teacher beliefs, expectations, and self-efficacy may impact student-teacher relations and/or classroom management. Finally, this literature review will conclude by bringing forth research which ties together the interplay between classroom management and student-teacher relationships.

2.1 Literature on Classroom Management

A vast amount of literature in the area of teacher concerns has shown that maintaining a positive working classroom environment is one of the greatest concerns for many beginning teachers (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Britt, 1997; Ganser, 1999; Jacques, 2000; Ladd, 2000; McCormack, 2001; Pigge & Marso, 1997; White, 1995, Jones, 2006). These concerns fall under the vein of classroom management, an area which is undeniably central to the practice of teaching (Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). The nature of classroom management itself is very complex (Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; Jones, Jones, & Vermette, 2013), as it involves interactions and applications of various aspects relating to the classroom such as school and board policies, the characteristics of students, parents, teachers, and teacher-student relations, to name a few. Jones et al. (2013) develop this complexity of classroom management further by suggesting 8 components relating to positive classroom management, bringing attention to the sheer number of elements involved in classroom management. These eight elements include: student-teacher relationships, high expectations for students, non-verbal cues and redirection, teacher consistency, teacher perseverance, and school wise consistency for student behaviour (Jones et al., 2013). It is thus important to recognize that classroom management is influenced by a number of factors that arise from both within and outside the classroom context, and this complexity should be recognized when detailing issues regarding classroom management. In order to gain a better understanding of classroom management, I will begin by laying down the groundwork in understanding what is
meant by the phrase ‘classroom management’ by reviewing the existing literature on its conceptualization.

2.1.1 Conceptualizing Classroom Management: Opening doors for further research

The notion of classroom management is one that is typically difficult to narrow down in terms of its definition. This is due to the overall complexity of classroom management, allowing it to be defined and conceptualized in various ways depending on the focus of one’s research or study. Past literature on classroom management has emphasized teacher strategies for controlling and disciplining their students (or behaviour modification) (Bucher & Manning, 2001; Doyle 1986; Canter, 1976; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006). As McCaslin and Good (1998) note, it is not uncommon for teachers to view classroom management as managing the classroom through controlling student behaviours; that is, to have students respond to “demands, needs, and goals” of the teacher (Evertson & Weinstein 2006, p. 4). This perspective on classroom management in particular does not prioritize the development of student-teacher relations as a means for classroom management, which in turn affects a teacher’s perspectives and approaches to classroom management. As will be shown, this particular framework is not as prevalent in the more recent literature on classroom management, but it is possible that this notion of classroom management may still continue to persist in today’s classrooms. This point would be of interest for future research.

In contrast to the past literature on classroom management, recent literature on this topic has moved away from conceptualizing classroom management as strictly discipline or behaviour-oriented, and has incorporated areas such as student-teacher relations, creating positive and supportive environments, and fostering communities through the classroom (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Jones et al., 2013; van Tartwijk, den Brok, Weldman, & Wubbels, 2009). In addition to these elements, Evertson & Weinstein (2006) also point out that “… current views of
curriculum and instruction emphasize independence, understanding, problem solving, and the active participation of students” (p. 4), although there remains many views towards classroom management which are “… sometimes equated with a mechanistic, authoritarian orientation that minimizes the importance of positive interpersonal relationships and maximizes control and compliance” (Evertson & Weinstein 2006, p. 4). However, as Weinstein et al. (2011) suggest, “… classroom management is not [only] about achieving order for order’s sake” (p. 5), and it is easy for teachers to forget this during the course of their practice. In light of these notions, it is important to recognize that classroom management is not a closed-ended form of inquiry; rather it is dynamic and encompasses aspects which go beyond the traditional ideas of discipline and behaviour management in the classroom.

In an attempt to broaden the conceptualization of classroom management, Evertson and Weinstein (2006) suggest “new ways to conceptualize its [classroom management’s] role in the educational enterprise” (p. 4). In doing so, Everston and Weinstein (2006) define classroom management as:

… the actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social-emotional learning. In other words, classroom management has two distinct purposes: It not only seeks to establish and sustain an orderly environment so students can engage in meaningful academic learning, it also aims to enhance students’ social and moral growth. (p. 4)

This particular conceptualization of classroom management manages to incorporate a variety of aspects, including supportive environments and fostering meaningful learning and student development in the classroom. In conjunction with this definition, Emmer and Gerwels (2006) also outline other areas that make up classroom management, noting that classroom management…
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… can [also] be viewed from the perspective of actions teachers take to structure the physical and behavioral setting to facilitate engagement by students and to reduce the potential for disruption. (p. 431-432)

Tying in these various concepts to classroom management allows for greater insight into the different themes which emerge when inquiring about managing a classroom. All these conceptualizations of classroom management offer the opportunity to incorporate other factors which relate to or impact classroom management for teachers, essentially breaking away from the rigid structure of its past conceptualizations which only focused on managing behaviour.

In conceptualizing classroom management (as seen above), Evertson and Weinstein (2006) further support the notion that classroom management is a “multifaceted endeavor” (p. 5) by outlining four themes in current research on classroom management, which include: (1) teachers developing caring and supportive relationships with students, (2) teacher instruction with a focus on optimizing student learning, (3) use of group management which encourages student engagement in school, and (4) promoting student development of social skills and self-regulation (Evertson & Weinstein 2006, p. 5).

This study in particular will focus on the first of Evertson and Weinstein’s four themes, which extend the conceptualization of classroom management to include the link between developing student-teacher relations and the management of a classroom. Thus, this study will focus on conceptualizing classroom management in relation to the social aspects of teacher-student relationships. The next section will outline the importance of classroom management for teachers.

2.1.2 Implications and Importance of Classroom Management

As it would seem, classrooms are places where teachers and students spend the most hours of their days. As such, being able to maintain a good classroom environment through positive management practices is essential for both teacher and student outcomes. This notion is captured
by Emmer & Gerwels (2006), who note that classroom management is essential to the “task of teaching, and without good management practices the teacher’s job is much more difficult” (p. 408), especially in middle and high school classrooms (Kennedy, 2011).

The literature has shown that for teachers, proper classroom management can have positive implications on reducing teacher stress in the classroom, and studies have also shown that this reduces the risk of teacher burnout (Friedman, 2006). Not only are good classroom management practices important for teachers in their practice, they also have implications on student learning, engagement, and academic success (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; Morine-Dershimer, 2006; van Tartwijk, 2009). More specifically, Emmer & Gerwels (2006) point out the implications of positive and negative classroom management for students, and state that “well-managed settings promote student engagement and create opportunities to learn; poorly managed classrooms dissipate student time and attention, reduce learning, and discourage academic accomplishment” (p. 408).

In addition to these notions, creating positive classroom environments and management increases not only the student’s sense of belonging and reduces disruptive behaviour (Battistich, et al., 1995; Ryan & Patrick 2001, c.f. Brackett et al., 2011), but also has implications on the teacher’s sense of self-efficacy and attachment to students (i.e. student-teacher relations) (Riley, 2009; Hoy & Weinstein, 2006; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). Thus, it appears that classroom management and maintaining a positive classroom environment is essential for both teachers and students in a number of different respects. This is especially so given that classroom management is central to not only student learning but also the practice of teaching. It is in this sense that teachers should be familiar with the various strategies for maintaining a positive and effective classroom environment.
2.1.3 Classroom Management Strategies in the Literature

Having outlined the importance and implications of classroom management, this section will briefly review the overall literature on the types of strategies, actions, and guidelines which teachers use and implement for effective classroom management. Beginning with research done by Evertson and Weinstein (2006), effective classroom management is seen to involve having teachers carry out what they call the five specific tasks of classroom management:

1. They must develop caring, supportive relationships with and amongst students;
2. Organize and implement instruction in ways that optimize students’ access to learning;
3. Use group management methods that encourage students’ engagement in academic tasks;
4. Promote the development of students’ social skills and self-regulation;
5. Use appropriate interventions to assist students with behavior problems.

As these tasks show, classroom management involves using strategies in creating a structured, yet stimulating and supportive classroom environment that facilitates student learning and development, while also supporting both the teacher and students’ wellbeing.

Similar to Evertson and Weinstein (2006), Weinstein et al. (2011) also propose five guiding principles of classroom management:

Five Guiding Principles of Classroom Management, as outlined in Weinstein et al. (2011)
(p. 5)
1. Successful classroom management fosters self-discipline and personal responsibility.
2. Most problems of disorder in classrooms can be avoided if teachers foster positive student-teacher relationships, implement engaging instruction, and use good preventive management strategies.
3. The need for order must not supersede the need for meaningful instruction.
4. Managing today’s diverse classrooms requires the knowledge, skills, and predispositions to work with students from diverse racial, ethnic language, and social class backgrounds. In other words, teachers must become “culturally responsive classroom managers”.
5. Becoming an effective classroom manager requires reflection, hard work, and time.
In comparison to Evertson and Weinstein’s (2006) notions of classroom management, Weinstein et al. (2011) extend classroom management practices to incorporate the recognition of diversity in classrooms when implementing classroom management strategies or actions.

To extend to the guidelines above, Hoy and Weinstein (2006) and Weinstein et al. (2011) both offer a number of strategies for positive and effective classroom management for teachers, based on their research on the perspectives of students and teachers on classroom management. Some of their strategies for classroom management include having teachers exercise authority without being rigid or punitive (i.e. creating a safe and supportive environment for students, as well as setting clear limits for behaviour in the classroom), making learning fun (i.e. to keep students engaged and motivated to participate in academic and classroom activities), and creating positive and supportive relationships with students (i.e. high quality student-teacher relations).

In addition to these guidelines and strategies, a portion of the literature also emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive classroom environments as a strategy for classroom management (Soodak, 2003; Soodak & Rose McCarthy, 2006), as inclusivity fosters more positive relations between both peers and students and teachers in the classroom. Inclusive classroom settings also act as a buffer for behaviour modification, focusing on not only teaching students “new or alternate behaviours”, but also on managing behaviours in a “preventative, proactive, and educative” way (Soodak 2003, p. 330).

While these strategies are commonly noted throughout the literature on classroom management, they are also quite general and do not focus on more specific aspects of classroom management, especially elements which go beyond the classroom (i.e., the school, school policies, parents, diversity and multicultural classrooms, etc.). Despite this, the review of the literature on general classroom management practices and strategies has shown that there are a number of
aspects to consider in how a teacher manages their classroom. More importantly, one of the common themes that appears to persist throughout most of the literature on contemporary classroom management is the notion of developing positive student-teacher relations as a viable strategy in effective classroom management. This is especially important given the topic of my research which focuses on the areas of classroom management and student-teacher relationships. Through my research, I hope to extend on the literature in this regard through my findings on the strategies used by Ontario middle and high school teachers in their practice of teaching and classroom management. The following section will detail the current literature on student-teacher relations, with a focus on its implications to classroom management.

2.2 Literature on Teacher-Student Relationships in the Classroom

The literature surrounding teacher-student relationships encompasses a number of varying subject areas, including teacher authority (Macleod, MacAllister, & Pirrie, 2012), student engagement, motivation, and efficacy (Harris et al., 2008; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011), relatedness and attachment for both teachers and students (Riley, 2009; Furrer & Skinner, 2003), and classroom management, among other areas. Furthermore, Roorda et al. (2011) also contend that “the quality of TSRs [teacher-student relationships] has been shown [to be] significantly associated with students’ social functioning (e.g., Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999), behavior problems (e.g., Graziano, Reavis, Keane, & Calkins, 2007), engagement in learning activities (e.g., Skinner, Wellborn, & Connell, 1990), and academic achievement (e.g., Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008) (p. 493). In particular, there has been an extensive amount of literature regarding the area of student-teacher relations and classroom management, drawing on the importance for teachers to develop high quality relations with their students if they are to succeed in managing a classroom effectively. Much of this literature draws on not only the why of
developing relations, but also the *how*; that is, the ways in which teachers can and should foster these relations in their classrooms. This area of the literature is especially important in developing the link between fostering student-teacher relations and how it may be used as a classroom management tool. The following sections will draw literature which articulates these ideas of fostering positive and supportive relations with students for classroom management, first by conceptualizing this notion of teacher-student relations in the context of classroom management, and then going into the research regarding the effects of these relations to classroom management.

### 2.2.1 Conceptualizing Teacher-Student Relations in the Classroom

In conceptualizing teacher-student relationships in the classroom, research in this area has approached this topic in a number of ways. One prevailing view in the literature has been through the perspective of the classroom as a social system, in which social processes such as the development of relations and interactions between students and teachers influence areas such as student and teacher expectations, classroom management, and teacher self-efficacy (Pianta, 2006).

To further expand on this notion, Pianta (2006) suggests that “viewing the classroom as a relationship system offers educators a wider array of conceptual and practice tools to address social and management concerns than are offered by a focus on discrete operant techniques” (p. 687). In other words, analysing teacher-student relations in the classroom management context can allow for an expanded focus on effective classroom management strategies which take into account the effect of classroom interactions and relations.

