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Are They Ready? Final Year Pre-service Teachers' Learning about Managing Student Behaviour

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Abstract: This paper presents findings from a study addressing final year pre-service teachers' perceptions of their confidence and competence in managing student behaviour. Data were collected by means of a written survey administered shortly after the end of their last professional experience. Themes derived from analysing survey responses are examined in relation to seven principles identified by the MCEETYA funded Student Behaviour Management Project as best practice in Australia (De Jong, 2005). The findings reveal that although the majority of participating pre-service teachers felt confident and competent to manage student behaviour, their reporting of strategies indicated a narrow 'behaviourist' conception of management that may limit their chances of successfully responding to more complex challenges as beginning teachers – challenges such as responding to the diversity of student backgrounds and behaviours, engaging all learners and working with a range of stake-holders.

Introduction

Issues around managing student behaviour have been found to be a 'dominant preoccupation' for pre-service teachers from first through to fourth year (McNally, I'anson, Whewall and Wilson, 2005, p. 170). McNally et al. (2005) described the experience of many pre-service teachers in their first professional experience as a 'mini crisis, induced mainly by pupil

behaviour' (p. 170) and reported that a high number of incidents were seen as 'extreme' from the pre-service teacher's perspective (p. 179). These findings were echoed in Bromfield's (2006) study of first year secondary pre-service teachers that showed they placed greatest importance on being 'in control' of a class (p. 191). More recently, Kaufman & Moss (2010) studied 42 final year pre-service teachers in the US and found they cited fears about classroom management at least twice as often as any other response. They found that 'they framed management in terms of both behaviour control and discipline, worrying about keeping behavior problems to a minimum so that teaching could occur without disruption' (p. 127).

Concerns continue into the first years of teaching with many beginning teachers citing classroom management, and in particular behaviour management, as one of the greatest challenges (see for example Flores & Day, 2006; McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006; Kiggins, 2007; Putman, 2009). According to Flores and Day (2006), many beginning teachers experience 'reality shock' once they have total responsibility for a class. When faced with highly disruptive students, they are at a loss to know how to respond in ways that acknowledge the complexity of students' varied backgrounds and needs (Kiggins, 2007). In a study of 18 beginning teachers at the end of their first year, Huntly (2008) found that participants' feelings about 'being in control' of students' behaviour affected their feelings of success or failure when determining professional competence (p. 135). Zuckerman (2007) concluded 'the ability to prevent and manage discipline problems is what principals (Veenman, 1984), inservice supervisors (Zuckerman, 1997), and the public (Gallup, 1983) focus on when assessing the effectiveness of any teacher' (p. 4). Beginning teachers and other stakeholders, such as school leaders and system representatives, often attribute early career difficulties with classroom management to inadequate attention to this topic in teacher education programs (Australian Education Union, 2008; TTA NQT Survey, 2005, cited in Bromfield, 2006; Aultman, Williams-Johnson & Schutz, 2009). Beginning teachers report feeling unprepared 'to deal with the complex and demanding nature of their daily jobs in schools and classrooms' (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 224).

McNally et al. (2005) and McCormack (2007) noted the absence of studies in regard to pre-service teachers' learning about behaviour management, although research has pointed to the important role of professional experience in pre-service teachers' learning about all aspects of teaching (see for example Dobbins, 1994; House of Representatives Standing Committee and Vocational Training, 2007;Author, 2009; Putman, 2009). Schmidt, (2006) conducted one of the few studies of pre-service teachers' learning about behaviour management and found that they

appeared to forget classroom management strategies learnt in their on-campus program. They only acknowledged having learnt skills through their time in schools, even though the same skills had been taught explicitly to them prior to their school placements.

There is an onus on teacher education programs to address the perceived lack of attention to this important area. Some teacher educators would argue that attention to classroom management theory and practice has always permeated much of what occurs in teacher education programs, but others have sought to redress the perceived gap by including additional courses that have a specific focus on organisation and behaviour management (Putman, 2009). It is clear that more needs to be known about what pre-service teachers learn about behaviour management during the on-campus and in-school components of their programs. This study sought to address identified gaps in the field by examining final year pre-service teachers' perceptions of their learning about behaviour management after their last professional experience. In particular it sought to find out about their levels of confidence before and after their final professional experience and the extent to which their reported practices were in line with current thinking about effective behaviour management expressed. A deliberate decision was taken to focus on 'behaviour management' rather than the broader area of 'classroom management' because, as reported earlier, research consistently shows that it is issues to do with student behaviour that cause pre-service and beginning teachers the most stress. Asking specifically about behaviour management also provided the opportunity to see to what extent participants in the study made their own connections between managing student behaviour and managing other aspects of teaching.

