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A study of feelings of alienation among relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools

Ralph G. Lunay
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Edith Cowan University

**A Study of Feelings of Alienation Among
Relief Teachers Servicing Western
Australian Government Metropolitan
Primary Schools**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the award
of**

Master of Education

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Submission Date: 25th November 2005.

ABSTRACT:

It is perhaps fair to say that the relief (substitute) teacher should be viewed as an extremely important educational resource. Reviewed literature spanning the better part of twenty years indicates that in parts of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, many students spend as much as one full year (or more) of their K-12 education having curriculum delivered to them by these individuals. Unfortunately, the literature also indicates that many relief teachers are still viewed by many as less than "real" teachers in terms of perceived competence, skill and capability.

In addition to this, the existence of a number of pervasive, enduring systemic problems have been identified as being present in the educational systems of the above-mentioned regions, which have been seen to impact negatively on the relief teacher, making the difficult job they do, even more arduous. There is reason to hypothesise that as a result of exposure to these problems, relief teachers could be expected to suffer from feelings of alienation and further "disconnection" from tenured (or contracted) colleagues, and that this may further marginalise them from the rest of the greater educational community.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether feelings of alienation were present in relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools, and if so, what they identified as contributing to those feelings. Additionally the research attempted to ascertain what (if any) support strategies for relief teachers were actually offered by the schools that had been serviced by the subject population.

The research itself was qualitative in nature, using semi-structured interviews as the main data gathering tool, with twenty "currently serving" relief teachers being interviewed.

The current study established strong positive links between feelings of alienation in the subject population and exposure to a number of major systemic problems, which currently exist within the educational "system" of this state.

The present research also identified a number of support strategies offered by some schools, which indicates some cognisance of the problems faced by relief teachers during the course of their work.

As a result of the research findings, several recommendations for further action emerged. Implementation of these should, logically, go some considerable way toward reducing feelings of alienation and disconnection among relief teachers, and more importantly augmenting their effectiveness as an arguably increasingly important educational resource.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate any unacknowledged material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any higher education institution;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signed: _____

(Ralph G Lunay)

Date: 20/11/2005

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Contents

Abstract	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of contents	iv
CHAPTER ONE	
Overview of the study	
Introduction	1
Background	1
Significance	3
Need for the study	3
Purpose of the study	4
Research questions	4
Specific research aims and objectives	5
Definition of key terms	5
Outline of study	6
Assumptions	7
Summary	7
CHAPTER TWO	
Review of the literature	
Introduction	9
Linking the literature review to the conceptual framework	9
The concept of alienation	11
Availability of literature focussing on relief teaching	12
Relief teacher demographics	14
Probable sources of relief teachers' feelings of alienation	16
Recommendations for improvement to current practices	31
Conclusion	38
Summary	39

CHAPTER THREE

Conceptual framework

Introduction	41
Psychological model of alienation	41
Summary	46

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

Introduction	47
Ethical considerations	47
Subject population	48
Nature and design of research	48
Instruments and materials	50
Analysis of data collected	52
Limitations of the research	53
Summary	56

CHAPTER FIVE

Overview of interviews and demographic findings

Introduction	57
Overview of semi-structured interviews	57
Respondent demographics	59
Summary	65

CHAPTER SIX

Identified positive aspects of relief teaching

Introduction	66
Justification for inclusion	66
Identified positive aspects of relief teaching	67
Summary	70

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Alienation” as identified and discussed by the subject population

Introduction	71
Alienation as defined for the purposes of the research	71
Relief teacher alienation as identified by the interviewees	72
Alienation as expressed over the three constructs	73
Summary	79

CHAPTER EIGHT

System problems and support strategies as identified and discussed by the subject population

Introduction	80
Links to the literature review	
Issues identified by respondents which led to feelings of alienation	81
Specific in-class challenges	83
Relationship issues	85
Relief teacher image and perception	89
Equity with tenured colleagues	91
Identified support strategies offered to relief teachers	96
Summary	101

CHAPTER NINE

Summary of the research findings

Introduction	103
Overview	103
Relief teacher demographics	104
The identified “positives” of relief teaching	105
Alienation as identified and discussed by the subject population	106
Issues identified by respondents, which led to feelings of alienation	107
Identified support strategies offered by schools to relief teachers	110
Summary	112

CHAPTER TEN

Recommendations and conclusion

Introduction	113
Recommendations	113
Conclusion	119

References	122
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List of appendices

Appendix 1:	Transcripts of interviews	125
Appendix 2(a):	Invitation to participate	165
Appendix 2(b):	Research consent form	167

List of figures

Figure 1:	Psychological model of alienation	44
Figure 2:	Age range of cohort	59
Figure 3:	Continuous relief teaching experience (years)	60
Figure 4:	Total number of schools serviced by cohort	61
Figure 5:	Total teaching experience (years)	62
Figure 6:	Career aspirations	63
Figure 7:	Positive aspects of relief teaching	67
Figure 8A:	Alienation as expressed over construct combinations	74
Figure 8B:	Total number of respondents who identified each alienation construct	74
Figure 9A	Major systemic problems encountered which lead to feelings of alienation in the subject population (by theme)	81
Figure 9B	Major systemic problems encountered which lead to Feelings of alienation in the subject population (by specific sub-theme)	82
Figure 10:	Support strategies as identified by subject population	97

Chapter 1

Overview of the study

Introduction

Chapter one introduces the reader to the research. The first section discusses the background of the study, in effect setting the scene for the reader. The next section deals with the significance of this research, justifying its importance to the field of education. Sections three and four discuss the need for and purpose of the research, while the fifth section defines the specific research questions that this study has attempted to answer. The penultimate section provides a basic outline of the research itself, and the final section lists important key assumptions of the study.

Background

Research both in Australia and overseas (United States and United Kingdom in particular) has for many years identified teaching in primary and secondary government schools as being a profession which carries higher levels of stress, job dissatisfaction and consequent “drop out” rates than many other skilled occupations. Some Western countries (parts of the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia) now face significant problems regarding falling numbers of teachers (Bruce & Cacioppe, 1989; Gonzales, 2002; Woods, 2004), and the consequent difficulties experienced by school districts in being able to adequately service existing students’ needs. Much of the research also shows that the highest rates of teacher resignation appear to be graduates with 6 years or less experience (Bruce & Cacioppe, 1989; Department of Education and Training, 2003; Gonzales, 2002; Woods, 2004), leading to ageing workforces.

There is reason to speculate that, partially as a result of the above trends, the importance of the relief teacher as an educational resource is increasing. Other reasons for this heightened importance include the emphasis being placed on professional development and other in service training for tenured educators, meaning yet more time which students will spend away from their regular teacher(s).

A review of the relevant literature reveals that over the course of a student's kindergarten to year 12 education, significant amounts of time are already being spent with relief teachers--in some instances, a year or more (Abdal Haqq, 1997; Brace, 1990; Edelman, 2003; Gonzales, 2002; Longhurst, 2000). If this trend *is* on the increase, there is little doubt that the relief teacher needs to be as effective as the regular teacher in the continuation of curriculum delivery in the classroom setting.

Unfortunately, the above does not appear to be the case. Relief teachers are still generally seen by the broader educational community as somewhat "lacking" regarding their capabilities as professional educators (Black, 2002; Cardon, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001). Negative perceptions from tenured or contracted colleagues, students and school leaders, coupled with low expectations (Abdal Haqq, 1997; Black, 2002; Cardon, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001), marginalise the relief teacher from the outset. Lack of in-service training and professional development opportunities (Crittenden, 1994; Lunay, 2004), real problems with in-class and administrative back up, and general lack of respect for the difficult job they do, are other major issues facing these educators (Black, 2002; Crittenden, 1994; Gonzales, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Shilling, 1991). These problems are often additional to the well-recognised problems faced by the teaching profession in general.

The review of the available literature on the subject of relief teachers identified several recurrent themes, which when analysed further, could reasonably be expected to produce strong feelings of alienation and disconnection from tenured/contracted counterparts and the broader education community in general. If indeed, these feelings do exist, questions need to be asked which address how much effect this has on the ability of the relief teacher to function at full capacity, and what can be done to assist in the overall reduction of this estrangement and disconnection.

Significance

The uniqueness of this study is considered to be a major reason why research of this nature should be undertaken. An exhaustive review of available literature on the subject of relief teaching has identified several recurring systemic problems, which could reasonably be considered to negatively impact upon relief teachers. However, no literature could be found which actually determines whether this is in fact, the case. Indeed, no background literature that discusses in any real depth the possibility of negative psychological and/or emotional effects arising from the special nature of the work in which these professionals engage appears to exist.

In conducting research of this type, it is hoped that some foundation for further inquiry might be laid, which will begin a conscious process of actively developing the relief teacher as an effective educational resource.

Need for the study

The comparative lack of research into relief teaching in general, coupled with the fact that relief teachers' contributions to the provision of educational services appear to be increasing both in frequency and importance, provide strong reasons for looking deeper into the problems these professionals face.

Further, most research that has been carried out concentrates mainly on issues facing relief teachers in North America or the United Kingdom. Scant research on this group of educators exists in Australia, and almost none is relevant to Western Australia.

The results of this study might hopefully begin to portray the specific problems faced by relief teachers in Western Australia, explore the possibility that these individuals are experiencing high (and often totally unnecessary) levels of alienation, and provide some basic pointers to what can be done by the educational bureaucracy and school administrators to reduce these feelings.

Purpose of the study

The intended purpose of this study is first, to identify if feelings of alienation do in fact exist among relief teachers, and second, to investigate which areas of concern produce the strongest feelings of alienation. In addition, it is intended to identify any other problems experienced by relief teachers, which might cause feelings of alienation, that have not been identified by relevant literature, and to determine what support strategies schools actually provide for relief teachers. In answering these questions, it may become possible to further explore this problem, and perhaps develop strategic initiatives designed to address the issues.

Research Questions

The body of this research focussed on determining the existence of feelings of alienation being experienced by relief teachers working in Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools. Specific reference to areas of concern identified by the literature, which impact either solely on relief teachers, or, could reasonably be expected to affect relief teachers to the same degree as their tenured colleagues, were also examined. In addition, focus was placed on other possible sources of alienation identified by relief teachers themselves, as opposed to those identified in the available literature, along with identification of any support systems actually offered to relief teachers by the schools they have been servicing.

The above was distilled into two broad research questions:

1. **(a) Are relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools feeling alienation as a consequence of their work?**

(b) If alienation is confirmed, what do Western Australian government metropolitan primary school relief teachers identify as contributing to these feelings?
2. **What identified support strategies/systems have been offered to relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools?**

Specific research aims and objectives

This study will attempt to:

- ◆ Determine sources of alienation among relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools.
- ◆ Investigate other possible sources of alienation among the above group, which have not been identified by previous research.
- ◆ Determine what types of support strategies are offered to relief teachers by those schools utilising their services.

Definition of key terms

In order to ensure that no confusion exists, it was considered necessary to clearly define and clarify the terms *relief* (Australia), *substitute* (North America), or *supply* (United Kingdom), teacher from the outset. This study focuses only on the "casually" employed teacher who may be called to cover for a class's regular teacher during planned or unplanned short-term absences. Such absences could include sick, personal or professional development (PD) leave. Relief teachers may be called to cover such absences for periods ranging from half-day placements, through to periods of several weeks, although "usual" placements will typically last from one to several days at a time. Relief teachers are distinct from *temporary/contract* teachers, who are employed through the Western Australian Department of Education and Training (DET) for "block" periods usually lasting from one term to a complete school year, and usually remain in one class or school for the duration of their contract. These teachers usually receive all the benefits of tenured full and part-time educators, including sick, annual and professional leave.

The term "alienation" also requires clarification. This concept can hold many different meanings to different stakeholders, and is very widely used in a multitude of different "arenas" (Ray, 1998, p. 67). For the purposes of this study, *alienation* has been defined as persistent negative feelings that some relief teachers may experience during the course of their work within Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools. These feelings may be expressed as powerlessness, meaninglessness, or isolation, and may in fact be expressed in combinations of these constructs. Alienation as it relates to the context of this research is fully discussed in chapters two and three.

Outline of study

Chapter two presents a review of the available literature. This review focuses on the literature that relates to the aims and objectives of the study. These include the identification of the presence of feelings of alienation among relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools, probable causes of these feelings (identified by the literature), and possible other sources of alienation. Therefore, the review of literature will include the definition and sociological/psychological explanation of alienation, a clarification of the term "relief" teacher (as opposed to other temporary forms of teacher employment), relief teacher demographics, identified systemic problems facing these individuals, and suggested improvements to current practice.

Chapter three focuses on the conceptual framework of this study. A psychological concept of alienation is used in the study, and an Alienation-Non-Alienation model has been adapted from Carlson (1995) and Finn (1989), that helps to explain the various dimensions along which these negative feelings may manifest themselves. Chapter four discusses the methodology used in this research including its design, procedure, instruments and materials to be used, analysis of data, possible weaknesses, and defines the specific target population. Chapters five through eight discuss and analyse in some detail, the findings of the current study and chapter nine summarises these findings. Chapter ten highlights a series of recommendations which emerged from the research findings, and provides a brief conclusion to the study.

Assumptions

Four key assumptions underlie this study.

- ◆ The relief teachers' responses to the open-ended questions at interview, actually represented their true feelings and perceptions.
- ◆ The unpredictable and often tenuous nature of relief teachers' placements within various and widely divergent school settings could influence levels and types of alienation being felt over varying periods of time.
- ◆ Other bio-psycho-social variables outside the actual school setting (both within and outside the control of the individual) could have positive or negative effects on feelings of alienation.
- ◆ All relief teachers surveyed/interviewed in this study are equal in competence to that of their tenured colleagues.

Summary

This chapter has established the context in which the research will occur. The first section provided background information identifying the importance of the relief teacher to the educational community, discussed reasons why this importance is increasing, and contended that the relief teacher is still undervalued as a legitimate educational resource. Sections two and three discussed the uniqueness of this study, identifying a lack of research in the area of relief teaching (especially in Western Australia). Section three further suggested that confirmation of feelings of alienation, together with the reasons for these feelings among this group of professionals, may be identified by this study. Section four outlined the purpose of this research and sections five and six detailed the two broad research questions that this study will attempt to answer. The final section identified several important key assumptions underlying this study.

An in-depth review of the relevant literature is presented in the following chapter, identifying many of the systemic problems faced by relief teachers which could reasonably be expected to produce varying types and levels of alienation. Interestingly, many of these challenges were found to be common in all countries from which this literature was drawn.

Chapter 2

Review of the literature

Introduction

A comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the research is presented in this chapter. The first section provides a link between the literature review and the conceptual framework of the research. A general definition of alienation and a brief description of the concept of alienation as a psychological/sociological construct then follows. Clarification of the term "relief teacher" is included, along with a brief discussion on the scarcity of literature that relates to the subject of relief teaching in general. The third section discusses relief teacher demographics, with particular reference being made to identified proportions of relief teachers servicing schools and age/gender/experience mixes identified in the reviewed literature. Section four discusses the probable sources of alienation experienced by relief teachers as reported in the available literature whilst the fifth section identifies recommendations for improvement to current practices (also reported in the literature), which if implemented, could reasonably be expected to reduce feelings of alienation in this group of professionals. The final section provides a conclusion and briefly summarises the literature findings.

Linking the literature review to the conceptual framework

The concept of alienation among relief teachers, whether actual or perceived, is not identified or discussed in any of the available literature. Indeed, as will become apparent later in this review, literature dealing in any substantive way with the specific issues relating to relief teachers or teaching is indeed scant. This is particularly evident in Australia, and although comparatively more literature is available which discusses relief teacher issues in North America and the United Kingdom, the amount is still minuscule in comparison with published research dealing with tenured educators. Although the available literature *implied* that alienation could possibly become manifest in relief teachers who were exposed to some or all of the systemic problems

subsequently identified, no direct links are evident. (Indeed, one of the general aims of this research is to attempt to establish this link.)

The available literature did, however, reveal a number of prevalent “themes” which when analysed further, highlighted the major systemic problems faced by relief teachers. The logical implication of these problems is that they themselves could be expected to provide the “platform” from which feelings of alienation may develop. These themes also provided a “tight” and very natural framework for the subsequent discussion.

The conceptual framework, however, utilises a psychological alienation-non-alienation model (adapted from Carlson (1995) and Finn (1989)) and that allows any identified alienation amongst the target population to be explicitly expressed along a combination of three continua: *Powerlessness*, *Meaninglessness*, and/or *Isolation*. The development of this model was considered essential, in order for “alienation” to be properly quantified.

As can be seen from the above discussion, this seeming “disconnection” presents somewhat of a problem when attempting to draw strong, logical and direct links between the literature review and the conceptual framework of the research. The possibility of framing the literature review’s emergent themes within the constructs of the conceptual framework was considered, but was discarded due to the fact that to do this would have led to a considerable degree of repetition. Many of the identified issues could well be expressed on more than one of the alienation constructs, because of course, the social “reality” of each individual within the target population can be quite different from another’s (Burns, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For example, one strong emergent theme (discussed fully in the subsequent review) was an identified lack of professional development (PD) being available for relief teachers, which is in stark contrast to its availability for tenured educators. In fact, a two-tiered system of access to PD currently exists, with tenured teachers receiving this education free of charge, whilst relief teachers are required to pay the full cost of any desired course and, in addition, often having to forfeit a day’s pay in order to attend (Lunay, 2004). That feelings of alienation in relief teachers could possibly stem from this inequality of access requires no great leap of logic. However, the way in which these feelings are

manifested in each individual could vary considerably. Some individuals may experience feelings of *powerlessness*, when attempting (and being denied) access to PD on equal terms to those of their tenured counterparts, whilst others may find their alienation being expressed as *isolation* --feelings of being "left out" and not supported by colleagues or the bureaucracy itself. Still others may express their alienation in terms of *meaninglessness*--feeling devalued as a professional of equal educational standing and competency. Some individuals may possibly express their alienation as a combination of these 3 constructs, and yet others may experience no alienation at all. Most of the other emergent themes could be expressed similarly.

As can be seen from: the above discussion, framing the literature review within the structure of the conceptual framework, might prove cumbersome, repetitive, and would quite possibly ruin the natural "flow" of the work itself.

The concept of alienation

The Collins English Dictionary (1979, p. 36) defines "alienation" as " 1.Turning away; estrangement. 2.The state of being an outsider or the feeling of being isolated."

Oerlemans and Jenkins (1998) contended that alienation as a concept was first used by Karl Marx, in describing the powerlessness of the worker in relation to the means of production -- specifically regarding the imbalance of power between the workers themselves and "big business" owners of the time. They also indicated that alienation as a *sociological concept* was delineated by Secman (1959), who added several other broad constructs/dimensions, which are discussed in the next paragraph. This delineation, in effect, brought the concept into a "modern" framework, with subsequent research by psychologists and sociologists recognising alienation as a "real" and quantifiable construct.

McInerney and McInerney (2003, p. 456) cited Mau (1992) and Oerlemans and Jenkins (1998), who indicated that alienation may involve three broad dimensions:

- ◆ *Powerlessness*, which can lead to an individual's feelings of lack of control over their lives;

- ◆ *Social estrangement*, where an individual feels physically and/or psychologically isolated from various social groups around them;
- ◆ *Meaninglessness*, which can include feelings of irrelevancy about what is happening to them.

These three dimensions can operate in isolation from one another, or “in concert”, in any combination, and could probably be expected to change in reaction to variables such as time, specific “triggers”, and other lifestyle influences. Alienation is recognised as being very complex in aetiology, with probable “roots” in a person's bio-psycho-social background (McInerney & McInerney 2002, p. 456). In extreme cases, severe feelings of alienation can express themselves in physical illness, psychological disturbance, or combinations of both (Bess, 1998; Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999; McInerney & McInerney, 2002).

Availability of literature focussing on relief teaching

Relief teaching is an integral part of the provision of education to our young, and is an important and crucial cog in the machinery of this service, yet seems to be basically ignored by the “machine” itself, and educational researchers in general. When researching literature on the systemic problems facing relief teachers (and how these could possibly lead to feelings of alienation), considerable time was taken to locate relatively few articles that provided *some* insight into the subject. No actual reference relating to the levels of alienation that relief teachers may or may not be feeling towards their profession or teaching colleagues is actually made by any of the literature. The scarcity of literature on even the “general” topic of relief/substitute teaching is confirmed by Crittenden (1994) who stated:

The initial search and review of relevant literature established right from the start that there is scant published material on the subject of relief teaching. Very little research has been conducted in Australia on the subject, and even less information is available on the West Australian scene. (p. 82)

Crittenden's (1994) finding is also supported by Gill and Hand (1992), and Galloway (1993), (cited in Crittenden, 1994) and is in stark contrast to the vast body of worldwide research dating back almost a century, which focuses on educational issues relating to tenured teachers.

The above situation is mirrored in North America where a review of the available literature from this location shows much the same trend. A convincing example illustrating the "great divide" between relief teachers and permanent staff is that of Gonzales (2002) who, in citing Lester (1986) and Short and Rinehart (1992), noted that between 1975 and 1986, over one thousand articles were written which related to tenured educators' job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, yet very little of this focused in any meaningful way on substitute teachers.

Overall, the majority of the comparatively few articles that were located mostly dealt with relief/substitute teaching issues in North America and the United Kingdom. One welcome exception, however, was Crittenden's (1994) article, which did in fact deal with relief teachers working in Western Australian government primary schools. Although now a decade old, many of the issues dealt with in this article are still wholly relevant to the present study and were mirrored by much of the more recent, reviewed literature.

Why the relative scarcity of literature on this subject? One possible reason may be that the whole issue of relief or substitute teaching is not really seen as "important" enough in which to invest time, money and research. Relief teachers are often "out of sight and out of mind". Indeed, when attempting to access up to date figures relating to the number of relief teachers working in the Western Australian (WA) government system at present, it was extremely difficult to ascertain exact numbers, because the Department of Education and Training (DET) admitted to not keeping official records of these individuals. (Human Resources officer, Department of Education and Training, personal communication, July 13, 2004) In fact, the only way to provide this data was to access pay records and identify from teacher identity numbers, those teachers who were paid weekly, and at casual rates. (Weekly pay was about the only way to obtain the relevant data, as all tenured full time, part time and fixed contract

teaching staff, are paid fortnightly). The Department of Education and Training proved unwilling to take the time to access this information.

However, when reviewing the available literature relating to the general topic of relief/substitute teaching, a number of prevalent “themes” emerged, which when identified and examined further, could be divided into 3 broad categories: “Relief teacher demographics”; “Probable sources of relief teacher alienation”; and “Recommendations for improvements to current practices”. These themes provide the framework for the subsequent discussion.

This section of the literature review introduced the reader to the concept of alienation as a sociological and psychological construct, and identified the four basic “dimensions” through which alienation can manifest itself in affected individuals. Finally, a brief discussion regarding the relative scarcity of literature that deals in any depth with relief teachers and relief teacher issues was included.

Relief teacher demographics

Section two discusses general relief teacher demographics that have been identified in the reviewed literature. The section is essentially divided into two parts, first dealing with identified proportions of relief teachers actually servicing schools, and second, discussing who actually comprises the relief teacher population.

Proportion of relief teachers servicing schools

As discussed previously, exact figures for Western Australia, are difficult to ascertain, but would be reasonably expected to fluctuate somewhat, due to the tenuous nature of the work, and the fact that at the start of any given “school year” varying numbers of newly graduated teachers as yet not appointed to permanent or contract positions, would be seeking temporary relief work.

Crittenden (1994) reported that in WA in 1993 a total of 1100 relief teachers were servicing government kindergarten to year 12 schools, representing around 14% of the total teacher population. Abdal-Haqq (1997), stated that studies by Wyld (1995) in the

U.S. show that on any given day, the relief teacher staffing component could be as much as 10% of the total teacher population. Billman (1994), Nidds and McGerald (1994) and Ostapczuk (1994), cited in Abdal-Haqq (1997) indicated that over the course of a student's K-12 education, between 5% and 10% of their education will be provided by relief teachers. Earlier U.S. findings by Brace (1990) reported similar percentages. Research undertaken by Pardini (2000), as reported in Gonzales (2002), supported earlier findings, contending that students in the U.S. will spend around one full year of their kindergarten to year 12 education with relief teachers, and that on any given teaching day, an average of 274,000 substitute teachers will lead classes in North America. This is also supported by Longhurst (2000), and Smith and Sorenson (2000) as reported in Edelman (2003), who found that the average student will spend "...about one full year with a substitute teacher..." (p. 22) between kindergarten and year 12.

The above figures would obviously vary from time to time (Terms 2, 3 and 4 being the most favourable period for WA relief teachers to find placements, according to the major relief teaching placement agencies), and from school to school, with institutions that cater for students from low socioeconomic areas possibly relying on relief teachers significantly more than other schools. This contention is certainly supported by research in the US by Adams (1999), (cited in Gonzales, 2003) who indicated that in highly impacted, low socioeconomic schools, students are likely to spend around 3.5% more time with substitute teachers. Adams' (1999) findings revealed the possibility that students from these schools have the curriculum delivered to them by many different teachers over the course of their educational lives. If the above really is the case, then this is of some significance, and could be the cause of some concern. There is also possible reason to believe that the reliance schools place on relief teachers has been increasing in recent years, due in part to the higher importance being placed on professional development for tenured teaching staff (Crittenden 1994; Gonzales 2002; Shilling, 1991), and the "drain" of young teachers from the profession into other areas of employment (Gonzales, 2002; Woods, 2004; Department of Education and Training, 2003).

Who makes up the relief teacher population?

This question, like many others relating to this field of inquiry, reveals no hard and fast data that is especially relevant to WA. Research by Gonzales (2002) provided some interesting demographic information regarding relief teachers in northern California. An analysis of relief teacher gender showed 33% male and 67% female; 33% of relief teachers were aged between 21 and 40, and interestingly enough, 52% were aged between 41 and 60 years. A staggering 49% of these teachers had been in education for more than 5 years. These figures indicate a well-seasoned, experienced and mature educational resource. (Demographic information sourced from the target population of this research revealed strikingly similar percentage-spreads, and is highlighted in chapter five).

More research in this area might possibly reveal some interesting information about WA. Suffice to say at this stage, that many of the relief teachers in service at any given time in WA are looking for permanent postings, as evidenced by Crittenden (1994) who cited Hemmings (1985) and Clark (1983), both of whom commented that "...a large component of the relief teaching population in Australia is made up of newly graduated teachers not yet appointed to full time positions" (p. 83).

This section of the literature review discussed the proportions of relief teachers servicing schools, and noted that dependent on location and several other factors, these professionals could be providing somewhere between ten and fifteen percent of a typical student's kindergarten to year 12 education. This represents around one (or even more) full year of curriculum delivery, and should be viewed by educational authorities with some concern, particularly if relief teachers are not being utilised to their maximum effectiveness. This section also identified and discussed a small demographic study of a population of relief teachers servicing a northern Californian educational district. Interestingly, the study showed significant percentages of well seasoned, experienced educators, indicating the presence of a valuable educational resource.

Probable sources of relief teachers' feelings of alienation

Several recurrent areas of concern that have been identified by the reviewed literature are discussed in this section. These problems have been discussed separately, and indicate how and why relief teachers might well experience feelings of alienation as a result of having to deal with any or all of the following problems. There are two general "parts" to this section. The first part discusses two broad areas that, singularly or in combination, have been recognised by the literature as problems facing the teaching profession in general. These problems could reasonably be expected to negatively impact on teachers regardless of how they are employed, although may in some instances, possibly impact more heavily on relief staff depending on certain variables. The second part of this section focuses on problems identified by the literature as more specific to the nature of relief teaching. These areas of concern appear to be recurring in nature, having been identified and discussed at some length in various literature articles for the past fifteen years at least.

There appears to be reason to speculate upon the possibility that relief/substitute teachers suffer from greater feelings of alienation than tenured teachers, although a review of the available literature revealed that no "hard and fast" data is available, which directly addresses this issue. However, the problem is inferred in much of the research. The literature revealed several common and recurring "themes" explaining this professional group's possible feelings of disconnection, "undervaluedness" and general estrangement.

Significant levels of general teacher "discontent" and job dissatisfaction

The subject of teachers' dissatisfaction with their profession has been studied in depth by researchers over the previous 30 years, and shows that teachers are generally more likely to become dissatisfied with their jobs and leave the profession in significantly greater proportions than other professions. Perceived lack of support in the execution of their duties, and physical working conditions were two main areas leading to teachers' dissatisfaction (Black, 2002; Gonzales, 2002).

A study conducted by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (North America) cited in Gonzales (2002, p. 35) reported that 61% of tenured teachers felt a lack of job support resulting in less incentive to stay in the teaching profession. Some teachers went so far as to say that a lack of support from colleagues as well as from administrators were *specific* reasons for actually leaving the profession. Woods (2004), cited Colbert and Wolff (1992), noting a lack of administrative support and low levels of perceived collegiality coupled with often restrictive curricula were causing fledgling U.S. teachers to leave in “droves”: “Improving teachers’ job satisfaction is paramount in an era when 50% of new teachers drop out of the profession in the first 5 years.” (p. 118)

Working conditions (physical and otherwise) were also identified (Gonzales, 2002) as real detractors to teachers’ motivation to remain. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company study cited in Gonzales (2002) reported that 36% of surveyed teachers identified poor working conditions as the direct reason they left the education profession. (p. 36) Specific issues included decrepit buildings, minimal classroom supplies, increasing class sizes, excessive teaching loads, a sense of isolation and unreasonable parents.