To draw on the area of teacher-student interactions in the classroom further, teacher-student relationships can also be characterized as “teacher behaviour at the level of interactions” (Wubbels et al., 2014). In particular, there are various factors (such as teacher and student characteristics and classroom environment) which influence teacher-student interactions, and can in turn can affect
the quality of the teacher-student relationship. Wubbels et al. (2014) extend this notion by characterizing teacher-student relationships through “a combination of agency (the notion that someone is individuated, dominant, has power and control) and communion (someone who is social, shows love, union, friendliness, and affiliation (Gurtman, 2009))” (p.366). Through this characterization, “teacher[s] [can] offer [a] controlled environment that is structured and has clear expectations, along with an environment that sends students the message of empathy and mutual respect” (Wubbels et al., 2014, p. 367). This notion is very similar to the literature on effective classroom management strategies as noted in previous sections, and is supported in other literature relating to classroom management and student-teacher relationships (see: Weinstein et al., 2011; Brackett et al., 2011; Hoy & Weinstein, 2006; Pianta, 2006).

The literature on teacher-student relationships also draws on the attachment theory, which suggests that caring and nurturing relationships between teachers and their students play a role in overall student behaviour and classroom management (Weinstein et al., 2011). This area of study encourages teachers to see misbehaving students as children who need support and care from a caregiver, which a teacher may provide to a student within the classroom context (Weinstein et al., 2011; Riley, 2009). With the proper care and support, along with a sense of safety and security, students can be encouraged to participate in class, be more motivated to learn, and become more self-confident and engaged in the classroom (Weinstein et al., 2011; Wubbels et al., 2014), making them more manageable for teachers. In this sense, providing caring and supporting relationships may also foster a higher-quality relationship between the teacher and their students (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Harris et al., 2008).

As the literature shows, viewing classroom management from a framework which emphasizes various conceptualizations of student-teacher relationships can allow for teachers and
educators to recognize the array of ways in which student-teacher relations may affect classroom management. These conceptualizations all work together to bring forth a number of strategies for teachers when developing high quality relations with their students to manage their classrooms. As the next section will detail, high quality relationships are an important factor in maintaining classrooms, and it is important for teachers to make an effort in developing these relations.

### 2.2.2 Significance of the Teacher-Student Relationship on Classroom Management

As seen in the literature on strategies and guidelines for classroom management, the development of positive student-teacher relations was a common theme throughout much of the research presented. Most of the literature reviewed above regarding classroom management emphasized the need for teachers to build positive, high quality relationships with their students if they are to effectively manage their classrooms. For instance, Everston and Weinstein (2006) identified teacher-student relationships as an important theme in classroom management literature, also citing that developing these relations is an important and essential task to managing a classroom. This section will expand on these notions, and will provide some relevant literature on the significance of the student-teacher relationship on classroom management.

Much of the research on student-teacher relationships and classroom management has found that the quality of student-teacher relations is an important element for managing student behaviour. One of the concepts used to ‘measure’ the quality of the student-teacher relationship is the sense of relatedness between both the teacher and the student (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). A sense of relatedness can include “feelings of belonging, inclusion, acceptance, importance, and interpersonal support” (Furrer & Skinner, 2003, p. 149), areas which are deemed to contribute to a high quality relationship (Furrer & Skinner, 2003) and a positive classroom environment (Thijs, Koomen, & Leij, 2008; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006). This notion of relatedness can also be seen in
terms of the extent to which teachers are able to foster positive connections with their students (connectedness) on an emotional level (Suldo et al., 2009, as cited in Wubbels et al., 2014). A high sense of relatedness (or connectedness), in turn, has been found to “be linked to important academic outcomes, including self-efficacy, success expectations, achievement values, positive affect, effort, engagement, interest in school, task goal orientation, and school marks” (Furrer & Skinner, 2003, p. 149), which in turn have been found to reduce problem behaviour and increase greater student participation and attendance in the classroom (Brackett et al., 2011; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Conversely, Furrer & Skinner (2003) note that a sense of disaffection, in which the quality of the student-teacher relationship is low, causes the student to become “alienated, apathetic, rebellious, frightened, or burned out, [which] turn people [students] away from opportunities for learning” (p. 149), thereby being less compliant and engaged with the classroom environment (and subsequently making classroom management more difficult for the teacher).

Although the notion of relatedness is a central aspect in the development of positive student and teacher relations, this research can be further developed in the context of teacher practice. Further research on the development of relatedness and teacher strategies for fostering relatedness would be a step forward in better understanding the mechanics of relatedness in the classroom context, a goal which I hope to achieve through this research study.

To further extend on the notion of the quality of student-teacher relationships, Alderman and Green (2011) note that “…many educators can attest [that] the quality of teacher-student relationships often has [an] enormous impact on student success at every level. When teacher-student relationships improve, concurrent improvements in classroom behavior such as reductions in aggression and increases in compliance with rules can be expected (Murray & Pianta, 2007)” (p. 39). This notion that higher quality student-teacher relationships can improve the student’s
behaviour is important, as managing behaviours and fostering compliance in the classroom is not only essential to classroom management, but it can also help with facilitating an environment that promotes student learning, engagement, and academic success (Brackett et al., 2011). This is supported by Harris et al. (2008), who found that “students who experience an accepting and warm relationship with their teachers will be more capable and motivated to comply with classroom rules and teacher expectations (Brophy, 1983; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Gest, Welsh, & Domitrovich, 2005; Wentzel, 1998). This increased engagement in classroom learning activities, in turn, is expected to lead to greater achievement gains” (p. 1). In this respect, the literature points to the importance of teacher-student relations as a factor in contributing to a positive classroom environment, further supporting the idea that relationship-building with students may act as a tool for effective classroom management.

As noted by Harris et al. (2008), developing caring and supportive relationships with students can help with managing and encouraging positive student behaviour. Research in the area of developing relations between teachers and their students has largely supported this notion. According to Hoy and Weinstein (2006), “extensive research demonstrates that when students perceive their teachers to be supportive and caring, they are more likely to engage in cooperative, responsible behaviour and to adhere to classroom rules and norms” (p. 6, as cited from Weinstein et al., 2011). Weinstein et al. (2011) attest to this notion as well by summarizing the literature in this area and stating that: “Both common sense and research tells us that students are more likely to cooperate with teachers whom they see as caring, trustworthy, and respectful (Cornelius-White, 2007; Gregory & Ripski, 2008; Osterman, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein, 2006)” (Weinstein et al., p. 53). From this, the research suggests that teachers who are supportive and demonstrate that they care for their students’ wellbeing and academic success are generally better at managing
their classrooms effectively, as students tend to be more cooperative and in return respectful towards teachers who are supportive and caring towards them (Hoy & Weinstein, 2006). In Hoy and Weinstein’s (2006) study on teacher and student perspectives on classroom management, it was found that students generally desire a caring and supportive relationship with their teachers, and when students recognize that their teachers are concerned for them (in both academics and other social aspects), they are more attuned to like and cooperate with their teacher in the classroom. In this sense, the nature of the relationships that teachers develop with their students is important; showing care and support for their students is thus a critical element in effective classroom management. This idea of support and care to students opens doors for its conceptualization as a possible classroom management strategy in which teachers may implement to their practice. Despite this possibility, the literature has not gone into depth regarding this topic, making it difficult to determine the outcomes of teacher implementation of care and support in their actual practice. Through my own research study, I hope to contribute to this area of research.

To conclude this section, the research seems to largely suggest that positive, caring, supportive, and high quality relationships between teachers and their students are central to teaching and to effective classroom management. Hoy and Weinstein (2006) in particular strongly suggest that “teachers need to recognize that to teach well, they must also put effort into forging positive relationships with students”, and that “the research clearly demonstrates the link between positive student-teacher relationships and students’ motivation to become engaged with academic activities” (p. 210). The idea that forming good relations with students encourages engagement is linked to participation and cooperative behaviour in the classroom, as noted in the literature above. Lastly, Riley (2009) makes the point that “for some teachers … the possibility exists that they will receive corrective emotional experiences [of their students] through the relationships they are able
to form with their students. [Thus,] training in relationship building may therefore hold much potential” (p. 634). Drawing on Riley’s sentiments, providing professional development for teachers in this regard may educate and encourage teachers to not only see the benefits of relationship building, but to also implement it in the classroom (whether for engagement, or classroom management). In order to cultivate this potential of relationship-building, the next section will briefly review the literature on strategies for teachers on building positive relationships with their students.

2.2.3 Building Relations with Students

The literature in the area of strategies to building positive student-teacher relationships has shown that there is a general consensus for teachers to use strategies which demonstrate that they are supportive, respectful, and caring towards their students. Alderman and Green (2011), for instance, use a *social powers* model (Wood, 1996; Wood, Quirk, & Swindle, 2007; as cited in Alderman & Green 2011) to describe ‘social powers’ which teachers can use to build positive relations with their students. Two of the more relevant social powers which Alderman and Green describe are expertness and likability. In the expertness social power, students view the teacher as the problem-solver, and thus choose to behave in ways in which they want to work with a teacher (Alderman & Green, 2011). In this sense, “when a teacher takes the time to provide extra academic support, actively listens to a student’s concerns, or helps a student get connected with someone who will help him or her, students are more likely to do what is asked of them” (Alderman & Green, 2011, p. 39). Thus, teachers should be encouraged to listen attentively to their students, and to show that they are there to help when the student needs their support (whether academically or for other reasons), without dismissing their needs (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Expertness also leads into another social power described by Alderman and Green as likeability. Likeability refers to the
extent to which students like a teacher, and think of the teacher in positive ways (Alderman & Green 2011). As Alderman and Green elaborate: “If students like a teacher, they may be more inclined to do what the teacher asks. When a teacher is viewed as fun, interesting, and personable, students feel more connected to that teacher (Wood, 1996), then that type of connection increases their likelihood of cooperating with the teacher.” (Alderman & Green, p. 40). Increasing likeability may be done through engaging students in fun activities, remembering birthdays, smiling and greeting students, using humour in the classroom, changing up lessons, or sharing stories that can connect with the students (Alderman & Green, 2011; Weinstein et al., 2011; Pianta, 2006). When teachers take into account these social factors and incorporate them in their practice in teaching, they can form positive relationships with their students, in addition to developing effective classroom management.

Another method that can be used to build and maintain positive relationships with students is to use supportive language (Weinstein et al., 2011; Alderman & Green, 2011; Pianta, 2006). As Alderman and Green (2011) note, “how a teacher uses language to convey a correction often makes the difference in how emotionally supported a student feels” (p. 41). In using supportive language, the teacher is viewed as less confrontational, less aggressive, and generally more supportive and caring of their students, which, as we have seen in the literature presented earlier, can lead to more positive student behaviour and student-teacher relations (Alderman & Green, 2011; Weinstein et al., 2011; Hoy & Weinstein, 2006).

While this section reviews various methods and strategies for developing teacher-student relationships, it is important to note that these strategies only provide a small snapshot of the various strategies and techniques that exist in the literature. There is a vast amount of literature which explore different strategies for developing relations, and it is beyond the scope of this review
to examine all the literature on this topic. However, this review has shown the importance of student-teacher relations, especially in the classroom, and has outlined some main strategies that teachers can and may use in developing positive relations with their students. Another important point to note is the extent to which the above strategies may work to foster positive relations in practice. In general, the literature has not addressed how or why these strategies work to build positive relations with students. It is thus important to take note of how these ideas are used in practice by teachers within or outside the classroom, and to expand on these ideas through further research.

2.3 Teacher Perspectives: Beliefs, Behaviours, and Characteristics

Having reviewed the literature on classroom management and student-teacher relationships, this literature review will now turn its focus to the area of teacher perspectives on classroom management and student-teacher relations. In particular, this section of the literature review will focus on how teacher perspectives and beliefs may shape their pedagogical practices in the classroom. Examining research on teacher perspectives is important, as this study will be focusing primarily on teacher responses (through semi-structured interviews) in regards to student-teacher relationships and classroom management. Understanding how teachers perceive these areas, in addition to how their perceptions may influence their actions or behaviours in the classroom will give some context to teacher responses conducted through this study.

To begin, much of the literature in this area has shown that “the majority of researchers make the argument that classroom management must be studied in complex, sophisticated, and multilayered ways that include analyses of teachers’ beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge as well as their behaviors and techniques” (Freiberg, 1999b; Jones & Jones, 2004; Tauber, 1999; as cited in Fries & Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 690). In this sense, how the teacher perceives classroom
management and their students can affect their behaviours towards these areas to a certain extent. For instance, a study conducted by Brown (2003) on teacher’s knowledge about classroom management, found that “teachers [who] emphasize the importance of developing a caring relationship with their students demonstrate assertiveness through establishing and making clear a set of academic expectations for their students, and through enforcing rules and behavioural policies” (Brown, 2003; as cited in van Tartwijk et al., 2009, p. 454). Brown’s study points to the idea that a teacher’s beliefs on classroom management influences their actions and management practices. To extend on this point of teacher perspectives and their pedagogical practices, research conducted by Hoy and Weinstein (2006) on student and teacher perspectives on classroom management addresses the notion that teacher beliefs have implications on their practice, which in turn can affect areas such as student-teacher relations and classroom management. To summarize their main point, Hoy and Weinstein (2006) note that:

Beliefs about classroom management and appropriate or inappropriate student behavior will vary, in part, based on a teacher’s instructional goals and strategies (Johnson, Whittington, & Oswald, 1994; Prawat, 1992). For example, the belief that students learn by explanation, practice, and direct instruction usually also includes an emphasis on rules, such as “one person speaks at time,” “do your own work,” or “no talking.” Practice, repetition, and compliance with authorities are valued… The most successful teachers view class management as the creation of effective, engaging, supportive learning environments and the socialization of students, whereas less successful teachers see management as discipline and the maintenance of authority. (p. 192-193)

Although a majority of the literature supports the notion that teacher beliefs can impact classroom practices and relations, there has also been research which suggests the opposite. More specifically, Buyse and their colleagues (2008) have shown that “teacher-reported management behaviour [does not] predict relationship quality” (Buyse et al., 2008, as cited in Wubbels et al., 2014, p. 376).
However, it appears that research which does not support the relation between teacher beliefs and classroom management/relations are fewer compared to the literature which supports this notion, suggesting that it may still be worthwhile to take into consideration this line of inquiry for teachers.