Background

I coordinate the professional experience courses in the final year of the Junior Primary /Primary program (for teaching children from 5-13 years of age) at the University of South Australia. The professional experience course for the final year students comprises an on-campus program of nine workshops with a 27-day professional experience program (introductory days followed by a five-week block). Students are required to undertake a classroom placement that is at a different level of schooling to the one they had in the previous year i.e. if they taught in a class in the Reception –Year 2 range (roughly 5-7 year olds) in the previous year, they needed to

work with a class in the Years 3-7 range (8-13 year olds) in the final year and vice versa. Some students also opt to combine a half time specialisation in one subject area (e.g. Music) with a mainstream classroom placement. They must take full responsibility for teaching for most of the time. Consequently, although they are near the end of their program, this placement represents a considerable challenge in terms of facing unfamiliar year levels, teaching roles and school contexts.

The students do not undertake a specific core course in 'classroom management' as it is intended that management issues are addressed through many courses in the program. Each year as a workshop lecturer for three final year professional experience classes (approximately 80 students), I have read her students' reflective accounts of their classroom experience and the final reports written by their mentor teachers (the teachers who host the students in their classes and supervise them during their professional experience placements). The vast majority of these reflective accounts and reports indicate that the pre-service teachers display high levels of confidence and skill in their final professional experience placements. Hence, I have been intrigued and concerned by the research findings and stakeholder feedback about beginning teachers' lack of confidence and poor practice in behaviour management (see for example Flores & Day, 2006; McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006; Kiggins, 2007; Putman, 2009). The impetus for the study reported in this paper grew out of this concern.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to investigate final year pre-service teachers' perceptions of their learning about managing student behaviour by the end of their final professional experience. Potential participants were 166 final year pre-service teachers enrolled in the undergraduate (4 year) and graduate entry (2 year) Bachelor of Education (Junior Primary/Primary). All had completed successfully their final 27 day professional experience. Data were collected via an anonymous questionnaire distributed at the on-campus debriefing session held shortly after the end of the final professional experience. To provide a 'best practice' frame of reference when designing the survey, I decided to draw on seven core behaviour management principles that were recommended by the MCEETYA (The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) funded Student Behaviour

Management Project as best practice in Australia (De Jong, 2005). The seven recommended principles can be summarised as

1. the creation of a safe, supportive and caring environment;
2. inclusiveness which caters for the different potentials, needs and resources of all students;
3. a student-centred philosophy;
4. a quality learning experience;
5. positive classroom relationships;
6. school-based and external support structures; and
7. an eco-systemic approach to discipline that considers the complex interplay between 'environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors' (De Jong, 2005, pp. 357-359).

The questionnaire did not ask participants for their name, gender or age as it was not intended to provide insights about the impact of these variables on the pre-service teachers' perceptions of confidence and strategies used, but rather to provide an indication of patterns or trends across all the respondents in relation to these issues. It comprised fourteen 'Likert-type scale' statements (Bernard, 2000, p. 295) against which the pre-service teachers were asked to indicate their degree of agreement using a 4 point scale of 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'(see Table 1). The items included general statements about overall confidence in responding to appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (Items 1, 2, 10, 11,12, 13 and 14) and seven items matching the MCYEETYA principles detailed above (Items 3-9). There were also the following open-ended questions:

1. What strategies do you use to promote responsible student behaviour?
2. What strategies do you use to respond to inappropriate student behaviour?
3. What aspects of classroom management do you feel you need to learn more about?

Neumann (1997) argued that when mixed method approaches to research are used, quantitative data can supplement or complement qualitative data, providing a form of triangulation. This research was a mixed method study in that it used strategies that collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data were intended to provide a 'holistic picture, formed with words' (Creswell, 1994, p.2) and comprised responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The quantitative element comprised the frequencies calculated for

the responses to the Likert scale questions and for key themes emerging from their written responses.