A study by Bruce and Cacioppe (1989) into reasons why teachers resigned from Western Australian government secondary schools produced similar findings, indicating that fifty five percent of the study’s respondents had left the school system by age 32 (p. 73).

The highly stressful and demanding nature of the job

A large amount of research has shown that the nature of teaching is particularly demanding and involves high levels of job-related stress. In a review of relevant literature, Gonzales (2002) indicated that many articles had been written, and much research undertaken on teacher job satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and that regular (and substitute) teachers continue to leave the profession “...in numbers that are not characteristic of other professions” (p. 54).

In WA Bruce and Cacioppe's (1989) research identified issues such as working conditions (discipline and consequent stress-related problems), perceived lack of administrative support, relations with superiors, lack of promotion opportunities and low salary, as major reasons for resignation. In addition, their research revealed that the majority of their respondents had resigned "...within 6 years of commencing their teaching careers in WA" (p. 78).

Other WA research conducted in the 1990s supported these findings, revealing the highly stressful nature of teaching, and indicating quite strongly that teachers face a range of specific issues which appear to contribute to higher levels of job dissatisfaction (and consequently higher levels of resignation) than members of other professions (Lock, 1993; Hutchinson, 1996).

A decade later the Department of Education and Training (2003) conducted a survey measuring attitudes to the teaching profession of educators in WA government schools. Again, key findings indicated that many of the surveyed teachers reported concerns with key areas of their chosen profession:

Young teachers reported that the expectation that they deal with all aspects of student development, as well as planning, assessing and delivering lessons could be overwhelming. Teachers in both early and later phases of their careers showed similar concerns in regard to workplace stress and the workloads associated with teaching. In addition, many respondents reported a lack of satisfaction with their salary as it related to their responsibilities. (Department of Education and Training, 2003, p. 5)

The survey also noted the disturbing fact that up to 50% of young teachers were considering changing careers. (p. 5) This finding is similar to the already mentioned US studies that indicate similar percentages of "drop out" from the profession in some parts of North America. (Gonzales, 2002; Woods, 2004)

The highly stressful and demanding nature of this work may well be magnified for the relief teacher who often needs to deal with additional problems, including unfamiliar students [who often see relief teachers as "fair game" (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Edelman, 2003)], poorly defined or non-existent lesson preparation, unfamiliar surroundings and

staff, undefined expectations and unexplained procedures (Black, 2002; Brace, 1990; Duebber, 2000; Gonzales, 2002). Also acknowledged is that relief teaching can be extremely demanding (Shilling, 1991), an issue summarised succinctly by Duebber (2000) who stated: "There is probably no harder job in education than substitute teaching, with the possible exception of driving a school bus!" (p. 57)

Crittenden (1994) supported this view when quoting Clifton and Rambaran (1985).

The common theme running through these papers is that relief teaching is beset with difficulties. In fact there is hardly anything positive to read about substitute teaching. (p. 82)

These comments suggest that the relief teacher needs to be "top quality" (Black 2002, p. 55), and it is widely accepted that this individual needs to be tough, adaptable, lateral-thinking and possess excellent classroom management techniques to survive long-term in this profession (Lunay, 2004).

The nature of contingent work

The nature of contingent/casual work (which is the standard form of employment offered to relief teachers) has been identified in studies as having the potential to cause feelings of powerlessness, disconnection and alienation amongst individuals employed in this manner, even before other industry-specific variables are considered. The nature and unpredictability of contingent work may well serve as a factor in the alienation of the relief teacher. Bjorkquist and Kleinhesselink (1999) maintained that the relationship between workers and their work has been a concern through much of recorded history, beginning as far back in time as ancient Greece. For much of history, work was viewed as a means of ennobling and uplifting the worker (Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999, p. 5). Today, however, the purpose for working is seen by many as a means to a financial end, rather than an end in itself, although the positive and negative emotional, social and psychological "spin-offs" of working are well recognised. During the past decade, much of the "Western World" has gravitated to "casual" or contingent work, with increasing numbers of employees being hired by this method. Figures quoted by Bjorkquist and Kleinhesselink (1999) showed that in Spain 70% of 372,000 new jobs in 1995 alone were for contingent workers. In the USA,

temporary employment grew 10 times faster than permanent employment during the 1980s and 20 times faster in 1993 alone. Significant increases in the creation of casual employment were also apparent in the UK, France and the Netherlands (Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999, p. 6).

The movement toward contingent workers is part of a long term strategy by management to cut wages, and avoid paying for costly benefits like health care, pensions, paid sick leave and vacations. (Rifkin, 1995 cited in Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999, p. 8)

The negative effects of "casualised" employment on workers, present problems not only for the workers themselves, but for their families and society in general. Contingent employment can often dehumanise, isolate and depersonalise employees (Feldman, 1995, cited in Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999) and this can (and often does) lead to significant levels of alienation among these groups of people.

Economically, psychologically and socially, contingent employment has the potential to further alienate workers. The organisation of contingent work reduces the control of workers over the purpose and product of their work effort, the overall organisation of the workplace, and the immediate work process itself. Insecurities of disrupted employment, loss of benefits ...and not holding steady jobs can weigh on contingent workers economically, socially and emotionally. (Bjorkquist & Kleinhesselink, 1999, p. 11)

Bess (1998), when analysing some of the negative consequences of contingent work in the higher academic field, also contended that one of the "prices" paid by "casual" (or contract) staff for this type of employment, was possible alienation from the workplace, and that this in itself, should be cause for major concern:

The prices we pay for worker alienation are staggering: underproduction, poor quality, sabotage, turnover, absenteeism and alcoholism. Clearly, motivating workers remains one of management's primary concerns and one of its most difficult tasks. (p. 10)

Low expectations and negative perceptions of relief teachers

The reviewed literature indicated that relief teachers can face somewhat negative perceptions by the education community in general, and that expectations of these professionals do not mirror those of their tenured counterparts.

Ask members of the K-12 school community how they regard substitute teachers and, depending on whether the informant is an educator or a student, you might get some of the following answers: baby sitter, fair game, stop-gap, object of pity, warm body... Rarely do students, teachers or administrators regard substitutes as full professionals who meet accepted standards of practice. – Wyld (1995) and Ostapczuk (1994), cited in Abdal-Haqq. (1997, p. 1)

This statement seems to signal a generally low expectation of the relief teacher as a professional educator. Cardon (2002) stated that general perceptions of relief teachers in the US are "...almost invariably negative" (p. 29), and that this assumption has persisted for the better part of a century. He added that, "Substitute teachers are labelled over and over. They're labelled as ...warm bodies...babysitters...a necessary evil." (p. 33) Black (2002) painted a similar picture in the United Kingdom: "...the supply teacher needs to be a top quality teacher. Ironically, their status within schools is often the opposite; they are 'just the supply teacher.'" (p. 55)

Hardman and Tippetts (2001, p. 21) reinforced this notion, citing research undertaken by Trent and Ghiloti (1972) which showed a great disparity between how substitute teachers rated their performance in the classroom (high), and how the regular teachers and administrators rated the substitute (significantly lower).

Cardon (2002) attributed many of the negative perceptions of relief teachers to two distinct reasons. First and foremost, relief teaching is simply not a priority. Substitutes are seen as the last individuals deserving of district resources, and as such, are "left out" of many or most new initiatives. Second, relief teachers tend only to be noticed if there is a problem in a classroom at some particular point in the day and as such are more likely to be evaluated on a complaint basis, leading to recognition for weaknesses rather than strengths (p. 34).

A perceived lack of administrative support and in-class "back-up"

On-the-job support was one of the most commonly reported problems experienced by relief teachers and was a prevalent theme in the reviewed literature. Relief teachers are often expected to perform the jobs of their full-time counterparts without the back-up given to tenured staff (Shilling, 1991). Hardman and Tippetts (2001) discussed the fact that teachers and administrators rate instruction and classroom management highly, yet poorly prepared lesson materials and classroom plans are common and recurrent problems facing the substitute teacher on any given teaching day. Crittenden's (1994) research identified that it was not uncommon for relief teachers to arrive in a given classroom and find no educational program, and no work set for the class. Sixty six percent of respondents indicated that they brought their own lessons in the event that no work had been set. Black (2002) supported this finding, indicating disappointment with the "...lack of systems, support and accountability in the present system" (p. 55). In addition to this, Gonzales (2002) indicated it is quite often the case that when regular teachers do leave lesson plans, there is a high probability that the "how to" element has been left out (p. 34). Clearly, if relief teachers constitute a significant portion of a student's K-12 education (as the literature would seem to indicate), these professionals should be expected to offer a little more than simply a behaviour-control service with some "busy-work" thrown in. Brace (1990) contended:

Studies show that students spend as much as 5-10% of their actual class time with substitute teachers. If substitutes are prepared to function only as baby sitters and law enforcers, then students could be losing a significant amount of instruction. Substitutes should be expected to maintain class continuity and move the curriculum forward. But they should not be expected to walk in, pick up a room key from a secretary, and then feel prepared to make a significant contribution to academic learning. (p. 73)

Classroom management challenges

Classroom management is probably one of the most difficult problems facing the relief teacher during the course of his/her teaching day. The teaching profession, in general, rates this issue as one of its most important and challenging. Schools, education districts and policy-makers, invest large amounts of time, money and energy

addressing existing problems, and developing new strategies to better manage students and their behaviour. Teacher training institutions devote significant instructional time to ensure student teachers graduate with the tools, strategies and training to be able to deal with this complex and demanding issue. Managing student behaviour is difficult enough for the regular teacher, who knows individual students' personalities, has an understanding of their particular class's group dynamic and has developed certain relationships with the group or specific individuals. Consequently, it is of little surprise, that substitute teachers rate the management and control of classrooms as one of the job's most stressful demands. Paradoxically, the literature revealed that this important issue is all but ignored by many administrators and teachers, indicating again and again, that relief teachers often walk into classrooms at the start of each day, with absolutely no information on classroom seating arrangements, Managing Student Behaviour (MSB) policies, teacher expectations, "at-risk" students and special behaviour management strategies possibly employed to control challenging behaviour and/or students. Black's (2002) research in the UK, summed up these concerns by stating:

This data indicates that too few schools are providing a discipline policy, which all of the [surveyed] supply teachers see as important and is identified elsewhere in the research as the major problem facing supply teachers. Other areas of concern [were] ... expectations of the supply teacher, contact names, classroom expectations and what to do if a problem arises. Supply teachers cannot feel confident if they do not know the school's policy on these matters. (p. 58)

The above concerns are mirrored in the US. Hardman and Tippetts (2001) stated that classroom management is the foundation upon which instruction takes place, but that control of student behaviour is "...the overriding difficulty [faced by] the substitute teacher". Studies conducted by Gonzales (2002), indicated that 58.5% of surveyed relief teachers claimed that lack of administrative support, missing or incomplete lesson plans, and inappropriate student behaviour were directly responsible for their desire to leave the profession. Eighty percent of surveyed relief teachers commented that the lack of respect and unruly behaviour of students, *contributed* to their desire to leave the profession.

Studies by Crittenden (1994), in Western Australia, reported that of the school principals surveyed in her research, all either agreed or strongly agreed about the importance of providing details of Managing Student Behaviour (MSB) policies to relief teachers, however, only one admitted to actually doing this. Of the relief teachers who were surveyed, 67% reported that principals did not provide this information at all, and "...only 26% of relief teachers [were] told of difficult children, and only 20% [were] told of children with special needs" (p. 86).

School community and staffroom dynamics

Loneliness and isolation often accompany the relief teacher during the course of a teaching day. Unfamiliar surroundings and faces (both colleague and student) can be daunting to even the most hardened substitute (Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Shilling, 1991), especially when newly encountered on a daily basis.

The reviewed literature identified the relationship between relief teachers and the rest of the school community's staff as a cause of some concern. Crittenden's (1994) research identified that whilst all surveyed principals agreed that it was important to have a system whereby relief teachers were "introduced" to the rest of the staffroom, this did not always happen, and varied dramatically from school to school (p. 86). The lack of appropriate systems (and other types of "survival packs" which introduce relief teachers to their professional colleagues and assist in orienting them to unfamiliar surroundings) has been identified by much of the reviewed literature together with recommendations to implement these as a matter of priority (Black, 2002; Brace, 1990; Gonzales, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Simmons, 1991).

The lack of effort by many school communities to "meet and greet" relief teachers leads many of these professionals to feel "alone", undervalued and generally disconnected from their colleagues.

Crittenden (1994) reported:

The [relief teachers] surveyed, reported a high incidence of teacher indifference or unfriendliness. This is substantiated by Mullett (1989) cited by Galloway (1993, p.165). "Fifty eight percent of her respondents had worked in some schools where they found no welcome and no support". Observations of [relief teachers] in staffrooms confirms this data. The unknown [relief teacher] is often left sitting alone and not spoken to. Informal discussions with other [relief teachers] has verified this as a not uncommon fact. (p. 87)

Brace (1990) supported these findings, when commenting that:

Unintentionally, substitutes can be treated as "outsiders", not really part of the staff. This lack of support is evident in absence of lesson plans, seating charts, orientation to the building, and orientation to the school schedule and operating procedures. (p. 73)

Lack of ongoing in-service training and professional development

All tenured and contract teachers within the Western Australian school system have access to professional development and other in-service training to enable the updating of teaching skills, curriculum changes and/or innovations. This is usually carried out at facilities close to teachers' place of work (if not at their place of work), is normally undertaken during standard work hours (meaning no loss of pay for participants), and costs the participants nothing in the way of up-front fees or charges. Relief teachers, on the other hand, are not provided with any of these services. Quite possibly, for a relief teacher to actually undertake professional development of any kind, will mean bearing a double financial burden in the form of up-front fees for the actual course itself, along with forfeiture of a day's pay in order to simply be free to undertake the program.

In addition to this, the relief/substitute teacher, by the very nature and unpredictability of his/her work, is often least able to afford the cost of professional development. This inequity has led to a two-tiered level of availability to the ongoing development of the professional skills of the educator, and should be viewed by policy-makers and the educational bureaucracy with some concern (Lunay, 2004). This is confirmed by Crittenden (1994) who stated that relief teachers often fill vacancies created by tenured staff who are absent whilst receiving professional development and ask the question of

how, when and where they themselves will receive this knowledge. Gill and Hand (1992) as cited in Crittenden (1994) stated:

...[relief teachers] had appeared not to be involved with much in-service activity. When asked if they felt their in-service needs were taken as seriously as full time teachers, they responded overwhelmingly in the negative. (p. 87)

In addition to this issue, there is real concern as to how the WA College of Teaching's views on professional development will affect relief teachers. The College (recently set up by an Act of Parliament in September 2004) bears similarity to those professional bodies currently in existence, which govern legal, medical and other important professions, and will have control over registration of all teachers working in government and non-government schools. One of the requirements for initial and ongoing registration concerns "adequate" amounts of professional development being undertaken by *all* teachers.

In acknowledging the professional status of teachers, evidence of ongoing professional learning will be a requirement for renewal of registration as a teacher in Western Australia. (<http://www.collegeofteaching.wa.edu.au/>)

The question of how, when and who will bear the cost of this ongoing training remains unanswered at this juncture.

The problem of equitable access to professional development has been identified and discussed in Australia and especially North America at length for many years, yet little appears to have been done to address the issue. Tracy (1988) contended that appropriate and ongoing professional development was as necessary for relief teachers as it was for tenured staff, and this was supported by Crittenden (1994), Abdal-Haqq (1997) and Simmons (1991). Yet schools and educational districts claim that funding is not readily available to make this happen (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Cardon, 2002; Crittenden, 1994). Black (2002) and Shilling (1991) confirmed that this is still very much the situation facing supply teachers in the UK (p. 54), although OFSTED (the Office for Standards in Education) has flagged this and other issues as areas in need of further study and possible change.

Pay, conditions and procurement of employment

In Australia, relief teachers must be qualified teachers and be registered with the States' various statutory professional bodies (such as the WA College of Teaching) in order to practise as educators in government schools. Until 1984, WA relief teachers were able to secure work through the Department of Education and Training (as it is now named) by being placed in a "pool" that was managed by this authority. Schools that required a relief teacher would contact DET who would then allocate a suitable candidate for the period required (Crittenden, 1994). Since 1985, this arrangement is no longer the case. Relief teachers have been effectively "cut loose" and are now required to make their own arrangements with individual schools when attempting to procure assignments. This in itself can be a lonely and frustrating experience, as evidenced by Crittenden (1994):

Whether or not the [relief teacher] succeeds in securing work is largely dependent upon personal motivation and a whole range of chance variables, as much as upon personal qualities and professional skills. It is quite common for a teacher to register with 40 to 50 schools at the beginning of the school year, despite the inevitability of obtaining work from only a handful of these. (p. 81)

Some relief teachers in WA use the services of 2 or 3 temporary employment agencies that specialise in the placement of these individuals into various schools, at no cost to them. The school, however, is charged for this service, which obviously impacts on (already tight) budgets.

The UK experience is currently much the same, with supply teachers expending considerable effort (and sometimes hard-earned cash) to obtain placements in district schools. Black (2002, p. 54) noted the fact that those relief teachers who utilise the services of placement agencies often lose up to 25% of their wages in agency fees. (In the UK, it is the supply teachers themselves who are charged, rather than the schools.) The employment procurement situation in North America varies widely, being dependent on state and educational district, with substitute teachers utilising previously discussed mechanisms, or in isolated situations are actually employed by an education district as "full-time" substitutes, teaching at a number of schools within that district (Gonzales, 2002; Cardon, 2002; Abdal-Haqq, 1997).

Pay and other conditions for relief teachers are also seen as an area that needs positive and definitive action. The reviewed literature confirmed without exception, that levels of pay and other associated conditions of employment were well below what could be considered adequate for substitutes' skills, responsibilities and professionalism. Black (2002, p. 54) noted that supply teachers in the UK are denied the same conditions as their tenured counterparts, citing lack of holiday pay, no pension rights and no access to paid PD as cause for some concern. This observation is supported by Shilling (1991, p. 5) who contended that supply teachers have provided local education authorities (LEAs) with great financial flexibility, as these individuals can be employed without the same levels of remuneration or security levels that must be afforded their full-time counterparts. The most widely varying scales of remuneration and conditions occur in the US with daily pay rates ranging anywhere from US \$45 per day to around US \$120 per day (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Cardon, 2002; Gonzales, 2002). This huge variation is due in part to the widely differing qualifications required by the various states, and education districts within those states (Abdal-Haqq, 1997). This sees many substitutes living in effect below the poverty-line.

Pay and conditions in WA are similar to those in the UK. At present, relief teachers receive the same daily pay rate as their tenured counterparts, plus an additional 15% loading. This, however, is the start and finish of any and all benefits. In WA, relief teachers have access to 200 days per year where the opportunity of work in classrooms actually exists. This in some cases, reduced to 195 days at the beginning of 2005, due to the state government's decision to remove "pupil free days" (professional development days for tenured staff), and incorporate these into one week's extra holiday for students at the end of each school year. No holiday pay, sick pay or any other financial "security" exists; relief teachers can be hired for as little as half a school day, and can of course be terminated at any point. A pension plan of sorts does exist in the form of compulsory employer contributions to an elected superannuation scheme, however, this is of course limited to the amount of hours a relief teacher actually manages to secure work. Also tied in with the number of hours worked by a relief teacher, is the issue of pay increments for years of service. The Department of Education and Training will only advance a relief teacher's remuneration to the next "level" after a fully completed "teaching year". Depending on the amount of work the

relief teacher is lucky enough to secure, advancement to the next pay increment may in actuality take two or three years to achieve.

Litigation issues

Relief teachers are, by the very nature of their work, often totally unfamiliar with the students in their charge, physical layout of schools and their grounds, and the specific details of daily procedures that ensure student safety. Yet duty-of-care expectations and legal responsibilities apply with equal force to the substitute (Gonzales, 2002; Hattaway & Novak, 2003; Longhurst, 2002; Lunay, 2004). With society becoming more litigious, there is cause for some concern as to whether or not relief teachers are in a position to adequately prepare themselves against the possibility of lawsuits. An example of this issue is the questionable practice (in Western Australia at least) of often assigning the relief teacher to recess duty when not really necessary. Lunay (2004) contended that this practice places relief teachers at greater risk of litigation as well as contributing to relief teachers' feelings of alienation and estrangement from colleagues:

Many times, I have found myself standing in an unfamiliar setting, overseeing numerous energetic youngsters who I have absolutely no information about, and unsure of the specific rules and regulations pertinent to that situation. Yet my legal responsibilities and Duty of Care requirements are exactly the same as a teacher who has been at that school for years, knows most of the children, and essentially has the knowledge needed to stop trouble and injury often before it starts. Sometimes, I know for a fact that the teacher whose duty I am replacing is not the one whose class I am actually teaching for the day, but one who is sitting in the staffroom, drinking coffee with colleagues. Professionally speaking, I find this rather lacking. From a personal point of view, I feel devalued as a professional and can understand why so many other relief teachers might feel the same way. (p. 25)

The preceding section examined, in some detail, probable sources of relief teachers' possible feelings of alienation. Major identified areas of concern included the well recognised problems of teacher stress, and high levels of general teacher discontent and job dissatisfaction which in themselves have historically shown to contribute to high levels of "drain" from the profession. These problems could impact on both tenured and relief staff. The nature of contingent work was examined next, along with the contention that this alone, has the potential to trigger feelings of estrangement and

disconnectedness from other work colleagues, even before other industry-specific variables are considered. Also discussed were several problems centring on the notion of lack of in-class, administrative, and other important sources of relief teacher “back-up” and support. These problems were seen to add to other areas of concern such as management and control issues, and the perception held by much of the educational community that relief teachers are in some ways less competent than their tenured counterparts. Loneliness and feelings of isolation from peers when on placement in some schools was also identified as a serious concern by many surveyed relief teachers. Finally, the general issue of equity was examined, with the literature identifying marked differences between tenured and relief educators in access to professional development, allocation of pay and working conditions, and possible increased litigation risk to relief teachers.

The reviewed literature whilst not directly identifying the discussed problems as definitively causing feelings of alienation, certainly appeared to infer that this could indeed be a possible outcome for relief teachers who were continually exposed to one, all, or combinations of the above circumstances.

Recommendations for improvement to current practices

The reviewed literature not only emphasised overwhelmingly the need for improvements to be made to the way relief/ substitute teachers are procured, used, and regarded by the various identified education communities, but also suggested solutions to many of the previously discussed problems. Most of the recommendations were shown to be grounded in “common sense”, and implied implicit understanding of the financial constraints in which most education districts and authorities are forced to operate. Logically, if implemented, these recommendations could be reasonably considered to go some significant way towards reducing relief teachers’ levels of alienation and disconnection from the rest of the educational community. Recommendations were subsequently categorised into one of two central themes: “Professional Collegiality” and “Professional Equity, Access and Support”.

Professional Collegiality

Meet and greet procedures

The creation of a school policy, which determines who in the school will officially meet the relief teacher at the start of an assignment was recognised in the literature as important. Assisting the relief teacher in settling into the school/class routine as quickly and “seamlessly” as possible should be an integral component of any support system. Brace (1990) maintained the view that this responsibility should be undertaken by the “administrator”, “...at their earliest convenience. This brief contact acknowledges administrative awareness of their presence and subtly emphasises their importance” (p. 76). He also added that “touching base” with the relief teacher at strategic points during the day would help to reduce potential problems. Crittenden (1994) supported this contention, stating that it is important to have a system in place which “introduces” the relief teacher (p. 91). Meet and greet procedures were also identified by Potter (2001) who maintained that the school principal should meet substitute teachers before the commencement of classes. Introductions to other support staff and a brief “walk around” could be included in the meet/greet protocol. In addition to the benefits such practices would create, feelings of professional collegiality, dignity and respect would be fostered.

Buddy system

The implementation of a buddy system is widely practised when settling young newcomers into school, so why not for the relief teacher? Hardman and Tippetts (2001) aptly described the positive difference that a “buddy system” could make for relief teachers who find themselves working with unfamiliar students in unfamiliar surroundings:

Many substitute teachers feel isolated when they go to their assigned classroom. When the door closes, the substitute can be frighteningly alone...When awareness is given of who can help him or her and how, that substitute and those students are much better off. (p. 22)

All that is needed is a simple school protocol, which automatically selects a regular member (or members) of staff (dependent on such issues as year level being taught, proximity to the relief teacher's classroom and other specific variables). This staff member could be responsible for the "niceties" of the day (which could include walking the relief teacher to the staffroom, providing introductions and "ice-breaking" assistance, and generally making the new arrival feel at ease), and could possibly double as the "go-to" staff member, should in-class assistance or advice be needed. This is consistently suggested by the literature and is exemplified by Gonzales (2002), who maintained "...School site administrators should assign a staff person to supervise substitute teachers and provide needed assistance" (p. 38). Brace (1990), Crittenden (1994) and Simmons (1991) supported this suggestion, agreeing that "...a buddy system of some type, provides substitutes with someone to whom they can turn for help." (Simmons, 1991, p. 97)

Gratitude / respect / professional status

Brace (1990) contended that the relief teacher must be made to feel that they are treated as professionals, and that they are valued as an important part of the staff team (p. 74). This comment was supported by Crittenden (1994, p. 92) and Simmons (1991) who contended that substitutes need to be afforded "...the recognition they deserve" (p. 98), and that as much as possible, "...substitutes should be thought of as [part of] the school family" (p. 98). Cardon (2002) suggested that the "public dignity" of substitute teachers suffers greatly through negative perceptions (p. 37), and that this can be reversed through "...managers who recognise that producing positive images of substitute teachers and substitute teaching is a critical aspect of creating change" (p. 42). This contention was supported by Gonzales (2002) who viewed the issue of appropriate respect and recognition being afforded to relief teachers, as falling firmly on the shoulders of school leaders.

Substitute teachers play an essential role in student learning but often work in different classrooms every day. They seldom receive the appreciation bestowed on regular classroom teachers and are often not included in school events. It is increasingly important that school leaders take an interest in substitute teachers. (p. 62)

Although the literature indicated this issue as a school-leadership responsibility, it should probably be viewed as a whole educational community responsibility (albeit one that is perhaps initiated and initially *driven* by school leaders). The students have a responsibility to view the relief teacher in the same (hopefully positive) light as their regular teacher, which means that school policy needs to reflect this value and to enforce it as needed. Classroom teachers need to be aware that part of their responsibility lies with continuity of instruction, and that means effective forward planning. Principals and administrators need to create a culture of valuing the relief teacher along with the positive effects that emanate from the contribution that these professionals bring to the education community. Educational bureaucracy needs to foster the professional status that should be accorded all relief teachers. Parents and guardians also need to be educated into viewing the relief teacher in the same positive light as the regular teacher of their children, and to expect the best from these individuals.

Professional Equity, Access and Support

Relief teacher "survival packs"

"Survival packs" do exist in some schools, and should cost little to produce if carefully and judiciously created. All basic information necessary for the relief teacher to discharge their daily duties according to legal and intra-school protocols should be listed, and could include school daily and emergency procedures, building "mud maps", managing student behaviour (MSB) policy, contact details of specific "go-to persons", bell times, and other essential information. Crittenden (1994) noted that this was of great importance, if the relief teacher was to "...fit into the school easily and harmoniously" (p. 91). This comment is supported by Brace (1990), who suggested a 7-point comprehensive substitute support program, including the introduction of a "special school handbook" (p. 74). Hardman and Tippetts (2001) referred to the necessity for a "substitute teacher folder/kit" which would contain basic classroom information as well as "other invaluable tools" (p. 22), whilst Edelman (2003) suggested the development of a "school handbook" (p. 23). This latter suggestion was also supported by Gonzales (2002) and Lunay (2004).

Classroom specific procedures, information, expectations, and adequate lesson preparation

Aspects concerning the classroom are recognised as one of the most important issues relating to the relief teacher's ability to effectively control the class, along with actually *moving the curriculum forward*. There is no question that to effectively manage a class, a relief teacher needs knowledge of seating arrangements, standard classroom procedures, teacher expectations, potential behaviour and discipline problems, and any other information specific or pertinent to that class's smooth functioning. Regular classroom teachers need also to understand that regardless of planned or unplanned absences, the need for students' continuity of instruction is paramount. Regular forward planning of lessons is essential. Simmons (1991) underlined the crucial importance of this by contending,

Regular teachers should never leave substitutes in the lurch. Unfortunately many of the problems experienced by substitutes are directly attributable to negligent classroom teachers...explicit [lesson] plans must be left for substitutes. In addition, a class roll, current seating chart, name of student assistants and suggestions for scheduled activities should be readily available. ... If schedules are clear, materials accessible, lessons organised and rules enforced, substitutes should have little difficulty assuming the reins of leadership. (p. 97)

This view was mirrored by Edelman (2003, p. 24), Gonzales (2002, p. 38) and Potter (2001, p. 27). Interestingly, Crittenden's (1994) research revealed a rather "fractured" finding on this point, contending that results had shown "Expectations between teachers and [relief teachers] over following the teacher's set program, marking of student work and management of student behaviour...reveal a high rate of divergent opinion" (p. 91). However, it was stressed that principals and teachers *did* feel strongly about the relief teacher's ability to deal with student behaviour problems, even though few of these individuals gave the necessary assistance and input to meet expectations (p. 91).