Teacher characteristics have also been shown to play a role in their actions or behaviours in the classroom. Teachers who are fair, patient, understanding, and caring people tend to be more likely to establish better connections with their students and hold better classroom management strategies (Weinstein et al., 2011). In addition, teachers who are ‘real’, in that they reveal parts of their own lives, make them more relatable to their students, thereby increasing their likeability as mentioned earlier (Weinstein et al., 2011; Alderman & Green, 2011). Another type of teacher characteristic is self-efficacy, a related research area which will be described in the next section.

2.3.1 Teacher Self-Efficacy

How a teacher views their ability in teaching and affecting students plays an essential part in how they conduct themselves to students and how they manage their classes. Teacher self-efficacy refers to the extent to which a teacher believes that they are able to influence their students and to effectively manage them in the classroom context (Hoy & Weinstein, 2006; Pianta, 2006). According to the literature on teacher self-efficacy relating to classroom management, teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are better able to handle classroom misbehaviours and are generally better in overall classroom management (Hoy & Weinstein, 2006), while teachers with low self-efficacy “tend to have an orientation toward custodial control, taking a pessimistic view of students’ motivation, relying on strict classroom regulations, extrinsic rewards, and punishments to make students study” (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990; as cited in Hoy & Weinstein, 2006, p. 204). When looking at teacher self-efficacy in relation to student-teacher relationships, teachers with high self-efficacy showed more interactions with their students “in ways that enhance[d]
student investment and achievement” (Midglet, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; as cited in Pianta, 2006, p. 693). From this literature, it appears that much of a teacher’s beliefs on whether or not they can influence a student and manage their classes brings forth a psychological aspect into looking at how beliefs may affect actions in the practice of teaching. These ideas are well articulated by Pianta (2006), who states that: “As is evident, a range of psychological processes can play a role in teachers’ perceptions of and behavior in relationships with children. More broadly, teachers hold beliefs about their efficacy in the classroom and associated expectations for children that are related to experiences with children and their own success and satisfaction” (p. 693). These beliefs and expectations made by teachers in turn play a role in their pedagogical practices (including classroom management and building student-teacher relationships). Pianta (2006) concludes by stating that “In sum, there is ample evidence to suggest that teachers’ psychological and relational experiences and histories play a role in the relational behaviors and perceptions that they hold with students in their classrooms” (p. 693). Thus, it is important to keep in mind that teacher characteristics, personalities, and self-efficacy affect how their teaching practice. Particularly to this research study, it can be assumed that teachers who are more willing to apply different sorts of strategies for classroom management would therefore be more likely to try applying relationship building as a classroom management strategy. To ignore these characteristics would mean to ignore the foundation for which teachers base their own pedagogical practices.

There is, however, a need for more literature on the area of teacher self-efficacy and its relation and implications for teacher training, in addition to literature on interventions and strategies for teachers who continue to have problems with classroom management or relationship building with students.
2.4 Conclusion

This literature review has shown that in order to understand the extent to which student-teacher relationships and classroom management are linked, it is important to look at the various aspects relating to these areas both in terms of how they are related and how they are conceptualized individually. While this literature has focused mainly on the dynamics of classroom management and student-teacher relationships in the classroom, it is important to note that these concepts are linked with a variety of other concepts as well, which can shape their implications in the classroom. For this literature review, however, the focus was on reviewing the research on classroom management (its conceptualization, implications and effective strategies) in relation to student-teacher relationships, and outlining what the research has to say about the interconnectedness of these two aspects. This literature review has also drawn on research relating to teacher perceptions, which are an essential aspect for this research study. Finally, while the literature presented places a focus on the within-classroom aspects of classroom management and student-teacher relationships, the literature also points to the need for further research on external forces which may play a role in how student-teacher relationships operate in the classroom environment, how it may shape classroom management practices and dynamics, and also how it affects the relation between classroom management and student-teacher relationships. These external forces may include areas outside the classroom, including parents, school policies and administration, school board policies, social issues, or any other external system which can be linked to classroom management and/or student-teacher relationships. Thus, to enrich the research on the area of classroom management and student-teacher relationships, it is important for future research to give attention on both the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ variables relating to the classroom environment.
Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This research study has looked at methods and strategies used by teachers in managing their classrooms, with a focus towards how the student-teacher relationship can have an impact on the effectiveness of these strategies. In this chapter, I will be describing the research methodology for this research study. Along with a review of the literature, this study will also explore the areas of classroom management and student-teacher relations with data collected from semi-structured interviews with teachers and relevant educators. I will begin this chapter by reviewing my research approach and procedures, followed by the instruments I will use for data collection. Then, I will provide an in-depth description of my research participants, including the sampling criteria used, the sampling procedures, and the participant bios. I will then explain my data analysis procedures, and review the ethical considerations relating to my research study. This chapter will also explore the strengths and limitations of the research methodology used for this study, and will conclude with a brief summary of the rationale behind my methodological decisions in relation to the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

To further develop my research questions, it is important to outline the research approach and procedures that I will be undertaking for this research study. In particular, I will conduct this study using a qualitative research approach which involves drawing on a review of relevant literature as well as semi-structured interviews with teachers and other educators. The qualitative research approach focuses primarily on exploring an issue or phenomenon in a social setting, where data on themes or emerging patterns are collected on the area being studied (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research allows for meaningful inquiry into a topic of study, often involving the
voices and interpretations of events or themes of those who are related or involved with the social phenomenon or problem (Horvat, 2013; Creswell, 2009), which holds value in giving way for greater authenticity in examining people’s experiences (Silverman, 2010). This form of research methodology provides more flexibility and nuance into a study by allowing for a more open-ended form of inquiry (for instance, in data collection through semi-structured interviews), which can create opportunities to encounter new themes or patterns which have not yet been realized (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

As this study is looking towards gathering information on the strategies and tools used by Ontario Certified Teachers, a qualitative research study would provide the opportunity for teachers to speak in depth to their own experiences with classroom management and developing rapport with their students. This approach works well with this particular study as it not only informs the educational community on the various methods used by teachers for classroom management, but it also allows for the study to investigate these teacher’s experiences in relation to currently established themes and strategies noted in the literature. In this way, approaching this study using a qualitative research method can provide a means of understanding classroom management and student-teacher relations through a practical lens as told by certified teachers in Ontario. It is important to gain an understanding of a teacher’s experiences with classroom management and/or building effective relations with their students and to have them elaborate on their own practice in order to contribute to the literature relating to this particular topic. Since the area of classroom management and building relations with students is one in which beginning teachers such as myself tend to struggle in, gathering different and varied ideas and information on themes relating to these areas can help inform the practice of the teaching community as a whole. In this sense, a qualitative approach works well with this particular topic of study.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, the semi-structured interview protocol will be used as the primary instrument for data collection. Unlike structured interviews which tend to be more rigid in questioning and participant responses (i.e. specific questions which work to confirm or elicit a particular answer to the research question), semi-structured interviews allow for a more open-ended and versatile research approach (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Creswell, 2007). Semi-structured interviews lean towards more open discussion, allowing a research participant to speak on a particular topic based on their own views, perspectives, or experiences. This approach gives way for more varied and unexpected information, which in turn can work to give expanded insight into a topic of study (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Galletta, 2013). To further extend on this idea, the semi-structured interview also allows the interviewer to develop and design an interview that is tailored towards their research focus and questions, while also providing opportunities for participants to shed light on areas which may be unfamiliar or unforeseen by the interviewer (Creswell, 2007).

As mentioned, one of the main tenants of the semi-structured interview is its ability to allow the participants to speak to their experiences towards a particular social phenomenon. This is particularly important because it can give insight to a study by providing alternative explanations and varied perspectives in relation to the current literature (Galletta, 2013). While the semi-structure interview approach also uses predetermined questions, these questions merely act as a guideline for the interview, and are formulated to allow for freedom in expressing the concerns or opinions of a participant (Hesse-Biber, 2011). A conversation-like approach is adopted to give the interview an opportunity to branch away from the main focus of the initial study, and allows for the participant to speak in-depth about their own experiences in the field being studied while also
being able to ask for further clarification on something that the interviewee has brought up (Galletta, 2013).

Since this research study focuses on teacher strategies for classroom management (in particular, strategies used by teachers in building positive relations with students and how this in turn can be used as a management strategy), it is important that the participants in this study have the opportunity to speak towards this subject area. In this sense, semi-structured interviews provide this opportunity by exploring in-depth about one’s experiences and/or thoughts (i.e. experiences in the classroom) (Creswell, 2007), which can be valuable in better informing existing strategies used for classroom management. By having Ontario teachers speak about their experiences in the classroom, semi-structured interviews can shed light on the extent to which building relations with students can aid towards more effective management of the classroom, and the outcomes which these teachers observe (if any) when they implement positive relationship building as a management strategy. This approach also allows the teachers to speak about the resources they may use, and the specific challenges that they face when dealing with classroom management, in addition to reflecting on their own experiences for the overall practice of teaching. The goal of the semi-structured interviews then, is to gain an understanding of the tools and strategies which have been shown and experienced by teachers as being effective classroom management strategies, and to use their insight to better inform the teaching community.

For this particular study, I will conduct my interviews through a series of questions which have been categorized into 4 main sections. Section 1 includes general questions relating to the participant’s background and teaching experience relating to classroom management and building positive relations with their students. Section 2 contains questions pertaining to the participant’s experiences in managing a classroom and developing relations, in addition to the specific strategies
and tools used by these teachers relating to these two areas. This section will also attempt to ask teachers about the effectiveness of the strategies they use in their classrooms. Section 3 looks into questions relating to the self-efficacy and perspectives of the participants in relation to their ability to manage a classroom and their ability to develop positive relations with their students, in addition to the challenges that these teachers may face when implementing their strategies. Finally, Section 4 will go into the next steps for the participants, and their views on the link between the student-teacher relationship and classroom management, in addition to their goals for their own classrooms moving forward.

3.3 Participants

Since this research study places a focus on interviewing Ontario Certified teachers, it is important to establish who will be interviewed and how they will be recruited. In this section, I will discuss the sampling criteria that I will use for participant recruitment, as well as some possible avenues for teacher recruitment. An introduction of each of these participants will also be included in this section, and will be updated once I have confirmed the participation of my research participants. From these interviews, I hope to gather data on the types of strategies these teachers use in the management of their classrooms, in addition to any challenges they may face when developing relations with their students.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

In addressing my research questions and purpose, it is important to determine the teachers who would be most suitable and knowledgeable for my particular study. More specifically, I am looking for teachers or educators who are familiar with implementing positive relation building with their students as a classroom management strategy, and who
continue to see good results from its implementation. With this in mind, I will be using the following criteria in determining my participants:

- **Middle/high school teachers (Intermediate/Senior focus, teaching grades 7-10):**

  It is important that the participants are teachers who are currently teaching intermediate grades in elementary schools or in high schools as this study places its focus on the effects of relationship building on classroom management for students in their adolescent years. As mentioned previously, the impact of a teacher’s ability to manage their classroom and develop relations with their students can be especially profound for students in their adolescent years, as it is a time when students are continuing to discover themselves as they transition through changes in their lives (Kennedy 2011). By focusing on the experiences of middle and/or high school teachers, greater insight into the impact of student-teacher relations on classroom management for this particular age group can be observed and analyzed.

- **Teachers with at least five years of experience or more in implementing classroom management strategies:**

  For this study, teachers should have at least 5 years of teaching experience, as this study focuses on looking into the effectiveness of the tools and strategies used by teachers who implement relationship building as a method for better classroom management. In this sense, teachers with more experience in this area are able to speak to whether certain strategies work or do not work for them through their own attempts during their teaching careers. Thus, teachers with more experience will have a better sense of whether or not certain tools or strategies will work when developing positive relations with their students in order to improve their classroom management.

- **Teachers who use positive relationship building with their students as a classroom management strategy:**

  It is important that the research participants are teachers who are currently using and implementing relationship building strategies, and can speak to how it can
help with managing a classroom, as this is one of the main aspects of this research study. In this way, it is possible to gather data on the particular methods or strategies that teachers use in managing their classrooms which can help inform the teaching community on practices to improving relationship building and classroom management. These teachers will have preferably taken some professional development or training in the area of relationship building with students, and have an interest in using this approach for classroom management. Teachers should be able to speak about how positive relations can affect their ability to manage a classroom, and will have demonstrated this through their knowledge and experience in classroom management and relationship building.