The questionnaire was distributed to all pre-service teachers who attended on the debriefing day (166) and 92 surveys were returned (55%). The frequencies for the responses to the Likert scale questions in the questionnaire were calculated as percentages and can be seen in Table 1. The percentages shown have been rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

N=92	S.A	A.	D.	S.D.
1. Before the final placement I was worried about managing student behaviour.	11%	53%	27%	9%
2. I learnt a great deal about positive classroom management from my final placement.	52%	40%	7%	1%
3. I feel confident that I can establish a safe, supportive and caring environment for my students.	55%	45%	0%	0%
4. I feel confident that I can cater for the different potential, needs and resources of all students.	27%	60%	13%	0%
5. I feel confident that I can implement a student-centred philosophy.	32%	63%	5%	0%
6. I feel confident that I can plan and implement quality learning experiences.	46%	51%	3%	0%
7. I feel confident that I can promote positive classroom relationships.	65%	35%	0%	0%
8. I am aware of and can utilise school-based and external support structures for effective classroom management.	24%	69%	7%	0%
9. My approach to behaviour management considers the complex interplay between environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors.	24%	70%	6%	0%
10. I feel confident that I can respond effectively to appropriate and inappropriate student behaviour.	38%	55%	7%	0%
11. I have the knowledge and skills to implement effective management strategies.	34%	60%	6%	0%
12. I feel worried that I will not be able to manage highly disruptive student behaviour.	9%	29%	51%	11%
13. There is still a great deal I need to learn about encouraging and developing appropriate student behaviour	18%	55%	25%	2%
14. There is still a great deal I need to learn about responding to inappropriate behaviour.	23%	46%	29%	2%

Table 1: Frequencies for Pre-service Teachers' Responses to Survey Items 1-14

Using Bernard's (2000) 'mechanics of grounded theory', written responses were coded and categorised. As categories were developed they were reviewed to identify similarities, differences and other patterns that linked them (p. 443). The numbers of instances of each theme were counted to provide frequencies of responses. In using frequencies to show the relative strength of themes identified from the open-ended questions I aligned myself with Bryman's (1992) view that:

> …the use of quantification of such data is not meant to provide the means for examining the kinds of issue that are normally of concern among quantitative researchers, such as precise calculations of relationships between variables, teasing out causal paths, providing estimates of central tendency and dispersion, inferring from sample to population and so on. Instead, quantification acts as a means of summarizing qualitative material as an alternative to a more indeterminate presentation of the data. (p. 73)

The themes identified through this process can be seen in Table 2. In reporting key themes, any category containing three or more responses was counted as a reportable pattern (as per Kaufman & Moss, 2010). A judgment was then made about which of the seven MCEETYA best practice principles (described above) best incorporated each theme and that is also indicated in Table 1.

In presenting the findings in the following section illustrative quotes from the responses to the open-ended questions are also used and to show that they are from different pre-service teachers they are numbered (e.g. PT23 indicates 23rd Pre-service Teacher).

Pre-service Teachers' Learning about Behaviour Management

It can be seen from the responses to the first item in Table 1 that managing student behaviour was a dominant concern for many pre-service teachers before they commenced their final professional experience in schools, with 11% strongly agreeing and 53% agreeing that they were worried about this aspect. It is also interesting to note that roughly a third (D.=27%; S.D.=9%) were not worried about the prospect of having to manage student behaviour. It appears from the second item in Table 1 that the final professional experience placement was considered

to be a powerful learning experience with 92% (S.A.= 52%; A.= 40%) agreeing that they had learnt a great deal about positive classroom management. The impact of the learning experience is also clear in the responses to items 10 and 11 in which 93% (S.A.=38%; A.=55%) agreed that they now felt confident in responding to appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and 94% (S.A.=34%; A.=60%) agreed that they had the skills and knowledge to do so. However, it can be see in item 12 that just over a third of respondents (S.A.=9%; A.=29%) felt worried that they would not be able to manage highly disruptive behaviour. Despite their high levels of confidence, responses to items 13 and 14 indicate that the majority agreed that there is still a great deal they need to learn about encouraging and developing appropriate student behaviour (S.A.=18%; A.=55%) and responding to inappropriate behaviour (S.A.=23%; A.=46%). Comments such as this one indicate that some recognised the limitations of how much could be learnt as a pre-service teacher: 'All! Much of what I feel I need to learn will be learnt once I get out into a school' (PT1).

As items 3-9 of the questionnaire (see Table 1) were designed to closely align with the seven MCEETYA behaviour management principles that were recommended as best practice in Australia, they are discussed in more detail below and in conjunction with the main themes from written responses shown in Table 2.

