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## **Best Practice or Most Practiced? Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs about Effective Behaviour Management Strategies and Reported Self-efficacy.**

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*Abstract: Managing student behaviour remains one of the most daunting aspects of teaching for educators and this is particularly so when children with disabilities are included in the regular classroom. Self-efficacy has been identified as having a significant impact on a teacher's behaviour, and pre-service training can play an important role in preparing teachers to be effective classroom managers. The purpose of this study was to identify if pre-service teachers in an Australian university held high or low self-efficacy beliefs and whether the type of strategies they identified as most effective correlated with those highlighted in the research as best practice. In addition, pre-service teachers were surveyed before and after their practicum in order to determine if actual classroom experience impacted on their self-efficacy and their knowledge of behaviour management strategies. Findings indicated that self-efficacy beliefs among this cohort of pre-service teachers were generally high and were even higher after the practicum. There were concerns, however, that the range of behaviour management strategies identified by pre-service teachers was limited and did not incorporate strategies to deal with more challenging and persistent behaviour problems.*

### **Introduction**

Behaviour management is arguably the cornerstone of good teaching and this is particularly so in inclusive settings, that is, where children with disabilities are taught alongside their peers without disabilities. In a Western Australian context students with mild to moderate support needs for a range of sensory, physical and intellectual disabilities are included in mainstream classrooms. Children with behavioural difficulties are often considered to be among the most difficult to include in regular classrooms (Corbett, 2001; Croll & Moses, 2000; Hodkinson, 2006; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) and the more diverse the student population is the more teachers become concerned about inappropriate behaviour (Blankenship, 1988; Safran & Safran, 1985). With the move toward more inclusive educational practices in Western Australian schools in the past decade (Pearce & Forlin, 2005), there is the need to ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared for behaviour management in inclusive classrooms. Put simply, a teacher equipped with effective

behaviour management skills is better able to deliver lessons that address the needs of individual children (Kounin, 1970).

Some of the more challenging behaviours that may be exhibited by children with disabilities have been identified as significant stressors for teachers in inclusive settings (Forlin, 2001; Forlin, Keen, & Barrett, in press). Not surprisingly, behaviour problems in the classroom have also been identified as a factor in the retention of teachers to the profession – an important consideration at a time when the demand for teachers is greater than the supply. The Australian Education Union (2006) national survey of 1200 beginning teachers identified behaviour management as the second most significant concern, after workload, for newly qualified teachers. Further, several studies have identified behaviour problems in the classroom as a significant factor in the stress and burnout for both novice and experienced teachers (Blankenship, 1988; Griffith, Steptoe, & Cropley, 1999; Martin, Linfoot, & Stephenson, 1999; Schottle & Peltier, 1991). A longitudinal study by Brouwers and Tomic (2000) highlighted the relationship between teacher burnout and sense of self-efficacy, reporting that burnout was preceded by low efficacy beliefs in classroom management. This finding concurs with previous studies on teachers' sense of self-efficacy and provides compelling support for the significance of this construct on teacher behaviour.

Self-efficacy is conceptualized as the individual's belief in his or her ability to undertake the actions required to successfully accomplish a specific task in a specific context (Bandura, 1986); it is also thought to play an important mediating role between an individual's knowledge and skills and his or her behaviour (Emmer & Hickman, 1991). Bandura (1997) asserted that beginning teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more willing to pursue challenging goals, have greater perseverance, and are more resilient in adverse conditions. Self-efficacy has also been regarded as an indicator of teachers' willingness to include students with disabilities in their classrooms (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998).

In relation to behaviour management, Martin, Linfoot, and Stephenson (1999) identified teacher's self-efficacy as a factor in the way in which teachers respond to inappropriate classroom behaviour. Woolfolk, Rosoff, and Hoy (1990) suggested that teachers who hold high self-efficacy beliefs are more likely to use a range of behaviour management techniques. Further highlighting the importance of teacher confidence, Baker (2005) found that there was a significant correlation "between perceived self-efficacy for classroom management and teacher readiness for managing challenging behaviours" (p.58). This concurs with Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, and Scheer (1999) and Soodak and Podell's (1993) findings that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy hold the belief that difficult students are teachable. Clearly, self-efficacy beliefs about behaviour management can be seen as an important pre-requisite for inclusive classroom practice as well as a factor in teachers' longevity within the teaching profession.