**3.3.2 Sampling Procedures**

This study will rely on several methods for recruiting and locating participants, namely purposeful and convenience sampling. It is important to engage in purposeful sampling in this particular study since the participants must be knowledgeable in the topic at hand (i.e. classroom management and other forms of teaching practice) in order to inform the study. Thus, participants must be purposefully selected as they will be contributing meaningful data to the research (Creswell, 2007). In addition to purposeful sampling, I will also be engaging in convenience sampling, which involves finding participants who are the most easily accessible and available (Hesse-Biber, 2011). With these two methods of sampling in mind, and given the nature of this study and my current position as an aspiring student teacher, I am will conduct purposeful convenience sampling as I am currently immersed in a community where I have access to a number of professional educators, teacher colleagues, and mentor teachers who can fulfill my participant criteria. In this case, I will be relying on existing contacts and networks as one method of recruiting participants.
Another method that I will use in recruiting suitable participants is to attend professional development courses and conferences relating to classroom management and building relations with students. Teachers who participate in these conferences will most likely be interested or may already implement certain strategies for classroom management involving relationship building with students, and thus may be most suitable in informing my research study. I will also work to engage with my existing connections with teachers who I have previously worked with where I have personally observed their classroom management strategies involving relationship building. In this way, I will be using these methods to gather potential participants who will best inform my topic of study.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

All participants that were interviewed for this study are teachers currently teaching in Ontario, and who are qualified to teach at the middle school level and above. Three participants were interviewed in total for the purposes of this study, each with qualifications to teach at the Intermediate-Senior level. The participants come from a variety of school settings; two of the participants have taught only at public schools, while another teacher has taught in both the public and private school settings. The participants were found through personal networks and researching online articles relating to the topic of student-teacher relationship building and classroom management. Participants were selected based on their experiences with relationship building and classroom management in the middle-high school grade levels. The following sections detail the specific qualifications of each participant.

Participant 1: Bill
Bill is a teacher with 13 years of experience at the secondary level. He specializes in teaching math and sciences, and has taught primarily physics during his teaching career. As a result, most of his experiences are informed by his sciences classes at the grades 9-12 level. He is currently working at a public high school in the Greater Toronto Area that has a population of about 1200 students. Bill is very involved with a variety of extra-curricular activities at the school, including coaching cheerleading, basketball, and rugby, and acting as the staff supervisor of the robotics club and the Christian fellowship at the school. He is also involved in the prom committee and the student council at the school.

Participant 2: Anna

Anna is a teacher with 16 years of experience teaching at the secondary level. She specializes in teaching Drama, History, and English at the Grades 9-12 level. She currently teaches at an independent high school in the Greater Toronto Area. Anna is involved in a number of school-related activities, and is the head of the drama department (which also hosts annual plays), teacher-supervisor for the boys basketball team, and frequently attends school and sporting activities at the school.

Participant 3: Rachel

Rachel is a teacher with 13 years of experience in both the elementary and secondary level. She specializes in art education and has primarily taught at the intermediate level (Grades 7/8). Over the years, she has mainly taught grades 7/8 math, language, geography, history, and art. She is currently teaching at a public elementary (K-8) school in the Greater Toronto Area that has a population of approximately 900 students. She is also involved a number of school events and activities, including acing as the representative for visual arts, head of the art club, and a supervisor for the Global Citizens Club at the school.
3.4 Data Analysis

After the data has been collected, each interview will be transcribed and coded based on my main research questions and purpose. Each transcript will be coded individually and the data will be organized into separate categories based on the responses. As this study is focusing on strategies and tools used by teachers to develop positive relations with their students and classroom management, coding interviews based on the types of strategies or attitudes towards certain tools can help with finding themes in these areas. Organizing the data by coding the interviews allows the researcher to sift through the data, which is important because it helps to remove the data that is irrelevant or simply not used in the study. As noted by Creswell (2007), not all the data that is collected through interviews is used; in certain cases some of the data may not be relevant to the study and therefore must be removed to prevent confusion and to keep the focus of the study. As a result, codes must be used to organize the relevant data and be put in place to find any similarities or patterns between the interview data, which can aid in establishing themes, should they exist. It is also important at this stage to look for any outstanding ideas or perspectives offered by the participants and to analyze the importance of these ideas, in addition to further exploring what was not mentioned by the teachers in comparison to the existing literature (Creswell, 2007). Analyzing the reasoning behind what is not present in the data also works to inform the study as it elicits the researcher to ask why as aspect or idea is not present in the data, and to further analyze the reasoning behind it (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Creswell, 2007). In this way, it is possible to discover nuances in the research that may not have been present before, making way for new possibilities in the literature (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Galletta, 2013). The data collected will then be interpreted in order to give meaning to the data (Creswell, 2007). Based on the data collected, the views and strategies of the teachers interviewed will be compared with one another and with existing
literature to better inform the practice of teaching for relationship building with students and classroom management.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

In order to gather interview data from the research participants, it is important to first consider the ethical issues that may arise throughout the research study. As noted by Creswell (2007), ethical issues may arise at any phase of the research process, including prior to the study, at the beginning stages, at the data collection stage, during the data analysis and data reporting stage, and finally at the publishing stage. In this sense, it is important to consider the type of issue that can arise at each stage, and to ensure it is to be addressed accordingly. Given the parameters of this study, there are several ethical issues that need to be considered which will take place at each stage of the research process.

One issue that must be addressed prior to conducting the study is the issue of gaining approval and consent (Creswell, 2007). As this study is conducted in association with the University of Toronto Masters of Teaching program at OISE, it has received proper approval from the university to be conducted and published. In addition to gaining approval for the research study, it is also important to gain approval from the participants that will be interviewed for the study. In this case, being transparent with the participant about the purpose of the study and informing them of the expectations for being a research participant is very important, as it contributes to obtaining a participant’s informed consent to participate in the research study (Creswell, 2007). Gaining informed consent from the participant is a central aspect in conducting a research study because participants must have the right to decide whether they want to participate in the study by being fully informed on the matter (Hesse-Biber, 2011). In order to obtain each participant’s informed consent, a letter of consent will be issued and distributed to the participants, and they will be asked
to sign the consent form (Appendix A) before having any engagement with the research study. This letter of consent informs the participant of their participation in the research study, and includes information on the purpose and overview of the study, expectations of participation (one 40-60 minute semi-structured interview), and requests that they give their consent to be interviewed as well as having their responses be audio-recorded.

Fully disclosing the purpose and contents of the research study is another ethical aspect which is important in having the participants stay informed about their participation in the research study (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Creswell, 2007). As such, participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts and will be able to clarify or retract any statements before data analysis is conducted. This ensures that the participants are fully aware of the content being published, and to prevent any biases that may result from the influence of the researcher during the interview (Hesse-Biber, 2011; Creswell, 2007). Interview questions will also be sent to the participants ahead of time in order to give the participants a sense of the questions being asked and to minimize any risk that the questions may pose for them. Participants will also be informed in person and in the consent letter that there are no known risks to this study and that they have the right to refrain from answering any question that they do not feel comfortable with, having the option to withdraw from participation at any time during the course of the research study.

Another ethical issue that will be addressed is confidentiality. In order to protect each participant’s anonymity, pseudonyms will be assigned for individual names and schools or institutions. All other identifying information (such as grades or courses taught, position, etc.) will also be assigned placeholders or will be excluded from the study. In addition, all data and audio recordings collected will be securely stored on a password protected computer in order to ensure protection of data and participant identities and will be destroyed after 5 years.
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Given the research parameters, there are several limitations to this study. As this study only has approval to have interviews with teachers, the sample size for this study is rather limited and does not go beyond to include other key players in classroom management and/or relationship building, namely the students. As noted by Flick (2009), small sample sizes can lead to ‘problem centering’, essentially focusing the research or problem at hand to the person being interviewed. This leaves out the perspectives and ideas of other players involved in the issue, making it more difficult to see the bigger picture. In this case, since interviews can only be conducted with teachers, the data collected solely focuses on the teacher’s perspectives on relationship building and classroom management. This leaves out what the students may think about their teacher’s strategies, and how the students may perceive certain aspects of classroom management or relationship building differently than their teachers, ideas which can give more depth into the study. Having a limited sample size also limits the extent to which findings on the experiences of these teachers can be generalized. However, given that my research focus is on the tools and strategies used by teachers to foster relationship building as a classroom management strategy, I feel that solely interviewing teachers in this regard is sufficient in informing the practice of teaching.

Despite the methodological limitations of this study, there are also several strengths, namely in the semi-structured interview method. The semi-structured interview makes way for more in-depth data to be collected, allowing the participant to speak about the topic in ways which cannot be captured through simple surveys or questionnaires (Galletta, 2013; Creswell, 2007). Interviewing teachers allows the teachers to expand on their perspectives and strategies towards creating positive relations with students in managing a classroom and can provide an opportunity
for teachers to speak about areas which are most important to them, creating a more open-ended and freely flowing conversation (Hesse-Biber, 2011). In this way, the perspectives and experiences of teachers are validated and made meaningful to the current practice of teaching. Interviews also provide an opportunity for teachers to reflect on their practices, particularly looking into how teachers conceptualize certain topics in the literature and in practice. Examining the data on teacher conceptualizations of classroom management or relationship building strategies becomes especially important when analyzed in relation to the literature, as it provides greater meaning and insight into this particular area, and is helpful for beginning teachers such as myself in looking for new ways of thinking about classroom management and relationship building that exists outside of the current literature.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the research methods that I will be implementing in conducting this study. In particular, this research study will be employing a qualitative method whereby semi-structured interviews and purposeful convenience sampling are used to inform the study. As noted, semi-structured interviews tend to allow for more freedom in participant responses, which works to add more depth into teacher experiences and strategies with classroom management (i.e. the types of strategies, the challenges to using these strategies, etc.), subsequently working to better inform this research study. Purposeful convenience sampling is also used to recruit participants, since it allows for the researcher find potential participants who are most suitable to the study, and therefore more credible. Since the participants recruited are teachers from schools, teacher community networks or professional development conferences relating to classroom management and positive relationship building, I find that using a convenience sampling method would best suit this research study as it would work well in finding teachers which fit my criteria and who are
knowledgeable and experienced in classroom management practices. Finally, this chapter has outlined the importance of ethical procedures, and has worked to ensure that all participants will be at ease with contributing to this study by detailing methods for informed participant consent through consent letters, university approval for the research study, and confidentiality for all participants. In the next chapter, I will report on the research findings.
Chapter 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report the findings from three face-to-face semi-structured interviews with teachers currently teaching in the Toronto/Greater Toronto Area. Two of the three participants (Bill and Anna) are primarily high school teachers while the final participant (Rachel) teaches predominately Grades 7/8. As such, the data gathered from the interviews centers on strategies and experiences relating to Intermediate/Senior grade students (i.e. students in the adolescent years). During the interviews, participants shared their experiences and strategies in building relationships with students for managing their classrooms, with each participant approaching the topic of relationship building and classroom management in differing ways, yet with similar understandings on the importance that relationship building plays on their teaching and management of a classroom. In other words, although each teacher had different strategies for building relationships and managing their classrooms, there were several themes which emerged from their responses which were based upon similar underlying principles that were present throughout all their strategies, which in turn, led to similar outcomes for their classroom management.

In analyzing the interview data, four main themes were identified: (1) Participant’s notions of ‘positive’ classroom management consisted of having students be involved and engaged in the classroom, which was manifested through a positive classroom environment, (2) Participants emphasized the importance of connecting with students both within and outside the classroom, noting its significance in effectively managing a classroom, (3) The teachers recognizing that student empathy towards their teachers and peers is an outcome of strong relationship building, drawing on the idea of teacher ‘disappointment’ in student behaviour and how it can be used to
effectively manage the classroom, and (4) The participant’s realized limitations and challenges of using the relationship building approach towards classroom management. This chapter will report on each of these themes, their respective sub-themes, and the nuances and connections that arose in the analysis of these themes.

### 4.1 “Good” Classroom Management: Student Engagement, Positive Learning Environment, & Sustained Relationship Building

In order to recognize how each teacher’s relationship building efforts are related to their management of the classroom, and to draw comparisons between their approaches and strategies, it was important to gain an understanding of how each participant conceptualized the idea of ‘good’ classroom management. When asked to describe the components of good classroom management, all three respondents mentioned similar aspects relating to involving and engaging the students in the classroom, and related this back to creating a positive space for the overall classroom environment. Although the teachers had responded with different approaches and strategies, much of their understanding on classroom management involved making a comfortable and welcoming classroom environment.

For instance, in Anna’s view, classroom management was something in which she described as “invisible.” In other words, it is something that is not entirely based upon overt or visible strategies to control the behaviour of the students, but rather, it is about the things that are unseen (i.e. invisible). She elaborates on this by describing classroom management as:

…in it’s ideal form, it is something that is an outgrowth of something that is a natural environment of respect, where you’re creating an environment that is pleasant to be in, and is just so stimulating and exciting and lovely that people are just happy to be there.

In Anna’s statement, she points to classroom management as creating an environment where students are happy to be in the class, and are stimulated and excited to learn. By creating a stimulating and exciting environment, the students would be less likely to act out in ways that
would be adverse to this positive environment, because they are in a place in which they are comfortable and happy. As the next section will outline, it is important to develop this type of stimulating environment through student interests and engagement, both of which were discussed by Bill and Rachel, which are consistent with Anna’s statement.