Logically, a system whereby the regular teacher documents (and regularly updates) classroom specific information (and includes regular forward planning of lessons and activities) and, through school operating procedures makes this information available

to substitutes, should be viewed as a matter of priority. Hardman and Tippetts (2001) contended that the absence of this information creates management problems right from the start, due to the fact that finding the appropriate “resources” usually “...takes place in the critical moments at the beginning of class when control is usually won or lost” (p. 22).

Professional Development

Lack of access to professional development for relief teachers should be addressed, and has been identified by much of the literature as an issue that has been “discussed” at length for well over a decade-and-a-half, yet still remains unresolved. Black (2002, p. 55), Brace (1990, p. 75), Gonzales (2002, p. 37) and Simmons (1991, p. 96), reported that professional development should be accessible to relief teachers in the same way it is currently available to tenured educators. Crittenden (1994, p. 92) suggested that relief teachers in WA should be included in school-based professional development wherever possible (although this may not be practical today, as much professional development now occurs during “pupil free days”).

At present, in WA, there exists a two-tiered level of availability to ongoing training and development (Lunay, 2004), which sees tenured staff receive this as a matter of course, whilst relief teachers not only have to pay for this training, but in many cases must also forfeit a day’s pay in order to attend. However, while professional development is not cheap, strategies should be implemented that will at least begin to defray some of the cost of ongoing training faced by this group of professionals. If relief teachers are to be held to the same standards of professionalism, teaching ability and up to date knowledge of new strategies and curriculum advancements, access to this ongoing training ultimately needs to be provided on the same basis as full-time teachers.

Evaluation and professional feedback

Potter (2001), in identifying studies undertaken by Purvis (1991), showed that 89% of substitute teachers were not formally evaluated, and contended that:

This is not conducive to quality performance, and all districts should have procedures to evaluate substitutes regularly and frequently...most substitutes welcome comments because they want to do the best job possible. (p. 28)

A three-way system of monitoring a relief teacher's performance that involves the relief teacher, regular class teacher and the principal has been suggested (Simmons 1991, p. 97) and that appropriate feedback procedures be included. Interestingly, Potter (2001) suggested that this feedback loop should also involve student input to some extent (p. 28). Brace (1990, p. 76) stressed the importance of systematic feedback for (and from) substitutes, and this was supported by Black (2002, p. 62), who highlighted the necessity of relief teacher accountability for the students in their care.

There is a need to identify and recognise "good" relief teachers, as well as to identify possible "problem" teachers, in much the same way that performance reports and other evaluation techniques are utilised to assist permanent teachers to identify and correct shortcomings within their own knowledge and experience. At present, research shows that many relief teachers are quickly recognised for negative outcomes within classroom situations (many of which can be argued as stemming from systemic issues that are beyond their control). Ongoing evaluation can help to further "professionalise" the work of these individuals.

This section discussed at some length, the recommendations for improving current practices identified by the literature. Most recommendations centred on one of two separate "themes". First, a theme of "*Professional Collegiality*" emerged, which included recommendations such as meet and greet procedures to assist the relief teacher at the start of each new placement, and buddy systems to reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation from professional colleagues. Suggestions were also made that stressed the importance of gratitude, respect and the according of a more professional status to the relief teacher. In combination, these recommendations might be seen as

powerful methods for substantially increasing relief teachers' feelings of inclusion and acceptance as full members of a complex and demanding profession. The second theme that emerged was one of "*Professional Equity, Access and Support*". This included suggestions for the introduction of "survival packs" for relief teachers, important and regularly updated information on classroom specific procedures, behaviour management programs, specific information about all at risk students, regular teacher expectations and other useful information. Adequate lesson preparation was also discussed and was identified by the literature as being of paramount importance in keeping the curriculum moving forward, regardless of which professional is delivering it. Other recommendations central to the second theme included equity of professional development access for relief teachers and the development of feedback and professional evaluation systems for relief teachers similar in nature to those currently supporting tenured staff.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature identified the importance of the relief teacher, and indicated that over the course of a student's K-12 education, relief teachers might be providing over one full year of instruction and curriculum delivery. This is a significant proportion of students' education, and should be viewed with some concern if the quality of this instruction is not comparable to that provided by the regular teacher. Research indicates that reliance on the services of these professionals is increasing. Some reasons for this trend include higher levels of absence of tenured staff for professional development and related training and high levels of job dissatisfaction amongst tenured teaching staff leading to an exodus from the profession. In addition, some reports highlight low levels of enrolment into teacher training institutions, coupled with the fact that up to 50% of new graduates are leaving the profession within 5 years in some education districts.

Although the reliance on relief teacher populations is increasing, the literature identified systemic problems within the education community as a whole, which are contributing to the marginalisation of substitutes as credible, professional and competent educators, and that most of these issues have been known about for well

over a decade. Several distinct areas of concern were identified as major detractors to the status, image and ability of substitutes to provide an educational service that in all reality should be close in quality and expertise to that of the regular teacher. The identified areas of concern suggest the probability that these professionals are experiencing significant levels of alienation from their tenured counterparts, students, administrators and other stake-holders within the broader educational community. That this band of educators appears to be so marginalised and in effect, often “wasted”, when their value as a significant educational resource has been well established should be of great concern to educational communities.

Much needs to be done to reverse this situation. Through additional research, and the consequent “light” that is shed on these issues, positive change might slowly begin to occur.

Summary

Chapter two was divided into several distinct sections. The first section provided a link between the literature review and the conceptual framework of the research, whilst section two defined alienation as a general term, before discussing the concept from a psychological/sociological standpoint. Also included was a clarification of the term “relief teacher”, and acknowledgment of other terms used in the US and UK to describe this type of educator. A distinction was then drawn between “relief” and “temporary/contract” teachers. A discussion followed which detailed the relatively scarce availability of literature that concentrates in any meaningful way on the subject of relief teaching in general. The majority of the sourced literature concentrated on relief teaching in the US, although several articles dealing with the subject from the UK perspective were found. Literature that is relevant to Australia is indeed scant.

Relief teacher demographics were discussed in the third section, focusing primarily on the numbers servicing government schools in various parts of the world. The percentage of time spent with relief teachers over the course of a student’s K-12 education appears to represent around one full year, is believed to be increasing over time, and varies to some extent according to the socioeconomic area in which schools are located. Also discussed, were details of a recent demographic study conducted in

northern California which indicated the presence of a well-seasoned, experienced and mature relief teacher population. A more comprehensive study in Western Australia might possibly reveal similar results and could be a worthwhile undertaking.

The fourth section discussed systemic problems identified by the literature as possibly contributing to relief teachers' feelings of alienation. Essentially, these problems were divided into two general areas or "parts". The first part identified problems that could impact on both tenured and relief educators, namely, the highly stressful nature of teaching, and, the fact that the teaching profession suffers from high levels of job dissatisfaction and consequent "drain" from the job, (much of which appears to occur within 5-6 years of graduation). The second part provided a discursive overview of identified problems that were more specific to the relief teacher. These included negative perceptions of relief teachers by much of the educational community, lack of professional back-up, classroom management issues, loneliness and isolation problems, equity of access to professional development and equal pay/conditions, and finally, the concerning issue of increased risk of litigation. Sadly, these problems have been well known and acknowledged for over a decade; however, to date, little appears to have been done to address them.

Section five discussed suggested improvements to current practices, which if implemented in a timely and sensible manner, could logically be expected to markedly improve conditions for relief teachers. Two themes were identified, and recommendations grouped under each before being discussed further. "*Professional Collegiality*" refers to the way in which relief teachers should be viewed and treated by the educational community at large. Included within this theme were suggested improvements to meet and greet procedures, the creation of buddy systems, and a call to the whole educational community to begin viewing the relief teacher with gratitude, respect and a long overdue increase in general professional status. The second theme "*Professional Equity, Access and Support*" contends that for a relief teacher to function as a fully professional educator, the educational community *needs to provide the tools for this to occur*. Recommendations identified in the literature included equitable access to professional development, proper administrative and in-class support, professional evaluation and feedback, and provision of all information needed

to not only manage the classroom, but to move the curriculum forward. A brief conclusion and summary of the overall discussion was provided in the final section.

The conceptual framework of the research is discussed in the following chapter, and includes details of the psychological model of alienation specifically developed for this study.

Chapter 3

Conceptual Framework

Introduction

The conceptual framework within which this research was undertaken is outlined and discussed in this chapter.

When describing the purpose of a conceptual framework, Lock (1993) cited Miles and Huberman (1984), who contended that the conceptual framework explains "...either graphically or in narrative form, the main dimensions to be studied – the key factors or variables and the presumed relationships among them" (Lock, 1993, p. 111).

The above parameters enable the researcher to become critically selective about which aspects of the research should be concentrated on, and consequently, what information should be collected and analysed.

Psychological model of alienation

In the context of the present study, a psychological alienation-non-alienation model has been adapted from Carlson (1995) and Finn (1989) as the conceptual framework within which this research was undertaken.

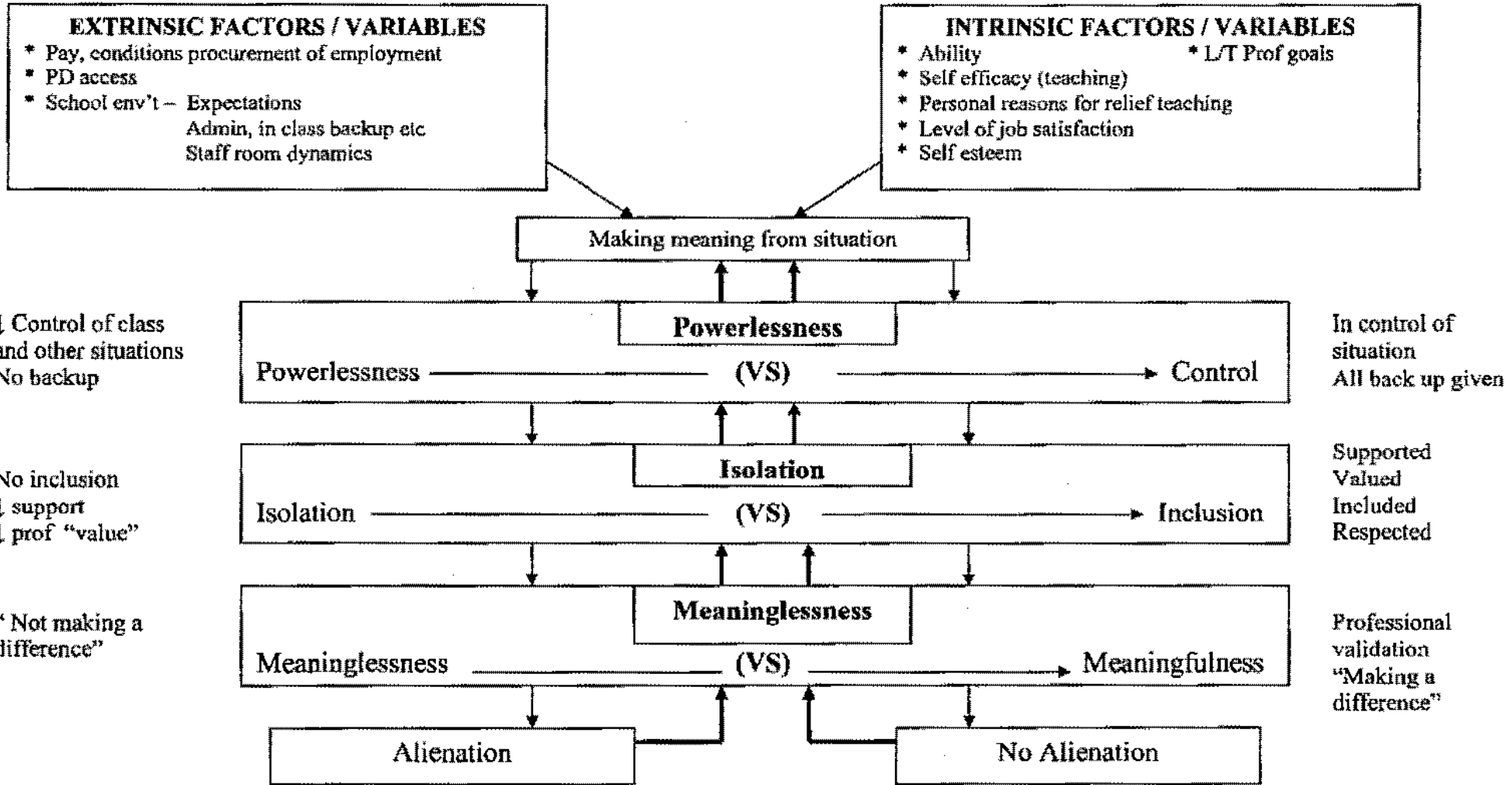
Oerlemans and Jenkins (1998) contended that alienation as a concept, was first used by Karl Marx, in describing the powerlessness of the worker in relation to the means of production--specifically with regard to the imbalance of power between the workers themselves and "big business" owners of the time. They also indicated that alienation as a *sociological concept*, was delineated by Seeman (1959), who added several other broad constructs/dimensions (see below). This, in effect, brought the concept into a contemporary framework, with subsequent research by psychologists and sociologists recognising alienation as a "real" and quantifiable construct.

Carlson (1995, p. 467) in citing Dean (1961), Calabrese (1984), and Seeman (1959), contended that alienation (when viewed from a social science perspective) could be “expressed” in one of three psychological constructs:

- ◆ *Powerlessness*, which relates to individuals who feel a lack of control over general or specific personal situations.
- ◆ *Isolation*, referring to feelings of withdrawal and isolation from, or rejection by, peers or peer groups, or a general sense of being “alone” either socially or emotionally.
- ◆ *Meaninglessness*, which relates to feelings of a lack of personal meaning when in a specific situation.

As previously stated in chapter one, for the purposes of this study, *alienation* was defined as persistent negative feelings that some relief teachers may experience during the course of their work within Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools. These feelings may be expressed as powerlessness, meaninglessness, or isolation, and may in fact be expressed in combinations of these constructs.

Figure 1 shows in diagrammatic form, the model adapted for this study.



PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL SHOWING PROCESS OF ALIENATION / NON-ALIENTATION AMONG WA RELIEF TEACHERS

The intrinsic factors listed in this model include personal or situational variables that may reasonably be expected to impact in some way, on the relief teacher's perception of his/her work. These include (but would not be limited to) self-efficacy, ability, personal reasons for relief teaching, general level of job satisfaction as an educator, self-esteem and long-term professional goals. The above factors should be viewed as more or less "constant" and would not be expected to change on a short-term basis. They could, however, be expected to have some kind of impact on the individual, possibly "predisposing" that person to feelings of alienation (or non-alienation) even before walking into a placement at the start of each day.

Extrinsic factors are those variables that impact on the relief teacher as a result of external influences beyond the control of that individual. These can be further divided into two groups:

- ◆ Fairly constant and unchanging: These include difficulty of access to professional development; pay, conditions and procurement of employment; and the nature of casual work.
- ◆ Situational factors (constantly changing according to placements): These include school environment variables such as expectations of the relief teacher; staffroom dynamics; level of administrative and in-class support; specific classroom management challenges; and other issues specific to a particular placement.

The above factors (of course unique in combination to each relief teacher) combine to form some kind of *meaning* for each individual, and it is from this point that the process of feelings of alienation or non-alienation begin to develop. Each personal experience could be seen to generate certain feelings (either positive or negative), that are expressed along a continuum of the three constructs of alienation discussed earlier. The culmination of this process either results in feelings of alienation, or feelings of non-alienation. The model suggests that this process is an ongoing cycle, with resultant positive or negative feelings feeding back to a point where making meaning of the situation begins once again.

The concept of alienation means many different things to many different researchers and stakeholders. Ray (1998) contended, "Alienation is one of the most widely used constructs" (p. 67). Many different models, instruments and scales exist, and represent various other facets of alienation, including political, racial, physical, sociological and many other conceptions of the term. Ray (1998) also contended that over the course of just one 5 year period, "...no less than 24 scales and indices measuring alienation or related constructs..." (p. 67) were identified by researchers in the sociological field *alone*.

In the context of the above discussion, this model should be viewed only as an attempt to describe the major dimensions/constructs of alienation as they apply to the *target group* of this research, and to display some of the interrelationships between the major variables that have been identified by the literature as possibly contributing to feelings of alienation among these individuals.

Summary

This chapter introduced the reader to the conceptual framework of the current study. The first section explained the purpose and necessity of inclusion of a conceptual framework into formal research, whilst section two described the psychological model of alienation that was specifically adapted for the purposes of this study. A working definition, along with a brief discussion of the term "alienation" (as it applies to the context of this research) was also provided.

The next chapter discusses the methodology of this research, including its design and nature, the instruments and materials used, ethical considerations, target population and analysis of collected data.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Introduction

The research methodology is identified and discussed in this chapter. The ethical considerations pertinent to this research are discussed first, whilst section two identifies the target population of this study. Section three discusses the design and nature of the research and section four describes the data gathering tool that was employed. The fifth section of this chapter indicates the basic procedure that the research followed whilst section six describes how the obtained data were analysed. The final section addresses the perceived limitations of the research.

Ethical considerations

Prior to the commencement of the data-gathering phase, an APPLICATION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS document was forwarded to the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee, which is mandatory University policy when dealing with research issues involving human subjects. A copy of the interview questions was also submitted to this committee for perusal. This list of open-ended (prompt) questions also doubled as the transcript of interview page(s). Responses were initially handwritten by the researcher onto this instrument, then word processed onto duplicates for ease of content analysis and further codification. Appendix one contains all interview transcripts, including the exact list of prompt questions asked of each interviewee.

The main ethical concerns regarding this study were:

- ◆ The maintenance of respondents' anonymity, which was ensured by using only a coded number system (R1-R20) and designated gender to identify each respondent in the study. All other identifying information, including names of schools, suburbs and other individuals' names, were removed from final transcripts.

- ◆ Ensuring participants felt no obligation to continue participating in this research, should they decide for whatever reason, to withdraw. This was made clear to each participant both in writing, via a standard consent letter that was required to be signed, (see appendix two), and verbally at the beginning of each interview.

Subject population

A very specific population was targeted for this study. Only relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools were invited to participate, and concentrated on only those relief teachers whose main source of employment is through relief work. Teachers who supplement existing permanent or contract part time work with the occasional relief assignment were not considered valid subjects. This was due to the fact that these individuals could reasonably be expected to not experience the types of problems that produce the feelings of alienation that this study attempted to uncover. The subject population also represented both genders, and quite wide variations in age and relief teaching experience.

Forty six potential subjects were invited to participate in this research and, ultimately, twenty relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools were interviewed, representing a participation rate of slightly under forty four percent.

Nature and design of research

This research was primarily qualitative in nature, and is couched in the *Constructivism* paradigm of human inquiry. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 107) described a paradigm as an individual's set of basic beliefs about the world, and his/her place in it. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 110-111) further contended that the constructivism paradigm assumes that "reality" for any given person is formed through an individual's social and experiential interactions and is "constructed" as a direct result of these experiences.

These constructions, whilst local and specific in nature, are often shared by individuals within a particular culture, and in some instances can also be cross-cultural, "...are alterable, and are no more or less "true" in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111). The constructivism paradigm contends that the researcher and subject are interactively linked, with research findings being literally created as the investigation proceeds. Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 111) also noted that the research methodology employed within this paradigm is hermeneutical and dialectical in nature, with human interaction between the researcher and respondent(s) being viewed as the only way in which to elicit relevant data (individual constructions).

The research utilised semi-structured interviews as the main data collection tool. Burns (2000, p. 388) contended that only qualitative methods of research such as interviewing and direct observation permit access to an individual's meaning of the world within the context of his/her daily life. This study primarily focused on the probable feelings of alienation (and the specific reasons for these feelings) of the target population, and as such, needed to be designed in such a way as to draw these feelings out of the subjects. The concept of alienation is not an "absolute truth" in the same way as, for example, physical/chemical laws. Alienation will probably mean many different things to different individuals, but will, however, represent "truth" to the subjects of this study. Burns (2000) mirrored this contention by stating that "The qualitative researcher is not concerned with objective truth, but rather with the truth as the informant sees it" (p. 388). This view is supported by Wiersma and Jurs (2005) who state that one of the key assumptions of qualitative research is that "reality" is determined by the individual(s) who are experiencing it.

"It is the perceptions of those being studied that are important, and, to the extent possible, these perceptions are to be captured in order to obtain an accurate 'measure' of reality. 'Meaning' is perceived or experienced by those being studied, it is not imposed by the researcher." (p. 201-202)

Semi-structured interviewing, viewed as being the most appropriate tool for the gathering of data for this study, is distinct from other types of interview processes. Burns (2000, p. 422-426) drew distinctions between unstructured, semi-structured and structured interview techniques, contending that structured (or "standardised")

interviews usually involve the use of very "closed" questions, which provide only a narrow range of possible responses. These questions (developed beforehand by the researcher) are delivered in the same order to each subject, conversational approach is not fostered, and coding of responses is consequently relatively easy. This type of interview is often employed when surveying large groups of respondents, or obtaining clinical histories. Unstructured (or "in-depth") interviews are essentially conversational in form, focussing on a general topic relevant to the interviewee. The researcher attempts to "draw out" as much rich data as possible, relying very little on set questions, but instead on the quality of the social interaction between interviewer and interviewee. Subtle redirection can be used if the conversation strays too far from the topic. Unstructured interviews are often used when researching life events or oral histories.

Semi-structured interviews are a hybrid of the above techniques. Often, a series of general, open-ended questions are used as a guide and the order of these is not seen as important. The interview style is still very much conversational in nature, and the responses to questions reflect the interviewee's own language, reality and social meaning. This study attempted to ascertain whether or not feelings of alienation exist in the target group of individuals, and importantly, whether or not these feelings are in response to specific systemic problems that have been identified by the reviewed literature. As it was envisaged that certain "themes" would emerge from the interviews, the use of semi-structured interviews was seen as the most appropriate method by which to illicit relevant information.

Instruments/materials

As previously discussed, this research utilised semi-structured interviews as the main data-gathering tool. A list of open ended questions was prepared, which addressed the concept of alienation, various problems identified by the literature as possible sources of alienation, and asked respondents to identify support strategies for relief teachers that have been offered by schools. This "questionnaire" also doubled as the researcher's transcription page. Some basic demographic information was also sought from each respondent, including age range, gender, years spent as a relief teacher, number of schools serviced during their relief teaching careers, and career aspirations.

A tape recorder was envisaged as being used during the interview phase (providing that permission to use this device was granted by each respondent); however, this idea was discarded after the first few interviewees indicated that they preferred not to have their responses taped. This proved somewhat of a problem, due to the fact that hastily written notes therefore had to be jotted down by the researcher, in order to “keep up” with each respondent. Some concern as to whether or not the “flavour” of the moment had been captured (as well as specific quotes) became evident, because the intention was wherever possible not to interrupt the “flow” of interviewees’ responses, in order for the researcher to “catch up” with what each individual was saying. This unforeseen problem was addressed by asking each interviewee to read over their responses just prior to the conclusion of the interview. In some cases, this elicited further comments or clarifications, which were then duly noted by the researcher.

Procedure

Contact with potential respondents was made through three avenues. First, several schools familiar to the researcher were contacted via the principals. This took the form of a face-to-face meeting with each principal and included a description of the proposed research, along with a request for the researcher’s contact details to be provided to each relief teacher who showed interest in participating in the study. It was then left to the potential respondent to make contact with the researcher. Second, contact was made with several relief teachers known to the researcher, who were currently working within the system, and interested parties invited to participate in the research. Interested participants from both above sources, were then invited to mention this research to other relief teachers known to them. The researcher’s contact details along with an invitation to participate were supplied, and it was again left to the individual to respond in the first instance.

Subsequent to initial contact being made, interested respondents were provided with a letter describing the nature and scope of the research, including a formal invitation to participate, along with a consent form, which was required to be signed by both researcher and participant (refer to appendix two.) Arrangements were then made to conduct the interview at a time and place that was mutually convenient. Interview sessions were subsequently conducted in a quiet, private area (thus minimising the

potential for interruptions), were of a “one to one” nature and consisted of the researcher asking each interview question, then allowing the respondent to answer in their own time. Responses to each question were transcribed by the researcher, as detailed above, before moving on to the next question.

Official transcripts were then re-transcribed onto computer, printed and returned to each respondent for verification and change if necessary. This procedure not only ensured that each participant was totally “comfortable” with their responses, it ensured that individual “meaning” remained unadulterated, thereby strengthening the validity of findings through the process of triangulation (Cresswell, 2005; Leedy & Ormond, 2005; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). (The issue of “validity” is discussed in more detail later in this chapter). All names of individuals, schools and other places, had been removed by this point. Only individually verified transcripts were used for final analysis (see appendix one)

Analysis of data collected

The first stage of the formal analysis process was one of overall content analysis and familiarisation with the interview transcripts. At this point all interviews had been re-transcribed, verified by the respondents (and changed if necessary), printed, and copied for ease of codification. Transcripts were read then re-read several times, in order for the researcher to “immerse” himself into the data. As a result of this immersion, five “meta” themes (subsequently referred to as “sections”) emerged through the research questions, conceptual framework and to some extent the literature review. These included alienation, demographic information, positive aspects of relief teaching, systemic problems encountered, and identified support strategies. The following chapters discuss and analyse these sections in some detail.

Data were then coded further into the various themes and sub-themes that emerged. The process of obtaining relevant meaning from the interview transcripts required a certain amount of data reduction to take place in order to allow these themes (and later, more specific) sub-themes to emerge. Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 286) define coding as “...the translation of question responses and respondent information to specific categories for the purpose of further analysis.” Burns (2000, p. 432), contended that

the process of coding begins at the actual interviewing stage, with strong early themes often emerging which further focus the researcher's topic of inquiry. Wiersma and Jurs (2005) state that qualitative data analysis requires obtained data to be organised and reduced in order for a "clear picture" to emerge, describing coding as "...a process of organising data and obtaining data reduction. In essence it is the process by which qualitative researchers 'see what they have in the data'" (p. 206). Wiersma and Jurs (2005) also contended that any number and categories of codes may be used, and that repetition and cross-referencing of these codes (or themes) is often evident when research findings are discussed in some detail.

Care must also be taken by the researcher to ensure that participants' perspectives are not lost or altered when "...conglomerating data from a wide variety of sources..." (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005, p. 103). During the data reduction and coding phase great care was taken to ensure that "individual meaning" was not lost in the process by having the respondents read the transcript of their responses twice: prior to the termination of the interview, and again, when word processed transcripts were provided for verification. Burns (2000, p. 433) suggested that the issue of the potential for loss of individual meaning is one which yields no easy answers when attempting to assign individual meaning to specific responses. Personal meaning can differ dramatically between individuals. However, as each interview was analysed further, and themes/codes continually refined, the question of individual meaning, although "narrowed down" to some extent, remained "valid" for each individual.

Once these "codes" (sections, themes and sub-themes) had been identified, the process of labelling and discussing each became relatively simple.

Limitations of the research

Three major weaknesses have been identified in the current study. First, the issue of respondent numbers needs to be discussed. Most research, which deals in some way with human subjects (be it qualitative or quantitative), will produce results more representative of the target population, when larger numbers of respondents are utilised. This is certainly the case with the current study. The intention of the researcher was to gain access to as many respondents as possible (given the time and

financial constraints) in an effort to provide findings that as accurately as possible, mirror the general target population's true feelings. Every effort was made to source respondents with widely diverse demographic and experiential backgrounds in order to (hopefully) paint the broadest possible picture. A total of twenty relief teachers were interviewed for this study, and whilst this is by no means a "large" number, the resultant responses showed very little variation in terms of experienced problems and the resultant alienation that was claimed to stem from exposure to these issues.

The second potential weakness stems from reliability concerns that may arise when being tempted to extend the findings across broader sections of the relief teacher community.

The conceptual framework indicates that feelings of alienation can be "triggered" and expressed in different ways, and can be changeable in frequency and intensity, depending on an almost limitless set of variables, each of which being peculiar to each individual. In other words, findings need to be viewed as extremely "situational" in nature, and likely to change over varying timeframes.

Whilst the possibility exists that these findings could be representative of other relief teachers, great caution should be taken in suggesting that this is the case. One of the central requirements in order for research findings to be considered "reliable", is that similar results could be expected to be replicated either in the same population at some later stage, or in other similar cohorts (Angus & Gray, 2001; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005; Weirsmas & Jurs, 2005). The fact that the concept of alienation (and the situational factors that can trigger these feelings) is so subjective and changeable means that research of this nature might produce very different findings each time it was carried out.