There is now an expectation that novice practitioners will design and deliver curriculum to an increasingly diverse population; however, effective teaching is also thought to be contingent on effective management of student behaviour. Perhaps the need to juggle these two requirements is why pre-service teachers in particular have been found to be anxious about their ability to manage student behaviour. This is linked with the adequacy of teacher preparation courses in terms of teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Latz, 1992) and Tasan (2001). Giallo and Little (2003) go so far as to suggest that "classroom placement of children with persistent behaviour problems

could be based upon an assessment of the prospective teachers' self-efficacy in behaviour management." (p.32).

Perception and reality are clearly separate issues and whereas educators may report that they feel confident managing student behaviour, this may not be reflected in their practice. Judging effective behaviour management is a complex issue, as evidenced in research by DeJong (2005) aimed at identifying best practice in Australian schools. DeJong found that many of the approaches that were identified as best practice "lacked 'hard' evidence to substantiate claims of successful outcomes" (p.357). There was, however, the indication that successful approaches were contingent on key contributing factors, such as the need for teachers to understand behaviour in relation to the "cycles of interaction" (p.357) and to "embrace inclusiveness" (p.358). DeJong (2005) identified as among best practice, those approaches that acknowledged the interplay of various factors on the behaviour of an individual. This emphasis on understanding the factors that contribute to, and maintain, behaviour is also advocated by Snell and Brown (2000) who note the role of a functional analysis of behaviour when developing positive behaviour support. A functional analysis aims to identify the antecedents and consequences of inappropriate behaviours with a view to modifying either or both of these factors. Positive behaviour support involves the "redesign of environments" (Snell & Brown, 2000, p.207) so that inappropriate behaviour is replaced by appropriate behaviour. In utilizing this approach, Snell and Brown (2000) acknowledge the significant contribution of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) principles to the management of challenging behaviours. Indeed, there is considerable research to support the efficacy of ABA in modifying inappropriate behaviour (Alberto & Troutman, 2006), which makes this an important inclusion in a teacher's behaviour management repertoire.

The researchers in this study have had extensive experience working with students who require teaching and learning adjustments in inclusive school settings and have been involved in pre-service teacher education for several years. They have observed the importance of effective behaviour management on teachers' ability to implement appropriate teaching and learning adjustments and are interested in effective ways to prepare pre-service teachers to manage challenging behaviour in all students, including those with disabilities, in inclusive settings. Mindful of previous research on behaviour management and self-efficacy, the authors aim to measure the self-efficacy in behaviour management of pre-service teachers in an Australian university and compare this with their knowledge of different behaviour management strategies. In other words the study is concerned with the correlation between participants' self-efficacy and knowledge of behaviour management strategies and with their preparedness to manage challenging behaviour.

## **Method**

Pre-service teachers in their third year of a four year Bachelor of Education degree were surveyed to determine their self-efficacy in behaviour management. In addition, they were asked to identify the behaviour management strategies they perceived to be most effective and those that they had observed being used in schools. The survey included demographic data, such as age and gender, questions relating to past experience with children in educational and other settings, and their attitude to inclusive education. Course work in which the pre-service teachers were enrolled defined inclusive education as classroom settings in which children with disabilities

are educated together with their peers without disabilities. Questionnaires were distributed to 155 Kindergarten to Year 7 and 147 Secondary pre-service teachers prior to and after the completion of a four-week practicum. A total of 123 (41%) of the pre-service teachers responded to the pre-practicum survey: 43 males and 82 females; however, only 69 (23%) responded to the post-practicum survey: 18 males and 51 females.

### **Instrument**

The instrument for measuring self-efficacy (appendix A) was adapted from one developed by Baker (2005), which in itself was an adaptation of Brouwers and Tomic's (1999) *Teacher Interpersonal Self-Efficacy Scale* and of an instrument with a more individualized behavioural perspective by Bullock, Ellis, and Wilson (1994). Advice was sought from professionals in the field of Special Education on the instrument's face and content validity. As the emphasis on behaviour management in units that pre-service teachers had already undertaken was on humanistic and ecological approaches, it was felt that further adaptation was required to ensure its applicability. Pre-service teachers had had limited exposure to Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) in their course work; therefore, questions relating specifically to this approach were removed. The survey was then piloted with five pre-service teachers from the cohort, resulting in further minor changes to the descriptive questions, but none to the self-efficacy scale. It was not possible to conduct a larger scale pilot study and as such the reliability of the self-efficacy scale had to be established after the surveys had been administered. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the self-efficacy scale was determined to be .881.