4.1.1 Creating a Positive Environment by gaining the Interest and Attention of the Students

This sub-section will draw on how the teachers created a positive environment by taking into account student interests, which contributed to both their engagement in classroom activities and in fostering relations with the students (which will be further discussed in section 4.2). One of the participants, Rachel, described classroom management as “…having the interest and attention of the students, because if they’re interested they’ll work harder and behave better and are engaged.” She noted the use of TRIBES Learning Communities (a teaching strategy that focuses on community-building in the classroom) to build inclusive classroom environments, in addition to ‘getting to know you’ activities at the beginning of the year to figure out student interests. One other participant, Bill, had very similar sentiments to Rachel, outlining the incorporation of student interests and having them engaged as being integral to their classroom management approach, in addition to using constant communication with the students to better understand them. In this sense, getting the students interested and engaged in the classroom and its activities by understanding the things that the students liked was an important aspect in managing classroom behaviour and in creating an engaging environment.

In Rachel’s case, she noted that:

I like to get to know their (the students’) interests and be familiar with the things they do in their free time. I try to keep aware of what’s cool so that I don’t feel outdated and that I’m not someone that they feel isn’t in tune with what’s going on.
Rachel fostered a sense of familiarity with students by identifying their interests and incorporating them into lessons in an ongoing manner. For instance, Rachel would use popular celebrities in detailing math examples by having the students represent the salary of their favourite celebrities in the form of scientific notation. In doing so, the students were engaged due to their interests in their favourite people, while also learning how to use the mathematical concept of scientific notation. By relating to the students through their interests, Rachel noticed that the class was usually more engaged, while also finding that “their behaviour is better if the topic/content was relevant to their interests”.

Bill shared similar experiences to Rachel, and made a constant effort to try to get to know the students’ interests by always engaging in conversation with the students within and outside the classroom. As Bill states:

I try to figure out their interests and I get to know the things that they like. I try to relate things and some of my classes have a lot of fun… If they’re interested they’ll work harder and behave better and are engaged.

For Bill, trying to get to know the students and creating a ‘fun’ classroom environment was important in managing student behaviour. Making a class fun allows the students to become more involved in their classroom tasks, and gives fewer opportunities for students to engage in off-task behaviour. In order to make his classes fun, Bill would incorporate elements of competition while also weaving in the things that the students liked. For instance, Bill would often host contests (such as building the best paper airplane or parachute) to get his students competing with this classmates, while also engaging them with the physics behind the task. Bill observed that including competition encouraged students to take on a more active role in doing the assignment or task, which made the students much more engaged and willing to learn in the classroom.
In describing the engagement of his students, Bill also states that “I’m always trying to figure out how to get them interested, and if I get certain kids interested, it draws the other kids in an interests them as well.” Through the interests of the students, Bill was able to draw in certain students, which led to the engagement of other students as well. This created a domino effect, which helped Bill to manage and engage most of the students in classroom lessons or tasks.

Both these teachers’ experiences demonstrate the importance of placing an effort to getting to know the students, and all the things that they have an interest in. The findings shown here are supported by Furrer and Skinner (2003), who point to the importance of developing strong relationships with the students through a sense of ‘relatedness’. Both participants used student interests to not only draw in and engage the students in their classrooms, but they also tied student interests into curriculum learning. They described how this helps to create a sense of relatedness between them and their students and supported student engagement in learning. This also allowed for the development of what Anna referred to as a ‘stimulating and enjoyable environment,’ where students are engaged and willing to be in a classroom without disruptions that would jeopardize a safe and comfortable environment.

4.1.2 Sustaining a positive classroom environment: Student ownership and input

In addition to understanding the students’ interests and having them engaged in classroom tasks that contribute to a positive classroom environment, the teachers in this study also noted the significance of allowing students to become more involved in their learning. To do so, the teachers gave their students opportunities to have input on their learning in the classroom. In this way, the students felt that their voices were important and recognized in the classroom setting.

Both Bill and Rachel expressed the need for opportunities to hear the student’s voices and to allow students to take ownership over their own learning. In particular, Rachel makes the point
that “Classroom management involves making sure the students are in a positive environment, so they feel comfortable contributing and that their voices are valid, heard, and important.” In this way, the students feel that their teachers are showing them respect, and this sense of respect is conveyed and shown throughout the classroom. Bill pointed out some of the strategies and experienced outcomes of providing opportunities for student input, stating that:

Students enjoy the class when there’s a lot of back and forth. I listen to their suggestions and I think that’s important because they [have input]… and it makes them feel like their input is important, that they have ownership over it too.

This mention of ‘back and forth’ between the student and the teacher shows that Bill was willing to listen to the student’s suggestions on how they want to learn or do certain class-related tasks. Bill and Rachel also detailed using this method to build environments where everyone in the class is what Bill indicates as ‘in it together’. The focus was on getting the students and the teacher to be on the same side, and to build teamwork amongst the class. Rachel pursued these same aims through her use of TRIBES Learning Communities in or to build community and teamwork in her classroom. By allowing the students to have freedom to give input, in addition to encouraging the sense that ‘everyone is in it together’, both Rachel and Bill were able to foster an open environment that made students comfortable, and therefore less likely to misbehave. Encouraging student input towards their learning and in the classroom again promotes Skinner & Furrer’s (2003) notion of relatedness, which also includes elements such as inclusion and emotional connection with their teacher, which in turn, improves the overall classroom environment for learning, engagement, and academic success (Brackett et al., 2011).

As noted, fostering a positive classroom environment was an essential aspect for teachers when speaking towards the idea of ‘good’ classroom management. Many of the strategies and
experiences mentioned by these teachers involved learning about the interests of the students in various ways, while also prioritizing communication with the students through listening to student voice and fostering respect in the classroom. From these responses, it appears that one of the key underlying components in creating a positive classroom environment is the idea that teachers should communicate with students, which is linked to developing and building relationships with students, a theme which will be discussed in the following section.

4.2 Connecting with students requires work, effort, and initiative

For all the participants, building relationships with the students was central in their approach to classroom management. As Bill mentioned, “it takes work to get to know them”. All the participants expressed that to build relationships with students, effort was required. In discussing the observations of other teacher’s management strategies, Anna felt that many teachers found relationship building to be a difficult feat, and that it was too much of a time commitment to be feasible, along with some skeptics on the link between relationship building and classroom management. This sentiment is also alluded to in Bill’s previous statement, suggesting that fostering relationships with the students can be a challenging task, yet the outcomes of positive relationship building have been noted in the literature and experienced by the participants in this study. The next sub-themes will detail relationship-building as extending across both within the classroom and outside of the classroom through extra-curricular activities.

4.2.1 Building relationships within and outside the classroom: Teacher strategies in showing care, respect, and openness in one-on-one interactions

As noted by the participants, building relationships with students can be challenging for some, yet rewarding for other teachers, especially in regards to managing a classroom. In each
participant’s experience, building relationships with students in contexts both within and outside the classroom were rewarding for managing student behaviour in the classroom.

4.2.1.1 Building Relationships within the Classroom Setting

For the participants in this study, teachers developed positive relationships with their students through constant and individual communication and feedback. Within the classroom, relationship building within the classroom consisted of garnering engagement and incorporating student interests in the class, encouraging team-building and whole-class activities, and using humour to better relate and connect to their students. The participants also found that simple interactions with students, including checking up on the students or asking about a student’s day, worked well in developing relationships by showing they cared about the student. In doing so, Bill makes note that the questions asked needed to be ‘genuine’ questions that were specific and showed that you wanted to know more about the students and their lives. These genuine questions made the teacher seem more ‘authentic’ and ‘believable’ to the students. Both Bill and Anna stated several examples of genuine questions, often which would relate to something that the student cared about. For example, asking about an event they attended over the weekend and following up on these inquiries to show that you are interested in the student’s stories, problems, and lives outside of school events. For all three participants, this form of genuine interaction and connection took place during free time/work time in class, or even in the hallways in brief conversations as the students passed by.

Having one-on-one interactions with the students was also considered important in building rapport with the students. To illustrate this, Anna’s strategies of fostering relationships in the classroom involved showing students that she cared about their learning and well-being on an individual basis. This is noted in her experiences, where she states:
My only strategy is to be there for the kids, so that they know that I am there for them. Something that I’ve found that really helps is if you give them something [their assignments] back… [and] you say to them verbally [the feedback] with them sitting half a foot away from you, it just goes into their head… So this way, it was my way of saying to them: ‘Hey, I’m in this with you, and I care about your success. I want you to feel comfortable and that you… won’t just forget about this assignment’. I do as much as I can to have one-on-one interactions with people, as often as possible.

As shown by Anna’s response, fostering relationships with students in the classroom involves putting the effort into talking with each student individually. Her experiences show that the teacher’s care is not just generalized amongst all the students, but rather, that the care is individualized, and that the teacher is open to act as a support for learning if and when needed. In Anna’s case, she showed her students that she was aware of their academic needs and struggles, and that she was willing to support the student when she conducted one-on-one conferences regarding a student’s grades for a particular assignment. Bill also expressed similar sentiments, noting that he would talk to students individually when he noticed they were struggling academically, and would try to figure out ways to work with the student that would help with their learning. Anna summarized this sentiment well when she states:

It takes so much work everyday to remember, and to seek out these opportunities [to build relationships with students]… [but when] you stand up there [in front of the class], it’s not a relationship building interaction. You have to go out of your way to make sure it’s a moment where you’re seeking [to make] connections with them.

This idea showcases the importance of fostering communication to create one-on-one connections with the students, and as will be shown in section 4.3, these connections allow teachers to build stronger bonds with their students, leading to a better sense of respect, and less misbehaviour from the students that could undermine a positive classroom environment. Anna and Bill’s methods of
relationship-building in the classroom links with the literature by Alderman and Green (2011) on developing relationships with students, where they find that:

When a teacher takes time to provide extra academic support, actively listens to student concerns, or helps a student get connected with someone who will help him or her, students are more likely to do what is asked of them (p. 39)

Consistent with the literature, participants highlighted how one-to-one feedback and support helped developed connections with students, which aids in managing student behaviour and compliance to instructions in the classroom.

4.2.1.2 Building Relationships Outside of the Classroom through Extra-Curriculars

In addition to building relationships with students within the classroom, all three participants also emphasized the importance of reaching out and connecting with students outside the classroom, generally through extra-curricular activities. For instance, when asked about how they would actively build relationships with students for classroom management, Anna responded with the notion that sometimes relationship building is related to “…things that have nothing to do with your classroom or teaching, that’s what people don’t realize”, citing that teachers should take opportunities outside the classroom to build relationships with their students. Both Bill and Rachel responded with the same sentiment, and all three participants are currently very active with extra-curricular activities at their respective schools.

In Anna’s case, she recognized that there are students who are “not so successful in the classroom, but there are places that they can be successful in, maybe it’s a sport, in drama, or something else, people need to be seen as their best selves”. This notion of ‘best selves’ is central to the way these teachers viewed the students and how they in turn used that to manage their classrooms. For all three participants, engaging with students in activities outside of schoolwork allowed them to see the student in another light, especially for those students who may be
struggling or misbehaving in the classroom, and to see them as people who are able to do things (and be great at them) outside of school work (i.e., as their ‘best selves’). Anna found that connecting with the students through extra-curricular activities (whether it be watching school sports games, supervising clubs, or being involved in various activities) was a relationship building opportunity that allowed the teacher to create conversation about the events of the activities the next day. Anna also noted that these opportunities for interaction through extra-curricular activities fostered a sense of recognition in the students in areas outside of school or academics, making them feel more validated at school. This becomes especially important as it generates a sense of respect and care from the students for their teachers; which in turn has shown to these teachers that the students are generally more well behaved and willing to listen and respect the teacher in return within the classroom. For instance, Rachel shared that

> Extra-curricular activities let you get to know [the students] better, how students are outside of the classroom, and those teachers tend to have better relationships with the students…

> Making the kids know you are [involved in] school and the extra-curricular activities makes you more believable as a teacher.

In Rachel’s experience, building relations through extra-curricular activities shows the students that the teacher is involved in aspects of the school outside of the classroom, which provided opportunities for further interactions with the students.

> As shown by both Rachel and Anna’s experiences, involvement in extra-curricular activities allowed the teachers to see the students as they are outside of the classroom, and to recognize their successes in areas other than schoolwork. In recognizing and celebrating the student’s successes and using them as opportunities for interaction and relationship building, the students came to respect their teachers, and saw that their teachers were able to give them
validation in their lives at school, in addition to being believable and genuine teachers. This helped the teachers with managing the classroom in terms of listening and behavioural problems, and worked as a natural consequence of building a deep connection and sense of respect that came from outside the classroom environment. Although the literature has not been extensive in this area of extra-curricular involvement in fostering relationships, it remains an effective and central strategy for these teachers in their development of student-teacher relationships.

4.3 Experienced outcomes of Relationship-building

For both Bill and Anna, relationship-building with the students not only contributed to managing their classrooms, but also their passion for teaching. For Anna in particular, building relationships with her students had left her with very few problems in managing a classroom, making it easier to enjoy her teaching practice. Through Anna’s experiences and observations, she has recognized that teaching is not about classroom management, despite the fact that a lot of classroom management is a primary issue for teachers today (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; van Tartwijk, 2009; Brackett et al., 2011). Since Anna does not experience the anxiety of managing a classroom, she was able to truly appreciate the key aspects of teaching that go beyond just managing a classroom, something that is hard to achieve when a teacher is overwhelmed with misbehaviours in the classroom. Bill also expressed similar sentiments, stating that his realized passion for teaching does not involve classroom management; it involves showing his love for the subjects that he teaches, and passing that passion along to his students without having to deal with classroom management. For Rachel, having fewer classroom management problems meant that she could tackle the curriculum more easily, and be able to fully cover the material with the students.
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In this sense, the participants in this study experienced several positive outcomes of classroom management as a result of building relationships with their students. They were able to focus on other aspects of teaching that went beyond worrying about classroom management issues.