The third potential weakness stems from the issue of validity. Burns (2000, p. 390) noted that qualitative research can suffer from validity problems, meaning that there exists the possibility that this research will not actually measure what it is supposed to measure. This is supported to some extent, by Wiersma and Jurs (2005, p. 215). However, Maxwell, (1992), cited in Angus and Gray (2001, p. 84), contended that other researchers have sought to redefine the construct of validity in terms that are

more relevant to qualitative research, and have identified four “different” types of validity that could be used in this type of study:

- ◆ *Descriptive validity*: The extent to which there would be agreement between different observers, regarding the information elicited from respondents.
- ◆ *Interpretive validity*: The extent to which the descriptions of elicited information truly reflect the meaning of what respondents were trying to communicate.
- ◆ *Theoretical validity*: The extent to which the information successfully addresses the theoretical constructs/research questions the researcher brings to the study.
- ◆ *Validity of generalisations*: This refers to the extent to which the account(s) can be extended to the rest of the target population.

As stated previously, the concept of alienation is highly subjective in nature. What one individual perceives as alienation, may not be seen the same way as other respondents, or indeed the researcher. In an effort to minimise the possibility of invalid results, the conceptual framework of this research (psychological model of alienation) was developed in such a way as to narrow down the broad concept of alienation to three simple “expressions” or constructs. These constructs include feelings of meaninglessness within the workplace, feelings of powerlessness, and feelings of exclusion. Each interviewee was made explicitly aware of the conceptual framework of the research and was asked as much as possible, to frame their responses within the bounds of these constructs.

Triangulation was also used to narrow the chances of invalid data being used as evidence in the subsequent findings of the research. Cresswell (2005) defines triangulation as “...the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals...types of data... or methods of data collection...in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 352). As stated earlier in the chapter, this process was used when ensuring that each respondent was comfortable with their responses, and is similar to the process known as “member checking”, which strengthens validity

of findings through ensuring one or more respondents physically check the accuracy of their accounts (Cresswell, 2005).

Information gathered from multiple sites can further enhance validity (Stringer & Dwyer, 2005), and this form of triangulation was employed when ensuring that the subject population each had experience in servicing multiple schools, meaning in effect that their experiences were drawn from many different sites (in some cases twenty or more schools). In many cases, respondents also “overlapped” in their servicing of schools. The subject population reported having serviced around two hundred and thirty five schools between them, however, after cross-referencing the names of these schools, the total number of *different* schools serviced was only seventy six. The fact that a significant amount of overlapping was evident further strengthens validity, due to the fact that not only were multiple sites seen to generate similar experiences, but that in many cases, different respondents quoted similar experiences as a result of exposure to the same sites, thereby providing evidence of further triangulation (Cresswell, 2005; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005).

Summary

Chapter four provided an overview of the methodology used in the research. The main ethical considerations regarding this study were firstly identified, and strategies to effectively deal with these considerations, put forward. The second section described the very specific nature of the target population from which respondents were selected and justified why this was considered necessary. Section three discussed the nature and design of the proposed research, indicating that the study was qualitative in nature, was couched in the constructivism paradigm of social inquiry, and employed semi-structured interviews as its main data collection tool. The next section dealt with the instruments/materials to be used for data collection, while section five described how this data would be analysed. The final section discussed perceived weaknesses of the research and identified ways that these weaknesses were minimised as far as practically possible.

The next chapter begins discussing in detail, the findings of the current research.

Chapter 5

Overview of interviews, and demographic findings.

Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section of this chapter reiterates the aims and objectives of the present research, then provides a brief overview of the semi-structured interviews, whilst the second section discusses basic respondent demographic information. In all cases, as previously outlined in chapter four, semi-structured interviews were employed as the major data gathering tool.

The aims and objectives of this research were to determine, and confirm sources of alienation among relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools, investigate other possible sources of alienation not yet identified by the reviewed literature, and finally, determine what (if any) support strategies are actually offered to relief teachers by those schools.

The aims and objectives were then distilled into two broad research questions:

- 1(a) Are relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools feeling alienation as a consequence of their work?
- (b) If alienation is confirmed, what do Western Australian government metropolitan primary school relief teachers identify as contributing to these feelings?
- 2 What identified support strategies/systems have been offered to relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools?

Overview of the semi-structured interviews

The interviews took place over a time period encompassing term one and the first two weeks of term two, 2005. Some degree of difficulty was encountered in securing an adequate number of interviewees, although this difficulty could have been somewhat reduced had the considerably short timeframe of this study been extended. A total of

forty six potential subjects were invited to participate in this research and, ultimately, twenty relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools were interviewed, representing a participation rate of slightly under forty four percent. Potential interviewees were recruited from schools known to the researcher (permission was first obtained from each principal), and from relief teachers also known to the researcher. In some cases this lead to other relief teachers known to separate interviewees.

Each interviewed respondent was currently engaged in relief teaching at Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools, and at time of interview, used this type of employment as their major source of income. In all cases, Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee guidelines were followed. All interviews were conducted face-to-face with each respondent, and all but three were conducted at the interviewee's place of residence. The remainder were conducted at the interviewee's place of work, in a "private" location and outside of normal working hours. Each interview lasted around one hour, with the longest taking one hour and forty five minutes. The shortest interview lasted slightly over forty minutes. Verbal responses were handwritten (by the researcher) onto a transcript page, which was then viewed by the interviewee at the conclusion of interview. Handwritten responses were subsequently word processed onto computer for ease of future codification. At this point all names and identifying information were removed from the transcripts and each respondent was issued with a number ranging between one and twenty. Printed transcripts were then posted to respondents for final checking, approval and changes if needed. Only after this process had been completed was any information analysed and included in the research

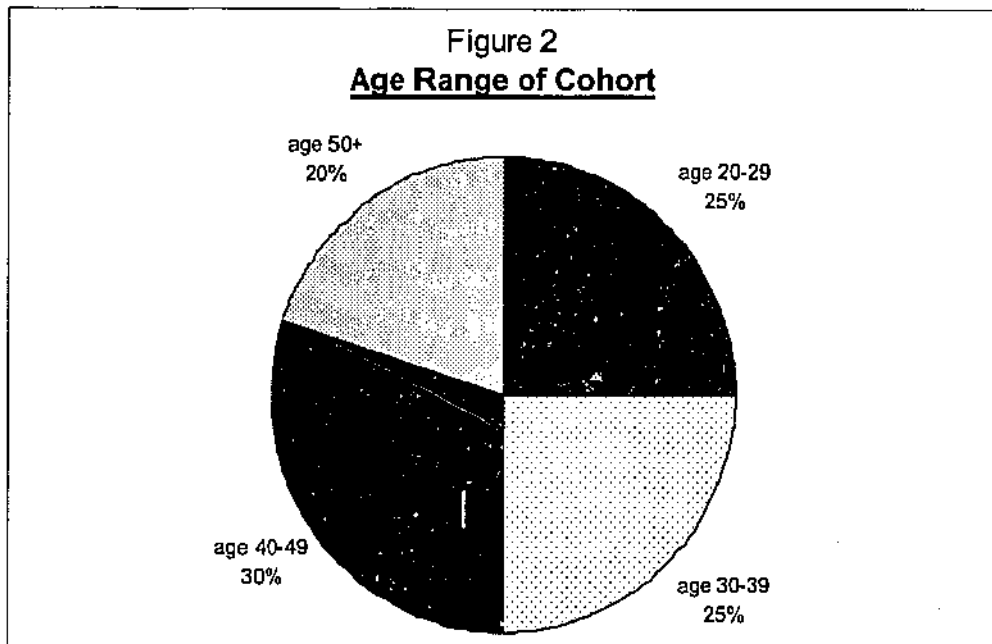
In every case, interviewees showed a great deal of interest in the topic of discussion, with animation and obvious enthusiasm being readily displayed. This was somewhat of a relief, as the University's Ethics Committee had shown some concern regarding the possibility that the subject-matter of these interviews might elicit some degree of distress or re-lived negative emotions in some respondents (especially when prompted to verbalise their feelings of alienation and disconnection). In reality, the opposite effect was observed, with one particular interviewee (R16) actually commenting on her

positive feelings at the conclusion of the interview, stating that "...it's refreshing to talk to someone who is actually *interested* in relief teachers"

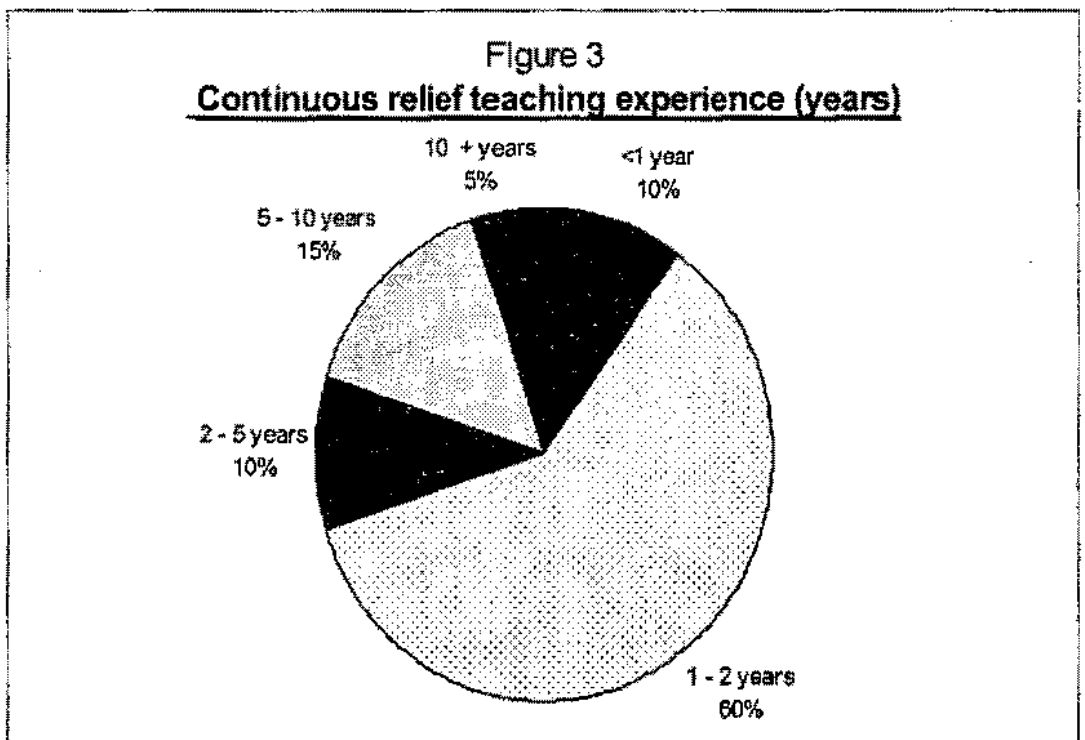
Once engaged, subjects were very forthcoming with their responses, and often built on their own descriptions without the need for prompting or redirection from the researcher. In general, the longer the interview lasted, the more useful and "rich" the data appeared to be.

Respondent demographics.

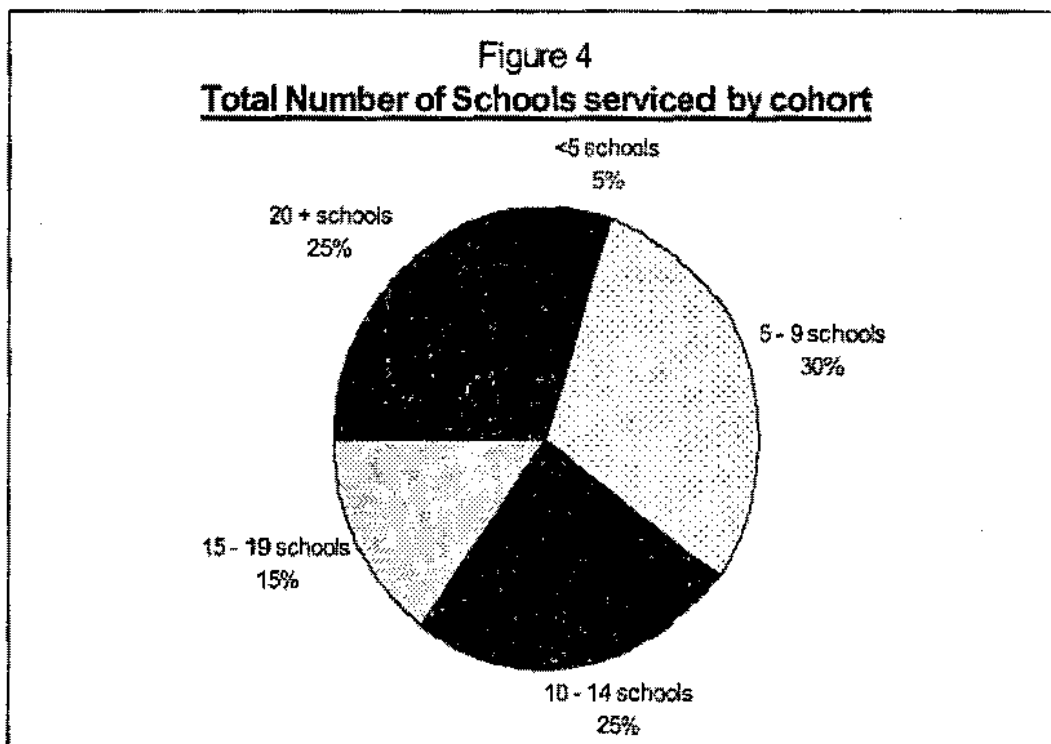
Twenty relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools were interviewed for this research and all respondents were utilising this form of employment as their primary source of income. Four were male and the remaining sixteen female. Ages ranged from twenty one to fifty five, and the average age of the subject population was slightly over thirty eight years. Figure 2 shows age ranges in graphical form.



The length of time each respondent had been *continuously* relief teaching ranged from between four months to a maximum of eleven years. At the time of interview, ten percent of respondents had worked as a relief teacher for less than one year, sixty percent had worked in this capacity for between one and two years, sixty percent had worked in this capacity for between one and two years, and 10 percent between two and five years. Fifteen percent of respondents had been working as relief teachers for between five and ten years, and five percent for over ten years. The average number of years served as a relief teacher, was 2.85. Figure three below, summarises these percentages in graphical form.

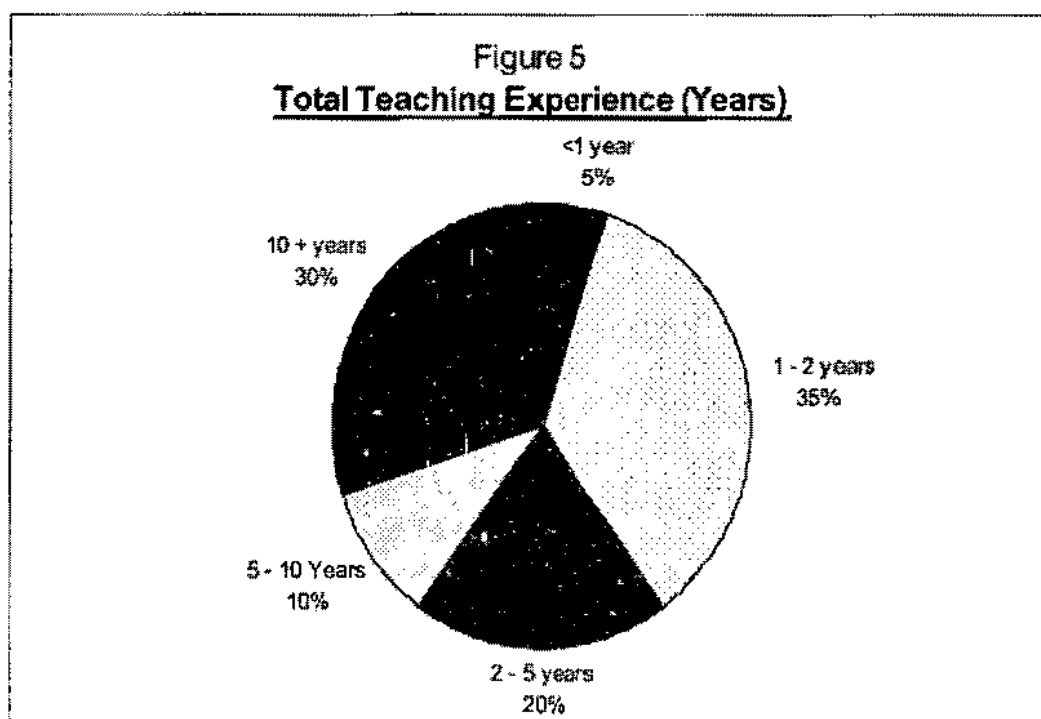


The number of schools each relief teacher had serviced ranged from two, to more than twenty, with sixty five percent of respondents indicating that they had serviced more than ten schools. Figure four below, illustrates this finding.



A total of seventy six separate schools were serviced by the subject population, which represents slightly over twenty three percent of the three hundred and twenty four Western Australian government primary schools (Senior policy officer, Department of Education and Training, personal communication, June 14, 2005) situated in the greater Perth metropolitan area. This figure was arrived at by physically cross-referencing the names of schools that each respondent claimed to have serviced over the course of their relief teaching careers.

Nearly half of the surveyed respondents (forty percent) had previously been employed as teachers in some tenured capacity prior to practising as relief primary school teachers. Total teaching experience for these individuals ranged from between three and thirty years, with the vast majority of this group (six out of eight) having taught for over ten years. Three reported each having thirty years' overall experience in the teaching arena. This cohort in itself, represents a well seasoned and highly experienced educational resource. A total of eight respondents (forty percent) had been teaching for more than five years. Figure 5 below, summarises total teaching experience in graphical form.

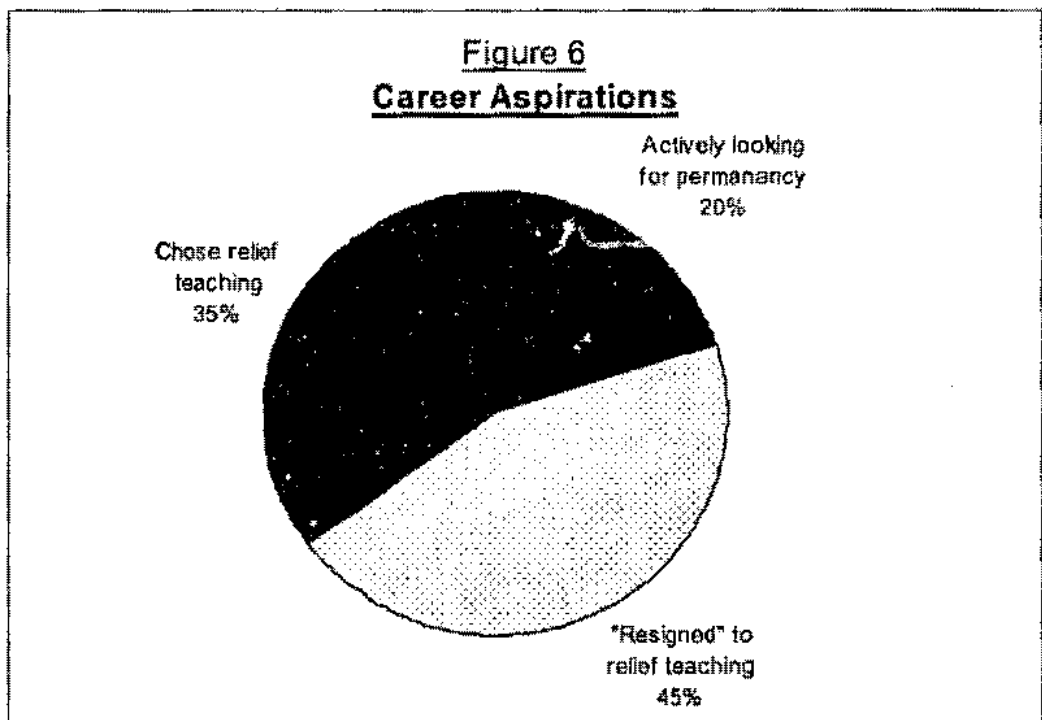


An analysis of the cohort's "career aspirations" revealed an interesting finding, with three categories being identified. The expectation had been to identify only two: relief teachers who were actively looking for permanency, and those who had chosen (for varying lifestyle reasons) relief teaching as their preferred mode of employment.

A total of four interviewees (twenty percent) stated that they were "actively" looking for permanency (or long term contract work), whilst a further seven individuals (thirty

five percent) claimed to have either chosen relief teaching, or were "happy" working in this capacity.

Perhaps surprisingly, a third category emerged--relief teachers who would "prefer" permanency (or long term contract employment), but for various reasons had "resigned" themselves to relief teaching, usually due to an inability or refusal to leave the city in favour of long term work in rural or remote areas of the state. This category was the most strongly represented, with a total of nine respondents (forty five percent). Figure six below, illustrates these findings.



Although not specifically included within the formal aims and objectives of this research, basic demographic information on the subject population was considered important to document. A review of the literature showed little in the way of *who* actually make up relief teacher populations in the three countries from which the literature was drawn, with the exception of two studies (Crittenden 1994, and Gonzales 2002). Some difficulty would clearly be expected to be experienced when attempting to ascertain such information, due to the often transitory nature of the relief teacher's work, and this was certainly the researcher's experience when trying to establish (through the Department of Education and Training) the number of relief teachers currently servicing government schools in WA. The Department of Education and Training claimed they were "unable" to easily access this information because the only way to determine such numbers was to manually check pay records of all teachers paid by the Department. Consequently, it was felt that any information at all, that shed at least some light on who actually make up this population, was well worth documenting.

Crittenden's (1994) WA study quoted general figures relating to the estimated population of relief teachers who were at that stage (1993) servicing WA government kindergarten to year twelve schools (around 1100), and surmised that "many" of the individuals who comprise the relief teaching population were actively looking for full time placements. Although a small sample population, the results of the current study may not necessarily reflect this contention, as evidenced by the above data, which indicates that only four relief teachers are at this stage "actively" seeking tenure. Even if the third emergent category is included in these figures (those who had in some ways "resigned themselves to relief teaching), thirty five percent of the cohort were relief teaching through *active choice* at time of interview.

The second quoted study (Gonzales, 2002), looked at a small cohort of relief teachers servicing schools in northern California, studying in some detail variables such as age, teaching experience and so on. Interestingly, strong parallels between that research and the findings of this study can be drawn, indicating that the relief teacher population may not be as "young and/or inexperienced" as many might think.

Gonzalez's (2002) study found that 52% of that cohort were aged between 41 and 60 years of age. The current research produced similar results, with 50% of the subject population ranging from 40 to 50-plus years of age. Teaching experience was also worthy of comment. The relief teachers surveyed by Gonzales (2002) showed 49% had over 5 years of teaching experience, whilst the current research indicated that 45% of the subject population had between 5 and 30 years of experience. In both cases this represents a surprisingly mature, experienced and "well seasoned" educational resource.

Naturally, the results of two small studies, half a world apart, cannot be extended to the rest of the relief teacher population in either country. However, they do raise certain possibilities, not the least of which could centre around the prospect that a significant proportion of relief teachers might well bring a wealth of educational experience into many classrooms on a daily basis.

Summary

This chapter was divided into two sections and dealt firstly with a recapitulation of the main aims and objectives of the research, before discussing and providing an overview of the semi-structured interview process that underpinned the data gathering phase of the study. The second section discussed and analysed some basic demographic information relating to the respondents, and included justification as to why this data should be included in the research findings. Age range and years of teaching experience of interviewed relief teachers were identified, and these proved remarkably similar to findings reported in a small study carried out in the US in 2002.

The next chapter identifies and discusses the positive aspects of relief teaching, that were identified by the subject population of this study.

Chapter 6

Positive aspects of relief teaching

Introduction

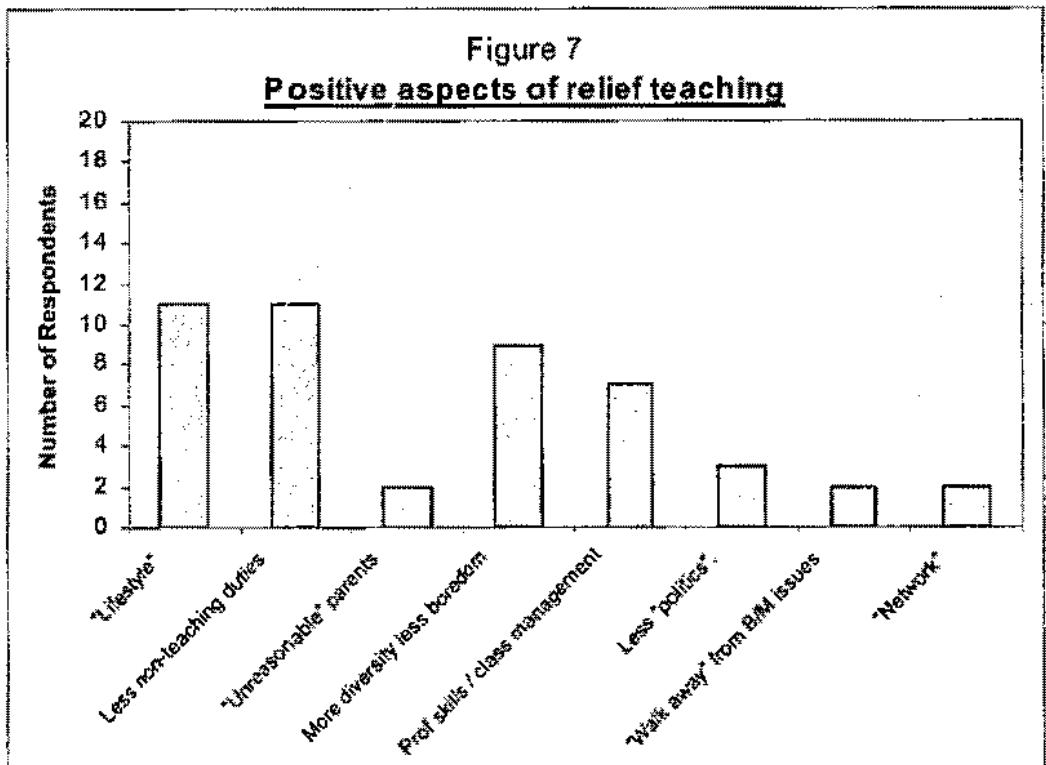
This chapter identifies and discusses the major positive aspects of relief teaching as identified by the respondents. The first section briefly identifies these emergent themes as “unexpected” new information and provides justification as to why it is felt that they should be included in the research findings. Section two discusses in some detail these identified themes.

Justification for inclusion

The question of whether relief teachers find anything “positive” in their work is not found among any of the literature that was reviewed in preparation for this research, and indeed was not consciously considered by the researcher when preparing for the actual study. The pre-prepared interview transcript page used by the researcher did, however, contain one “prompt” question which asked interviewees what aspects of their job they “liked”. This was included not so much to elicit specific information, but rather, to start the interview off on a “positive note”, especially in light of the fact that the bulk of responses were anticipated to be of a rather “negative” nature. Perhaps surprisingly, the responses to this question showed that the subject population did in fact enjoy various facets of their work, even when showing alienation as a result of their exposure to a variety of identified systemic problems within the schools that they serviced. The following findings are therefore considered well worthy of note, and of inclusion into the findings of the research. These findings are considered as new information and are discussed in some detail in the following section.

Identified positive aspects of relief teaching

Without exception, all respondents cited numerous positive aspects about relief teaching, with eight distinct themes emerging from the data. These are discussed below, whilst Figure 7 summarises in graphical form, the number of respondents who attached specific importance to particular aspects. All interviewees identified between two and five perceived “benefits of the job”.



“Lifestyle”/freedom/ability to “move on”: Eleven respondents (fifty five percent) indicated that relief teaching provided the freedom to move from school to school and district to district. The ability (at least to some degree) to work employment around lifestyle demands was considered important by some individuals. One respondent (R2) commented that being able to get home “...not long after the kids [is a] real bonus.”

Other interviewees indicated that there was a certain “freedom” in not being “tied down” to any particular school or district, with one relief teacher (R6) stating that not having to return to “negative” workplaces reduced “pressure”. Another (R20) commented on the positive aspect of being able to “work when I want to”, whilst others made note of the fact that the ability to be able to take time off to attend to other life-issues, was a benefit of the job.

Less marking, preparation, administrative/non-teaching duties: Eleven respondents (fifty-five percent) mentioned that as a relief teacher, far less was required in the way of after hours and non-teaching duties. This, in some ways relates closely with the “lifestyle” aspect discussed above. One respondent (R7), stated that in his opinion, relief teaching could be “less demanding” because of the reduced demand for after hours preparation, whilst another (R16) stated that not having student reports and portfolios to coordinate meant “less headaches”. This was somewhat mirrored by R17 who liked the fact that relief teaching meant that one could “...come in, [and then just] go home”. One interviewee (R9) indicated that she had actually made the conscious decision to move from a tenured position to relief teaching based largely on the above. Other respondents cited variously that the absence of extended after hours marking and preparation were significant “bonuses” of working as relief teachers.

Fewer dealings with “unreasonable” parents/family-members. Two respondents (ten percent) indicated that not having to deal with parents or guardians of students under their charge was a positive aspect of working as a relief teacher. Interestingly the cohort made some distinction between “reasonable” and “unreasonable” parents, indicating that the “real stress” was experienced when having to deal with the latter group of individuals.