### **Results**

The survey included both qualitative and quantitative data; descriptive analysis and inferential statistics were employed in analysing the data. T-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used to explore the impact of specific characteristics on reported self-efficacy, and descriptive data on preferred management techniques were compiled.

#### **Self-Efficacy**

In establishing self-efficacy levels it was necessary to determine a cut-off point between high and low self-efficacy. Since standard normal distribution representative of an average respondent includes one standard deviation above and below the mean (Creswell, 2005), the distinction between high and low self-efficacy was set at one standard deviation ( $SD = .32$ ) below the mean ( $M = 2.89$ ). This total of 2.57 was then rounded to 2.6 to establish a value between high and low self-efficacy scores. Therefore, respondents with a mean less than 2.6 were placed in the low category; whereas those with a mean equal to or greater than 2.6 were placed in the high category. On the basis of this, the level of self-efficacy for 79% of the pre-practicum respondents was in the high category. After practicum, pre-service teachers reported higher levels of self-efficacy ( $M = 3.12$ ) and this reached statistically significant levels  $t(64) = 6.44, p < .05$  when compared their pre-practicum responses.

Prior to the practicum, pre-service teachers rated highest on the question of their ability to use a variety of non-aversive techniques, including voice modulation, facial expressions, planned ignoring and proximity control ( $M = 3.2$ ); post-practicum they rated highest in their ability to self-evaluate their own teaching and classroom management skills and use the results constructively ( $M = 3.4$ ). The pre-service teachers' lowest self-efficacy both pre- and post-practicum was reported on the following two items: *a) There are very few students that I cannot handle* (pre  $M = 2.5$  post  $M = 2.9$ ) and *b) I can keep defiant students involved in my lessons* (pre  $M = 2.5$  post  $M = 2.8$ ). This was consistent with their response to a discrete question on the pre-practicum survey that asked pre-service teachers about their readiness, willingness and ability (Baker, 2005) to manage challenging behaviours ( $M = 2.4$ ). There was a significant difference between pre-service teachers' overall sense of self-efficacy and their response to this question  $F(3,118) = 4.660, p < .05$ .

### Impact of demographics

It was hypothesized *a priori* that certain factors would have an impact on an individual's self-efficacy; therefore, a number of questions pertaining to demographic information and past experience were included. Factors that were thought to be related to levels of self-efficacy included: type of program, prior experience working with children, teaching children with disabilities, gender, and attitude to inclusion. These factors were compared to self-efficacy scores using T-tests and ANOVAs to determine if there was a significant difference between populations.

Pre-service teachers were asked to identify which program they were enrolled in because some studies have found that secondary teachers had a lower sense of self-efficacy than primary teachers (Baker, 2005). Conversely, other studies found no significant difference between secondary and primary trained teachers in terms of their perceived preparedness to manage behaviour problems (Cains & Brown, 1998). In this study, pre-service teachers who identified themselves as being in the K-7 program had a mean self-efficacy score of 2.85 pre and 3.16 post, whereas those in the Secondary program had a mean score of 2.87 pre and 3.06 post, indicating that there was no significant difference in their sense of self-efficacy (Pre  $t(120) = -.321, p > .05$ . Post  $t(65) = .876, p > .05$ ).

Pre-service teachers who had no prior experience working with children rated slightly lower in their level of self-efficacy, but this was not statistically significant ( $F(3,120) = .860, p > .05$ ), and there was no significant difference between those pre-service teachers who are parents and those who are not ( $t(122) = 1.174, p > .05$ ). Overall, pre-service teachers reported a positive attitude to inclusive educational practices and, whereas the majority responded that children with disabilities required different behaviour management strategies from other children, this did not impact on their reported self-efficacy ( $t(113) = 1.68, p > .05$ ). Similarly, having a student with a disability in their class during practicum did not significantly impact on their levels of self-efficacy ( $t(64) = 1.06, p > .05$ ). Interestingly, male pre-service teachers reported statistically significantly higher levels of self-efficacy than female pre-service teachers prior to practicum,  $t(123) = 2.32, p < .05$ ; however, post practicum there was no significant difference,  $t(65) = .262, p > .05$ .