4.4 Student empathy: An outcome of strong relationship building

In fostering rapport with their students, each participant’s personality influenced their approaches and strategies for relationship-building. For instance, Bill often made his classes engaging and fun by using competition, student interests, or humour, in addition to constant interaction through chatting with his students in both group/whole class and one-to-one settings, while Anna focused more on showing the students that she cared for them as individual students by supporting them with their learning and academics in addition to attending extra-curricular events for her students. Rachel’s focus was largely on building community in the classroom, where everyone was respected and heard, and built relationships with students at the group level through community building activities and through extra-curricular activities and student interests in the classroom. Despite these differences in approaching relationship building, each teacher’s outcomes for classroom management were the same; all the participants noticed that students or classes with whom they had a positive rapport with were generally easier to ‘handle’ in terms of classroom management. The teachers in this study mentioned two key elements of relationship building that they observed created positive outcomes for classroom management: (1) students tended to be more forgiving in classes if they liked the teacher, and (2) student empathy towards the teacher and their peers is developed through positive relationship-building between the teacher and their students.

One of the outcomes observed by the teachers in this study of developing relationships and rapport with the students was that generally, students who liked their teacher would be more willing and likely to listen and learn from that teacher. As Bill puts it: “they’re more likely to show
up if they like you and the class”. Because Bill had built up a positive rapport with his students through building relationships, he noticed that many of his students would often show up for his classes compared to other classes. He also found that it was easier to manage the students because they would listen to his instructions and follow through with them without any problems. This was largely due to the respect that was built up through developing the relationship with the students, in which the students thought to respect and care for him much in the same way as he had done for them.

All three participants in this study had also noticed this form of reciprocal empathy from their students as a result of building relationships with them. In discussing this idea, Rachel pointed out that:

Students are going to be better to people they care about. If the relationship with the student is strong, it would make them more likely to be good at listening or complete a task because they don’t want to disappoint me. Relationship building is important because it’s going to make them feel empathy towards the person they have a bond with.

Anna expressed similar sentiments in stating that:

You don’t ever have to punish, yell, or do all of those things that people do, all you have to do is give someone the ‘disappointed face’… because that is coming from a place of relationship, because if you give that student the look, then it’s saying ‘I’m sorry that you had to compromise our relationship in this way’, which makes them feel sad, and nobody ever wants to lose a positive relationship… it’s something that they’ve spent time building, and it’s not worthwhile to compromise it.

As noted in both of these responses, the teachers recognized that as a result of developing strong relationships with their students, the students themselves were less likely to act out in ways which would undermine the relationship that was built while in the classroom, thus expressing empathy towards the person they cared about; namely the teacher in which they had built up a connection with. This made it easier for the teachers to manage their classes, reducing the extent to which
misbehaviours would compromise the classroom proceedings. The notion that the students would not want to compromise a positive relationship that they have with their teacher was observed by the participants when students showed respect and care towards their teacher by managing their own behaviour in front of that teacher in the classroom. According to both Rachel and Anna, the students did not want the teacher to be disappointed in them because the teachers found that if the students disappointed them, the bonds that were set in place would weaken the relationship between the teacher and their students. The participants in this study indicated that when a student with whom they had a strong bond with disappointed their teacher, they were less willing to speak with their teacher and were generally quiet. The participants also observed that whenever the student did disappoint their teachers, they would feel guilt over what they had done and realize that they had done something wrong; in which case, they would try to ‘repair’ the damage done by behaving well the next time. This is indicated clearly by Bill, who noted that: “I rarely get angry [at the students], but when they see me angry, they know something’s wrong, and usually they won’t do it again”. Since Bill’s expression of anger was uncharacteristic, it indicated to the students that he was upset, and therefore disappointed, by their actions. This led the students to refrain from misbehaving again, which showed that they did not want to undermine the relationship that they had with their teacher. In this way, relationship-building and empathy are effective as preventive classroom management strategies. This is supported by both Evertson and Weinstein (2006) and Weinstein et al. (2011), who suggest that implementing preventive measures, such as relationship-building, is one of the guiding principles of classroom management.

Without a strong bond between the students and their teacher, it would be less likely for the students to feel the same level of empathy or respect for their teachers, and therefore, make it much more difficult to handle the negative (‘relationship-breaking’) behaviours in the classroom,
since the students would not care about disappointing a teacher that they did not have a connection or bond with. With this, the three participants have shown that in their practices, building relationships with the students creates bonds which foster a sense of empathy in the students towards their teacher. This source of empathy encourages the students to become more respectful and aware of their actions towards the teachers, which works to sustain positive bonds between the teacher and their students. This sense of empathy is carried over to the classroom, where students have an incentive to sustain their relationships with their teachers by behaving in the classroom, which aids the teacher in managing their classes.

4.5 Limitations and Challenges of Relationship Building: Boundaries and Personal Issues

While each of the participants have seen the outcomes of developing strong relations with their students in managing their classrooms, they also expressed several concerns and challenges in using relationship-building as a classroom management strategy. One of the limitations that was shared across all the participants included recognizing the boundaries between the student and the teacher, where the participants expressed concerns about not being too much ‘like a friend’ and maintaining a balance of authority as a teacher. In their experiences, when teachers seemed like ‘friends’ with the students, it diminished the teacher’s authority, which made it difficult for the students to take the words of the teacher seriously. In this case, these teachers suggested that making sure teachers establish themselves as teachers before friends is essential in maintaining power over the students in order to manage a classroom. This balance of authority can be difficult to achieve, especially at the beginning of one’s teaching career. Anna provides some insight into this challenge, asserting that:
It’s a perfect blend [balance of authority], but I think that place takes time to get to. It was hard [when I first started out], …but the approach is perfect if you can hone it over years to get it to that place.

Thus, for most of the participants, getting to the ‘perfect balance’ between teacher and friend was a challenge which required years of experience to develop and to master.

Anna also expressed concerns relating to this notion of boundaries, in the sense of emotional boundaries and level of care towards her students. As a teacher who is passionate and caring towards her students, Anna faces the challenge of finding the line between being a social worker and a teacher, especially in situations where students revealed their struggles and situations which went beyond what she could provide in terms of help and support. Because of this, she cautioned that teachers who take on this approach need to be ready to cope with the issues that some students may open up about when developing relationships with students.

### 4.5.1 Teachers’ self-reflections on weaknesses and teacher self-efficacy

During the interviews, each participant also shared a variety of concerns relating to relationship-building which ranged and varied considerably. This was likely attributed to the different personalities of each of the participants, which reflect each teacher’s self-efficacy in their teaching and implementation of relationship-building and classroom management strategies.

For Bill, one of the challenges that he faced was getting the more quiet students to open up to him. His method of relationship building with his students encourages communication between himself and his students, often asking them ‘genuine’ questions, or making jokes so that the students could relate to him and know that they were ‘on the same side’. Although this strategy worked for most students, he also recalled several instances where the students would not respond to his efforts, and that he was essentially ‘stuck’ on what to do with them. He also relayed his
difficulties in trying to reach all his students through relationship-building, as he noted: “I am not able to reach everyone and I don’t think you can reach everybody. It’s extremely difficult”. In this sense, one of the main difficulties that Bill encounters is getting to know every student in his classes on an individual basis. Because of the nature of high school classes, he does not see many of his students often, and therefore does not have many opportunities to interact with them. This is especially the case for students who are not a part of any clubs or activities at the school. Since Bill’s main approach utilizes communication as a main vehicle for building relationships, large class sizes and rotating classes made it difficult for him to connect with and reach out to all his students, which can be a limiting factor when trying to manage a classroom using established rapport with the students. In his responses, Bill also reflected on this challenge and how he was unable to find a solution to the problem that he was faced. Despite this, he continues to use humour and student interests in and outside of his classes to foster connections with the students, asserting that it is in his personality of being the ‘funny and relaxed’ teacher that draws the students in, and which makes relationship-building with his students a natural occurrence. In this sense, Bill’s personality and beliefs of the student-teacher relationship, in addition to his passion for teaching, helped him in managing the classroom.

One other participant, Anna, also reflected on her own practice in both relationship-building and in classroom management:

“I am by nature, very introverted. So it’s been a great challenge for me [building relationships with my students]. So probably the biggest challenge for me is to let me personality grow, never mind standing up in front of a class and speaking, but… individual relationships was not easy, it was not something that came naturally to me. In my first year, it was… incredibly rough and… it forced me to realize that, well, I just thought that you go in and make really cool lesson plans and you teach, but I didn’t understand that if you don’t build relationships with those kids, you’re not teaching anyone, you’re teaching the
walls. So I think that for me, breaking through that was a huge part of me realizing that this was the only way to go about [building relationships].”

In this passage, Anna reflects on her own experiences as a beginning teacher, realizing that she needed to work with finding a way to balance her introverted personality with teaching and building relationships with her students. Her understanding of the students and what she needed to do to help them succeed allowed her reach out to the students and build those relationships in order to better her classroom and teaching practice.

All three participants in this study showed their passion in their respective teaching subjects. They demonstrated a high level of confidence in their knowledge and ability to teach their speciality (teachable) subjects, and were eager to relay that passion onto their students. In many ways, their passion shaped the way in which they approached their classrooms and classroom management. Their experiences in using relationship-building with their students as a classroom management strategy fits in with the literature relating to teacher-self efficacy and classroom management. According to Hoy and Weinstein (2006), teachers who have high self-efficacy in teaching and managing their students are more likely to approach their classes by building strong bonds with their students, whereas teachers with low self-efficacy tend to be more authoritative, controlling, and pessimistic towards their students. The participants in this study were all drawn to building relationships with their students, largely due to their beliefs on their ability and in their passion for the subject that they teach. In addition, the participants were able to reflect on their practices, and examine how and why they think their strategy for building relationships and managing a classroom worked for them, showing that openness to growth and passion for teaching are important in taking on a relationship-based approach to classroom management.
4.6 Conclusion

In reporting the findings on each participant’s responses, this chapter has detailed and analyzed the experiences and strategies used by the teachers to build relationships with their students and their perceived outcomes on their classroom management. Many of the strategies used by the participants in this study are not only in line with much of the literature on relationship building and classroom management, but they are also based upon several underlying principles which involve using relationship building as a means to manage student behaviour through respect, empathy, and positive interactions.

For the participants in this study, building a positive classroom environment was one of the key factors of managing a classroom, noting the importance of incorporating student interests, in addition to allowing for the student’s input and voices to be heard while fostering student ownership over their activities in the classroom. By doing so, the teachers were able to create a positive classroom environment that the students were happy and comfortable to be in; one in which the students would not want to disrupt through misbehaviour, thereby reducing the extent of classroom management issues experienced by the teachers in this study. Not only does bringing in student interests and input foster student engagement and positive classroom environments, but it also works to build relationships with students within the classroom setting.

The participants in this study also noted the importance of developing relationships and connections with their students both within the classroom. In developing bonds within the classroom, the participants incorporated engagement using student interests, talked to them as a class or in one-on-one conferences, and showed that they cared about their student’s success by speaking to them individually about their grades. Being involved in extra-curricular activities, such as attending sports games, or supervising events or clubs, worked well in developing relationships
outside of the classroom setting. In both cases, the teachers sought out opportunities to connect with the students to create strong bonds between themselves and their students, which worked to show the students that these teachers were supportive, and cared for their learning and well-being both within and outside the classroom. This helped to foster a sense of empathy from the students towards their teachers, where the students were less likely to misbehave if they respected the teacher and did not want to disappoint them. With a strong bond in place with their students, the participants were able to use this notion of disappointment as a means of managing student behaviour in the classroom, as the students would have an incentive to behave because they did not want to make their teacher (as someone who they cared for) disappointed during classes.

Finally, the teachers experienced several limitations in developing relationships with their students; some of which were experienced across all three participants, while others being more unique to the particular teacher’s personality and self-efficacy. Some general limitations that were found included finding the boundaries and the right balance of teacher authority, in addition to the initial building of relationships with students. Other limitations noted involved challenges in reaching and communicating with all students (especially so in a high school setting), and breaking through personal boundaries (i.e. introversion) in developing connections with the students. Despite these challenges, the teachers in this study continued to develop and foster positive relations with their students, and have found that the outcomes on managing their classrooms have generally been positive in reducing the extent of their classroom management issues.