Increased access to diversity of workplaces, student age and capabilities, and subject area. Decreased levels of boredom: Although appearing like two separate themes, these two aspects proved virtually impossible to analyse individually, due to the fact that most interviewees seemed to imply that occupational “boredom” was decreased as a direct result of constant exposure to the diversity experienced while working as a relief teacher. Nine respondents (forty five percent) mentioned that being able to experience widely varying settings, age and capability levels along with often

changing subject areas, helped keep occupational stagnation to a minimum. One interviewee (R18) described this as "...constantly refreshing..." Another respondent (R2) saw relief teaching offering "huge diversity [it is] interesting [with] no room for boredom", and this view was supported by R1, who valued the ability to "...experience different settings and schools".

Professional skills and classroom management enhancement: Seven respondents (thirty-five percent) believed that their experience in the relief teacher setting was enhancing their general teaching and classroom management skills. One respondent (R15) stated that relief teaching "...makes you a better teacher", whilst another (R8) believed that relief teaching "...makes you adaptable...resourceful, increases [your] skills." This general view was supported by the remainder of the cohort, who variously credited relief teaching with exposure to different classroom settings, rules, management strategies and student groups, and that this experience increased teaching skills overall.

No involvement in "politics": Three respondents (fifteen percent) cited lack of involvement in work-place "politics" as a definite benefit of working in a relief-only capacity. "Politics" was variously defined as "bitching", "backstabbing", and "negative work-places". One respondent (R5) succinctly summed up the sentiment of all three by contending that as a relief teacher, he did not have to "...put up with pettiness. I'm not involved in all that. [I can] walk out the door at three and not have to worry about all that".

Ability to "walk away" from behaviour management issues. Perhaps surprisingly, this aspect was mentioned by only two respondents (ten percent). In contrast, one of the most quoted systemic problems identified by the subject group as a whole was that of behaviour management challenges (which is discussed in detail in chapter six). There appears, therefore, to be some inconsistency in the low percentage of relief teachers who consider the fact that they can in effect "walk away" from serious behaviour problems at the end of a teaching day as a "positive", compared with the high percentage who identified behaviour management problems as a serious issue. Of course, a multitude of reasons for this aberration exist, not the least of which could include the relatively small cohort, the order in which prompt questions were asked, or

the possibility that this group of individuals consider serious behaviour management issues something that should *not* be “walked away from”.

A chance to “network” with other professionals. Two respondents (ten percent) indicated that the ability to meet and share ideas with a wide diversity of teaching staff across a broad spectrum of different schools was a positive aspect of their job. One interviewee (R11) stated that working in different schools provided the opportunity to meet more experienced tenured staff who (upon being suitably impressed with her work) might prove helpful to her in her quest for permanency or long-term contract positions.

Summary

This chapter firstly discussed the identification of several themes, which emerged from the data coding process, highlighting the respondents’ views on the “positives” of relief teaching. This was followed by a brief description of how this data came to be elicited, and a justification of why it was believed this information was considered worthy of inclusion in the results of the research.

The final section of this chapter discussed in some detail these “positives”. A total of eight themes emerged from the data, showing that all respondents found at least some “benefits” in working as a relief teacher. All identified at least two positive aspects of the job. Lifestyle issues and the perceived reduction of after hours non-teaching duties were the two most quoted themes, with fifty five percent of the cohort each identifying these.

The next chapter explores in some detail, the types of alienation experienced by the interviewees as a result of their work as relief teachers.

Chapter 7

“Alienation” as identified and discussed by the subject population

Introduction

This chapter identifies and discusses the concept of “alienation” as identified by the subject population of this research. The first section briefly recapitulates the concept of “alienation” as defined for the purposes of this research and identifies the three main constructs over which these feelings can be expressed. Section two provides an overview of interviewees’ general responses to the question of alienation being felt as a result of their work as relief teachers. Section three discusses in some detail, the specific combinations of alienation constructs, that respondents claim to have experienced as a result of their work.

“Alienation” as defined for the purposes of this research

As previously discussed in chapter two, no research appears to have been undertaken which directly addresses the question as to whether differing degrees of alienation exist among relief teachers. Certainly, this concept is not identified or discussed in any of the available literature referring to relief teaching. Literature that substantively deals in any real depth with the specific issues relating to relief teachers or teaching is scarce. This is particularly evident in Australia. The literature did, however, identify several distinct ongoing systemic problems that were present within the education systems of the countries from which the literature was drawn. Relief teachers who were exposed to one, some, or combinations of these problems might reasonably be expected to experience feelings of alienation.

One of the central aims of the present research was to ascertain whether exposure to previously identified systemic problems inherent within the education system produced feelings of alienation in the subject group, and if so, in what ways they specifically manifested (or were “felt/expressed”) in each individual. This formed the basis of part (a) of the first research question.

For the purpose of the present study, a psychological model of alienation was adapted from Carlson (1995) and Finn (1989), and is displayed as a flow-chart in figure 1.

Carlson (1995, p. 467) in citing Dean (1961), Calabrese (1984), and Seeman (1959), contended that alienation (when viewed from a social science perspective) could be “expressed” in one of three psychological constructs:

Powerlessness, which relates to individuals who feel a lack of control over general or specific personal situations.

Isolation, referring to feelings of withdrawal and isolation from, or rejection by, peers or peer groups, or a general sense of being “alone” either socially or emotionally.

Meaninglessness, which relates to feelings of a lack of personal meaning when in a specific situation.

The current study adopted the following definition of “alienation”: **Persistent negative feelings that some relief teachers may experience during the course of their work within Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools.** These feelings may be expressed as powerlessness, meaninglessness, or isolation, and may possibly be expressed in various combinations of these constructs.

Relief teacher alienation as identified by the interviewees

As stated previously, all interviewees responded positively, showing interest, “animation”, and enthusiasm when eliciting responses to prompt questions. Feelings of alienation were discussed freely and openly, with no apparent distress or other negative feelings evident at time of response. In fact the opposite seemed to manifest itself, in that some respondents appeared to find the experience of verbalising negative feelings somewhat cathartic.

All three constructs (powerlessness, meaninglessness and isolation) were variously identified by interviewees, with some mentioning all three, and others claiming to have

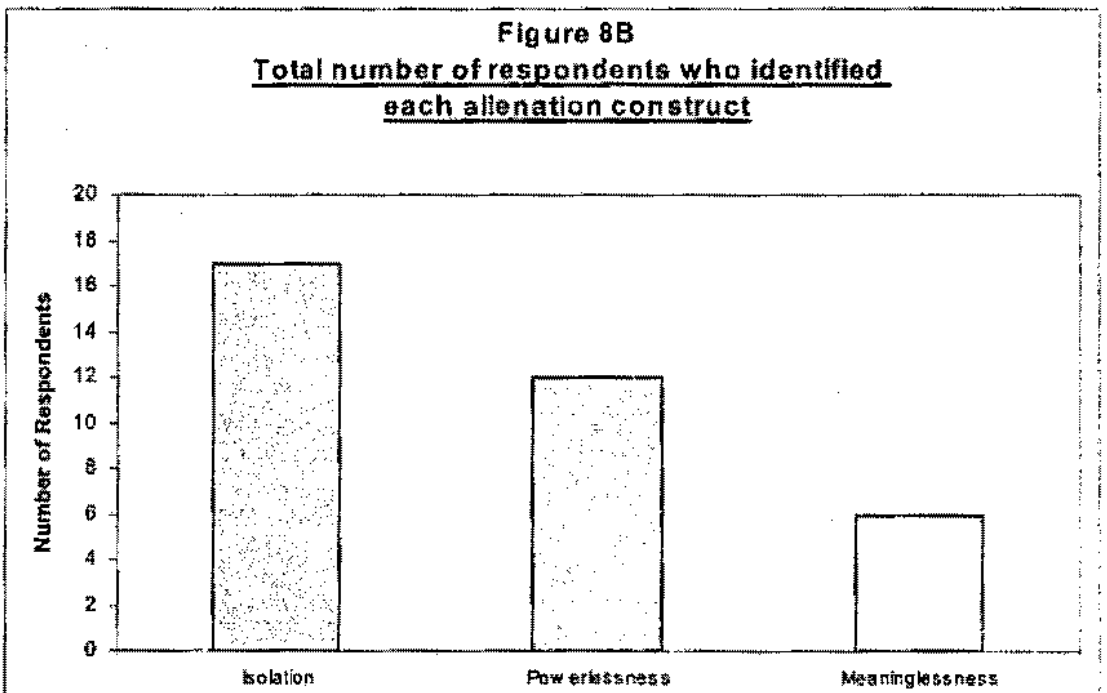
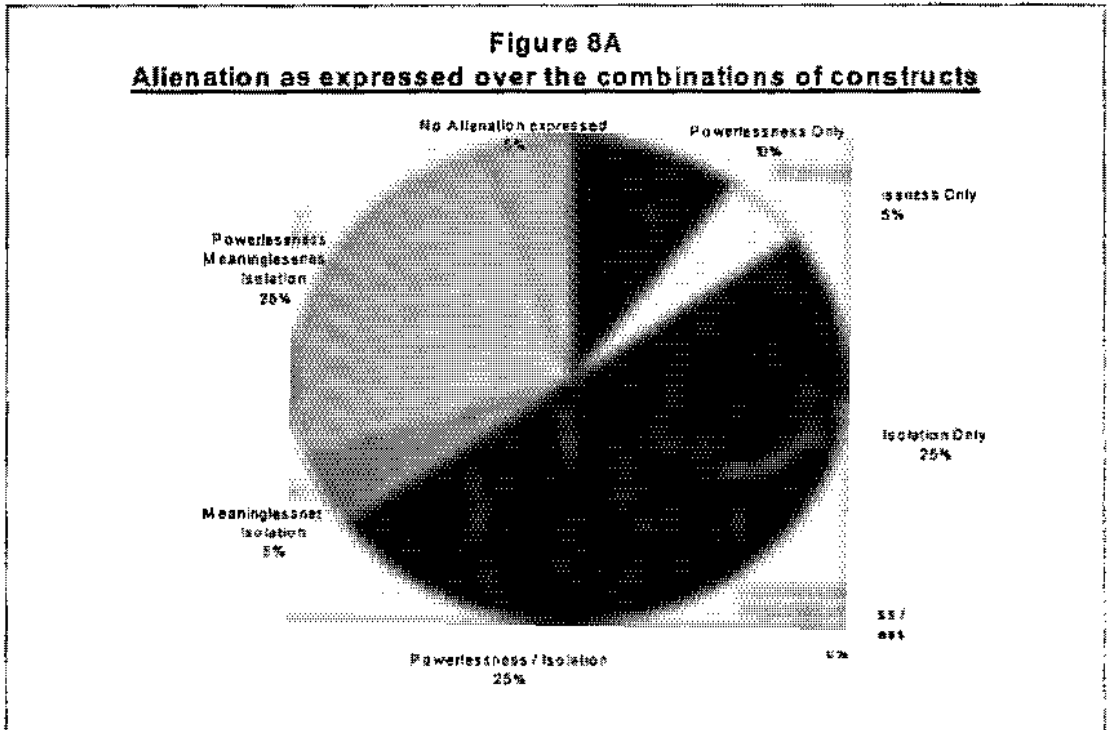
felt only one or two during the course of their work. Interestingly, three respondents (R3, R16 and R19) initially claimed not to have experienced any alienation at all whilst employed in a relief teaching capacity, however, only one participant, (R19), maintained throughout the interview that alienation had never manifested itself during her work as a relief teacher. She attributed this to the fact that she works only at two schools. In the other two cases, deeper self-investigation and analysis of previously experienced problems (and their consequent reactions to these situations) invited these interviewees to identify certain coping strategies that they employed as a way to reduce negative feelings. Thus they reported that they had indeed been experiencing some form of alienation from time to time. R3 stated that she chose to be “marginalised” as a way to combat feelings of alienation, whilst R16 admitted that when initially asked whether she had experienced alienation whilst working as a relief teacher, stated “no”, but realised later, that “...significant feelings have and do, exist”.

Each interviewee (with the exception of R19) claimed to have felt alienated whilst working as a relief teacher. This represents ninety five percent of the interviewed cohort. Most common short-answer responses to the direct question: “*Do you ever feel left out/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?*” were, “Yes”; “Yes—often”; “Frequently”; “Definitely!” and in one case, “It’s daunting!” One respondent (R2), who had been continuously relief teaching for the past eleven years, stated that she had experienced alienation over the course of her job, however, this had reduced significantly since (at the time of interview) having been able to secure most assignments at one school. This is consistent with R19’s view that the main reason she had not felt alienated was because she had restricted her relief work to only two schools.

Alienation as expressed over the three constructs.

During the course of the interviews each respondent was asked (after discussing alienation as a general concept), to try and describe which specific construct(s) most closely reflected their identified feelings of negativity. The results were rather interesting, with all constructs being identified individually and five respondents stating that they felt a combination of all three during the course of their work. In addition, two combinations of two constructs (Powerlessness/Isolation, and

Meaninglessness/Isolation) were quoted by five respondents and one respondent respectively. These findings have been dealt with separately and are detailed in the following pages. Figures eight (A) and eight (B) below, summarise the findings, showing the number of respondents who identified each individual construct in total as well as each separate combination.



Isolation: This was the most frequent single (individual) construct quoted by the respondents. Five interviewees (twenty five percent of the population) believed that feelings of isolation most adequately described their reactions when confronted by identified systemic problems during the course of their work. Some respondents who considered this construct to be the most representative description of their feelings of alienation made specific remarks about how this made them feel at the time. One respondent (R2) described “isolation” as relating particularly well to one incident in a context where she had been servicing one school for some weeks. On one occasion, she was unable to work, and described being “...dropped immediately...I never heard from them again”. Another participant (R12) felt that isolation was best expressed as “feeling very alone—especially in the larger schools”. Still another participant (R14) described her experiences with the Department of Education and Training, discussed in more detail later, stating that “...you’re not treated well by them—you feel particularly alone”.

Descriptors such as “lonely” “alone” and “out of the loop” were used. The general feeling gained from this cohort was that whilst some workplaces made active efforts to include relief staff, many did not. One teacher (R10) aptly summed up this sentiment by stating that “...you’re often not talked to—even when *you* make the effort.”

Powerlessness: Two respondents (ten percent) quoted this single construct as most adequately describing their feelings of alienation. Interestingly, in both cases, interviewees were aged fifty and fifty one respectively, and each had thirty years teaching experience. One respondent (R16) had been relief teaching for one year at the time of interview, and had been teaching in various tenured capacities for thirty years. Whilst considering herself essentially semi-retired and in many ways enjoying the freedom of relief teaching, she stated that as a relief teacher she felt devalued as a professional, commenting “[I’ve] been teaching for 30 years, [I’ve] got a lifetime experience to offer, but [you’re] treated as if you’re a junior--like straight out of teacher’s college. ... Being a relief teacher doesn’t mean you don’t know anything”. Still another (R8) related her feelings of powerlessness to a perceived lack of advancement opportunities as a relief teacher, and a feeling that regardless of the quality of her work, little difference in others’ “attitudes” was evident: “[You’ve] gone

into school—done [the] job—who really cares? [You] can't advance yourself. [You] could do [a] good or bad job and be viewed the same way”.

Meaninglessness: Interestingly only one respondent (five percent) quoted meaninglessness (on its own) as the construct most closely resembling feelings of alienation. This interviewee (R3) was one of the previously mentioned two individuals who initially believed that they had not experienced alienation during their course of employment as relief teachers, but who subsequently changed her mind on this during the latter stages of interview. This respondent was aged fifty-two at the time of interview and had been teaching in various capacities for slightly over thirty years. She had been working as a relief teacher in primary school settings for the past three years. The respondent believed that meaninglessness best described feelings that sometimes manifested when taking classes of “unruly” students, stating that she “...sometimes feel[s] there's no point teaching some classes [when their regular teacher is away]. [They] may as well pay a minder”. This respondent did, however, note that she had received some “...excellent staff support” during her time as a relief teacher.

Powerlessness/Isolation: Five respondents (twenty five percent) reported feeling a combination of isolation and powerlessness at various times during their jobs. These feelings changed on a situational basis, and became manifest in response to encountering different problems. However, this cohort appeared to place some considerable emphasis on the pay and conditions of relief staff, tenured staff members' attitudes to the relief teacher, and behaviour management issues. One interviewee (R20) believed that “...a general feeling of being looked at as a second class teacher” best summed up her feelings of powerlessness and isolation. Another respondent (R4) noted feeling particularly powerless when attempting to secure work during the early and later stages of a school year, believing terms one and four often proving “difficult”.

Meaninglessness/Isolation: One respondent (R1) reported that this combination best described their feelings of alienation, stating that “[I] often feel that what you do doesn't seem to matter”.

Powerlessness/Meaninglessness/Isolation: Five respondents (twenty five percent) stated that during the course of their employment as relief teachers they had experienced combinations of all three constructs, depending on situations and problems encountered. R7 stated that this combination of alienation constructs felt like a result of varying circumstances and problems encountered, and quoted issues like the feeling that "...no one wants to know you" and "lack of support" as strong triggers. However, he also stated that "[It's] very hard to pin down exactly where [these] feelings are coming from."

Interestingly, these five respondents had been relief teaching for between six months and a maximum of three years. All but one interviewee (R13), who was aged twenty-one at time of interview, were "mature age" teachers, with ages ranging from thirty two to fifty five years.

The responses to questions regarding alienation (and its manifestations) have shown that feelings of alienation were indeed experienced by the subject group during the course of their employment as relief teachers, and that these feelings would appear to stem from exposure to a range of previously identified systemic problems. Of the three constructs, *Isolation*, was quoted by seventeen respondents (eighty five percent) either singly or in tandem with other constructs, as the feeling which best described their alienation. *Powerlessness* was identified by twelve respondents (sixty percent), and *meaninglessness* by six (thirty percent).

Further analysis of the findings would appear, however, to possibly raise more questions than the current study can hope to answer given the limitations and constraints (time, financial and otherwise) of the present research.

Within this small sample, alienation exists (at least partially as a result of working within the current system) among the subject population. This is indeed without doubt. However, the conceptual framework indicates that feelings of alienation can be "triggered" and expressed in different ways, can be changeable in frequency and intensity, depending on an almost limitless set of variables, each of which would of course be peculiar to each individual. In other words the above findings need to be viewed as extremely "situational" in nature, and likely to change over varying

timeframes. A single (very subjective) “snapshot” might be an appropriate metaphor when placing these findings in context.

The reliability and generalisability (external validity) of the present research, as relating to these findings should be put into perspective (and has already been briefly discussed in chapter 4), especially in light of the considerably small subject population. The study found that ninety five percent of the subject population (nineteen relief teachers in total) identified and discussed feelings of alienation. Whilst the possibility exists that these findings could be representative of other relief teachers, great caution should be taken in doing so. One of the central requirements in order for research findings to be considered “reliable”, is that similar results could be expected to be replicated either in the same population at some later stage, or in other similar cohorts (Angus & Gray, 2001; Stringer & Dwyer, 2005; Weirisma & Jurs, 2005). The fact that the concept of alienation (and the situational factors that can trigger these feelings) is so subjective and changeable, means that research of this nature might produce very different findings each time it is carried out. Suffice to say at this stage, that the current research did indeed indicate that the vast majority of the subject population identified feelings of alienation, and that these feelings were generated at least partially by exposure to specific “problems” encountered during their work as relief teachers within the government primary school system. These findings may or may not be representative of the broader relief teacher population. Chapter nine provides details of specific recommendations, and this issue is further discussed there.

Summary

Chapter seven discussed the research findings relating to the feelings of alienation expressed by the subject population. The first section briefly recapitulated the concept and definition of "alienation" for the purposes of this research, and outlined the conceptual framework of the study. Section two firstly discussed the research findings in considerable detail, identifying ninety five percent of the subject population as claiming feelings of alienation as a result of their work. All constructs were variously identified by the respondents, however, either singularly, or in combination with other constructs, *isolation* was the most often quoted. The latter part of section two attempted to put these findings into "context", and called for caution when extending the findings across broader sections of the relief teacher population.

The next chapter discusses and analyses the study's findings in relation to issues identified by the respondents which they believe lead to feelings of alienation.

Chapter 8

System problems and support strategies identified by the respondents

Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses in some depth the research findings relating to the major systemic problems or "issues" which the subject population variously identified as leading to feelings of alienation, and also identifies support strategies that have been offered to the respondents by some of the schools they have serviced. The first section briefly discusses the links between the research findings and the literature review, identifies the emergence of both themes and sub-themes as a result of the coding process, and brings the reader's attention to the emergence of three sub-themes not already identified by the existing literature. Section two discusses and analyses these themes in some considerable detail, whilst the final section discusses the support strategies offered to various members of the subject population.

Links to the literature review

A review of the available literature (discussed fully in chapter two) identified the existence of a number of systemic problems faced by relief teachers who service schools within the education systems of the three countries from which the literature was drawn. The existence of these problems has been variously identified and discussed by researchers, in some instances for the better part of two decades, and indicate why relief teachers might well experience alienation as a result of exposure to these issues.

The second major aim of the current research was, therefore, to attempt to establish some positive links between these previously flagged problems and resultant feelings of alienation expressed by the subject population. This formed part (b) of the first research question.

As a result of the coding process, several themes emerged from the data. These were further studied, and in some cases led to the consequent identification of sub-themes, which focussed on more specific issues. These themes mostly mirrored the various systemic problems identified by the reviewed literature, however three additional sub-themes were identified by respondents as contributing to feelings of alienation, which do not appear to have been identified by previous research. These are considered new findings by the researcher, and are clearly identified as such in the body of the following discussion.

Issues identified by respondents, which lead to feelings of alienation

A total of four themes emerged from the data. These included: 1) specific in-class challenges, 2) relationship issues, 3) relief teacher image and perception, 4) equity with tenured colleagues, which when coded further, indicated the existence of twelve related sub-themes. These are individually identified and discussed in some detail in the following section, whilst figures nine (A) and nine (B) below, show in graphical form, the number of respondents who identified exposure to these problems, both by theme and sub-theme breakdown.

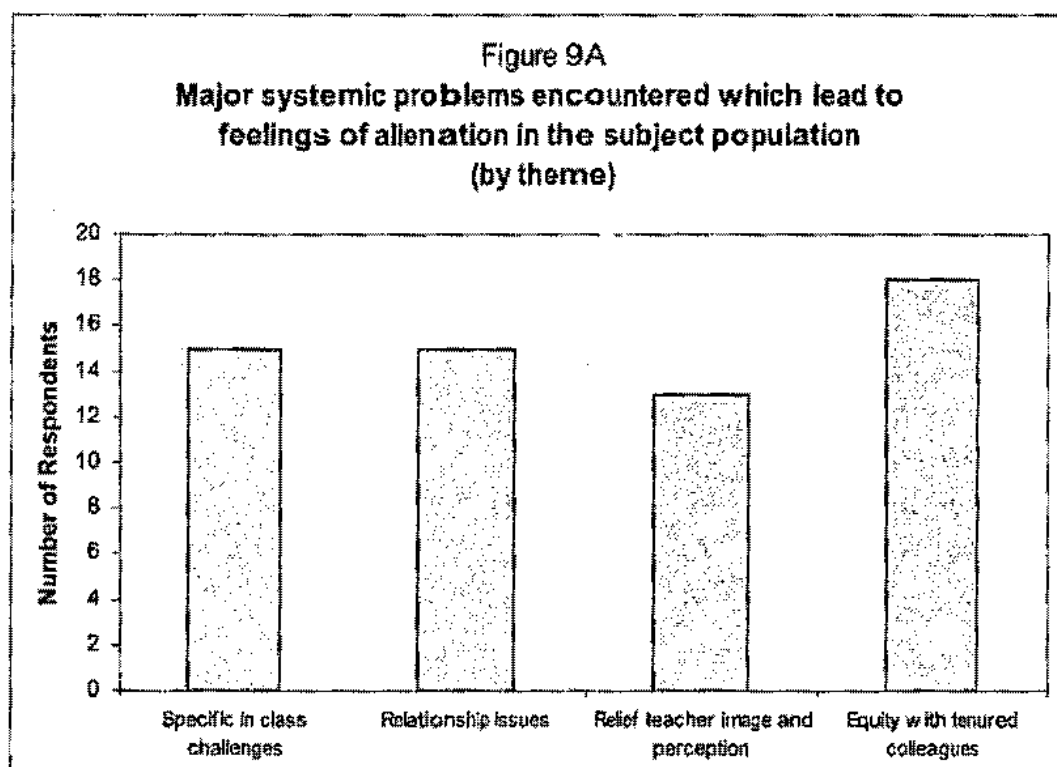
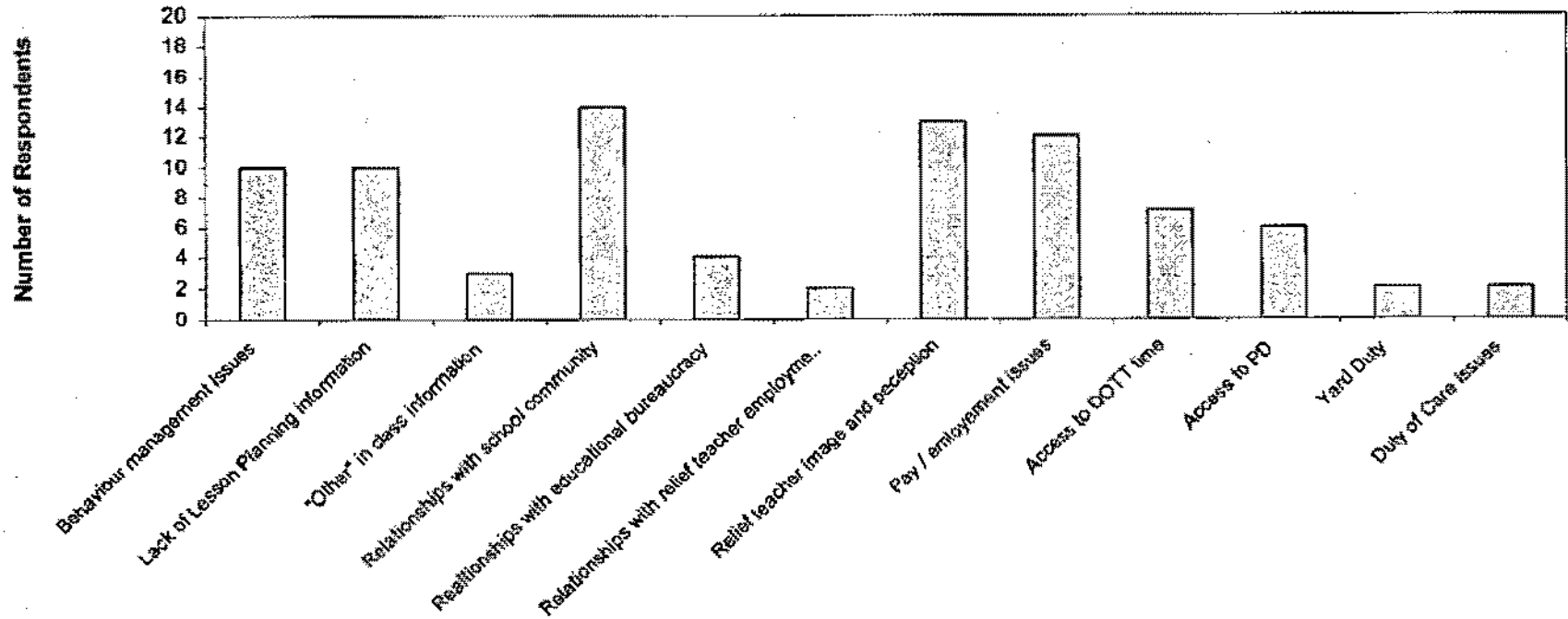


Figure 9B

Major systemic problems encountered which lead to feelings of alienation in the subject population
(by specific sub theme)



Theme 1: Specific in-class challenges

Fifteen respondents (seventy five percent) commonly identified this gross theme. These relief teachers variously felt that their experiences within the classroom contributed to feelings of alienation mainly through an identified lack of basic information that they felt was essential in order for the smooth functioning of that class to continue in the regular teacher's absence. The two most widely quoted issues (sub-themes) revolved around 1.1, behaviour management challenges, and 1.2, a perceived lack of daily lesson planning information being readily available. A third sub-theme, (1.3), identified some "miscellaneous" problems relating to other more general deficiencies in classroom-specific information. Together, these issues contribute significantly to participants' feelings of alienation.

1.1: Behaviour management

The reviewed literature identified classroom management challenges as one of the difficult problems facing the relief teacher, contending that this issue seems in many cases to be ignored by tenured educators and administration staff. Black (2002), stated that research in the UK supported this contention, and this was reiterated by studies in the US (Gonzales, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001). In WA, a study conducted by Crittenden (1994) indicated that 67% of surveyed relief teachers reported a lack of information causing behaviour management problems of students in their classes.

Ten respondents identified behaviour management challenges (either separately or in combination with lack of sufficient daily learning activity information) as issues, which directly contributed to feelings of alienation. Responses from relief teachers included being faced "often" with "unruly classes" or "disrespectful" behaviour; classroom management being seen as a "big problem" or dealing with "feral kids". One respondent (R1) commented that, in her opinion, it was often the older students who provided her with the most challenges, believing that these students viewed being taught by a relief teacher as a "holiday day". (She also believed that this "disrespect" was sometimes displayed by other staff). The feeling of a relief teacher being seen as "different" by some members of the educational community was supported to some extent by R20, who contended that behaviour management issues stemmed from students seeing the relief teacher as somewhat of a "target".