Principle 1: Creating a Safe, Supportive and Caring Environment

Item 3 in Table 1 (about feeling confident to establish a safe, supportive and caring environment) is one of only two items for which 100% of the pre-service teachers (S.A.=55%; A.=45%) indicated some level of agreement. It can be seen in Table 2 that many were able to refer to specific ways to implement this principle. These included supporting students' endeavours by providing encouragement and positive acknowledgement (65%) illustrated by strategies such as 'Be specific about what behaviour they are displaying' (PT70); issuing rewards (56%); negotiating expectations and rules through means such as; 'Go through behaviour with kids – create together' (PT 5); and modelling appropriate behaviour (13%), with examples such as; 'Explicitly teach appropriate behaviours i.e. moving between classrooms, quietly lining up, not calling out, sitting still' (PT49).

It was clear that participants also had used a range of strategies to respond to behaviour that threatened the safe and supportive nature of the environment.

Strategies pre-service teachers used	MCEETYA Principle	Frequencies
Providing encouragement and positive feedback	1,5	65%
Issuing rewards	1	56%
Giving reminders or warnings	1, 3	41%
Giving students responsibility	1, 3	36%
Negotiating expectations and rules	1, 3	35%
Discussing behaviour with student/s	1, 3	34%
Applying consequences	1	30%
Sending to time out	1	20%
Correcting verbally	1	20%
Teacher modelling appropriate behaviour	1	13%
Ignoring minor disruptions	1	12%
Using wider school policies and practices	6	11%
Building positive relationships	5	10%
Sending to buddy class	6	9%
Displaying behaviour charts	1	9%
Relocating student	1	8%
Being calm and assertive	1	7%
Being fair and consistent	1	7%
Correcting non verbally	1	5%
Re-focussing student on learning	4	4%
Implementing an engaging learning program	2, 4	4%
Gaining attention	1	4%
Communicating with parents	6	3%

Table 2: Frequencies for Themes Emerging from Pre-service Teachers' Written Survey Responses

Strategies represented in Table 2 included: applying consequences for inappropriate behaviour (50%) such as 'Consistent follow through e. g. move child from friend if continue talking' (PT11); giving reminders or warnings (41%); discussing the behaviour with the students (34%), with examples provided such as 'letting students calmly talk about what happened, how they feel, why the behaviours' inappropriate' (PT80); correcting verbally (20%), through means such as: 'Try to be explicit about impact behaviour has on student, class and teacher' (PT12);

and ignoring minor disruptions (12%). A surprising gap in responses was the absence of references to the importance of the physical environment in the development of a safe and supportive environment.

In responding to the open ended question about what they still needed to learn, 29% indicated that they needed to learn more about responding to ongoing, serious student misbehaviour. For instance, one wrote that she wanted to learn 'How to deal with really challenging children as there weren't really any on prac.' (PT 20), while another wrote, 'I expect most students (pre-service teachers) would struggle with behaviour management if they were in a challenging school' (PT2). Such comments indicate that pre-service teachers such as these realised that proficiency in their professional experience did not guarantee that they would manage as well when faced with more challenging placements and/or lower levels of support as beginning teachers.

Principle 2: Catering for the Different Potentials, Needs and Resources of All Students

Responses to item 4 in Table 1 indicate that 87% (S.A.=27%; A.=60%) of the pre-service teachers agreed that they felt confident in catering for the different potential, needs and resources of all students. However, the 27% who strongly agreed was roughly half those for the previous item about the classroom environment, indicating the respondents were more reserved about their capacities in this regard. Those who disagreed with this statement (13%) were the most for any of the seven principles. In the first section of Table 2 it can be seen that there was little evidence of pre-service teachers using strategies to engage all learners with only 4% providing examples such as; 'Know the children's background – build a safe and respectful class environment and inclusive classroom' (PT39). It can also be seen in the final section of the table that 15% identified the area of 'catering for diversity' as one about which they felt they needed to learn more.

Principle 3: A Student-centred Philosophy

As for the previous principle, there was a high level of agreement (95%) with item 5 in Table 1 (about confidence in implementing a student-centred philosophy) but only a third of the respondents (32%) strongly agreed with the statement. In their responses to the questions about strategies there was considerable evidence of pre-service teachers giving students responsibility (36%), with examples provided such as; 'The students are responsible for their own behaviours, and know that their behaviours effect their fellow peers', (PT75) and 'giving student roles/responsibilities to show leadership' (PT14).

Principle 4: A Quality Learning Experience

The responses to item 6 in Table 1 show that once again the vast majority of respondents agreed that they were confident in planning and implementing quality learning experiences with nearly half (46%) strongly agreeing with the statement and 51% agreeing. This principle is closely aligned with item 4 about catering for different students' potential, needs and resources and as discussed earlier, Table 2 shows that only 4% of the pre-service teachers included strategies around implementing an engaging learning program. Similarly, it can be seen in Table 2 that there were only 4% who mentioned management strategies related to re-focussing students on learning such as reminding students of goals (PT47), helping students make choices that promote learning (PT40), having early finishers support students having difficulty (PT18) and planning and implementing 'interactive/fun lessons' (PT4).