These findings have shown how relationship building fits in with classroom management in teacher practice. While the majority of the findings are aligned with the literature, there were also several aspects of the findings which the literature has not extensively addressed. The next and final chapter of this study will present a discussion on the research findings in relation to the
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literature, the implications these findings on beginning teachers and the teaching practice, and some recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.0 Introduction

This study has provided insight into three Ontario teachers’ perspectives and methods of relationship building with their students and how it was used as a strategy for classroom management. In general, the findings from this study supported much of the existing literature in the area of classroom management strategies and the importance of relationship-building with students for the classroom. In this final chapter, I provide an overview of some of the key findings of this research study and discuss their significance in relation to the literature and for the educational community. Then, I will discuss the implications of the main themes and findings for teachers, students, and school administrators, drawing on previous research to highlight these implications. The student-teacher relationship has significant implications for not only classroom management, but also student learning and well-being, and for teacher self-efficacy. I also highlight the implications of this study for myself as a teacher and researcher, showing how both of these identities have worked together to inform my research and my practice as a teacher. I will then detail some recommendations for practicing teachers in light of the findings discussed in this research paper. I conclude this chapter by outlining some questions and directions for further research.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Significance

As noted in the previous chapter, there were several significant themes that arose from the interviews with the three teachers: (1) Participant’s notions of ‘positive’ classroom management consisted of having students be involved and engaged in the classroom, which was manifested through a positive classroom environment, (2) Participants emphasized the importance of connecting with students both within and outside the classroom, noting its significance in
effectively managing a classroom, (3) The teachers recognized that student empathy towards their teachers and peers is an outcome of strong relationship building, drawing on the idea of teacher ‘disappointment’ in student behaviour and how it can be used to effectively manage the classroom, and (4) The participant’s realized challenges and limitations of using the relationship building approach towards classroom management.

The first theme emphasized the importance of creating a positive classroom environment, where students are involved and engaged through student interests, and are provided opportunities to take ownership and have input towards their own learning. By communicating with students about their interests and learning, the teachers in this study found that they were able to develop strong relationships with their students through what Skinner and Furrer (2003) call a sense of “relatedness,” where the teachers were able to connect and relate to their students and their needs in order to support and engage them in the classroom. This is especially significant for teachers because it reminds us that creating a positive classroom environment requires putting forth an effort into knowing and understanding our students, in addition to showing our care and support by providing opportunities for student voice to be heard in the classroom.

The second theme uncovered through this study underscored the idea of creating connections with students both within the classroom (through classroom activities and interactions), and outside the classroom (through extra-curricular activities). In particular, the teachers found that both one-on-one interactions and whole-group classroom interactions needed to be genuine in order for students to acknowledge and connect with the participants as caring and supportive teachers. This was consistent with the literature, which noted that when teachers provide extra help and support to their students in academics or emotionally, their students are more likely to comply with what has been asked of them (Alderman and Green, 2011), which helps
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teachers in managing a classroom. Additionally, the teachers in this study noted that interactions with students should also take place outside of the classroom, namely, through interactions during extra-curricular activities. Building relationships outside of the classroom environment allowed these teachers to recognize their students outside of their schoolwork. Participants felt that this helped their students gain a sense of validation of who they were. Participants indicated that this validation generated a sense of respect and care from the students for their teachers, which was shown through their willingness to respect the teacher in the classroom as well. Being a genuine and believable teacher both within the outside the classroom setting becomes especially important because it prompts teachers to broaden their understandings of their students to outside of the classroom or academic context. By realizing and celebrating the successes of students in all areas, teachers can work towards fostering strong relationships with their students, which in turn can contribute to the success of effectively managing a classroom.

The third theme that emerged through the interviews was the participant’s recognition of student empathy as an outcome of strong relationship building. The teachers observed that students who appeared to like them as a teacher also tended to show up for their classes more often than classes where the student did not seem to like the teacher. It was also noted that the students expressed empathy towards teachers that they bonded with, and were seen to be more apprehensive about compromising the relationship with a teacher that they liked. This meant that the students were less likely to act out in ways that would undermine the relationship that was built, which helped these teachers in managing behaviour problems in the classroom. This points to the significance of establishing strong connections with students as a preventative classroom management strategy, where empathy towards a teacher that they cared and respected was seen to help students manage their own behaviour in the classroom.
The final theme addressed in this study related to the challenges that the participants expressed in using relationship-building as a means for classroom management, and how they perceive their weaknesses in relation to their self-efficacy. Due to the nature of their teaching style and personalities, each teacher had different issues that they faced. With this in mind, some of the challenges included: finding the perfect balance of authority (i.e. not being ‘like a friend’), finding ways to support students who share with their teachers issues and experiences that are sensitive or difficult for the teachers to handle, and the difficulties in getting to know and interact with all students on an individual basis. The extent of these concerns varied considerably based on the personality of the teacher, and their sense of self-efficacy regarding their ability to manage a classroom. Despite this, all the participants were passionate about the subjects that they taught, had generally high self-efficacy in their ability to teach and manage a classroom, and were drawn to building strong bonds with their students. This supports the research on the area of self-efficacy and classroom management, where teachers who have high self-efficacy in teaching and managing their students are more likely to approach their classes by building strong bonds with their students (Hoy and Weinstein, 2006). With this, it is important to note that there is no ‘foolproof’ method for classroom management. Although all the participants used relationship-building as a method for managing their classes, they each approached it in different ways and were able to reflect on both their positive experiences, and in their varied weaknesses. This notion of self-efficacy and reflection suggests that teachers should not only look back at their own practice, but it also provides the potential for growth and an openness/flexibility in adopting a relationship-based approach to classroom management. The next section will detail the implications of the findings in this research study on the educational research community, as well as for myself as a teacher and researcher.
5.2 Implications

This research study has detailed the significance of fostering strong bonds for classroom management, which has been shown through the experiences of the participants in this study. Consistent with the conclusions drawn by Evertson and Weinstein (2006), Jones et al. (2013), and others, this study has shown that incorporating positive student-teacher relations, creating positive and supportive classroom environments, and including student voice and participation are essential components for effectively managing a classroom. It is imperative to make note of the important implications that this study highlights for the educational community. Broadly speaking, this study has shown that teachers and school administrators should acknowledge relationship-building as an effective means of classroom management, and to work towards taking initiative in fostering connections with students both within and outside the classroom. This study also provides insight into notions of relationship-building and classroom management as variable based on a teacher’s self-efficacy and personality. This was shown through the diverse strategies and complications that arose from building bonds and managing student behaviour in the classroom. Teachers and educators should take note of these variations, which serves as a reminder that relationship-building is not just a quick strategy for managing a classroom, but rather, it should serve as the building blocks for manifesting an effective classroom management strategy. The results of this study have several implications for teachers, students, and school administrators in relationship-building and classroom management, which will be further discussed in the upcoming section.

5.2.1 Implications for the Educational Research Community

For Teachers:

As noted, past conceptualizations of classroom management primarily focused on strategies for controlling and disciplining students in an effort to constrain student behaviour (Bucher & Manning, 2001; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006). It is not uncommon for teachers to continue
to hold the view that controlling and disciplining student behaviour is an effective means of managing a classroom, even though more recent literature on classroom management has moved away from these notions (McCaslin and Good, 1998; Evertson and Weinstein, 2006). In particular, the experiences of the teachers in this study support the more recent literature on relationship-building and creative inclusive environments for effective classroom management. This study has shown that teachers should be open to incorporating elements of relationship-building into their practice as teachers in order to effectively manage their classrooms. In addition to shedding light on the strategies for relationship-building and classroom management, this study also uncovers several other implications for teachers who choose to implement these strategies into their practice.

First, it is important for teachers to recognize that incorporating relationship-building with students in their everyday routine helps reduce the stress experienced from classroom disruptions or poor management practices. According to the literature on teacher stress and classroom management, proper classroom management can have positive implications on reducing teacher stress in the classroom, and studies have also shown that this reduces the risk of teacher burnout (Friedman, 2006). By using relationship-building as a means of managing their classes, the teachers in this study found that they did not have to worry about classroom management problems, and that it was easier for them to deal with behavioural disruptions in the class, which meant that they could dedicate their energy toward teaching and had more time to cover the curriculum. In this sense, relationship-building also has implications for a teachers’ self-efficacy in their teaching and management of a classroom, allowing them to become more confident, passionate, and attached to their teaching and their students. For teachers who struggle with classroom management, finding a means to mediate relationship-building and managing classes could help reduce the stress and issues associated with poor classroom management.
This research also has implications for classroom management in terms of how teacher’s beliefs influence their approaches to managing their classrooms. All the teachers in this study actively worked to integrate relationship-building into their teaching practice, which worked in helping them manage student behaviours in the classroom. Teachers should be wary of solely relying on authority and discipline in their classroom management practices, since that can contribute to hostile classroom situations. The teachers in this study indicated that their personalities and beliefs of having good relations with their students worked well for them in their teaching and management of their classes. In this sense, it is important to take note of how teachers approach classroom management based on their beliefs, and how these beliefs have implications for their practice in the classroom. This should serve as a reminder that we need to change the way we think about relationship-building and how that can have implications in how we manage the classroom. Teachers and educators need to acknowledge the idea that building positive connections with students can help with student engagement and behaviour management in the classroom. As educators, we must prioritize the creation of positive bonds with our classes, and bring this awareness to every aspect of our teaching by working with our students in developing positive relationships moving forward.

For Students:
This study also has several implications for students. Participants in this study, consistent with research, identified multiple benefits to students that result from positive student-teacher relationships (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Emmer & Gerwels, 2006; Morine-Dershimer, 2006; van Tartwijk, 2009). These findings suggest that student engagement and achievement are likely to be improved as teachers, schools, and school boards better acknowledge and support positive teacher-student relationships. Thus, it is important to note the implications of relationship-building in fostering good classroom management practices, and to take into account the inherent link
between management practices and student engagement in the classroom and their effects on student learning.

In addition to the above implications, the teachers in this study also noted the significance of acknowledging the successes of the students both within and outside of the classroom, and felt that doing so made the students feel valued and acknowledged within the school. The participants also worked to create positive classroom atmospheres, again through student input and voice, so that their students would feel comfortable, included, and willing to participate in class activities. In doing so, the teachers saw that their students were more willing to listen to them during their classes, which aided them in their classroom management. The experiences of these teachers fits with the research in this area, where creating positive classroom environments and supporting student endeavours increases not only the student’s sense of belonging, but also reduces disruptive behaviour (Battistich, et al., 1995; Ryan & Patrick 2001, c.f. Brackett et al., 2011). For students, having a caring and supportive teacher who understands and acknowledges them as individuals outside of purely academics promotes their sense of self-efficacy within the school context (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Conversely, those who do not have the support demonstrated by the teachers in this study and outlined in the literature tend to be less compliant and understanding in the classroom, causing them to become disengaged, act out, or feel alienated in the classroom (Harris et al., 2008; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Thus, it is important that students are shown that they are supported by their teachers, and that the student shares a strong sense of relatedness or bond with their teacher to avoid behavioural problems in the classroom.

**For School Administrators:**

While this study has focused on the strategies that teachers use to foster relationships with their students, it is also important for the school administration to take part in promoting relationship-building and creating an inclusive, comfortable community for students. As noted in
the literature, many teachers face the issue of having to deal with classroom management, and generally do not have enough supports to help them through these issues (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006). Additionally, the participants in this study cited very few resources and professional development courses in understanding the relationship between strong relationship-building and managing a classroom, largely drawing from personal experiences in ‘honoring’ their classroom management technique. Schools and school administrators should prioritize relationship building as an effective means for teachers to manage the classroom by creating initiatives to engage teachers with the idea of positive relationship building in their classrooms through professional development sessions, or creating school-wide initiatives and activities to promote relationship building between teachers and students.

5.2.2 Implications on my Professional Identity and Practice as a Teacher and Researcher

Implications as a Beginning Teacher

As a beginning teacher, this research study has allowed me to gain insight into the importance of showing care and support to my students through relationship-building and encouraging a positive classroom environment. The compelling experiences of the participants in this study led me to reflect on the impact that teachers can have on the success of their students both within and outside the classroom setting. This study has helped me to realize that self-efficacy in the school applies to both myself as a teacher and to my students. The extent to which I am confident in my abilities as a teacher and in my management practices reflects the extent to which I actively build connections with my students. In this sense, how I come to approach my classroom management has implications for how well I show my support and care for my students, which in turn affects their self-efficacy and success at school. The strategies outlined by the participants in this study (engaging with conversation, understanding student interests, and encouraging student-voice) are several ways in which teachers can show their support and care for their students. Thus,
as a beginning teacher, I have found that it is important to always remember that the teacher’s actions, beliefs, and personalities all play a role in how students experience the classroom, and that incorporating an inclusive classroom environment through relationship-building is a positive step forward towards my classroom management practices.

In addition, my initial thoughts relating to classroom management and relationship building had focused largely on the classroom context and on fostering rapport with the students individually. However, the literature and my participants’ responses have shown me that fostering relations with students does not need to take place within the classroom and for one individual student, but rather, bonds with students can be developed, strengthened, and maintained through simple gestures such as asking about one’s day, and engaging with students outside the classroom during extra-curricular activities or events. I have found that it is important to make an effort to get to know the students in as many areas as possible in order to foster meaningful connections with the students such that they are also carried over to the classroom environment. The participants in this study have taught me that relationships take time to build, and that the teacher must first try to build these bonds before it can be used effectively as a means for classroom management. I find that this sentiment holds very true, especially for beginning teachers such as myself, and I hope to take this sentiment with me in my teaching practice.

The strategies outlined by the participants in this study and in the literature will also help me to develop my own repertoire of strategies for relationship-building and managing a classroom. As noted, each teacher has different methods of approaching relationship-building based on their personalities and self-efficacy. In my case, I hope to keep these strategies in mind and to mould their use in a way that fits my personal style of teaching and developing relationships. In this way,
I know that I can be genuine in not only developing my relationships, but also in my teaching as well, such that I can be comfortable with my classroom management practices.