### Management techniques

In addition to self-efficacy and the factors that impact on this, the researchers were interested in establishing what behaviour management techniques pre-service teachers remembered from their course and observed being used in schools. Further, the researchers wanted to know whether the techniques the pre-service teachers perceived to be effective were aligned with those they had been taught about and/or those they observed. Pre-service teachers indicated that they were exposed to a broad range of behaviour management strategies and theoretical approaches in their tertiary studies. The exception to this, as predicted, was about Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA), with only 6% reporting knowledge of these approaches.

In secondary schools the pre-service teachers predominantly reported observing timeout, both in class and out of class, followed by the use of proximity. In K-7, timeout was also the most frequently observed approach, with extrinsic rewards and warning systems, such as putting the student's name on the board, ranking as the next most common. Only 30% of the pre-service teachers reported observing Individual Behaviour Plans or Behaviour Support Plans in use and none listed approaches aligned with ABA or FBA procedures.

The behaviour management strategies that pre-service teachers perceived to be most effective were closely aligned with those they observed in schools. Secondary pre-service teachers perceived proximity, followed by timeout, to be the most effective strategies and also included using discussion with student about their behaviour to assist them to make more appropriate choices. K-7 pre-service teachers highlighted extrinsic rewards followed by timeout as the most effective behaviour management strategies. None of the students considered behaviour analysis based strategies to be effective for behaviour management.

## **Discussion**

This research revealed a number of factors associated with pre-service teachers' attitude to and perceived self-efficacy in behaviour management. Prior to the implementation of this study, anecdotal evidence suggested that primary teachers were more confident about managing behaviour and that having a child with a disability in their classroom challenged pre-service teachers' beliefs about their ability in this area. The findings, however, were not consistent with these perceptions. In fact, the majority of the respondents reported high levels of self-efficacy in behaviour management and practical classroom experience appeared to strengthen these beliefs. This was the case particularly for female pre-service teachers whose level of self-efficacy was lower than their male counterparts prior to practicum but at the same level post-practicum. A study by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2002) into the overall self-efficacy of beginning teachers also found no significant differences between male and female teachers. This could reflect confidence levels between the genders and indicate that female teachers require more 'evidence' to support their beliefs in their self-efficacy; however, further investigation would be required to determine whether this is the case.

There were several other factors that were considered for their possible impact on self-efficacy, which also did not have a discernable effect on the levels reported by pre-service teachers. For example, prior experience with children both in educative, recreational and parental situations was hypothesized as likely to result in higher levels of self-efficacy. A possible explanation for why this was not the case could be

the level of preparation for behaviour management that these pre-service teachers received through their course. However, it is more likely to relate to the perceived differences in managing behaviour in recreational and home settings as opposed to the classroom environment.

Blankenship (1988) and King-Sears (1997) found that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy used proactive behaviour management techniques. Similarly, Emmer and Hickman (1991) found that teachers with a high level of self-efficacy were more likely to use positive management strategies, including positive reinforcement and modifying teaching approaches, as opposed to those with a lower self-efficacy who tended to use reductive strategies, such as time-out and loss of privileges. Despite the level of self-efficacy reported by pre-service teachers in this study, the strategies that they aligned themselves with tended to be more reactive than proactive.

This is not surprising because these were the strategies that pre-service teachers reported most frequently observing in classrooms. Spindler and Biott (2000) assert that the school plays a significant role in the professional development of teachers; therefore, it is reasonable to expect that the strategies teachers adopt will be impacted on by the practices they observe in schools. Of concern, however, is the lack of apparent structure to the approaches observed. Researchers have identified the efficacy of systematic approaches to behaviour management that focus on understanding the components and functions of behaviour, such as Functional Behavioural Assessment (FBA), when compared to other approaches (Didden, Duker, & Korzilius, 1997; Robinson & Wilczynski, 2001). However, as evidenced by the responses in this study, the approaches observed tended to be those that responded to the behaviour rather than attempting to identify its purpose (Fantuzzo & Atkins, 1992; Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997).

This is particularly significant in relation to the successful inclusion of children with disabilities in a regular classroom. Carpenter and McKee-Higgins (1996) and Colvin, Kameenui, and Sugai (1993) suggest that children with disabilities require direct instruction in appropriate behaviours, with the emphasis on modifying their behaviour rather than simply managing it (Alberto & Troutman, 2006). As Bandura suggests “It is a well established principle that behaviour is altered far more effectively by providing better alternatives than by imposing prohibitions” (1986, p. 46). The use of empirically-based behaviour management practices, specifically those based on Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), has been highlighted as best practice for children with disabilities (for example Carnine & Granzin, 2001; Engelmann, 1991; Kauffman, 1999). These approaches, however, were largely overlooked by the participants of this study.