Principle 5: Positive Classroom Relationships

As was the case for Principle 1, item 7 attracted 100% agreement that respondents felt confident in promoting positive classroom relationships, with nearly two thirds (65%) strongly agreeing with the statement. Surprisingly there were only a few (10%) specific mentions of the need to develop positive relationships in the responses to the open-ended questions about strategies. Comments focused on developing positive classroom relationships through building 'respect for each other' (PT27), shared 'pride in the room' (PT75) and 'ownership of the class

(through class meetings etc) and responsibility for their own actions' (PT10). In addition, as mentioned in the discussion of Principle 1, 65% focussed on encouragement and positive acknowledgment which presumably contributed to positive teacher/student relationships. However, the following comment indicates an awareness that developing relationships may be much more difficult in some beginning teacher situations such as temporary relief teaching (TRT); 'Managing a class I've never met and running lessons that are meaningful – as a TRT would do – as opposed to being in a class where the teacher continues to run things while I develop relationships prior to taking over' (PT66).

Principle 6: School-based and External Support Structures

Although overall agreement with item 8 in Table 1 was high (93%), only 24% of the respondents strongly agreed that they were aware of and could utilise school-based and external support structures for effective classroom management. It can be seen in Table 2 that only 11% reported using wider school policies and practices such as a school-wide approach to behaviour management or the support of school leaders, while 9% had made use of sending uncooperative students to a 'buddy class'. One student indicated that he/she would have liked to be 'given a short introduction by the school on their approach to behaviour management' (PT37) and another wrote, 'I use whatever strategies the particular school has in place' (PT51) indicating their awareness that classroom management is influenced by each school's interpretation of policies. Only 3% identified strategies that showed an awareness that communication with parents is an integral part of classroom management.

Principle 7: Considering the Complex Interplay Between Environmental, Interpersonal and Intra-personal factors

Overall agreement for item 7 was high (S.A.= 24%, A.=70%) for having an approach to behaviour management that considers the complex interplay between environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors, but once gain the level of strong agreement was relatively low at 24% when compared with the levels of strong agreement indicated on the Likert scales for some of the other principles (see responses to Items 3, 6 and 7 in Table 1). Nor did the

very specific nature of the strategies the pre-service teachers reported demonstrate a high level of awareness of behaviour management being part of a much more complex and inter-related set of circumstances.

Discussion

This study of 92 final year pre-service teachers confirmed that prior to the commencement of their last professional experience the majority were worried about managing student behaviour. This finding accords with those of other researchers such as McNally et al. (2005), Bromfield (2006) and Cakmak (2008). However, immediately following the successful conclusion of their final professional experience the vast majority of pre-service teachers reported that they had learnt a great deal about positive behaviour management and felt a high degree of confidence in their own abilities to positively manage a classroom and respond effectively to appropriate and inappropriate student behaviour. In their responses to open ended questions in the questionnaire, all pre-service teachers were able to identify a range of strategies they had used to encourage responsible behaviour and to respond to inappropriate behaviour. They also reported high degrees of confidence and competence in relation to seven core principles identified by the MCEETYA Student Behaviour Management Project as best practice in Australia (De Jong, 2005).

At first glance, these findings seem to be at odds with those of the researchers and stake-holders who have found that many beginning teachers struggle with classroom management, have low levels of confidence and feel ill prepared for this aspect of teaching (see for example Kiggins, 2007; Chambers & Hardy, 2005; McNally et al., 2005; Kaufman & Moss, 2010). The findings suggest that either the participants in this study are exceptional, or there is a dramatic difference between the perceptions of pre-service teachers at the end of their university program, and beginning teachers who have experienced the realities of their own classrooms. A closer consideration of pre-service teachers' responses to the open ended questions shown in Table 2 provides some insights that may illuminate this quandary. It can be seen that they knew about and reported using a wide range of strategies to encourage appropriate behaviour and respond to inappropriate behaviour. In particular, many were able to cite a range of strategies related to the first MCEETYA principle about creating a 'safe, supportive and encouraging environment. Over

a third also cited strategies that aligned with Principle 3 about demonstrating a student centred philosophy. These findings suggest that through both their on-campus course work and professional experiences they had learnt about and felt confident using some practices that are in line with current thinking about good practice in Australia.