**Implications as an Educational Researcher**

As a first-time educational researcher, I was grateful for the opportunity to conduct a research study into an educational issue that resonated with me as a teacher. Having read many research studies in the past, I appreciated the experience of conducting my own research study through the Master of Teaching program. I was able to align my concerns in my professional practice as a teacher with the educational research in the areas of classroom management and relationship-building. In developing this research paper, I had the opportunity to learn about conducting and developing strong interview questions, and to deconstruct data by coding transcripts and identifying themes through an analysis of participant responses. This allowed me to further develop my analytical abilities as a researcher. I was also able to engage with the literature in the area of classroom management, a field that I have held an interest in since deciding to become a certified teacher. In taking on the perspectives of both a teacher and a researcher, I was able to see and understand classroom management and relationship-building in ways which helped to further my understanding in the research, and in my practice as a teacher.

I found that the general findings from this study connected well with the existing literature on the student-teacher relationship and its implications on classroom management. I valued becoming more familiar with current research in the fields of relationship-building and classroom management, which have greatly informed my practice as a teacher. Although I was able to make connections with the literature, I also realized the importance of consistently relating the findings of this study to previous research on the topic to better account for my results. As a researcher, I have seen that drawing on the past literature in order to inform later findings allows the researcher
to ‘weave’ together ideas from various sources, creating an overall piece that is multi-faceted and which works to better inform the researcher and the reader.

I have come to better understand how research is conducted in the field of education, and greatly appreciate all the researchers before me who have conducted research in the field of education. Having said this, I have realized the need to grow and develop as both a teacher and as a researcher in order to better inform my practice and pedagogical understandings that underpin education. I hope to continue on the path into researching other areas in education in order to shed light on the various issues that plague our education systems today.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the implications previously noted, this study points to several recommendations for teachers to incorporate into their practice as well as for school administrators to consider integrating into the school system. These recommendations serve as a starting point to better inform and engage teachers in developing relationships with their students as a means for classroom management, which works to better student learning and inclusion in the school context. This section will detail recommendations for action for teachers and school administrators, which will be outlined below.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Teachers

(1) Teachers should take initiative to familiarize themselves with the research relating to relationship-building and classroom management: It is important for teachers to recognize the importance of relationship-building with their students for effective classroom management by keeping up-to-date with the research relating to these areas, and to look into strategies that would help them connect with their students in ways that they feel comfortable with. As this study has also shown, each participant had their own ways of connecting with their students, which attributed
to successful outcomes in the classroom. By understanding the pedagogical and conceptual underpinnings of why relationship-building aids with classroom management, teachers who struggle with how to begin developing relationships with their students can figure out how they may approach relationship-building through the literature and based on their teaching styles and personalities. Referring to the research also provides teachers with ideas and strategies that they can use in their own classrooms.

(2) Teachers should incorporate relationship building into their practices: Teachers should take the initiative in developing strong relationships with their students both within and outside the classroom. The teachers in this study all took the time and effort in communicating with their students on a daily basis, which contributed to the development of strong bonds between themselves and their students. These teachers also noted that it took time to build up connections with their students both within the classroom and outside of the classroom by allowing them to have input in classroom activities, speaking to them during classes and in the hallways, and interacting with them during extra-curricular events or activities. With strong relationships with their students, these teacher were able to foster a sense of respect and care, which translated into better behaviour management within the classroom environment.

(3) Being mindful of students as individuals, and show that you care and support the student in all endeavours: Teachers should also be aware of their influence over their students’ learning and confidence at school. Being able to see the student as an individual outside of schoolwork can help us be more attuned to providing care and support to the whole student. Because of the implications that poor teacher practice can have on their students (as noted previously), teachers should be mindful of how they conduct their classrooms and to ensure that they show their support and care to all their students, both in academics, and in other endeavors. As noted in this study, when
students see that their teachers care about their well-being and celebrate their successes, they can feel a sense of relatedness towards their teacher and tend to be more engaged in school. This also helps the teacher in terms of behaviour management in their classrooms. Providing extra help, asking about important events in their lives, and supporting them in extra-curricular activities are some ways in which teachers can show their support and are to students.

(4) Teachers should work towards creating positive and inclusive classroom environments where students feel comfortable and are willing to participate in class activities: One of the main themes that was identified through this study was the idea of creating positive classroom environments where the students are happy and comfortable. As noted by the participants in this study, relationship-building was an essential part of sustaining this positive classroom environment because they found that their students would not want to compromise their relationships with their teacher or the positive classroom environment by behaving poorly in the classroom. In this sense, I recommend that teachers implement strategies that would contribute to a positive classroom environment, which is enhanced by developing the student-teacher relationship. This may be done through the use of TRIBES Learning Communities (a community-building teaching strategy for the classroom), team-building activities in the classroom, integrating student voice and interests into curriculum teaching, or using games or competitions for student learning.

(5) Teachers should reflect on their own practices and beliefs about relationship-building and classroom management: As noted, a teacher’s beliefs have important implications on their practice in the classroom. Thus, my final recommendation for teachers is to have them reflect on their own practices and beliefs about relationship-building and classroom management, in order to see their own weaknesses, culturally-specific expectations, values, and assumptions about their students. Reflecting back on our practice allows us to develop our confidence and efficacy in the classroom.
in terms of classroom management. The teachers in this study reflected upon their practice, and acknowledged the idea that their strategies for relationship-building and classroom management are constantly in development; as practicing teachers, they continue to ‘hone’ their techniques and have seen themselves improving upon their classroom management over time. They noted taking their failures and working to improve upon them in order to better their own practice. Likewise, practicing teachers should not expect immediate results from relationship-building in their management of their classes. Instead, they should work towards building and developing their repertoire of tools and strategies for making connections with their students, which in time, can work well for the benefit of the management of the classroom and the quality of learning for students.

**Recommendations for School Administrators**

As noted in the educational research, many teachers find classroom management to be one of the greatest concerns in their practice, largely due to inadequate resources and professional development relating to classroom management (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Riley, 2009). As noted by Riley (2009), there is much potential for teaching training in the area of relationship building and classroom management, as it can educate and encourage teachers to encourage teachers to not only see the benefits of relationship building, but to also implement it in the classroom. Thus, school administrators should incorporate relationship building initiatives in their professional development programs for teachers in order to better support teacher training in this regard, and to provide them with the tools and strategies (such as school-wide team-building activities and initiatives, TRIBES Learning Community training, professional development sessions) that they need to better integrate the student-teacher relationship in their classroom management practices.
5.4 Areas for Further Research

Further research on a larger sample of teachers in this particular area could be conducted and compared to this study to see if similar outcomes would be reached. In addition, research could further investigate the strategies used by teachers to support relationship-building and classroom management and to see their effectiveness compared to the experiences of the participants in this study and to the existing literature in this area.

Due to the parameters of this study, only teacher’s experiences were included to inform this study. Much of the literature on classroom management and relationship-building focuses upon the perspectives, beliefs, and strategies of the teacher rather than the perspectives of the student. It would be beneficial to also include the experiences and thoughts of the students, and to see not only the effectiveness of teacher strategies, but to examine how students come to perceive their teachers and the extent to which they take the initiative to foster strong bonds with them. It would also be interesting to better understand students’ reasons and incentives for managing their own behaviour in the classroom.

This study also looked at connecting with students outside of the classroom through extra-curricular activities in order to foster strong bonds, which can carry over to the classroom. The impacts of extra-curricular activities on relationship-building was an interesting finding from this study, although the literature in this area was limited. While this study does highlight the importance of extra-curricular activities in relationship-building, further research into this matter would help us understand how they may help with relationship-building (if at all), and whether or not being involved in these areas at school would be beneficial for teachers in the management of their classrooms.
Finally, further study could explore the extent to which school administrations and school boards are promoting this notion of relationship-building for classroom management, and whether quality programs are available for teachers who are interested in incorporating this into their classroom practices. In doing so, we could have a better sense of the extent of support that is available to teachers to improve student-teacher dynamics as a strategy for classroom management.

5.5 Concluding Comments

As we have seen, one of the most common issues that teachers face in the classroom today is classroom management (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Jones, 2006). However, research has shown that teachers who have strong relationships with their students tend to also have better management practices, and have students that are less likely to act out or behave poorly in front of their teachers (Evertson and Weinstein 2006; Alderman & Green, 2011; Pianta, 2006; Weinstein et al. 2011), making it easier for teachers to manage their classrooms. This study in particular has largely supported the research, drawing on four main themes relating to relationship-building and classroom management relating to: (1) students being involved and engaged in a positive classroom environment, (2) connecting with students both within and outside the classroom, (3) student empathy towards their teachers and peers, and (4) the challenges of using the relationship building approach towards classroom management.

Given these four themes, this research study discussed several major implications for teachers, students, and school administrators. It is important for the educational community to realize these implications and to consider some of the strategies outlined by both the participants in this study and in the literature relating to building relationships and managing a classroom. For teachers, incorporating relationship-building in their classroom management practices helps to reduce the stress and anxiety from classroom disruptions, which promotes a teacher’s sense of
passion and self-efficacy for their teaching and management of their classrooms. Thus, it is recommended that teachers prioritize building up the relationships with their students by integrating relationship-building techniques noted in the research, and to be open to the idea of fostering these relationships for the benefit of their classrooms. For students, it is important that they learn in an engaging and comfortable space that is sustained through strong and supportive relations with their teachers, in addition to being valued in all areas at school, as this works to engage them in classroom activities and make them feel validated during their time at school. In this way, students are more willing to manage their behaviour in the classroom, which contributes to their success at school. Thus, teachers should work towards creating comfortable spaces for student learning by taking in student input and voice, while also making learning engaging by getting to know their student’s interests and celebrating their successes at the school. Finally, school administrators should encourage and implement quality professional development for their teachers in building relationships with their students at the school in order to promote safe classrooms and overall school spaces. Providing teacher training in this regard would also support teachers in giving them the ideas, tools, and resources to implementing relationship-building as a classroom management strategy.

This research study has worked to showcase the importance of relationship-building for classroom management, uncovering several strategies and tools to help teachers who wish to develop their classroom management practices. Several implications were also discussed for the major players in the school: the teachers, the students, and school administrators. Relationship-building has been shown to be integral to classroom management from the literature and the experiences of the participants, and has several implications for teachers, students, and school administrators. Given the findings and research highlighted in this study, it would be beneficial for
the educational research community to take into consideration the significance of the student-teacher relationship in providing the basis for understanding classroom management as well as supporting student success in the classroom moving forward.
References


TEACHER’S PERSPECTIVES ON CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT


Horvat E. M., Heron M. L. and Heron M. L. (Eds.). (2013). *The beginner's guide to doing qualitative research: How to get into the field, collect data, and write up your project*. New York: Teachers College Press.


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: __________________

Dear ____________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying teachers' perspectives on relationship building as a classroom management strategy for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Rodney Handelsman. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Anita Soo
Researcher name: Anita Soo
Phone number, email: anita.soo@mail.utoronto.ca

Instructor’s Name: Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic
Email: angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca

Research Supervisor’s Name: Rodney Handelsman
Email: rodney.handelsman@utoronto.ca

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Anita Soo and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name (printed): ___________________________________

Date: ______________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Time of Interview:                                  Date:

Name of Participant:                               Position of Participant:

Research Purpose

This research study aims to explore teacher perspectives on the importance of student-teacher relationships for classroom management. In doing so, I hope to highlight some methods of classroom management that will be insightful and helpful for both beginning and experienced teachers. This interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. I want to remind you of your right to refrain from answering any question. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

Section 1: General/Background of Interviewee

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. What grades and subjects have you taught in the past? What grades and subjects do you currently teach?
3. How long have you been teaching at the junior/intermediate level (particularly grades 6-10)?
4. Can you tell me more about the school you currently work in? (size, demographics, program priorities)
5. In addition to classroom teacher, do you fulfill any other roles in the school? (e.g. coach, counsellor, advisor, instructional leader etc.)

Section 2: Teacher Beliefs and Experiences
6. What does classroom management mean to you? In your view, what are the key components to ‘good’ classroom management?

7. In your experience, what are some of the most common approaches to classroom management that you have observed in schools? In your estimation, how effective are these approaches?

8. What is the role of relationship building in your classroom management approach? What does relationship-building mean to you? What are some of the key indicators of a positive relationship?

9. In your experience, what are some of the benefits of this approach?

10. In your experience, what are some of the limitations of this approach?

Section 3: Teacher Practices and Strategies

11. How would you describe your current classroom management strategy?

12. How do you actively use relationship building with students as a means for classroom management? What do you do to build positive relationships with students?

13. What are some strategies or tools that you use or have used when building positive relations with your students?
   a. Which strategies do you find work well in general?
   b. Which strategies do you find work well in relation to your ability to manage a classroom? Can you give me an example of a time you used this strategy and how it worked?
   c. What resources do you use to access these strategies or tools?

14. What outcomes do you observe as a result of using positive relations with students as a classroom management strategy? What are some key indicators you have observed that relationship-building has an effect on classroom management?

Section 4: Teacher Self-Efficacy and Challenges Faced

15. What issues or challenges do you face in your effort to build positive relationships with students? Why do you think you encounter these challenges? How do you respond to these challenges?

16. What range of factors and resources support you in building relationships with students?
Section 5: Next Steps

17. What are some of your goals for classroom management and/or relationship building with your students moving forward?

18. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who struggle with classroom management?

Thank you for your time and participation.