In a particularly disturbing incident, one interviewee (R17) described finding her car vandalised at the end of the day and, while not able to prove who the culprits were, stated that it was “common knowledge” amongst class peers that some of the more challenging children in her class had been responsible for the damage. Some respondents believed that at least part of the problem was due to little or no specific information being available to them which detailed, for example, classroom seating information, “class lists”, regular teacher’s behavioural management plan(s) or expectations. One respondent (R11) made the point that when the above information was not accessible, the students were “therefore hard to control”. This contention was also supported by R13 and R15. Another interviewee (R7) believed a different reason for classroom control issues played some part, contending that behaviour management was a “...huge issue, [however, I] don’t feel as if I have any say because [I’m] looked [on] as only a relief teacher”. Clearly, issues related to behaviour management generated feelings of alienation.

1.2: Lack of lesson planning information

On-the-job support in the form of adequate lesson planning being provided to relief teachers was identified by the literature as being of considerable importance to the relief teacher, not only for the purposes of ongoing curriculum delivery, but as a way to reduce overall classroom “disruption” and consequent management problems. Unfortunately, in many instances, previous research has shown that lack of lesson planning is a commonly experienced problem, with relief teachers often facing classes without adequate resources in this area. Hardman and Tippetts (2001) contended that this issue is common and recurring. This is backed up in the US by Brace (1990) and Gonzales (2002), with Black (2002) and Crittenden (1994) citing similar experiences in the UK and Australia respectively.

This was mirrored in the current research, with ten respondents identifying a lack of sufficient information regarding the day’s planned learning activities being available to them. The frequency of this experience was described variously, as “never” walking into a classroom and finding lessons prepared, lesson plans “rarely” being available, and “often” finding a lack of lesson plans. Sometimes, if planning was available, it was perceived by respondents to be incomplete to some degree, with one interviewee (R18) describing a particular class in which she found a daily work pad with three

words only: "Old Man Emu; Australia; Around". No other texts, work-sheets or other relevant resources were available. This experience was mirrored by another respondent (R5) who stated that sometimes lesson plans might be available, but that the accompanying resources are missing or "take half the day to find". Another interviewee (R17) claimed to have experienced the frustration of finding "wrong" and "incomplete" lesson plans, after being explicitly instructed to teach a certain lesson on that particular day. Such inadequacies in planning instigate feelings of alienation.

1.3: Other in-class information

Three respondents identified other "gaps" in information relating to their classes, which were considered to be important in order to maintain adequate control and smooth functioning. One interviewee (R1) described an incident in which no class timetable was available, and at around 9.30 that morning the students proceeded to get up from their desks and move toward the exit. The respondent halted the children and upon asking them where they thought they were going received the reply that it was time for their physical education class. This incident, in the respondent's words "...made [me look] like a fool". Another interviewee (R15), described rarely having access to information on children with documented behavioural problems, and students at educational risk. Feelings of alienation became overt as these incidents occurred.

Theme 2: Relationship issues

Fifteen respondents (seventy five percent) identified relationship issues as significant problems which contributed to feelings of alienation. Responses can be coded into three distinct sub-themes: 2.1, relationships with the school community (fourteen respondents), 2.2, relationships with wider educational bureaucracy, namely the Department of Education and Training (four respondents), and interestingly enough, 2.3, relationships with relief teacher employment agencies. These latter two sub-themes have not previously been identified by any of the reviewed literature.

2.1: Relationships with school community

The issue of how relief teachers perceive the way in which other staff “treat” them during the course of their work with various schools was widely acknowledged as a concern within the literature on which the study was conceived (Black, 2002; Brace, 1990; Crittenden, 1994; Gonzales, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Simmons, 1991). The general inference that can be drawn from previous studies in this area is that relief teachers are seen by other staff as “outsiders”, and that high degrees of “indifference”, or even “unfriendliness” are sometimes displayed to these individuals during the course of their placements. Whilst most of this is reported to be unintentional in nature, no great leap in logic is required to hypothesise that significant feelings of alienation could be expected to result in relief teachers who face this type of situation. This certainly is the case in the present study, with a total of fourteen interviewees (seventy percent) indicating that “poor relationships” with other members of the school community contributed to feelings of disconnection and alienation. This sub-theme on its own was quoted by more respondents than any other singular problem or issue.

“School community relationships” were variously referred to as those with other teachers in the school, other staff, students and non-teaching/general administration staff in general. Respondents often identified staffrooms as the origin of their feelings of exclusion, variously describing these places as “cold” and “daunting”, with one interviewee (R13) contending that staffrooms can be “cold, cold places!” Another respondent (R8) described feelings of not being readily welcomed when venturing into staffrooms, “...finding 30-50 staff [just] looking at you when you walk in...where do you [ever] sit?” However, this individual also stated that in one school at least, staff had begun to highlight relief teachers’ names on the staff-room whiteboard as a support strategy for these individuals. Another interviewee (R12) summed up her feelings, saying: “You don’t often get included in conversation, [you] feel out of the loop”. Yet another (R15) stated: “Often no one talks to you--even when you try to initiate conversation”.

Whilst staffroom dynamics were commonly mentioned, other more general responses often summed up perceived feelings of exclusion. One respondent noted that in her experience, schools were “not terribly welcoming” in general. Several respondents commented on feeling as if they were treated as “outsiders” when relief teaching at

various schools, with one noting that this contrasted markedly with how much she felt accepted when servicing her old school (used to be tenured staff), claiming that it was a "...very different experience" (R9). Other interviewees variously described feelings of exclusion as "...being left out of the loop", having "...very little interaction with other staff", (R10) and in one case, feeling generally "disrespected". One interviewee (R14) acknowledged that staff were often cold towards relief teachers to begin with, but that they "warmed" to you over time. She pointed out, however, that this "...[can take] a lot of time". In one case this feeling of "unfriendliness" spilled over into the classroom, with one respondent describing a tandem teaching situation in which she was replacing one of the teachers for a day, stating "...[the] remaining teacher [was] obviously friends with the one I was replacing,---[she] was *very* unfriendly, and distinctly unhelpful". (R18)

Feelings of not being respected nor "included" were not the only relationship issues identified in this study. Three respondents noted that relationships with administrative staff (school registrars and principals) were of crucial importance when endeavouring to secure, and in some cases maintain, ongoing work in a particular school. One respondent (R2) succinctly highlighted the tenuousness of these relationships when discussing a rather demoralising incident in which she had painstakingly developed and nurtured what she thought had been a mutually respectful relationship between her and the registrar of a local school: "...I worked with them (the school) for weeks--almost exclusively. One morning they rang me about coming in that day--because I didn't get back to them within five minutes, they gave the work to someone else. I never heard from them again". Another commented on her perception that administration (in this case school registrars) generally were "...not interested--[they] don't want to deal with you once they know you've arrived. They just want to fill the space." (R13) Clearly, experiences of rejection such as these are one catalyst to feelings of alienation.

2.2: Relationships with educational bureaucracy

This sub-theme does not appear to have been identified by any previously reviewed literature, and is considered as a new finding by the researcher. The issue of relief teachers reporting that they are "negatively" viewed (and treated) by the Department of Education and Training (DET) was identified by four (twenty percent) of the

interviewed respondents. These experiences directly influence feelings of alienation. This sub-theme is seen to be distinct from relationships with the educational community (schools), because the origins of alienation reported by the identified respondents appear to transcend the school system altogether. Adjectives used by the respondents to describe these perceived negative attitudes included “unfriendly”, “condescending” and “terrible”. In most cases, it was argued that one of the reasons for this attitude was a result of refusing tenured or contract “country” (or other) postings when offered by the Department of Education and Training. One respondent, (R4) who recently moved to WA from interstate, described being offered a position by the DET in the North-West: “I find the [DET’s] attitude towards me very condescending—even unfriendly. My wife and family moved to WA with me and we bought a house in [suburb named]. [The DET] offered me work in a North-West school, and because I didn’t take it I feel I’ve been shoved aside by them ever since.” Another interviewee described her perception of DET’s attitude towards her as “terrible”, claiming that after spending eighteen months as a relief teacher, she is still regarded by the DET as a “new graduate”. As a result her name simply “goes in with the rest” when being considered for permanent or contract placements (R18). This view was mirrored by another participant (R14) who stated that she had “...served [the Department] well for five years, [and] feel as if [I’m] still ‘bottom of the heap’”. The respondent went on to say that she had received no assistance “...filling out paperwork”, and that the Department showed, in her opinion, no consideration for personal circumstances. Again, this respondent appeared to attribute this poor relationship to refusing country posting(s): “...you won’t ‘go bush’ so the [DET] treats you as an outsider”. R15 described a similar experience, stating that he had been offered a two year contract position in the Pilbara region of the state. When he refused this position, he described being “‘told off’” by a member of the DET, who said that they (the Department) would not continue to offer him work if he refused offered postings. This interviewee believed that “...if you don’t take [the] offered job—they bury you”.

A fifth respondent (R19) also commented on her perception of DET, stating that in her opinion the Department could be quite “short”, and “insensitive”, that they treat “...[you] as a number”. She commented that her friend “...had a terrible experience with them...”, and generally felt that things were “...not quite right [with the Department]”. Astonishingly, this interviewee claimed that a Department

representative had directly told her that should she turn down an offered position "...you will be black-listed". Of interest here, the participant (R19) claimed to have felt no real alienation during the course of her relief teaching to date.

2.3: Relationships with relief teacher employment agencies

The second sub-theme to be considered as a new finding is that of the relationship between relief teachers and the employment agencies that some of these individuals utilise to source day to day placements. Whilst relief teacher agencies were identified and discussed in the reviewed literature (Black, 2002; Cardon, 2002; Gonzales, 2002; and Lunay, 2004), the context in which they were discussed was not relevant to the findings of this study. Specifically, it was the *relationship* between the relief teacher and the "agency or agencies" that they utilise to source placements that was mentioned by two respondents (R4 and R15) as leading to perceived feelings of alienation. Interestingly, both were male, and both identified one particular issue regarding their relationship with their respective agencies: that of suspecting they were often sent to "difficult to staff" schools or classes because they were male. One man (R4) stated that he "seem[ed] to get sent to a lot of 'rough' schools". Another, (R15) reported that he had eventually confronted one agency with this suspicion and, after some discussion, was informed that this was basically the case. Relationships of this type with employment agencies clearly instigate feelings of alienation.

Theme 3: Relief teacher image and perception

The reviewed literature identified and discussed low expectations and general "negative perceptions" held by much of the educational community towards relief teachers. This general attitude once again, appeared to be quite common across the US (Abdal-Haqq, 1997; Cardon, 2002; Harman & Tippetts, 2001) and was quoted by Black (2002) as being similar in nature in the UK. In Australia, this attitude is inferred in Crittenden's (1994) study, although not directly stated.

The results of this research would seem to firmly support contentions reported in the reviewed literature. A total of thirteen respondents (sixty five percent) made mention, in varying degrees, of feelings of being viewed in a "negative light" by schools in general, and in particular by tenured colleagues, leading to distinct feelings of

alienation. By far the most common expression of this perceived attitude was that of being seen as somewhat less than a "real" teacher by other tenured colleagues, and in one respondent's experience (R2), even by education assistants. Several respondents commented that they themselves felt (or were viewed by others) as if they were little more than "babysitters" or "nannies". This was often due to the perception that once ensconced in a classroom, no-one much cared what the relief teacher taught (or did not teach). This view was summed up by one respondent (R6), a twenty three year old recent graduate who was using relief teaching as a way to enhance skills while waiting for tenure or long term contract work: "[I'm] seen as a babysitter. I want experience, [but I] sometimes feel as if nobody cares what I teach the children". Other respondents variously described being "looked down upon" by tenured staff, with one (R4) stating that in his opinion there was often a culture of "blame the relief teacher". This was supported by another (R8) who stated having encountered this attitude from various "tenured teachers" making her feel that she had to be seen as "...perfect all the time". Another interviewee (R14), a forty two year old female with five years' teaching experience, commented that in her view, relief teachers were treated as "juniors, the bottom of the heap", regardless of age or experience.

Unfortunately, this negative perception of relief teachers' capabilities, in some cases, permeates other parts of the school population, with some respondents variously identifying this attitude being present at most levels of the hierarchy, from school children to the principal. A teacher (R9), with twenty-one years total teaching experience stated that in her opinion "...there's a perception in some workplaces that a relief teacher doesn't know much". Another interviewee (R18) described a recent situation in which she was teaching a class, where she was, in her words, "having a giggle" with the children, the end result being obviously a little more noisy than usual. A neighbouring teacher entered her class and shouted at the children, stating that although "...this lady is a relief teacher, she *does* know what she's doing!" This type of reaction was mirrored by R7, who cited a similar experience in which he was teaching a class that was apparently "noisier than normal". A regular teacher then entered the classroom and asked; "Why don't you control these children?" This "dressing down" was in the interviewee's words, "...conducted in front of the students, [and was an] absolute humiliation." In a separate, perhaps more disturbing incident, another respondent (R8), a relief teacher with thirty years of total teaching experience

(ten as a relief teacher), described a recent experience in which she taught for a few days in one particular school and then voluntarily attended a staff meeting (in her own time). During the course of the meeting she "ventured a comment" and was "challenged" by the principal who stated that she was a *relief teacher*, and asked why she was speaking. Participants R6 and R20 probably summed up the above theme well, by stating respectively: "Being a relief teacher is hard work--I don't feel as if we're really appreciated", and, "Regular teachers don't seem to give you much credit for the hard job you do". These comments capture the sentiments that result in feelings of alienation for relief teachers.

Theme 4: Equity with tenured colleagues

This theme was identified by ninety percent of all respondents, and was subdivided into five sub-themes. In general, respondents in this cohort variously felt that being a relief teacher either denied them access to benefits enjoyed by tenured or contract teachers, or in some cases exposed them to more of the commonly recognised "drawbacks" of the teaching profession, than fully employed colleagues might expect. A small portion of this cohort cited having experienced examples of both during their work as relief teachers. The examples of inequity are listed below as five sub-themes. Each will be dealt with in turn.

4.1: Pay issues and employment unpredictability

The often "negative" nature and unpredictability of contingent/casual work was studied in depth by Bess (1998), and Bjorkquist and Kleinhesselink (1999), who contended that the consequences of this type of employment was often expressed as alienation from the workplace, along with a general dehumanisation, depersonalisation and isolation from other (tenured) colleagues. Not knowing whether work will be forthcoming on any particular day, along with financial insecurity and loss of leave benefits not only negatively impacts on the individual, but often the worker's family, and society in general.

Critenden (1994) commented on the loneliness and frustration relief teachers felt when applying to numerous schools, despite the "...inevitability of obtaining work from only a handful of these." (p. 81) Indeed, the reviewed literature confirmed without

exception, that pay and other conditions for relief teachers were below what should be considered "appropriate" for these professionals.

The results of the present research confirmed that this issue results in feelings of alienation, with twelve respondents mentioning either singly or in combination with other sub-themes, the problems associated with pay and employment unpredictability.

Concern regarding the availability of work was mentioned by several respondents, with most interviewees describing frustration with not knowing whether or not work would be forthcoming on any given day. Common responses included "sitting around waiting for the telephone to ring", and the uncertainty of "not knowing where you'll be today". Two respondents identified term one as being particularly difficult in which to find work, and one respondent identified experiencing similar problems during term four. Another interviewee (R18) told of applying to over eighty schools at the start of the previous year, whilst another likened obtaining relief work to a "feast or famine". Also mentioned was the fact that sick leave or holiday pay was not made available to relief teachers. One respondent (R4), a thirty eight year old married male with a young family, described his frustration at needing to apply for social security payments over the holiday period between the beginning and end of each successive school year, and "...being hassled by the 'department' to take jobs at Hungry Jack's etcetera".

In addition to the tenuousness of work availability, several interviewees expressed frustration about issues regarding payment for services rendered. Almost thirty percent of this cohort made mention of the fact that relief teachers experienced issues with their pay that would not be expected to affect their tenured counterparts. One respondent (R14) mentioned having to wait for up to six weeks at a time before receiving payment, and that through no fault of her own, she had over the years accumulated three different Department of Education and Training (DET) teaching identification numbers. Whilst no other respondents appeared to have experienced this difficulty, four made mention of experiencing frustration over DET pay scale issues. One respondent, a relief teacher for the past eleven years, stated that pay increments were definitely "compromised" when working in this capacity (R2), whilst another (R18), with eighteen months service as a relief teacher spoke of her frustration at still being paid at the bottom level. One respondent (R15), a male relief teacher with three

years experience, described spending most of his time on the lowest pay level due to the stop-start nature of relief teaching: "...relief teaching is *broken*. [It's] hugely difficult to accrue a year's [full time equivalent] teaching in even two years". Another, (R7) also made mention of the relief teacher's inequality of access to pay when commenting "[In the] government system, relief teaching just doesn't seem to count".

4.2: Access to duties other than teaching (DOTT) time

This is the third sub-theme to emerge from the research which appears to have not been identified by the reviewed literature and, as such, is treated as a new finding by the researcher. The reasons for this issue not being flagged by the literature may well be numerous, and include the possibility that this issue was simply not viewed as "important" by previously surveyed relief teachers, or that in some other locations DOTT time simply does not exist in the same format as it does in Western Australia.

In all Western Australian government schools, tenured teachers are allocated several hours per week to research and prepare lessons, or undertake other non-teaching duties. This allocation, whilst equal in duration for all teachers over the course of a normal teaching week, is often spread in uneven portions over that time in order for timetabling considerations to be properly addressed. Depending on when a relief teacher actually "covers" for a tenured colleague, this individual may well find themselves with one or two periods of DOTT time being available to them on a particular day, or again, may not. The following discussion relates specifically to those relief teachers who covered regular teachers during times when DOTT time was actually allocated, and that as a result, viewed this time as rightfully theirs.

Seven respondents mentioned that they rarely received access to DOTT time when servicing schools, and that this for them, produced significant feelings of alienation from tenured counterparts. Some respondents claimed that they were simply slotted into other teachers' classes when their own DOTT time was due, and the perception by many of these individuals was one of "being used" or "used for everything". One relief teacher (R16) described often having no DOTT time available to prepare lessons, and that she now used a home photocopier for this purpose, which in her words "costs me a fortune". Two others, (R12 and R15) respectively summed up the cohort's

sentiments by stating that “[You] very often miss out on DOTT time—you get slotted in somewhere else—relief teachers are used for everything” and “...you feel used because you’re a relief teacher”.

4.3: Access to Professional Development (PD)

The reviewed literature identified that equity of access to PD for relief teachers was an unresolved issue in all three countries from which it was drawn. Black (2002) contended that the issue of relief teacher access to in-service training had been discussed for over fifteen years in the UK, and yet still remains unresolved. Similar findings have been discussed at length in the US (Brace, 1990; Gonzales, 2002; Simmons, 1991). In Western Australia these findings are supported by Crittenden (1994) and Lunay (2004).

Six respondents in this research identified lack of access to PD as cause of some concern. (R19 also identified this issue, however, she cannot be included in the findings due to not feeling alienated). One respondent (R16) described this inequality between herself and tenured counterparts as “frustrating and hurtful”. This sentiment was mirrored by another (R20) who contended that the fact that PD was never offered to her “...really upsets me”. Another (R8) asked the question: “How do you stay ‘current?’” This person stated that she now pays for her own PD, which although means having to possibly forgo paid work, allows her to at least choose the type of subject areas that interest and are relevant to her.

The issue of equality of access to PD for relief teachers will possibly become more contentious in the near future in Western Australia, as WACOT mandates minimum amounts of PD to be undertaken by all teachers as a prerequisite to ongoing registration.

4.4: Yard/playground duty

This sub-theme was discussed by the reviewed literature under the more general theme of litigation issues, with Lunay (2004) making specific reference to the links between relief teachers undertaking yard duty in unfamiliar settings, and the resultant increased exposure to the possibility of litigation should something in effect “go wrong”. Other more general observations regarding litigation risk for relief teachers operating within

unfamiliar settings were also highlighted by Gonzales (2002), Hattaway and Novak (2003), and Longhurst (2002).

The issue of playground duty was mentioned by two respondents. This "unpopular" aspect of the tenured teacher's job is normally shared between the staff via various types of roster systems, which see them regularly rotated in and out of the playground according to staff numbers, size of school grounds and student population. While it is "normal" and generally accepted that relief teachers "step in" to replace absent teachers' duty, these respondents both described being rostered for duty even when the teacher they were replacing was not required to undertake this duty on that particular day, and it was this distinction which appeared to generate resultant feelings of alienation. One person (R15) stated that he found playground duty "particularly annoying when [there is] no need for it", whilst still another (R18) described "Hate[ing] doing others' yard duty".

4.5: Duty of care issues

This issue was again discussed by the literature under the general theme of "litigation". Concern has been expressed by various studies (Gonzales, 2002; Hattaway & Novak, 2003; Longhurst, 2002; Lunay, 2004), which identify the possibility of relief teachers being exposed to greater risk of lawsuits, due to the fact that they often deal with "unknown" students in unfamiliar settings and surroundings. They are, however, subject to the same duty of care requirements as their tenured counterparts.

The current study identified two respondents who cited duty of care issues to which they were exposed as triggering feelings of alienation. They described three experiences in which they felt that the safety of the students in their care was compromised, because they were replacing the normal classroom teacher for that particular day. One respondent (R11) described two separate incidents, the first of which involved not being able to gain access to a locked cupboard where ADHD medication was kept for two students in her class. In a separate incident she was unable to gain access to a locked drawer of the teacher's desk, where the class roll was kept, having to wait until morning recess when a key was finally located by other staff. Perhaps the most disturbing incident was described by R13, a newly graduated twenty one year old female with six months teaching experience. On one particular day she

stated that she was sent to a public swimming pool to oversee swimming lessons. Three classes of children were involved (around seventy individuals). "I was sent to a public pool with one other regular teacher and one TA [teaching assistant]. No MSB [managing student behaviour] policy or specific information [was] supplied. [I] didn't know [the] kids—it was scary! One *regular* stayed back at school looking after six kids that couldn't go. Why wasn't that left to me?" The respondent ventured an opinion on why this had happened, stating that maybe the relief teacher was sent to do the "unpopular" job whilst the regular teacher had a "slack day".

Identification of support strategies offered to relief teachers by schools serviced by the interviewees

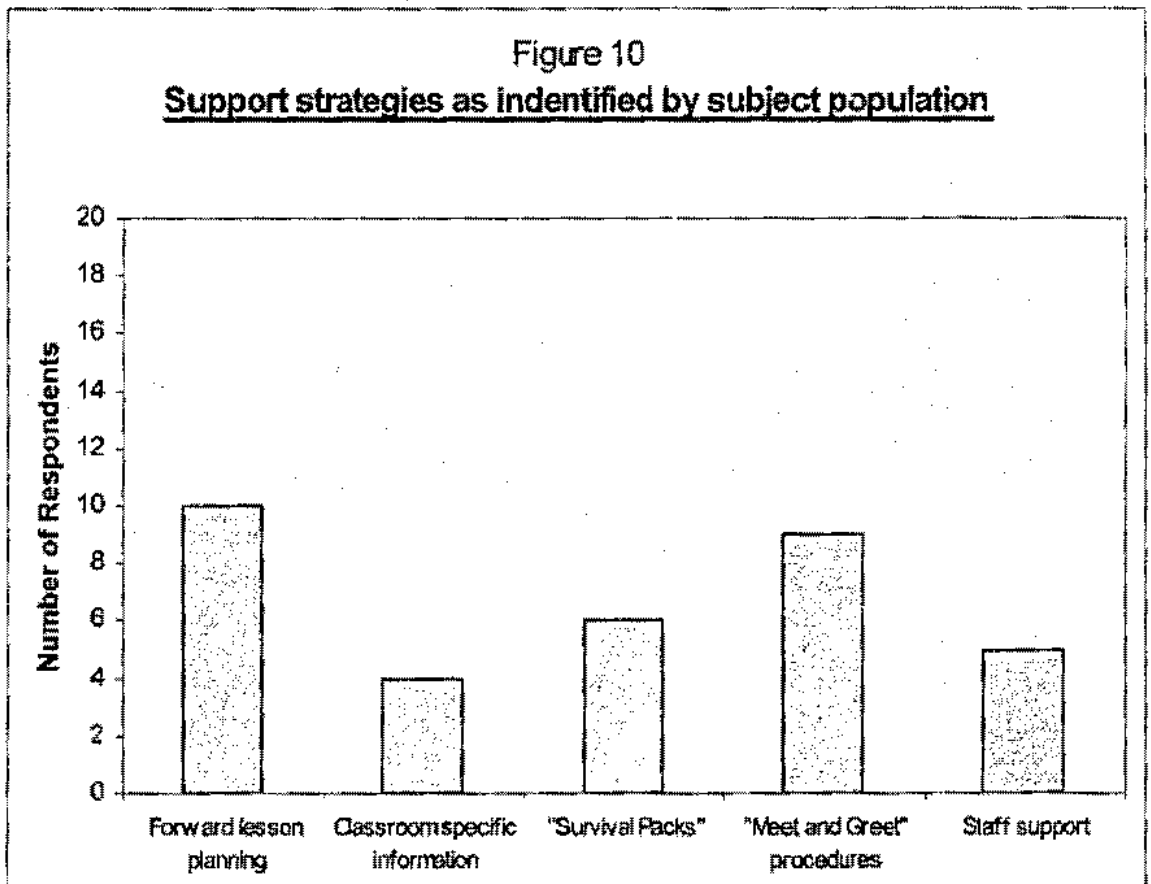
The literature reviewed for this research not only identified the major systemic problems being faced by relief teachers within various schools and education systems, but also called strongly for reforms to be considered. Most of these recommended "support strategies" were envisaged (at least in the beginning) to be initiated at an individual school level, were seen to be reasonably "simple" to introduce, and showed cognisance of the often "tight" financial constraints under which most educational districts are forced to operate.

The third major aim of this research was to identify some of the more important support strategies that have been offered to the subject population during the course of their placements, and also attempted to ascertain the frequency that these strategies are offered. This formed the basis of the second research question.

The identification of what schools might be providing their relief teachers in the way of support strategies was considered of some importance by the researcher for several reasons. The first reason centres around the assumption that if previously identified systemic problems present within the current system are indeed contributing to feelings of alienation in relief teachers, there exists the strong possibility that strategies designed specifically to reduce the negative impact of these problems may in fact reduce feelings of alienation. Secondly, by establishing that some schools are at least attempting to implement basic support strategies for relief teachers, some awareness of the existence of these problems is evident, meaning that to some degree these schools

value the importance of the relief teacher as an educational resource. The way is then left open to the possibility of conducting further research in this area, which may provide "pointers" toward establishing a more coordinated approach across educational districts in the provision of some of the more "expensive" support strategies (professional development for relief teachers, for example).

The data revealed a total of five support strategies that were identified by the respondents as being variously offered by schools they had serviced during the course of their employment. These are discussed in some detail below, whilst figure 10 shows in graphical form, the number of respondents who identified being offered each particular support strategy.



Strategy 1: Forward lesson planning

The literature contended that regular classroom teachers need to understand the importance of the need for students' continuity of instruction, regardless of whether absences were planned or unplanned. The need for regular forward planning was particularly noted by Edelman (2003), Gonzales (2002), Potter (2001), and Simmons (1991). The importance of adequate lesson planning was also highlighted by much of the subject population, who variously commented on the frustration felt when commencing placements with little or no lesson planning information being available.

Ten respondents identified some provision of forward lesson planning being available to them at the commencement of an assignment. "Lesson planning" was variously defined as lesson plans, daily work pads, daily planning, and the resources/texts associated with the above. The frequency of provision that respondents identified these actually being offered varied between "occasionally", "sometimes", "some [schools]", and "both schools". One respondent (R4) estimated that around ten percent of serviced schools offered pre-planned learning activities, whilst another (R13) commented that "one" school policy was to mandate forward planning for all classroom teachers. One teacher (R19) commented that she had seen some excellent daily work pads in the two schools she had serviced. Another, (R1) commented that "sometimes" a daily work pad was available, however, appropriate resources and accompanying texts were sometimes not.

Strategy 2: Classroom specific procedures/information

The literature identified the inclusion of "other" classroom specific information as also being crucial in enabling the relief teacher to assume "control" of the class from the outset (as well moving the curriculum forward). This includes student-specific information such as seating plans, specific behavioural or educational challenges, general behaviour expectations, and any other information considered crucial to the smooth running of a particular classroom. Hardman and Tippett (2001) contended that the absence of such information creates management problems right from the start, often due to the fact that valuable time and effort is wasted by the relief teacher during that all-important time when control of the class is usually won or lost. Simmons (1991) supported this view, stating that many of the management challenges/problems

experienced by relief teachers are attributable to a lack of this basic, but essentially crucial, information being made available.