What is interesting to note, however, is the extent to which the strategies identified by most pre-service teachers did not accord with the other five MCEETYA principles. Although they rated highly their confidence in being able to include all students, develop positive classroom relationships, provide a quality learning experience and draw on school-based and external structures, they provided very few examples from their practice that relate to these important aspects of behaviour management. Nor was there evidence that they understood and used holistic approaches as suggested in Principle 7: an eco-systemic approach to discipline that considers the complex interplay between 'environmental, interpersonal and intra-personal factors' (De Jong, 2005, p. 357). For instance, participants reported little or no use of strategies such as identifying and building on students' interests, researching and using student-based methodologies, accessing information from parents and care-givers or responding differently to different students based on knowledge of their needs. Because participants could only give limited responses on the survey form, and so had to be selective, it is likely that they knew about and used more practices than were evident. Clearly it would have been useful, had time allowed, to have asked participants to elaborate their responses in focus group interviews. But it is also seems reasonable to suggest those strategies that attracted the highest frequencies in Table 2 were at the forefront of their thinking about what constitutes effective behaviour management when having to be selective in making written responses on the survey. This finding is congruent with those of Kaufman & Moss' (2010) who found little evidence that final year pre-service teachers made connections between managing student behaviour, fostering student independence and pre-emptive classroom organisation. They concluded 'that although a significant number of respondents identified behavior management as a concern, they may not have yet made a clear connection between their concerns and how to address them through professional strategies and proactive work' (p.128).

According to Bromfield (2006), strategies such as those identified most by the participants in this study are more in line with a 'traditional behaviourist approach' to classroom management, rather than an approach which 'highlights the relationship between behaviour and learning' (p.188). Putman (2009), in her study of elementary pre-service teachers in the US, also

found 'teacher centered, interventionist strategies, including implementing rewards/consequences, or redirecting beahavior, in 68% of responses' (p. 242). One possible explanation for the high levels of confidence displayed by the final year pre-service teachers in this study is that they have developed similarly restrictive approaches to behaviour management. That these approaches appear to have been successful in the short term is perhaps because they were in classrooms where much of the learning culture, organisation and teaching program had already been established by more experienced teachers who acted as coaches and mentors, and where the mentor teacher's presence may have acted as a deterrent in terms of students acting inappropriately. It was certainly evident in Putman's (2009) study that mentors teachers retain a high level of influence in classrooms. This study found that the majority of pre-service teachers had limited input into the overall classroom management plan used and none were able to fully implement their own ideas.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that when thinking about approaches to behaviour management the pre-service teachers did not appear to prioritise practices informed by:

- a recognition of the diversity of students' backgrounds and behaviours;
- a focus on the development of an inclusive and engaging learning program; and
- relationships with a range of stake-holders.

In regard to the final point this may have been because they had limited opportunities to work with a range of stake-holders due to the limited duration of the professional experience. Whatever the reasons for these omissions in their reporting of their practices, it is likely that attempts to successfully manage their own classes as beginning teachers would be severely impeded if similarly narrowly approaches were adopted. This provides one possible explanation for why many beginning teachers appear to struggle with managing student behaviour even though they have successfully done so in their pre-service professional experience. What follows is a brief discussion of the implications for teacher educators and employers if pre-service teachers are to be better supported to implement more holistic approaches to behaviour management informed by these aspects.

Recognising the Diversity of Students' Backgrounds and Behaviours

Huntly (2008, p. 136) suggested that teachers need to develop an 'intuitive sense of what level of control is required' but that this can only occur when they have a thorough knowledge of students and their learning environment. Fields (2008) identified the following factors that need

to be taken into account when responding to student behaviour: 'the student's age, gender, cultural background, disability, socio-economic situation, family care arrangements and the students' emotional and mental health' (p.13). Baker (2005), referring to the context in the US, argued that this is even more crucial in current times:

> Today's educators are asked to meet the diverse needs of all students,
> including those with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD). The
> movement towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the
> general education classroom combined with recent mandates requiring all
> learners to meet or exceed established curricular guide-lines, makes it
> increasingly challenging fo educators to meet their moral and ethical
> responsibilities. (p. 51)

The same is true for Australian educators who face classes of growing complexity and an increased incidence of extreme behaviour (Fields, 2008).

