

# Effective Supply Teaching

Behaviour Management, Classroom  
Discipline and Colleague Support

Bill Rogers



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*Bill Rogers  
August 2002*



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The English novelist George Eliot said ‘What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?’ At the heart of colleague support is that shared humanity, without which any meaningful common activity is much more difficult. The days are long gone when teachers had to work in professional isolation, anxious perhaps that others might negatively assess and rate them. Collaboration and collegiality are not simplistic notions or some easy formula for ‘successful support’; rather they are the necessary condition for likely, constructive and purposeful support in our profession. When colleagues believe and feel they are valued, both their basic human needs as well as their professional needs are more likely to be met. I hope this book will support that aim.

# Introduction: the natural challenges of supply teaching

*O, how full of briers is this working-day world!*

(Shakespeare, ‘As You Like It’ I: iii)

*You’re not our normal teacher!*

(Every tenth student to a supply teacher)

I began teaching many years ago as an ET (an emergency teacher as we were then called in the 1970s). The current term in Victoria (Australia) is CRT – casual relief teacher, equivalent to a ‘supply teacher’. The term ‘supply’ conjures up for me a teacher bringing relief supplies to ‘the beleaguered garrison . . .’.

My first day as an ET is well remembered. I drove into the car park of the school, a rather shabby looking primary school with many students already at play, by 8.15 a.m. As I headed for the office several ‘lads’ came over and noisily started hassling me, ‘Ay; you gonna be our teacher?!’ ‘What’s your name?’ ‘Why you here?’ ‘You gonna take Ms Snaggs’s class . . .?’ (‘I hope not,’ I thought.)

As I walked to the front office I saw a mother yelling at another adult – who I assumed was a teacher – ‘Yeah well you never cared for our Jayson did yuh! You never gave him a break! This is a sh-t school . . .!’ I walked past hoping her Jayson wasn’t in my class that day. The principal (head teacher) looked really frazzled already; he was glad to see me. ‘Are you the ET? Sorry. What’s your name?’ We chatted all too briefly. ‘Yes.’ ‘You’ve got 6F. All the best. Room 17. See Richard or Judy, OK – staff room.’ He had that short-sentence way of speaking, like morse code. He hurried off

in the direction of Jayson's mum who could still be heard even inside the building 'Sorry. Got to go.' 6F were noisy, brash, challenging, fractious and attentional – and that was in the corridor 'lining' up! It seemed to takes ages for them to settle down, but we eventually got going and actually got some work done. There were students who were brought some unusual and provocative toys to class that day; students who were skilled at task-avoiding, who called out repeatedly; students who seemed to think that classroom conversations could be conducted at playground noise level. Several students came late to class that morning, had forgotten or mislaid pens and personal equipment (I quickly wondered how much of that was intentional). Calling out, butting in and talking while I was trying to gain whole-class attention was a repeated challenge throughout the day but mostly in the first 15–20 minutes. One student jumped out of the window and 'did a runner', just before morning recess (ground floor thankfully!).

I asked myself many questions that day; some quickly, some at the day's end:

- What sort of discipline language should I use? What is a better way of making my leadership firm, clear, without looking 'bossy', 'mean' or 'weak'?
- Should I confiscate toys – how?
- What do I do/say when students are late? Do I notify the office?
- The boy who 'did a runner' – how could I deal with that kind of incident more effectively next time?

I was a mature-age 'beginning' teacher and that helped a little (at least I didn't *look* like a neophyte).

I had many students ask me, as a matter of course, when I was going to become a 'real teacher'. They had in their minds a comparative conception between 'regular' and 'occasional' teacher; as 'real' is to 'non-real'. I taught in many, many schools like this one over the early years as a supply teacher before I became a 'real' teacher. What I learned as a supply teacher became my proving ground as a so-called 'full-time' teacher.

Many of the skills, and approaches, I eventually learned I have outlined in this book. Experience can be a helpful teacher but *experience* of itself does not tell you what to do in the sorts of situations typically faced by