A total of four respondents stated that some classroom specific information was made available to them at various schools. Two interviewees (R11 and R6) defined this information as “seating plans”. The remaining two were not specific regarding what “classroom specific information” actually constituted. The frequency that the respondents claimed this was supplied was not great, with all interviewees stating either “one school” or “occasionally”. One additional respondent commented that one Catholic school supplied her with class specific information, however, this cannot be included in the findings as it falls outside the parameters of the research.

Strategy 3: School-specific “survival packs”

The provision of various types of written information by schools to assist relief teachers (and other “new” staff) to quickly orientate themselves to unfamiliar surroundings is another support strategy flagged by the literature as being of great importance, if the relief teacher was to “...fit into the school easily and harmoniously” (Crittenden, 1994, p. 91). This contention was supported by Brace (1990), Edelman (2003), Gonzales (2002), Hardman and Tippetts (2001), and Lunay (2004) and should take little in the way of effort or cost, to produce, if created judiciously.

Six interviewees identified “survival packs” as being supplied by some schools, however, frequency of supply was not particularly high. R15 identified two schools who had supplied this information (out of more than twenty that he serviced), whilst two others (R14 and R7) stated that this support strategy had been offered once. These individuals had serviced six schools and fifteen schools respectively during their time as relief teachers. Another interviewee (R4) estimated that around ten percent of schools offered this support, whilst the remaining two described the frequency as “occasionally”. Another respondent (R18) claimed that whilst she had never been offered this form of support, she actually designed a “survival pack” for one school herself, after searching for staff toilets and encountering two other relief teachers who were also looking for the same.

Strategy 4: Meet and greet procedures

This most basic of professional “courtesies”, a simple formal greeting by a representative of the school at the beginning of a placement, was recognised by the literature as a small, but important policy that all schools should implement, (Brace, 1990; Crittenden, 1994; Potter, 2001). This brief, but important, contact was seen as most probably being initiated by the school principal/administrator, and would have the positive effect of acknowledging a fellow colleague, subtly enhancing their “importance” and professional standing. Once again, this is a strategy that is seen as requiring little in the way of effort or financial cost to implement.

Nine respondents identified being offered this support strategy when first arriving at some of the schools that they serviced. This function was variously reported as being performed by anyone ranging from the principal through to administration staff and/or the school’s registrar, and appeared from the respondents’ point of view to be either “formal” or quite “informal” in nature. Frequency of this support ranged from “one school” (two respondents), “two schools” (one respondent), “some schools” (three respondents), “very rarely” (one respondent) “around twenty percent” (one respondent), through to “good overall” (one respondent).

As stated above, the “formality” of this procedure was seen to vary quite widely. Four respondents identified the principal or deputy-principal performing this courtesy, whilst the remainder variously identified registrars or senior teachers, or did not specify. The “personal value” of this support was explicitly stated by one interviewee (R14), who described her experience in one particular school, where she was “officially” met by a deputy-principal, who then reiterated to the students in her class that the rules, consequences and expectations were the same as for the regular teacher. She stated that this made her feel “valued”.

Strategy 5: Support from other staff

The literature identified the need for some type of “buddy system”, which when correctly conceptualised and implemented would assign a regular teaching staff member to any relief teacher servicing that particular school. The positive outcomes for the relief teacher were aptly described by Hardman and Tippetts (2001), who believe the provision of this courtesy as one which would see “...that [relief teacher]

and those students...much better off". (p. 22) This was supported by Brace (1990), Crittenden (1994), Gonzales (2002) and Simmons (1991).

Five respondents from this study identified various types of support from other staff when working in some schools. This support was generally described as other regular teachers who either "looked in" from time to time throughout the day, or "buddied up" with the respondents for the duration of their time at that school, however appeared generally "unofficial" in nature. One respondent stated that her experience of other staff support included administration staff or a deputy-principal.

The frequency that this type of support was offered once again did not appear to be particularly high, with the exception of R19, who stated that she experienced "lots of on the spot support" from other staff. The other four interviewees variously described the frequency as "sometimes", "one school", and "a couple of times".

Summary

This chapter identified and discussed the major problems that the subject population attributed to triggering feelings of alienation, and then described the support strategies interviewees had identified as being offered by some schools to assist relief teachers in the execution of their duties.

The first section identified the links between the literature review and the findings related to this part of the research, in an attempt to set the scene for the reader. The second section discussed in detail the systemic problems encountered by the respondents as causing (or contributing to) feelings of alienation. Four major themes (and a total of twelve sub-themes) emerged strongly from the data generated by the interviewees. "Specific in-class challenges" faced by the relief teacher were quoted by seventy five percent of respondents, and produced three sub-themes. "Relationships within the broader educational community" were also identified by seventy five percent of the cohort. This theme produced two sub-themes. "Relief teacher image and perception" (by other stakeholders) was the third major theme to emerge from this study and was quoted by sixty five percent of respondents. This proved difficult to break down further, and so was treated as its own sub-theme. The fourth theme to

emerge from the data, "equity with tenured colleagues", was by far the largest, producing six sub-themes, and being identified by ninety percent of the subject population as contributing to feelings of alienation.

The third and final section of this chapter examined the various support strategies specifically offered to relief teachers by schools that respondents had serviced during the course of their careers to date. Five separate strategies were identified, and whilst up to fifty percent of respondents indicated that "some" schools offered one or more of these, the overall percentage of schools who did so, did not appear to be at all high.

Chapter nine provides a comprehensive summary of the current research, in effect drawing the findings together.

Chapter 9

Summary of the research findings

Introduction

This chapter summarises the research findings in relation to the main themes that emerged from the data. The first section provides a brief overview of the research, including the study's major aims and objectives, and identifies the five meta-themes that emerged from the data. The subsequent sections then summarise the main findings pertinent to each theme.

Overview

The aims and objectives of the current study were to determine, and confirm, sources of alienation among relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools, investigate other possible sources of alienation not yet identified by the reviewed literature, and finally, determine what (if any) support strategies are actually offered to relief teachers by those schools. These aims and objectives were then distilled into two broad research questions (see chapter 1).

Twenty relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools were interviewed, and in all cases semi-structured interviews were the main data gathering technique employed.

The findings of the present research essentially fell into five distinct sections: *demographic information* of the subject population, identified *positive aspects of relief teaching*, *alienation* as identified by the research population, the *identified systemic problems* leading to those feelings, and *identified support strategies* offered by some schools to their relief teachers. Further coding revealed themes relevant to each section, and in many cases, a number of specific sub-themes emerged. Each of these have been identified and fully discussed in previous chapters.

The first two sections contained information essentially considered as “unintended findings” by the researcher, which did not significantly contribute to answering the research questions or addressing the aims and objectives of the research. This information was, however, considered important enough to include in the overall findings, and justification for the inclusion of these findings was discussed in chapters five and six. The latter three sections directly addressed the aims and objectives of the present research. Each section is summarised below.

Relief teacher demographics

The subject population consisted of twenty currently serving relief teachers. All respondents were utilising this form of employment as their main source of income, and at the time of interview, were servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools.

Four interviewees were male and the remainder was female. Fifty percent were aged between forty and fifty five years of age, twenty five percent were aged over thirty and the remaining twenty five percent were between the ages of twenty one and thirty years.

The length of time interviewees had been relief teaching ranged from four months to a total of eleven years, with fifteen percent of the cohort having been relief teaching for over five years. The majority of the subject population (sixty percent) had been employed in this capacity for between one and two years. Many of the respondents had spent at least some time teaching in various tenured capacities prior to practising in a relief capacity (forty percent), and three respondents each quoted thirty years teaching experience in total. Strong similarities between the subject population of the current study and the population of a northern Californian relief teacher cohort were found, especially in terms of both cohorts’ maturity and previous educational experience.

An analysis of the cohort’s career aspirations found that thirty five percent were satisfied with remaining in a relief teaching capacity, whilst twenty percent were actively looking for permanency or long term teaching contracts. The remaining forty five percent believed that they would more than likely remain relief teaching due

mostly to their inability or refusal to take tenured/contract positions, which removed them from the metropolitan area.

The identified positives of relief teaching

Without exception, every respondent identified at least two positive aspects of their work as relief teachers, regardless of whether they aspired to remain in relief teaching, or were seeking permanency or long term contract positions. This was somewhat of a surprise, in light of the fact that most expressed various feelings of alienation as a result of their work. A total of eight general positive aspects (sub-themes) were identified by the respondents, and none of these are acknowledged or discussed in any of the reviewed literature.

Fifty five percent of all respondents indicated that relief teaching enabled them to in some ways improve "lifestyle", variously quoting the ability to work their jobs around other important aspects of their lives, and that relief teaching afforded them some degree of extra "freedom" that might not be as forthcoming with similar tenured positions. Another fifty five percent believed that relief teaching required far less in the way of non-teaching duties, and that this in itself was a significant benefit of the job. The issue of increasing amounts of non-teaching duties required to be undertaken by tenured educators is acknowledged in the reviewed literature as one of the factors contributing to significantly higher levels of stress and job dissatisfaction among tenured staff (Bruce & Cacioppe, 1989; Department of Education and Training, 2003; Gonzales, 2002; Hutchinson, 1996; Lock, 1993; Woods, 2004).

Ten percent of the subject population cited fewer dealings with "unreasonable" parents as a benefit of working in a relief capacity, and again ten percent believed that relief teaching exposed them to the positive influences of decreased boredom levels due to an availability of widely diverse workplaces, students and school settings.

Thirty five percent of respondents believed that relief teaching enhanced professional skills and provided them with opportunities to increase general classroom management skills, whilst ten percent saw relief teaching as a networking opportunity, by developing professional "connections" through exposure to different colleagues.

The ability to “walk away” from serious behavioural issues, and a perception that relief teachers did not have to involve themselves in negative staff politics was identified by ten and fifteen percent of interviewees respectively.

The following three sections summarise the findings, which directly relate to the research questions, conceptual framework, and the findings of the literature review of the current study.

Alienation as identified and discussed by the subject population

A central aim of the current research was to firstly ascertain whether or not the subject population believed that they felt alienation as a result of working as relief teachers, and if they in fact did, how it was expressed. This formed part (a) of the first research question.

To properly define and quantify alienation for the purposes of this study, a psychological model of alienation-non-alienation was adapted from Carlson (1995) and Finn (1989). This model represents the conceptual framework of the current research

The conceptual framework identified alienation as being able to be expressed by individuals along one or more of three separate constructs (feelings of *meaninglessness*, *powerlessness* and *isolation*). The model suggests that alienation could be triggered by varying situational factors, as well as indicating that certain individual characteristics may to varying degrees predispose one to feelings of alienation. As individuals themselves (or their situations) change, the type, frequency and intensity of alienation may also change. The model, therefore, should be viewed as a “living” framework, rather than one, which remains static and unchanging.

The current research identified that ninety five percent of the subject population cited feelings of alienation. The interviewees attributed these feelings to being exposed to major systemic problems or issues, which appear to be embedded in the school or in some cases, the broader educational system itself.

The expression of these feelings varied considerably across the subject population, with various combinations of constructs being quoted by the respondents. However, further analysis revealed that either singularly, or in combination with other constructs, feelings of *isolation* were by far the most dominant expression of alienation, with eighty five percent of the cohort quoting this construct. Sixty percent experienced feelings of *powerlessness* whilst working as relief teachers, and thirty percent identified *meaninglessness* in various contexts.

Deeper analysis concluded that whilst the above findings certainly appear to indicate that alienation was expressed by most of the subject population, the conceptual framework indicates that alienation can be extremely situational in nature. Therefore, caution should be exercised when attempting to generalise these findings over broader sections of the relief teacher population, especially in light of the small sample population.

Issues identified by respondents, which lead to feelings of alienation

The second aim of this research was to identify the systemic problems encountered by the subject population, which they believed either “triggered” feelings of alienation, or in some way “magnified” existing feelings. This aim formed part (b) of the first research question.

A review of the available literature relevant to the current research identified the existence of several major systemic “problems”, which have been present for some considerable time in the education systems of the three countries from which the literature was sourced.

The findings established strong positive links between feelings of alienation in the subject population and the problems identified by the reviewed literature. In addition to confirming these links, three additional problems/issues were identified by the subject population, which do not appear to have been flagged by the literature, and are considered new findings in the context of the present research.

The coding process identified the existence of four themes, and upon further analysis a total of twelve sub-themes emerged from the data.

Specific in-class challenges

Seventy five percent of the subject population identified a combination of negative classroom experiences as contributing to feelings of alienation. The three sub-themes to emerge from this data included behaviour management challenges (quoted by fifty percent of respondents), and a perceived lack of lesson planning information and/or the resources needed to implement these (quoted again by fifty percent of interviewees). A less significant third sub-theme, centring on lack of “other” important classroom information, was quoted by fifteen percent of the respondents. This included information such as class timetables, student-specific behaviour management plans, students at behavioural risk and so on. In all cases, the literature variously identified these sub-themes as issues that have been known about by education systems for many years, yet still continue to negatively impact on relief teachers.

Relationship issues

The issue of negative relationships with tenured colleagues and an array of other educational stake-holders was quoted by seventy five percent of the respondents. Three sub-themes were identified within this theme and included relationships with the educational community, which was identified by seventy percent of the subject population. This sub-theme on its own was quoted as leading to feelings of alienation by more respondents than any other single problem/issue.

The remaining two sub-themes included poor relationships with the wider educational bureaucracy (namely the Department of Education and Training), quoted by twenty percent of respondents, and interestingly, a perception by ten percent of respondents that some relief teacher placement “agencies” (used by these individuals to provide daily work) regularly sent them to more “challenging” schools because they were male. These latter two sub-themes were considered by the researcher to be “new information”, because they do not appear to have been identified or discussed in any previous research relating to relief teachers or teaching.

Relief teacher image and perception

Some considerable thought was given to the possibility of including this issue as an additional sub-theme relating to relationship issues, because in some ways the two showed strong links to each other. One could argue that "poor image" and the consequent negative perceptions of relief teachers' capabilities may well lead to poor relationships with other educational stake-holders. However, this was viewed as too simplistic, as many other situational factors could well come into play.

Sixty five percent of the subject population variously identified feeling alienated as a result of what they perceived were "negative" attitudes displayed towards them by some tenured staff. The general feeling among this cohort appeared to centre around perceptions of not being regarded by others as "real" or capable teachers, and that at best, they were "tolerated" by other staff because no "real" teachers were available to do the job. Respondents variously felt that this attitude was more prevalent in tenured teachers, however, the data uncovered instances of this negativity being displayed by other staff, and in one instance, by a school principal.

Equity with tenured colleagues

This was the most significant theme to emerge from the data, producing five sub-themes and being identified/discussed by ninety percent of the subject population as fostering feelings of alienation.

The issue of "broken" employment and pay, inequality of access to leave benefits along with the broader problems associated with "casual" work was the strongest sub-theme to emerge, with sixty percent of interviewees identifying these problems. Issues revolved around the "feast or famine" nature of relief teaching, the uncertainty of working on any particular day, and several distinct concerns regarding payment for services rendered. The problem of being able to access professional development (PD) was mentioned by thirty percent of the subject population. In all cases the central contention revolved around the issue of not being offered this essential in-servicing, in line with tenured counterparts (at no cost to recipients).

A further ten percent of respondents identified the issue of being assigned “playground/yard” duty simply because they were the “relief teacher”, rather than the fact that they were replacing a rostered staff member, as leading to feelings of alienation. This ties in somewhat with the fourth sub-theme, which identified general duty of care issues. Again this was identified by ten percent of respondents, and centred on three specific experiences which placed each relief teacher at considerably more risk of unintentional duty of care breach, because they were unfamiliar with students, procedures and rules.

The remaining sub-theme to emerge from the data was the issue of access to “duties other than teaching time” (DOTT). This issue has not been flagged by the reviewed literature, and is therefore considered to be the third sub-theme to be viewed as a “new” finding. In all Western Australian government schools, tenured staff are allocated several hours per week to research and prepare lessons, or undertake other non-teaching duties. Thirty five percent of interviewees quoted “rarely” receiving this time during the course of their placements, and that instead, they were often removed to other classes for the duration of this time to allow “extra” DOTT to be used by those teachers. Perceptions of “feeling used” and “used for everything” appeared to be the common feeling amongst this cohort, leading to feelings of alienation.

Identified support strategies offered by schools to relief teachers

The third major aim of the current research was to ascertain whether any of the schools serviced by the subject population actually provided identifiable support strategies to relief teachers, and if so, what these strategies were. This aim forms the basis of the second research question.

The reviewed literature, in addition to identifying some of the major problems experienced by relief teachers during the course of their work, also highlighted certain strategies (or reforms), many of which could be initiated at a school level and which if thoughtfully and judiciously executed, need not cost much (if anything) in the way of additional funding.

One hundred percent of the subjects variously identified support strategies being offered to them by some of the schools they serviced. However, the type and “quality” of these were seen to vary considerably between interviewees, producing rather “fractured” data. This was particularly evident when respondents discussed the frequency of provision of these services, with interviewees citing adjectives including “occasionally”, “sometimes”, “some schools”, “one school”, “both schools”, “rarely”, and in one case “good overall”.

A total of five sub-themes, representing five distinct support strategies, were identified by the respondents, showing that to varying degrees, some schools do appear to be cognisant of some of the problems regularly faced by relief teachers, and have attempted to devise strategies which reduce the impact of these.

Fifty percent of the subjects quoted having been provided with lesson plans or information at some of the schools they serviced, although the quality and/or frequency of provision appeared to be quite low in most cases. Twenty percent of respondents reported various provision of information specific to the class that they were teaching, including seating plans, behaviour management policies and other information considered necessary to keep the class “running smoothly”. Again, the frequency of supply of this information was not seen as “great” by these interviewees.

A further thirty percent of respondents indicated that they had been provided with school based “survival packs” at various placements. These information sheets variously provide basic orientation information including campus “mud maps”, daily routines and so on. Once again, overall frequency of supply was seen as fairly low. Forty five percent of the interviewees indicated that they had been “officially” met by a school staff member, and in some cases, escorted to class. This “meet and greet” strategy is widely acknowledged by the reviewed literature as important in enhancing the professional standing of the relief teacher, and certainly requires little in the way of extra resources or effort to implement as a matter of course. The frequency that this strategy was offered appeared to vary considerably, and seemed from the respondents’ point of view to range from “informal” to “formal” in nature.

Support from other (tenured) staff was quoted by another twenty five percent of the subject population as variously being offered to them during the course of their work. The type of support was seen to vary considerably between informal "head through the classroom door" to more formal "buddying up", although all appeared to be informal in origin, rather than part of any officially sanctioned support strategy. Again the frequency of this support was seen to be fairly low.

Summary

This chapter summarised the major findings of the current study, in effect "bringing together" the major points of note. The first section provided a brief overview of the research findings and identified the sections, which emerged from the data. These were then discussed separately in the subsequent sections of the chapter.

The final chapter provides major recommendations, which have emerged from the research and also concludes the current study.

Chapter 10

Recommendations and conclusion

Introduction

This (final) chapter is divided into two sections. The first section discusses the major recommendations, which have emerged from the current study and is divided into three categories. The second section provides a conclusion to the research.

Recommendations

A series of recommendations based on the findings of the current study are presented below. These are divided into three categories: recommendations for future research, recommendations for schools, and recommendations for educational districts/bureaucracy. Each category is discussed separately. At this point it should be clearly understood that all following recommendations need to be viewed within the (previously discussed) limitations of the current study, and in particular, the bounds and constraints of a relatively low sample size.

Recommendations for future research

The findings of the current research have conclusively shown that feelings of alienation exist within ninety five percent of the subject population, and that these feelings are at least partially generated by exposure to specific problems that exist within the schools that they service, or the wider education system within which they operate. There is a distinct possibility that these findings might well be representative of the broader relief teacher population, however, some caution should be exercised in making this claim without further study. Recommendations for further research include the following:

- ◆ Redesigning the conceptual framework to include the formulation of an “alienation scale” which could be distributed to large numbers of the relief teacher population. A properly designed “scale” might well increase the reliability and validity of results, and through quantitative analysis, possibly reveal a much broader “picture”.
- ◆ Including other relief teacher populations in future studies, namely, secondary government metropolitan schools, private schools and “country” schools. Comparisons might then be drawn in an effort to ascertain whether alienation exists in similar percentages across the broader population, or whether certain sections of the population appear to experience reduced alienation.
- ◆ Conducting comparison studies between specifically defined relief teacher cohorts and their tenured counterparts. There exists the possibility that tenured educators may well be experiencing feelings of alienation and disconnection as a result of their employment (although probably in response to different issues).
- ◆ Qualitative research could be conducted into tenured educators’ perceptions of relief teachers’ capabilities and “image”. The reviewed literature identified that many relief teachers tend to be viewed as “less capable” by tenured classroom teachers. Studies that were able to identify firstly, whether these perceptions have any basis in fact, and secondly, *why* these perceptions exist, might prove useful when developing appropriate support strategies for relief teachers.
- ◆ Further research might be undertaken to establish what support strategies relief teachers themselves feel would aid in increasing their perception of being valued and supported by the wider educational community.

Recommendations for schools

The current research established strong positive links between feelings of alienation in the subject population and many of the systemic problems within the educational systems identified by the reviewed literature. An additional three problems were also

identified by respondents, which do not appear in previous research. In light of these findings, several recommendations can be made, which if implemented by schools might be expected to significantly reduce relief teachers' feelings of alienation.

- ◆ The introduction of various support strategies to aid the relief teacher in the execution of his/her duties has been identified by the reviewed literature as important in order for these educators to be utilised to their full potential. In addition to this, the findings of the current study would appear to indicate that introduction of these support strategies might also go some considerable way to reducing feelings of alienation and disconnection from the broader educational community itself.

Bearing in mind the already arduous task of operating efficiently within seemingly "tight" budgets, there exist several important support strategies that schools should be able to implement, with a minimum of extra expense or "effort". These include "buddy systems" for relief teachers (Brace, 1990; Crittenden, 1994; Gonzales, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Simmons, 1991), meet and greet procedures (Brace, 1990; Crittenden, 1994; Potter, 2001), and orientation or "survival" packs for relief teachers (and other "new" staff) (Crittenden, 1994; Edelman, 2003; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Lunay, 2004).

The introduction of other, more classroom-specific support strategies should also be seriously considered by all schools. Explicit forward lesson planning by all tenured educators, in addition to the creation, maintenance and regular updating of class-specific information (Crittenden, 1994; Edelman, 2003; Gonzales, 2002; Hardman & Tippetts, 2001; Potter, 2001), need to be recognised by regular teachers as information crucial to the educational and emotional well-being of students and replacement teachers alike. With some thoughtful planning and judicious execution, little if any financial resources would be needed to implement many of these strategies, and need not take much in the way of extra time and effort to produce and maintain. Although many of these support strategies would ideally be created and maintained by tenured teachers themselves, it is envisaged that most would probably best be initiated and overseen by school administrators.

- ◆ Tenured staff members' attitude towards relief teachers received strong attention from the subject population of the current study. In particular, "poor" relationships between these professionals, and feelings of being viewed by regular teachers as somehow "less competent/capable" were prevalent among responses. If this perception is shared by the broader relief teacher community, there appears little doubt that feelings of alienation would be widespread among these individuals. A culture of professional respect, therefore, needs to be created among tenured educators, which reinforces the value of the relief teacher, and subtly acknowledges the significant contribution they make to the ongoing education of students. Whilst this is envisaged as being a whole-school responsibility, it is one which would probably be initiated and fostered (at least in the early stages) by school administrators and "senior" staff.

Recommendations for educational districts and central office

Some findings of the current study point to the issue of feelings of alienation among relief teachers as transcending the individual school setting, in some instances. This implies that intervention at a school district or even central office level may be warranted. As a consequence, several recommendations for this section of the educational system can be put forward.

- ◆ Two respondents indicated either not feeling alienated, or experiencing significant reductions in feelings of alienation, by reducing the number of schools in which they worked. Working for a small, compact number of schools can allow for working relationships to be built up, can allow the relief teacher to get to know students, and in general, become familiar with the internal "workings" of these institutions. In short, feelings of alienation could well be expected to reduce, because many of the problems faced by relief teachers working in unfamiliar settings would simply disappear. This may be achievable for a percentage of the relief teacher population, however, it would probably not be financially sustainable for the vast majority of this cohort, due to a multitude of ever-changing variables.

Prior to 1985 in WA, relief teachers were able to register with the Department of Education and Training to be placed in a “pool” of staff, which would then be allocated work by the Department on a day to day basis, dependent on varying factors (Crittenden, 1994). For the past twenty years, however, relief teachers have needed to source their own placements, often applying to large numbers of schools, despite the inevitability of securing work from only a handful of these (Crittenden, 1994). This can often lead to a “feast or famine” situation whereby relief teachers may receive numerous calls from schools to work on a single day, then receive no offers for long periods.

This situation could possibly be alleviated by the various education districts retaining the services of relief teachers who might be “employed” to each service a limited number of schools. The implementation of such an approach might well bring with it significant problems, especially those related to the unpredictability of day-to-day staff replacement, and the resultant over and under-supply implications. However, studies in the US (Cardon, 2002; Gonzales, 2002 and Abdal-Haqq, 1997) have identified some educational districts that have successfully utilised this technique.

There is even the possibility that several neighbouring schools may be able to employ this technique. In either case, the benefits to relief teachers, tenured staff and students alike, need little explanation.

- ◆ The issue of adequate ongoing professional development (PD) for relief teachers is an important and contentious one. Identified by thirty percent of respondents as leading to feelings of alienation, equitable access to PD is a problem with implications reaching much further than simply alienating sections of the relief teacher community. The seemingly greater role that relief teachers appear to be playing in the overall provision of educational services to students, coupled with the concerted “push” to professionalise the teaching industry, mean that ongoing access to quality PD is absolutely essential for *all* educators. An example of the perceived importance of ongoing in-service training is illustrated by the WA College of Teaching, which states that minimum amounts of PD will be mandated as a condition of ongoing registration for *every* teacher.

Unfortunately a two tiered system of access to PD currently exists in Western Australia (Lunay, 2004), with tenured and contracted teachers receiving this free of charge, whilst relief teachers are often subjected to the double financial burden of having to pay the cost of this themselves, and in some instances also forgoing paid employment in order to make themselves available to attend. In many cases the relief teacher, by virtue of the nature of his/her work, is least able to afford this cost.

The issue of who pays for relief teachers to attend PD is one that yields no easy answers, however, it is a problem which justifiably needs addressing. PD is not cheap, so making individual schools bear the cost of providing this to the relief teachers who service them is probably not financially practical, viable or "fair". The answer most likely lies with individual educational districts, or perhaps with the Department of Education and Training itself. Simple records could be created and maintained which "track" the location and frequency of government schools serviced by relief teachers, with these individuals generating a certain number of "credits/points" each time they work at a particular school. (Keeping these records should not prove particularly onerous, because DET already has details of this information, generated through relief teachers' pay records). An accumulation of a specified number of these "credits" would entitle the relief teacher to a certain amount of PD. The cost of this provision could be perhaps divided between DET and each educational district office. Whilst not addressing the issue of relief teachers possibly losing pay to attend PD, this solution would at least partially solve the inequity of the current situation, and possibly motivate the relief teacher to naturally concentrate targeting their services to specific schools/districts.

- ◆ Twenty percent of the subject population cited feelings of alienation stemming from what they perceived to be "poor" relations with the Department of Education and Training. The issues surrounding these perceptions essentially took three forms: feelings of "condescending" attitudes by DET staff who dealt with the respondents' queries, a perception of being "ignored" by the Department upon refusal of (usually rural or remote) postings, and a perception that as a relief teacher, the Department saw the respondents as "bottom of the heap" regarding pay scale advancement and experience, especially when being compared to new

graduates. Whilst claims of this nature are contentious and difficult to validate, there does appear (at least to some extent) to be little "awareness" shown by DET, of relief teachers in general. This was demonstrated during the literature review phase of the current research when attempting to ascertain from the Department of Education and Training basic information relating to the numbers of relief teachers servicing government schools in Western Australia. The researcher spent considerable time and effort in dialogue with various members of staff in an attempt to secure this information, resulting in an admission from one staff member that the requested information was "difficult to obtain", because official records were not kept. The only way to compile data on this subject was to "manually" work through all pay records to ascertain which teachers were paid weekly (relief teachers are paid this way, as opposed to tenured/contract staff who are paid fortnightly). Whilst there appears little that can be done to positively address this issue, the fact that twenty percent of the subject population cited poor relationships with the Department of Education and Training should be cause for possible concern. At the very least, the educational bureaucracy may need to become more "aware" of the not insignificant numbers of relief teachers employed by it, and the important function that they perform in keeping the "system" moving forward.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether feelings of alienation were present in relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools, and if so, what they identified as contributing to those feelings. Additionally, the research attempted to ascertain what (if any) support strategies for relief teachers were actually offered by the schools that had been serviced by the subject population.

The possible increasing importance of the relief teacher as an (equally competent) educational colleague has been identified in previous research, which has indicated that in the three countries from which the literature was drawn, significant numbers of tenured educators are leaving the profession in response to various "system" issues.

The uniqueness of this study presented a problem when attempting to link the subsequent conceptual framework with the review of available literature relating to relief teachers (or teaching), however, this was overcome with the creation of a psychological model, which was able to adequately define the concept of "alienation" for the purposes of this research.