Clearly, it is imperative for pre-service teachers and beginning teachers to know about the individuals in their care in order to be able to respond effectively to their different social, emotional, academic and behavioural needs. Pre-service teachers have the disadvantage that they have very limited contact with students and largely rely on mentor teachers for information about them, making it even harder for them to differentiate and use professional judgment when responding to students. Nor can they rely on having access to insights about the ways their mentor teachers use such judgement. They can see what their mentor teachers do but often do not have the time to discuss with them the reasons behind their choices of actions. Past research has found that mentor teachers often do not articulate their philosophies and rationale when working with pre-service teachers – rather they react intuitively and effectively without thinking to explaining their decisions (Wasley, 2002). Lourdusamy and Khine (2001) suggested that this may be even more the case when it comes to reflecting on management issues:

> Though often times teachers engage in a systematic reflection on a lesson
> delivered, self-evaluation of interpersonal behaviour and/or their
> interactions with students as part of the classroom management strategy
> is rarely done. (p. 2)

It seems that pre-service teachers need many structured opportunities to talk to mentor teachers about why they make the decisions they do. In communicating with school mentors, teacher educators need to highlight the importance of building in times for debriefing with pre-

service teachers each day, while pre-service teachers need to be supported to develop the kinds of questions that will elicit mentor teachers' reasoning. In addition, pre-service teachers need to develop the skills and attitudes that enable them to critically reflect on others' and their own practice. Courses should include opportunities for using these skills by grappling with dilemmas and problems based on students' individual needs and diverse teaching contexts. McCormack (1996) suggested a range of other opportunities that are likely to develop pre-service teachers' abilities to respond appropriately to students' needs:

> Exposure to the reality of teaching can be achieved through observation, peer teaching, video lesson reviews, team teaching, mentoring, practicum and extended internship placements in relevant classroom settings. This process must involve personal evaluation to allow pre-service teachers the time to reflect and discuss their experiences and plan for the future.
> (p.10)

It is also clear that in both their on campus and in school programs, pre-service teachers need to explicitly engage with theories and practices for the management of students who display serious forms of misbehaviour. This might involve exploring with lecturers, school mentors and students the variety of reasons for such behaviour, the range of strategies that are available and are deemed to be effective and the sources of support both within and outside of the school. However, once again it is important that the focus is on developing an understanding of the 'eco systemic perspective' mentioned earlier rather than on 'ready made responses' (McNally et al, 2005, P. 174). In addition, it would be helpful if pre-service teachers' periods of contact with their professional experience classes are extended over as long a period as possible through official weekly introductory visits and as many voluntary visits as mentor teachers are able to sustain.

According to McNally et al. (2005), no matter how effectively pre-service teachers are prepared, they still face huge challenges as beginning teachers because they 'do not have the experience or developed instinct for reading the situation'. They suggested they 'need an early period in which there is a tolerance of judgment calls and mistakes, in relation to behaviour management at least' (p. 177). This suggests that it may be worth employers considering changes to policy where all beginning teachers work in tandem with experienced teachers in the first year, and that they are prioritised for the least challenging classes in any school, rather than being given the most challenging as was found to be the case in a recent study of 59 early career

teachers in Australia (Johnson et al, 2012). Furthermore, Baker (2005) suggests on-going support for all teachers might include differentiated professional development based on needs, access to modelling from expert practitioners, help devising intervention plans, opportunities for collaboration and dialogue and the development of school leaders to better support teachers.

The Development of an Inclusive and Engaging Learning Program

De Jong (2005, p. 360) identified 'a relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum' as they key to best practice in behaviour management. Inherent in planning such a program is being able to cater for the diverse learning needs of students, including those of students identified as having special needs. It was not evident in the reporting of behaviour management strategies that most pre-service teachers made links to their planning, pedagogy or students' learning. This finding accords with that of Bromfield's (2006) who studied 3rd year pre-service teachers in England:

> The trainees appeared to be willing to intellectually engage with
> theoretical models when reflecting on issues and concerns regarding
> students with learning difficulties but there was little evidence that they
> were employing theory to make decisions about the use of behaviour
> management strategies and their subsequent evaluation (Clandinin and
> Connelly, 1995) (p.191).

Similarly, Kaufman & Moss (2010, p. 128), when asking final year pre-service teachers about their future teaching plans, found that they omitted any reference to notions of 'progressive, constructivist, or learner-centered approaches' and were focussed strongly on how they might control student behaviour. Fields (2006) found that many experienced teachers don't make connections between pedagogy and behaviour, while Mader (2009) attributed the lack of connection partly to their over-emphasis on behaviourist techniques, such as using rewards or external incentives, which can undermine students' valuing of the learning process. The participants in this study used such techniques widely.