Additional concerns pertain to the reliability of self-report measures, with Onafowora (2005) observing that while the novice teachers in her study expressed a high level of self-efficacy on the scales, their oral and written responses indicated lower levels of confidence. Emmer and Hickman (1991) also found that the pre-service teachers on practicum rated themselves more highly on behaviour management than did their supervising teachers. Further to this, Emmer and Hickman expressed concerns that this “unrealistically high self-efficacy might impede a teacher from making changes that would result in stronger teaching performance” (p. 764).

## **Conclusion**

There are important implications in the findings of this study for service

providers delivering both pre- and in-service training. According to the assertion made by Bandura (1997), that self-efficacy correlates with a teacher's actions, it is reasonable to predict that most of the pre-service teachers in this study will be effective classroom managers. Furthermore, as effective classroom managers, they would be better able to cater for diversity in their classroom and more receptive to inclusion (Meijer & Foster, 1988; Soodak et al., 1998). However, it has been noticed that the pre-service teachers in this study reported lower self-efficacy on items about managing defiant and challenging behaviours. Moreover, their repertoire of behaviour management strategies did not include those approaches identified in the literature as most effective for addressing more challenging behaviours.

Since pre-service and in-service teachers appear to be significantly influenced by their experience, both direct and indirect, when selecting an intervention, it has been suggested that teachers should be provided with more opportunities to reflect on their experience and share effective best practice (Murik, Shaddock, Spinks, Zilber, & Curry, 2005). It is important that this experience acknowledges the diversity of school populations and, as such, Baker (2005) suggests that professional development should be tailored to the specific needs of individual teachers rather than a "one-size fits all" approach. Teaching practicum is intended to provide this opportunity for pre-service teachers; however, this would appear to be dependent on the specific placement.

Trinder and Reynolds (2000) highlighted the importance of incorporating evidence-based practice in teachers' professional development and, as already discussed, there is considerable research highlighting the efficacy of ABA in managing challenging behaviours. Despite this, none of the pre-service teachers in this study reported observing this approach being used in schools. Whereas it is likely that providing pre-service teachers with training in appropriate behaviour management skills would go part way towards addressing the need for evidence-based practice, pre-service teachers also require the opportunity to see these approaches being implemented by experienced classroom practitioners. To address this deficit, observational classrooms or video-taped lessons, illustrating the use of a range of behaviour management approaches, could be utilized. These tools would provide the opportunity to demonstrate how specific approaches are used to deal with a range of inappropriate classroom behaviours. This would afford pre-service teachers with the opportunity to observe, identify and reflect on key elements of specific behaviour management approaches.

Ensuring the success of inclusive education is a complex issue and, although students appear to be graduating with a positive attitude to inclusion and confidence in their behaviour management skills, this attitude and confidence would not be sustained if teachers did not have the necessary skills. The study by Hodkinson (2006), which found that teachers in their first year of teaching were less positive about inclusion than they were as pre-service teachers, gives substance to this presumption. In part, this reduction was attributed to their perception that they lacked the specialized skills needed to cater for children with disabilities. Thus, beginning teachers need both 'the will and the skill' (Jackson, Chalmers, & Wills, 2004). We can be fairly confident that the better prepared pre-service teachers are the more likely they are to find fulfilment in their career and remain in the profession.

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## Appendix A

### *Behaviour Management Self-Efficacy Scale*

1. I am able to use a variety of behaviour management models and techniques.
2. If a student disrupts the lesson, I am able to redirect him/her quickly.
3. I can communicate to students that I am serious about getting appropriate behaviour.
4. There are very few students that I cannot handle.
5. I can manage a class very well.
6. I can keep defiant students involved in my lessons.
7. I am able to make my expectations clear to my students.
8. I can keep a few problem students from ruining an entire class.
9. If students stop working, I can put them back on track.
10. I know what rules are appropriate for my students.
11. I am able to use a variety of non-aversive techniques (e.g., voice modulation, facial expressions, planned ignoring, proximity control).
12. I am able to implement a consistent classroom routine.
13. I am able to self-evaluate my own teaching and classroom management skills and use the results constructively.
14. I am able to explain the rationale, program components, operation, and evaluation of the behavioural techniques I use.