The research itself was qualitative in nature, using semi-structured interviews as the main data gathering tool. Forty six potential respondents were invited to participate in the study, with twenty "currently serving" relief teachers ultimately being interviewed, representing a participation rate of slightly under forty four percent. A total of seventy six different schools had been serviced by the subject population, and some considerable degree of "overlap" was evident, with some schools having been serviced by more than one respondent. Coding was used to identify the main themes that emerged from the data.

The current study established strong positive links between feelings of alienation in the subject population (with ninety five percent of respondents citing these feelings) and exposure to a number of major systemic problems, which currently exist within the educational "system" of this state. Many of these issues have been identified by previous research and appear to be present in all three countries from which the literature was sourced. The present research also identified a number of support strategies offered by some schools, which indicates some cognisance of the problems faced by relief teachers during the course of their work. In addition, this study identified several major positive aspects of relief teaching. Interestingly, despite significant feelings of alienation being present in the vast majority of the subject population, every respondent cited at least two positives of working as a relief teacher.

As a result of the research findings, several recommendations for further action emerged, and were subsequently divided into three categories. Recommendations included the application of further research concentrating on attempting to establish whether feelings of alienation exist in similar percentages in wider relief teacher populations, whether these feelings are in response to previously identified problems, and what can be done to reduce these negative emotional responses. Recommendations for individual schools, districts and the educational bureaucracy itself, were also

suggested, which if thoughtfully implemented need not require much in the way of physical or financial resources. Implementation of these recommendations should, logically, go some considerable way toward reducing feelings of alienation and disconnection among relief teachers, and more importantly augmenting their effectiveness as an arguably increasingly important educational resource.

The major limitations of this research included the extremely short time span over which it was conducted, the small number of respondents interviewed, and subsequent validity concerns when attempting to generalise these findings over wider sections of the relief teacher population. However, it is hoped that this study has “opened the door” as it were, to the possibility of further and deeper research into what is felt by the researcher to be a widely neglected educational resource.

Looking beyond the context of the present research, it is perhaps fair to say that the issue of whether or not relief teachers are feeling significant alienation as a result of their work, may not be the most important point at stake. The notion of any student in any school being provided with the best possible educational opportunities must be of paramount importance to the teaching profession. As such, the notion of the relief teacher being viewed as a mere “stand in” for the “real” teacher during periods of absence (extended or otherwise), needs to be dispelled sooner rather than later. Relief teachers need to be provided with the tools, opportunities and *professional recognition* to be able not simply to keep the class occupied for the day, but to move the curriculum forward in the same way as the students’ regular classroom teacher. If these tools are provided, not only will relief teachers be better at their job, feelings of alienation will probably reduce, meaning benefits for every educational stake-holder.

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Interview Transcript.

Name: R1 Sex: Age: 25 Years teaching: 1 Years relief teaching: 1

Number schools serviced: 10+ Career aspirations: Looking for permanency.

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Ability to experience different settings and schools
- Less admin/non-teaching duties
- Feels like “real” teaching (not dealing with other “stuff”)

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

Yes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Often behaviour problems (especially from older students) who see relief teacher as “holiday day”.
- Disrespect—sometimes both staff and students.
- Lack of classroom resources (lesson plans, daily routines etc—one class children got up to walk out of classroom at 9.30 AM, were not prompted to do this. I was told “its time for PE”. I didn’t know—looked like a fool).

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Sometimes isolated, sometimes meaningless.
- “Often feel that what you do doesn’t seem to matter”.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Sometimes daily work pad available (but sometimes lesson plans etc are available, but no texts/resources –spend half the day trying to find everything).

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R2 Sex: F Age: 42 Years teaching: 11 Years relief teaching: 11

Number schools serviced: 20+ Career aspirations: Would like permanency
but won't go "bush"

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom to work life around my job
- Less preparation time/after hours work
- Huge diversity—interesting/no room for boredom
- "Get home not long after my kids—a real bonus"

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

Over the years yes, but reduced when working for one school.

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Contingent work—waiting for the 'phone to ring.
- Pay increments compromised.
- Less inclusion—treated as an outsider.
- (Low) support for relief teachers out there/ (low) in class support.
- Lesson plans—never walked into a classroom that has lessons prepared.
- Viewed as "less than a teacher" by school community, even by teaching assistants!

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- More isolation than other constructs. “(You) serve one school faithfully for months, and the one time you can’t make it—they drop you immediately. One particular school—I worked with them for weeks almost exclusively—one morning they rang me about coming in that day. Because I didn’t get back to them within 5 minutes, they gave the work to somebody else—I never heard from them again”.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Survival pack
- Meet and greet
- Classroom specific information. One school did this out of 20 or more I’ve worked for.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R3 **Sex:** F **Age:** 52 **Years teaching:** 30 **Years relief teaching:** 3

Number schools serviced: 5 **Career aspirations:** Not looking for permanency at this stage

What do you like about relief teaching?

- No involvement in “politics”
- Freedom—suited lifestyle change

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Chose to be marginalised
- Do not enjoy transitory nature of relief teaching—hard developing relationships with students.

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Procurement of employment—not knowing where I’ll be from day to day

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Some amount of meaninglessness

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Good overall
- Meet and greet procedures (deputy principal)
- Included relief teachers in social activities (1 school)
- Formal/informal gratitude

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

- Kids very difficult, but excellent staff support.
- Nature of the students has impacted negatively on my teaching outlook. Sometimes feel there’s no point in teaching some classes—may as well pay a “minder”.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R4 **Sex:** M **Age:** 38 **Years teaching:** 10 **Years relief teaching:** 5

Number schools serviced: "Numerous" 20+

Career aspirations: Looking for permanency, but won't take family rural/remote.

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom to move around
- Not having to deal with unreasonable parents

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Often

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Looked down upon by tenured staff
- Often a culture of "blame the relief teacher!"
- Term 1 and some of term 4 difficult to get any work—wait for 'phone to ring.
- Having to go on social security during holidays—being hassled by the department to take jobs at Hungry Jacks etc!
- Seem to get sent to a lot of "rough" schools—reckon its because I'm male
- Staffroom dynamics
- Incomplete/unprepared lesson plans and in-class information

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Powerlessness and isolation.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Meet and greet (around 20%)
- Survival packs (around 10%)
- Educational programs/lesson plans (around 10%)
- Never classroom specific information.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- **“Some schools are really friendly and helpful towards you as a relief teacher, but these are definitely in the minority in my experience”.**

Any other comments?

- “I find the Education Department's attitude towards me very condescending—even unfriendly. My wife and family moved to WA with me and we bought a house in [suburb named]. The Education Department offered me work in a North West school and because I didn't take it I feel I've been shoved aside by them ever since”.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R5 **Sex:** M **Age:** 28 **Years teaching:** 5 **Years relief teaching:** 5

Number schools serviced: 15+ **Career aspirations:** Would like permanent work but “choosy” about placements

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom to move around
- Lifestyle benefits
- Different age groups and experiences
- Less politics. “Don’t have to put up with pettiness”

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Frequently

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Classroom management issues
- Lesson plans rarely available and if they are, can take half a day to find proper resources
- Don’t feel valued. “You’re often looked on as something less than a real teacher”

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- “Isolation—definitely isolation. Out of the loop”.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Sometimes met by senior teacher and walked to classroom
- “Some schools give you handouts showing daily routines—these make all the difference” (Survival packs)

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- “You’re used up—don’t get your DOTT [duties other than teaching time] very often”.

Any other comments?

- Can be very lonely out there.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R6 **Sex:** F **Age:** 23 **Years teaching:** 1 **Years relief teaching:** 1

Number schools serviced: 10+ **Career aspirations:** Looking for permanency.

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Lifestyle
- Freedom to move around
- "Less pressure, if not having to deal with negative workplaces"
- Less non-teaching duties

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes--often

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Seen as a "baby-sitter"
- "I want experience but I sometimes feel as if nobody cares what I teach the children"
- "Not knowing if you'll work today"
- "Lack of work left for you to do"

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Isolated and powerless mostly.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various "survival packs"; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal "buddy system"; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- Sometimes lessons have been left for you to follow

Any other comments?

- "Being a relief teacher is hard work—I don't feel as if we're really appreciated".

Interview Transcript.

Name: R7 **Sex:** M **Age:** 47 **Years teaching:** 1 **Years relief teaching:** 1

Number schools serviced: 15+ **Career aspirations:** Graduated from Teacher's College "years ago" but didn't teach. Now happy to remain relief teaching.

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Like most, the interaction with the children (...if you actually teach them anything!)
- Relief teaching can be less demanding (less preparation, after hours work etc)

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes, frequently. Can feel this in the staffroom most prominently—feel like hiding in a corner.

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Professional development—never offered
- Low expectations. One time, class noisier than normal. A regular teacher entered and asked, "Why don't you control these children?" This was conducted in front of the students—absolute humiliation!
- Long time to gain acceptance from other staff
- One school, change of administration. I wasn't called back again (after very good rapport established with previous deputy principal).

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- All, depending on specific circumstances.
- “No one wants to know you”.
- “Lack of support—very hard to pin down exactly where these feelings are coming from”.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Never (stressed) meet and greet procedures
- Survival pack 1 school only “...but how much time do you have to read these anyway?”
- Couple of times, buddy system.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

“Behaviour management is a huge issue—don’t feel as if I have any say, because I’m looked on as only a relief teacher.

Any other comments?

- “The “government system”: Relief teaching just doesn’t seem to count. You can teach for 10 years and it won’t get you any closer to permanency”.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R8 **Sex:** F **Age:**50 **Years teaching:**30 **Years relief teaching:**10

Number schools serviced: 15+ **Career aspirations:** Followed husband around the state now happy to relief teach

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Makes you adaptable and resourceful (increases skills)
- You don't stagnate
- You can move on if you experience problems in the classroom, but often relief teaching forces you to solve these problems on the day

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Work in first term hard to get
- Feel as if you have to prove yourself as a relief teacher
- Schools not terribly welcoming
- (Staffrooms) daunting—30-50 staff looking at you when you walk in—where do you even sit?
- Poor image—encountered this attitude from tenured teachers. You have to be perfect all the time. "One example: I worked for 2 days at one school—went to a staff meeting on my own time. I ventured a comment and was challenged by the principal who stated: 'You're a relief teacher, why are *you* speaking?'"

- Access to professional development. How do you stay current? I now pay for my own,—I get to choose.
- Babysitter image

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

“Powerlessness. You've gone into the school, done the job. Who really cares? You can't advance yourself—you could do a good or bad job and be viewed the same way.”

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- One school, putting relief teachers' names on staffroom whiteboard.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R9 **Sex:** F **Age:** 46 **Years teaching:** 21 **Years relief teaching:** 2

Number schools serviced: 10+ **Career aspirations:** Was tenured. Now happy to teach in relief capacity

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Lifestyle
- Made conscious decision to relief teach because less non-teaching duties. "Had enough of all the changes".

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Sometimes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Unruly classes
- "The way you're treated—as an outsider. There's a perception in some workplaces that a relief teacher doesn't know much".
- "Feel like a babysitter"
- "I do a fair amount of relief for my old school—a very different experience".

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Powerlessness and isolation.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various "survival packs"; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal "buddy system"; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Some in-class support (Lesson plans)
- Sometimes other teachers close by have "looked in".

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R10 Sex: F Age: 39 Years teaching: 15 Years relief teaching: 3

Number schools serviced: 20+ Career aspirations: Relief teaching allows more time with young family

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Less after hours duties
- Less marking/preparation

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes, frequently

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- No professional development available
- Very little interaction with other staff
- Children can be unruly when relief teachers teach them
- Pay and conditions are less than regular teachers. “There’s no sick or holiday pay. Work is either a feast or a famine”.

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- “Isolation mostly. You’re often not talked to, even when *you* make the effort.”

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- “Sometimes lessons and resources are left—other times there’s nothing”.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- “One class I went to—there wasn’t even any scrap paper available, no chalk. I now take my own”.

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R11 Sex: F Age: 24 Years teaching: 1 Years relief teaching: 1

Number schools serviced: 5 Career aspirations: Looking for permanency.

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom to move around
- Enhance professional skills
- Networking with others

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

Quite often

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Classroom management issues. Don't have information on children, therefore difficult to control
- Unsure of teacher expectations of class behaviour—disruptive
- In class back-up. One occasion had no access to cupboards where ADHD medication kept for 2 students, and could not get into teacher's desk. Another occasion had to wait until recess, to get key to unlock drawer where roll was kept.

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Isolated, sometimes powerless

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various "survival packs"; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal "buddy system"; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Occasionally classroom seating plans
- Occasionally lesson plans and resources.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

- Feeling of frustration wondering if/when/where I'll work today.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R12 **Sex:** F **Age:** 41 **Years teaching:** 1.5yr **Years relief teaching:** 1.5yr

Number schools serviced: 15+ **Career aspirations:** Looking for permanency
but doubt if I'll get it (won't leave city)

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Get to work in variety of settings/schools
- See different strategies, rules, class set-ups

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Sometimes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Very often, miss out on DOTT—you get slotted in somewhere else—relief teachers are used for everything
- (Staffroom dynamics). "You don't often get included in conversations, you feel out of the loop".
- Very little in-class support

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- "Isolated. You often feel very alone—especially in the larger schools".

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Some schools (less than half), meet and greet by staff. Often just registrar.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R13 **Sex:** F **Age:** 21 **Years teaching:** 0.5 yr **Years relief teaching:** 0.5 yr

Number schools serviced: 6-7 **Career aspirations:** Looking for permanency

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Pay (+15%)
- Excellent experience

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- “Yes—daunting!”

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- “Staffrooms can be cold places!”
- Waiting around for ‘phone to ring
- Very often, lack of lesson plans, seating plans
- “Admin—not interested. (They) don’t want to deal with you once they know you’ve arrived. They just want to fill the space”.

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Combination of three depending on situation

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- File at office (1 school) showing class specific procedures
- Some schools point you in the direction of the classroom and make you feel welcome.
- One school’s policy was to have mandatory daily planning

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- **Specific incident at one school (swimming lessons at a public pool). Three classes (70 children). “I was sent to a public pool with one other regular teacher and one teaching assistant. No MSB or specific information (was) supplied. (I) didn’t know (the) kids—it was scary! One *regular* teacher stayed back at school looking after 6 kids that couldn’t go. Why wasn’t that left to me? Maybe the relief was sent so the teacher could have a slack day!”**

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R14 **Sex:** F **Age:** 42 **Years teaching:** 5 **Years relief teaching:** 5

Number schools serviced: 6 **Career aspirations:** Would like tenure but won't go "bush". (Family in city).

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Enhances classroom management skills
- Work at different schools

Do you ever feel "left out"/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- "Age vs seniority—mature age relief teacher is treated as a junior. Relief teachers are "bottom of the heap" (but) as you get to know the school/staff, they warm to you—but that takes a lot of time."
- Classroom management challenges
- Employment issues—up to 6 weeks waiting for pay
- DOTT time not offered

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- “More isolation than powerlessness or meaninglessness. (The) Education Department especially—you’re not treated well by them—you feel particularly alone”.

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- One school, deputy principal officially met and greeted. Reiterated rules, expectations and consequences were the same as regular teacher’s. You feel valued.
- One school offered survival pack.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- **Education Department concerns:**
 - “5 years teaching and (I’ve got) 3 Identification numbers!”
 - “(I’ve) served them well for 5 years—feel as if I’m still bottom of the heap”
 - “No help filling out paperwork”
 - “No consideration for personal circumstances—(this) ties in with ‘mature age attitude’—you won’t ‘go bush’ so the department treats you as an outsider. No support system at all”.

Any other comments?

- Country relief teachers—much more appreciation compared to the city.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R15 Sex: M Age: 46 Years teaching: 3 Years relief teaching: 3

Number schools serviced: 20+ Career aspirations: Would have liked permanency, but now resigned to relief teaching. Won't leave city (financial reasons)

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom of not having after hours marking, preparation
- Not having to deal with unreasonable parents

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes, often.

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Not knowing daily, where, if work is available
- Negative perceptions of relief teachers—“not real teachers”
- In class confusion: Inadequate lessons or preparation left, no class lists, behaviour management problems
- Staffroom: “Often no one talks to you even when *you* try to initiate conversation”
- Playground duty “particularly annoying when no need for it.”
- “(You) feel *used* because you’re a relief teacher”

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- All, at different times

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Survival packs, 2 schools
- Unofficial meet and greet procedures, 2 schools (One principal and one deputy)
- One school, next-door teacher unofficially “buddied up”. “(This) makes a huge difference”.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- “As a male, I get the feeling I’m sent to difficult schools. One agency refused to send me anywhere else. (They) actually admitted this after I confronted them!”.

Any other comments?

- “Relief teaching can be extremely satisfying—it’s almost like ‘pure’ teaching. (It) makes you a better teacher if you can think on your feet and quickly adapt to varying situations.”
- “We need more support out there”

Interview Transcript.

Name: R16 **Sex:** F **Age:** 51 **Years teaching:** 30 **Years relief teaching:** 1

Number schools serviced: 5-6 **Career aspirations:** Now semi retired. Does not want permanency again

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Not there all the time
- No reports, portfolios
- Administrative tasks: Less “headaches”
- Can walk away from behaviour management problems

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Initially thought not, but then realised significant feelings have and do exist

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Incomplete lesson plans (some schools), others—absolutely nothing
- “Rarely” in-class information, especially SAER (students at educational risk) and specific behaviour problems.
- DOTT time used up by other teachers. Often no time to prepare lessons. Now do lesson preparation on my own photocopier. Costs me a fortune.
- No access to PD. This is frustrating and hurtful

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- “Powerless mostly. What can you actually achieve? I’ve been teaching for 30 years—I’ve got a lifetime of experience to offer, but you’re treated as a junior—like straight out of teacher’s college.”

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Meet and greet procedures, very rarely.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

- “Being a relief teacher doesn’t mean you don’t know anything!”
- Dropped one school during the year—“feral kids”, got no support
- Would love some PD
- Mixed age-group classes *very* difficult, (--bad enough for the regular teacher)
- “Its refreshing to talk to someone interested in relief teaching”

Interview Transcript.

Name: R17 Sex: F Age: 32 Years teaching: 3 Years relief teaching: 1

**Number schools serviced: 5 Career aspirations: Would like permanency but
does not want country placement**

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom to move around
- Less marking/after class work
- “Come in—go home”

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Yes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Classroom management “big problem—feral classes”
- Being moved in the middle of teaching day to new class
- Treated as an “outsider”
- Looked on as “less than a real teacher”
- Finding “wrong”/incomplete lessons for students (after being directed to teach a particular lesson.)

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Combination of all three

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various "survival packs"; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal "buddy system"; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Informal meet and greet by principal of one school. Nothing else.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- Car damaged by some "challenging" students in one of my classes.

(Couldn't prove this but was common knowledge amongst their peers).

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R18 **Sex:** F **Age:** 55 **Years teaching:** 1.5 **Years relief teaching:** 1.5

Number schools serviced: 20 **Career aspirations:** Does not want permanency

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Networking/meeting different teachers and students
- Different resources and programs
- Exposed to wide variety of experiences
- Makes you a better teacher

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

“Definitely!”

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- 80+ applications to schools at start of the year
- “Education Department’s attitude is terrible, towards me, as a relief teacher”
- Considered (by Department of Education and Training) as a new graduate, after 18 months teaching, (18 months on same pay scale)
- Covering others’ DOTT time
- Hate doing others’ yard duty
- Staffroom dynamics—often a problem
- No PD
- No programs or lesson plans

- Relationship problems. Specific example: Tandem teaching situation. Remaining teacher obviously took a dislike to me. “(The) remaining teacher (was) obviously friends with the one I was replacing—(she) was *very* unfriendly and distinctly unhelpful.”
- Image and perception. Specific example: Recently relieving at a school and was “having a giggle” with the kids. Neighbouring male teacher walked in and yelled out that although “this lady is a relief teacher, she *does* know what she’s doing!”

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,— powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Combination of all three

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Classroom specific information (from Catholic school)
- Some excellent daily work pads
- No survival packs. Actually designed one myself for one school I do work for, after running into 3 relief teachers who were all looking for the toilets. No-one knew!

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Example of an incomplete daily work pad: 3 words: “Old Man Emu, Australia, Around”. No other texts, nothing!

Any other comments?

Interview Transcript.

Name: R19 **Sex:** F **Age:** 32 **Years teaching:** 3.5 **Years relief teaching:** 0.4

Number schools serviced: 2 **Career aspirations:** Looking for permanency, but won't leave city (husband started new business).

What do you like about relief teaching?

- No planning—just go in and teach/go home at end of the day
- Reasonable pay
- No non-teaching duties (reports, extra-curricular activities, dealing with unreasonable parents etc)
- Pick and choose schools
- Can turn down work if busy

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

No

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Don't feel alienation but some annoying issues:
 - No PD—actually brought in to relieve a teacher who was going on PD
 - Waiting for 'phone to ring/no regular money “sucks”

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- Not applicable

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various "survival packs"; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal "buddy system"; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- Lesson plans in both schools
- Other staff—lots of on the spot support. When you're there they help you out.

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

- **Education Department:**
 - Waiting on "hold"
 - Staff can be quite "short"/insensitive
 - Not really happy with their treatment
 - "My friend had a terrible experience with them"
 - A feeling that "something's not quite right" (with the department)
 - Claims being directly told (by official from the Department of Education and Training) "if you turn down a job, you will be blacklisted"

Any other comments?

- Have only worked at two schools, therefore feels like extended family. They get to know you and will ask you back. That's why no alienation felt.

Interview Transcript.

Name: R20 **Sex:** F **Age:** 33 **Years teaching:** 2 **Years relief teaching:** 2

Number schools serviced: 10+ **Career aspirations:** Would like permanency
but won't leave city.

What do you like about relief teaching?

- Freedom to move about
- Able to work when I want to
- No extensive after hours work: (Marking, planning, pastoral care)

Do you ever feel “left out”/alienated whilst working as a relief teacher?

- Sometimes

If so, what do you identify as contributing to those feelings?

(Encountered problems/issues might include, but not limited to: General teacher discontent/stress; the nature of contingent work; low expectations/negative perceptions; lack of in class and/or administrative backup; classroom management challenges; school community/staffroom dynamics; pay, conditions, procurement of employment; litigation issues; other issues not identified by literature.)

- Lesson plans often not available
- Behaviour management issues—children see the relief teacher as a “target”—can be harder to control
- “Staffroom—definitely the staffroom! You’re seen as an outsider, (its) very hard to get yourself included in cliques”
- No PD ever offered—“that really upsets me”.
- “Regular teachers don’t seem to give you much credit for the hard job you do”

Could you describe how these feelings of alienation make you feel?

(Specifically,-- powerless; meaningless; isolated from educational community; or combination?)

- “Mostly powerlessness and isolation. A general feeling of being looked at as a second class teacher”

What support strategies have schools actually offered you, as a relief teacher?

(Examples might include but not limited to: Professional evaluation; paid PD/in-service training; Classroom specific procedures/information on students; various “survival packs”; Formal/informal gratitude/professional respect; formal/informal “buddy system”; formal/informal meet and greet procedures.)

- “I’ve found very little. Occasionally there’s a daily work pad”
- Sometimes support from admin or a deputy, but often you’re just on your own”

What other problems/concerns/support have you encountered during your time as a relief teacher?

Any other comments?

- I love teaching but I’d just like to feel that relief teachers were considered as equals. At the moment I don’t think we really are”.

Appendix 2(a): Invitation to participate.



Edith Cowan University
Mt Lawley Campus
2 Bradford Street
Mt Lawley 6050

Dear

I am a Master of Education student at the above university, and am currently conducting a research project that aims to identify some of the specific problems faced by relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools. This research forms part of the requirements of the above degree.

Project Title:

“A study of feelings of alienation among relief teachers servicing WA government metropolitan primary schools.”

There seems reason to speculate that relief teachers face problems in addition to regular, tenured teachers, and that these problems appear to frequently go unnoticed by the rest of the educational community. Specifically, the research aims to confirm that relief teachers often experience these problems during the course of their placements, and that as a result, feelings of alienation often manifest themselves in this group of professionals. If this really is the case, steps can hopefully be taken by the educational community to positively address these issues.

I am inviting all relief teachers (whose main source of income is derived through this means of employment), to participate in this research. The research will take the form of one private face to face interview per teacher, and will be (audio) recorded providing your permission is granted. The interview will last for around one hour, and will focus on areas of concern identified by the literature (and by you), that “trigger” feelings of alienation and “disconnection” from the rest of the educational community. Interviews can be arranged to occur at a time and place most convenient to you, and naturally, **complete anonymity** is assured: Only pseudonyms or initials will be used; names of any schools mentioned during interviews will not be included in any subsequent documentation. All written/printed transcripts will be stored securely, then destroyed after the requisite period of time. Only myself and my research supervisor will have access to these transcripts/tapes.

The printed transcript of your interview will then be sent to you for confirmation of accuracy, before any content is used in the research itself. The audio tape of your interview will be destroyed upon receipt of the revised transcript.

It is envisaged that the results of this study will be disseminated in reports, and possibly in educational peer-reviewed journals. Naturally, such results will not include any information, which could lead to identification of individual participants and/or institutions.

Please note that participation in this research is **entirely voluntary**, and that you are able to withdraw at **any** stage of the research process (including the interview itself). Please also note that any recordings and/or transcripts of your interview will then of course be immediately destroyed.

This research has been sanctioned by Edith Cowan University, and all necessary ethics clearances will be obtained before interviews begin.

Important point of note: Because part of the interview involves subjects verbalising/describing forms of alienation that they may (or may not) be experiencing as a result of their work, there exists a small possibility that some interviewees may experience some psychological discomfort or distress. Should this be the case, subjects are reminded that they can terminate the interview at any point. The researcher/interviewer is also very mindful of this possibility, and will remain vigilant for the above signs. Should the researcher feel that the interview process is causing undue distress, the interview can also be terminated by this person. Further support will be offered, and contact details of ECU counselling service will be offered.

I have included a consent form, which I would ask you to sign and return in the prepaid envelope, if you wish to participate in this project. Please also include relevant contact details, along with times most suitable for you to be contacted.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me on [redacted] or (mobile) [redacted] or (e-mail) [redacted] or alternatively, my research supervisor: Dr Graeme Lock, on 9370 6529 / g.lock@ecu.edu.au.

Independent Contact Person:

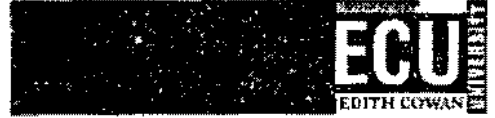
Should you have any concerns or complaints about this research and wish to talk to an independent contact person you may contact the following:

Research/Human Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup WA 6027
6304 2170
research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Yours sincerely

Ralph G Lunay

Appendix 2(b): Research consent form.



Edith Cowan University
Mt Lawley Campus
2 Bradford Street
Mt Lawley 6050
Telephone: (08) 9370 6529
FAX: (08) 9370 6044

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM TO BE COMPLETED BY RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM

Project Title: *A study of feelings of alienation among relief teachers servicing Western Australian government metropolitan primary schools.*

I _____ (name) acknowledge that I have read and understood the information letter and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand:

- ◆ That should I have any additional questions I can contact the persons listed below (and on the information letter)
- ◆ That participation in the research will involve a face-to face interview lasting for around 1 hour
- ◆ That this interview will be (audio) recorded with my consent
- ◆ That the information provided by me will be kept strictly confidential, and that my identity will not be disclosed without my express written permission
- ◆ That the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and may appear in report or journal article formats
- ◆ That I may withdraw from the research/interview at any time.

I hereby give my consent to participate in this research project, realising I may withdraw my participation at any time without penalty or explanation.

I understand that, subject to agreement, I will be interviewed and notes from the interview will be taken. Interviews will also be tape-recorded with my permission. I understand that any recorded interview will be erased once the interview is transcribed.

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published and presented in both report and journal article formats.

I understand that the project has the approval of the Edith Cowan University Ethics Committee.

Important point of note: Because part of the interview involves subjects verbalising/describing forms of alienation that they may (or may not) be experiencing as a result of their work, there exists a small possibility that some interviewees may experience some psychological discomfort or distress. Should this be the case, subjects are reminded that they can terminate the interview at any point. The researcher/interviewer is also very mindful of this possibility, and will remain vigilant for the above signs. Should the researcher feel that the interview process is causing undue distress, the interview can also be terminated by this person. Further support will be offered, and contact details of ECU counselling service will be offered.

Please circle your response below for the activities in which you agree to participate.

I agree to my interview being recorded: YES NO

I agree to participate in the interview for the purpose of research: YES NO

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED] (Mobile: [REDACTED] or Dr Graeme Lock (Tel: 9370 6529) who will act as an independent authority if you have any questions regarding these forms or the research project. Thank you for your support.

Independent Contact Person:

Should you have any concerns or complaints about this research and wish to talk to an independent contact person you may contact the following:

Research/Human Research Ethics Officer
Edith Cowan University
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup WA 6027
6304 2170
research.ethics@ecu.edu.au

Regards

Ralph G Lunay
Edith Cowan University,
School of Education
2 Bradford Street, Mt Lawley, WA 6050