We know from studies of first year pre-service teachers that many of them enter teacher education with a simplistic view of teaching and grossly underestimate the complexity of the role (Fajet et al., 2005; Peters, 2009). Fajet et a.l (2005) found that 'they assign greater importance to

their personal characteristics and less importance to pedagogical training' and that their beliefs tend to remain fixed over time (p. 724). They recommended that teacher educators need to begin any work with pre-service teachers by finding out about their existing belief structures and explicitly address these through differentiated teaching. Putman (2009) is one of many theorists who point to the importance of research-based practice, reflection and dialogue as one means of challenging pre-service teachers' existing assumptions and beliefs.

Fieman-Nemser (2001) and Kaufman and Moss (2010) argued that pre-service teachers' difficulties with understanding and implementing pedagogy that is informed by theory are partly attributable to the disconnected nature of many teacher education programs, where courses are taught independently from professional experience and each other. Kaufman & Moss (2010) expressed concern that teaching about behaviour management in a specific course may mean that it is neglected in other areas of programs, 'potentially isolating it from discussions of learning' (p.133). Powell and Tod's (2004, p.18) suggested that 'learning and behaviour should be linked via the term "learning behaviour" in order to reduce perceptions that "promoting learning" and "managing behaviour" are separate issues' (cited in McNally et al., 2005, p. 183). Fieman-Nemser (2001, p. 1023) called for greater 'conceptual coherence' in the design of teacher education programs so that the links between theory and practice are clearer, and for development of a 'professional learning continuum' for teachers throughout their careers. She argued that a curriculum for the professional development of teachers in the first years of teaching should include aspects such as learning the context, designing responsive instructional programs; creating a learning community and enacting a beginning repertoire (p. 1050).

Developing and Managing Relationships with a Range of Stakeholders

There was little evidence that pre-service teachers used behaviour management strategies that involved stakeholders other than mentor teachers, a worrying finding given recent changes in Australia. Fields (2008) noted examples of school based and external support including 'behaviour support teachers, guidance officers, school nurses, parent volunteers and mentors, teacher aides, police liaison officers, Life Education Program, Community Health, Child &Youth Mental Health, and the Juvenile Aid Bureau to name just a few' (p. 19). It is evident that at some point in their degree pre-service teachers need to be introduced to the broad range of support personnel and services that teachers can access when faced with diverse student needs and

significant behavioural difficulties. They also need to learn more about the important role of parents and caregivers in students' education and ways to develop strong partnerships with them. In addition, they need the opportunity to put their understandings into practice by working with support personnel and parents/caregivers while on professional experience. Such opportunities cannot be left to chance but need to be structured into course development and the expectations and communications between teacher educators and school mentors. There is also an onus on school leaders to provide thorough induction for both pre-service teachers and beginning teachers in their schools. This might include an introduction to school policies and practices for both behaviour management and involvement of parents, and an introduction to support personnel beyond the school. At the school and system level ongoing opportunities must be provided for beginning teachers to continue to learn about these important areas.

Conclusion

Although, on the surface, the findings from this study seemed to suggest that the participants were ready to manage student behaviour effectively as beginning teachers, a closer examination of the data raised questions about the basis on which their confidence was built. It appears their confidence may have been fuelled by the short term success of a range of behaviourist strategies such as the use of positive feedback, rewards, rules, warnings and consequences, rather than their awareness of more complex challenges such as responding to the diversity of student backgrounds and behaviours, engaging all learners and working with a range of stake-holders. It is clear that teacher education and professional development programs must aim to dispel the myth of 'neat answers that can be packaged or prescribed' (Bromfield, 2006, p. 191). They must develop an understanding of the individualistic, complex and constructed nature of student behaviour and the role of teachers as reflective practitioners who can analyse and respond to student needs and critique their own practice. That is not to say that pre-service teachers should not be introduced to a wide array of specific strategies, but these need to be taught in conjunction with opportunities to apply and reflect on them in situations that require considerations of all aspects of students' development and the learning environment. Such opportunities may include extending the time frame of professional experience placements, developing the skills needed for professional dialogue, inquiry and reflection and supported

engagement with holistic practice-based dilemmas and problems. It is also clear that this focus needs to be ongoing once they graduate. Early career teachers need to be supported at both the local and system level through collaboration with experienced colleagues and continuous professional development. This has implications for employers in terms of placement, transition and induction and the development of a structured curriculum and funded learning opportunities that respond to the developmental needs of teachers in all phases of their careers.

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